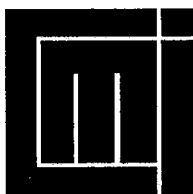


Migration, State and Civil Society in Southeast Asia

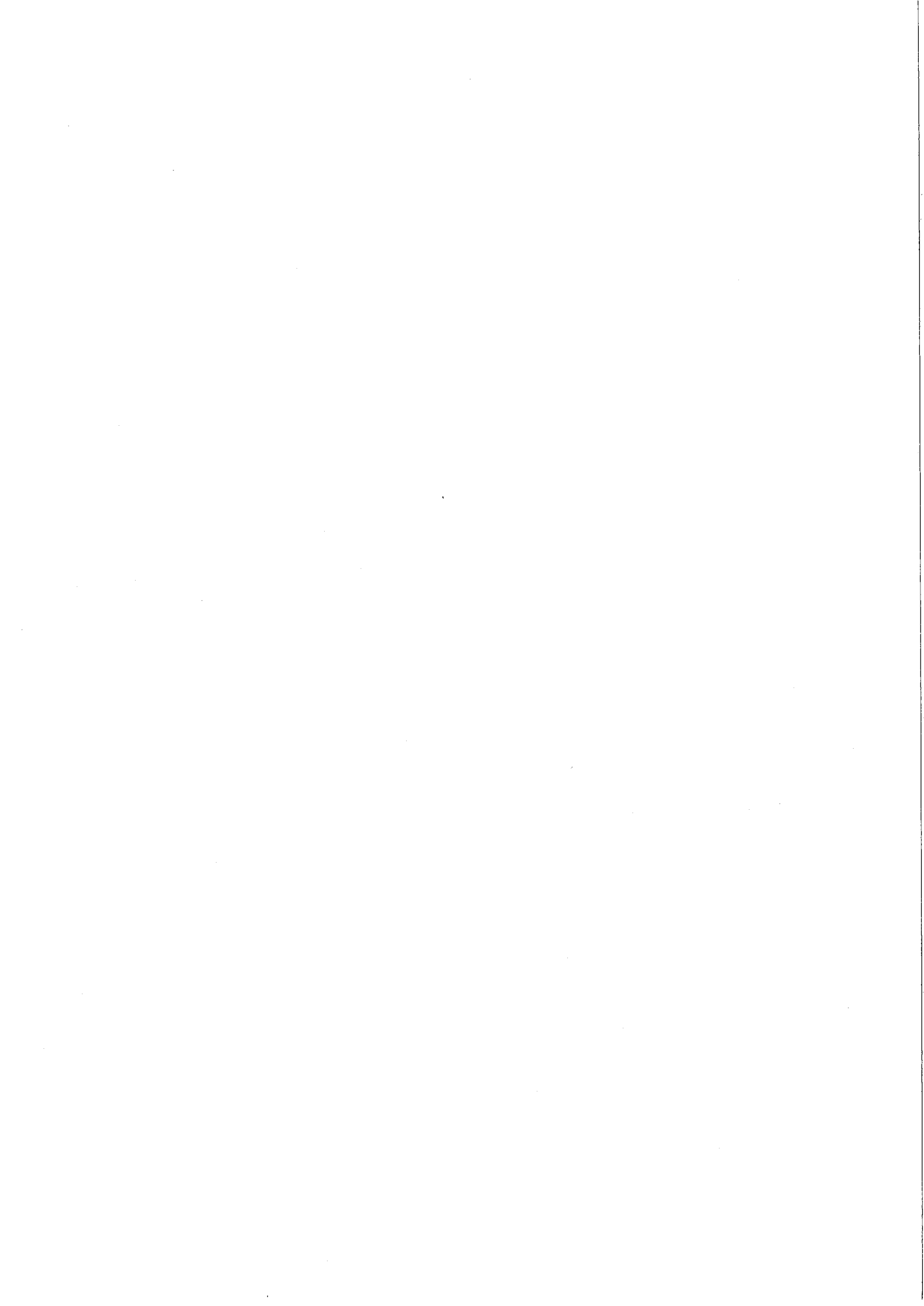
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Summary:

The paper was prepared for a conference on the impact of international migration on the security and stability of states, which was organized by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, December 1991. The analysis focuses on the consequences of migration on receiving states and societies in Southeast Asia, identifying distinct trends in various historical periods.

Sammendrag:

Studien ble utarbeidet til en konferanse om konsekvenser av internasjonal migrasjon for staters stabilitet og sikkerhet, organisert av Massachusetts Institute of Technology i desember 1991. Analysen fokuserer på Sørøst-Asia og identifiserer en rekke konsekvensmønstre i ulike historiske perioder.

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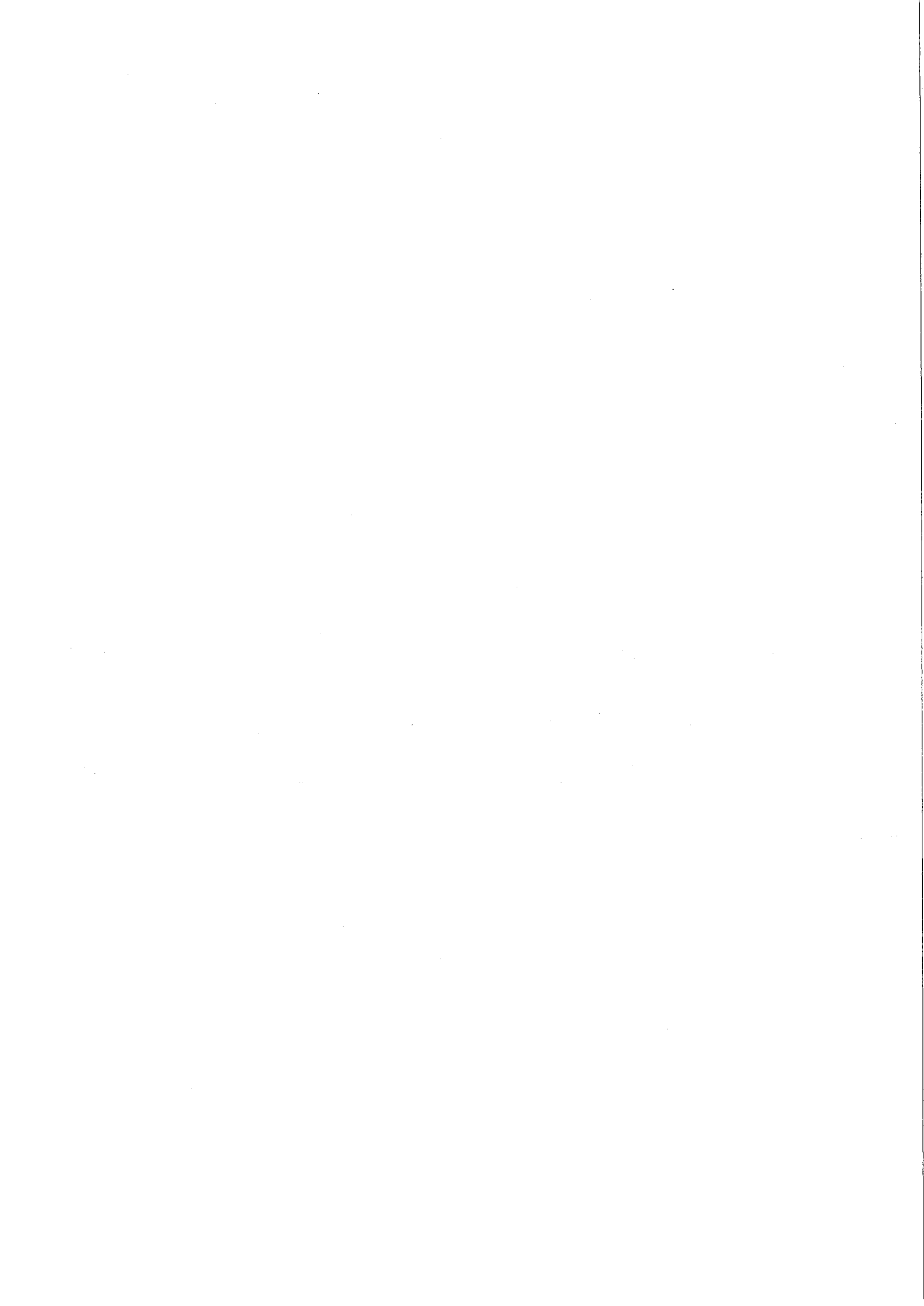
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Introduction¹

Since ancient times, successive migrations have made their imprint on the formation of both societies and states in Southeast Asia. Ancient population movements from southeast China followed the valleys in southward direction to trade, settle and conquer. Sea-borne traders came from Persia and the Arab world, especially during the 15th century's unprecedented growth of commerce. From India came advisors to kings, from Europe a class of colonial rulers. Colonialism in turn stimulated a massive inflow of migrant labor that from the mid-19th century and onwards enriched the ethnic mosaic of Southeast Asian societies which previous population movements had put in place.

The political implications in the receiving areas range from the most fundamental — the conquest of state power by new migrants — to the more indirect such as influence wielded by a particular ethnic group in a nation's political economy. The former concerns the core of national security as commonly defined; the latter may affect regime security and civil order. Since the term "security" is commonly used to legitimize particularist interests — not least in the Southeast Asian context where "foreign" groups readily have been depicted as a security threats — we shall here use the term "political" to analyze the effects of migration on state and civil society in the receiving areas.

Obviously numerous and complex, the political consequences nevertheless emerge with some clarity in a comparative perspective. If we consider the major population movements in Southeast Asia, it becomes evident that each migration had a different, principal impact.

In historical terms, the major population movements in Southeast Asia appear in four phases. The ancient southward migrations led to settlements at the periphery of established polities, and eventually conquest of state power. In some cases, the new arrivals also subjugated or expelled existing populations, effectively absorbing or extinguishing the older society. Elsewhere, a melting-pot mechanism developed. The distinguishing feature of both migrations, however, was that the migrants assumed political power by military conquest of the state apparatus.

During the colonial period, labor migration from China and, to a lesser extent, India, reached unprecedented levels. The full political implications of cultural pluralism came to the fore when the colonized states became independent,

¹ Prepared for the Conference on the Impact of International Migration on the Security and Internal Stability of States, Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 5 and 6, 1991. To be published in Myron Weiner (ed.): *International Migration and Security*. Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1993.

generating both social conflict and international tension. The migrants and their descendants formed distinct ethnic minorities. They occupied a special niche in the political economy and, by virtue of their ethnic identity, had clear ties to a large power in the region. Insofar as China aspired to an assertive international role, the cross-boundary ethnic ties had great political significance and caused deep tensions.

For the rulers of Southeast Asia's post-colonial states, the lessons of history were unambiguous: migration was a matter of high politics. Migration affected at the very least the structure of civil society, at most decided who would capture the state, and migrants from major regional countries created foreign policy complications. Coupled with nationalist and economic imperatives in the post-colonial order, these were compelling reasons to halt further in-migration. For years, Southeast Asian governments demonstrated both the will and ability to exclude new migrants. Even the very large refugee flows generated by the Indochina wars from 1975 and onwards were tightly controlled and only temporarily accommodated.

The refugees were unwanted on most accounts. They seemed to represent an economic burden, a political liability, a foreign policy complication, or all of the above. Additionally, the massive flows posed a more subtle but profound threat. Arriving unannounced, uninvited and landing in large numbers on the border and beaches in Southeast Asia, the refugees resembled an invading force. The invasion metaphor struck at the core of the receiving state; the very ability of the state to function according to modern precepts by exercising control throughout its territory was challenged. Yet, the essentially political nature of international refugee movements also gave a foreign policy dimension to the act of granting of asylum, which at times was welcomed. As we shall see, the Indochinese refugees, like refugee movements generally, carried with them some of the struggle from which they fled. This transformed them into potentially useful instruments of foreign policy for the receiving state.

Labor migration within and into the region started in the late 1970s as several countries experienced rapid economic growth and industrialization. 1980s. The movements included both legal and illegal flows which created serious political challenges in some of the receiving states.

The political consequences of migration in the receiving societies, then, can be grouped in three broad categories, each associated with types of movements that have occurred. These are (1) *the impact on the control of the state apparatus*, typically associated with military conquest and large-scale settlement; (2) *the impact on the structure of civil society*, exemplified by the appearance of diaspora related to labor migration; and (3) *assets and liabilities in foreign policy*, depending primarily on relations with the sending state and typically associated with diaspora populations and refugee movements. In what follows, we shall

consider the more specific forms which the impact may take, and their determinants.

While this paper will focus on the receiving states, it should be recalled that also sending countries are subject to a range of political effects. The most common problematic element is that refugees or migrants will engage in *revanchist* politics from abroad. This and other political considerations were paramount for socialist regimes that throughout most of the post World War II era prohibited outmigration (Dowty 1987). Political concerns also led many Chinese rulers before 1949 to forbid outmigration, although with more symbolic than practical effect. Strong control mechanisms in communist China made prohibitions more effective, as expressed most dramatically in the slogan of the Cultural Revolution: "You cannot run away from your Shadow!"

On the other side of the balance sheet is relief that "unwanted" social groups, ethnic minorities or political enemies leave. This was certainly a factor in Vietnam's policies towards departures after 1975. Although formally illegal, the exodus was intermittently facilitated and even encouraged by the authorities. There is no evidence, however, that Vietnam or any other sending country in the region deliberately generated mass outflows in order to destabilize or subvert the receiving states. Mass-migration evidently did not lend itself as a foreign policy instrument for the sending state (Sutter 1990:96, et.passim.)

1. Ancient migrations

Following the major river valleys, the ancient migrations in Southeast Asia moved southward from the interior (Coedes 1964, Cady 1966, Hall 1968). Centuries before the Buddhist era, the Mon people moved from western China into the Menam valley and the Malay peninsula. A little later and further east, the Funanese and the Cham came as "a kind of rear-guard element" of this early movement (Cady 1966:29) The next major migrations appear during the first millennium AD. The Khmer moved down the Mekong river but came to a halt on the outer fringes of the ancient, hinduized kingdom of the Funanese. Centered on the Great Lake in contemporary Cambodia, the Funan kings accepted the Khmer settlements as vassals. The Khmer duly constituted themselves into the Chenla state. Although many Chenla Khmer in the lower Mekong valley were assimilated into the Funanese culture, and intermarriage between the Funan and the Chenla rulers took place, this did not prevent an intense political rivalry from developing. In the 6th century, Chenla Khmer princes usurped the imperial throne, setting in motion the decline of the Funan empire.

On the fragments of Funan, the great Khmer kingdom of the classical period would rise. By the 13th century, the Kingdom of Angkor was at its zenith. At that

point, the historical process seemed to repeat itself. The geographical extension of Khmer authority was rolled back, heralding the decline of the Angkor kings.

The roll-back was primarily effected by the T'ai speaking people who since the 900s had been moving down the river valleys from the Nan Chao kingdom in southwestern China. They settled on the periphery of the Khmer empire, accepted the political authority of the King, and many among them entered his service as mercenaries. In the early 13th century, the steady southward trickle grew to an "effervescence" when Nan Chao was attacked by invading Mongol-Chinese armies (Coedes 1964:346). At the same time, the T'ais on the outer reaches of the Khmer empire established a fortified military garrison at Sukothai in the upper Menam valley. A commander in the Khmer imperial army of T'ai ancestry declared the settlement autonomous. His son — the famous Ram Khamheng of Thai annals — put the influx of refugees from Nan Chao to good use by enlisting them in his armies and, towards the end of the 13th century, pushed Khmer authority further south, picking up defecting vassals along the way.

The dynamic in both the Funan and the Khmer case is a classic conquest through migration, that is, the security of the state — in the sense of the power of the ruling king — is undermined by increasing pressures from new peoples settled on the periphery. As the new arrivals gain strength, partly by entering the political sphere of the central power through marriage alliances or military service, the stage is set for a contest over political power. In one resolution of the conflict, the upstart captures central state power as the throne is usurped (Chenla Khmer contra Funan). In another dynamic, the power of the center is whittled away from the periphery as the upstarts take control over progressively more territory and people (T'ai contra Khmer).

The T'ai model is yet more complex, possibly representing a prototype of political subversion. The T'ai-speaking migrants did not displace the local populations, but mixed culturally and intermarried with Mon and Khmer (Hall 1968:171). This has tended to obscure the historical tracks to the point that historians still disagree as to what really happened: Was the southward expansion of the T'ai primarily a migration of people, or chiefly a movement of cultures? (Osborne 1979:90, Silverman 1974:54). Possibly, relatively few T'ai migrated, yet succeeded in establishing their cultural primacy in the lower Menam valley through conversion. As society changed, so did the challenge to the state. It was the elite of this new cultural community, called T'ai, that displaced the old Khmer authority in Sukothai and beyond.

Whether the T'ais arrived *en masse* or not, there is general agreement that the T'ais did not displace the local people. The early T'ai kings deliberately followed a policy to accommodate diverse cultures within the dominant T'ai. Thus, the migrations threatened primarily the state, not society. One major reason was the balance between population and resources in the area. The lower Menam valley

was sparsely inhabited, and remained so for centuries. Manpower, not land, was the principal restraint on power for successive Thai kings (Akin 1969, Dhiravat 1990). The point applied to mainland and peninsular Southeast Asia more generally. Even though prevailing technology permitted cultivation in only a small area, perhaps amounting to only 12 per cent of the lowland regions, land was not in short supply (Fisher 1974:6). Even at the beginning of the 19th century, Southeast Asia's population was probably under 25 million people, or about 1/8 that of India and 1/12 of China (*Ibid.*:11).

Vietnam constituted an exception, and also presents a different migration pattern. The Red River delta in the North was densely populated, partly due to the introduction of Chinese irrigation technology which permitted an increase in agricultural production. Population density, political rivalries, and refugee flight generated a steady southward movement of the Vietnamese. Unlike the T'ai, the Vietnamese displaced other cultural groups as they moved. From ca. 900 AD and onwards, the Vietnamese moved southward through settlement, military annexation and expulsion until stopped by the countervailing power of European colonialism. For Vietnam's neighbors to the south, the migration clearly constituted a threat to both state and society. The first victim was the Champa kingdom, previously a buffer between the Vietnamese and the Khmer states. Both the Champa state and the Cham as a nation "disappear from history", as C.P. Fitzgerald puts it, in the late 15th century (C.P. Fitzgerald 1972:30). The pressure was subsequently transferred to the Khmer, compelling the Khmer King to cede territory and largely forcing the Khmer people out of the Mekong delta.

2. The colonial period and its legacy

European colonialism brought new mass migrations to Southeast Asia, not from Europe which did not send settlers, but from Asia's two most populous countries: China and India. The economic boom of early colonialism, coupled with open immigration policies and in some cases direct importation of needed labor for plantations and mining enterprises, produced a sustained inflow from China to all of Southeast Asia from the mid-19th century and onwards. Coincidental upheavals in China served as strong "push factors".

In cities throughout the European empires — from the British Straits Settlements, to the French-ruled Cholon and the walled city of Manila — commercial life came to be concentrated in the hands of the Chinese. Plantations in the Dutch East Indies relied partly on Chinese labor, in the neighboring Malayan peninsula, rubber estates and tin mining companies used overwhelmingly Chinese labor. Recognizing only economic and imperial boundaries, European colonial rulers also effected population transfers within the colonized realm. Indians went from the South Asian subcontinent to work in both the civil service and the plantation sector of Malaya; Vietnamese moved into the commercial and civil service niches in

French-ruled Laos and Cambodia. In another classic pattern, population movements that were induced by the colonial boom became themselves a spur to further colonization. When rival Chinese groups working the tin-mines in the Malayan sultanates virtually went to war over control of the mines, the Sultan of Perak invited the British in the neighboring Straits Settlements to restore law and order. The process culminated in extension of British colonial rule over most of the peninsula, constituted into the Federated Malay states. Also Thailand, the only Southeast Asian country not to be colonized, experienced massive in-migration from China as the colonially-induced economic growth created new demands and opportunities.

Only the Philippines did not fit the pattern. Spanish colonial rule was schizophrenic in its policy towards the Chinese. Since the native Filipinos were kept backwards, niches in the colonial economy for artisans and traders were filled by other peoples. The Chinese readily moved in, but the growth of the community was stunted by restrictive legislation. Whenever the Chinese protested, they were subjected to periodic massacres — including three major ones in the 1600s — that significantly reduced their numbers. When the U.S. replaced the Spanish as rulers, the exclusionary immigration laws applying to Chinese on mainland U.S.A were also applied to the Philippines.

The mass migrations from China into Southeast Asia — starting in the mid 1800s and lasting for about a century — left a complicated and sensitive political legacy in the receiving countries (Purcell 1965, Williams 1966, C.P. Fitzgerald 1972, Wang 1978, 1981, Suryadinata 1985). Ethnic hierarchies and politically significant divisions of labor were established; their stereotypical equivalents portrayed the Chinese as industrious and upwardly mobile, frequently as middlemen positioned between “the lazy natives” and the colonial rulers. In the post-colonial states, the question of the Overseas Chinese came to bedevil domestic politics and foreign policy for decades.²

Four principal factors explain the political significance of the immigration and its consequences in post-colonial Southeast Asia: the size of the Chinese community, its role in the local political economy, the structure of social conflict in the country of residence, and the pattern of international relations in the region.

The size of the Chinese diaspora was a principal determinant of the relationship between the community and the nation. In Singapore, where the Chinese constituted a large majority, the community in effect absorbed the nation. The

² These problems were less pronounced in Thailand which, as it was never was colonized, early on adopted a thorough assimilation policy. Cultural similarities between Theravada Buddhist Thais and immigrant Chinese also facilitated assimilation. For a recent study, see Cushman 1991.

principal restraints lay in foreign policy, which dictated that Singapore had to “compensate” for its Chineseness by officially lying low in its relationship with China — or at least, lower than Singapore’s non-Chinese neighbours. Only thus could Singapore demonstrate its regional credentials as an independent and reliable state. In neighboring Malaysia, the Chinese were sufficiently numerous (almost 40 per cent) to organize as a political community with distinct political institutions. The institutionalized pluralism of Malaysian politics ensured that virtually all questions of domestic and foreign policy acquired an ethnic dimension. In the remaining Southeast Asian states, the ethnic Chinese formed a small minority, ranging from nearly 10 per cent in Thailand to about 2 per cent in Indonesia and even less in the Philippines. The only realistic choice for these Chinese was to influence the terms of integration through individual participation in the political arena.

The socio-economic position of the Chinese carried with it both assets and liabilities in the political arena. By the mid-20th century, the Chinese immigrants had formed concentrated, highly visible minorities in the urban landscape of Southeast Asia. Upward mobility during the colonial period had put them in critical middle-men positions in the post-colonial economy. They constituted agents of economic growth, critical to the development policies announced by the newly independent government. At the same time, they were a physically distinct and politically vulnerable minority. They had poor nationalist credentials and during the independence movement had shown more interest in the epochal battle underway in China than in the politics of their adopted country. They labored under various forms of discrimination, ranging from employment to citizenship restrictions, that made assimilation and participation difficult even when it was desired.

The relationship between these “pariah entrepreneurs” and the host societies was complex and contradictory. There was certainly an element of symbiosis between Chinese capital and the elites whose position derived from bureaucratic or military power (as in Indonesia and Thailand). At the same time, Chinese traders and entrepreneurs came into conflict with emerging indigenous, entrepreneurs and were often the object of economic indigenization policies and other discriminatory measures (Golay 1969, Lim and Gosling 1983). Such policies also had broader, populist appeal which was useful to the new nationalist elites anxious to establish their legitimacy after independence (Steinberg 1987). In this calculus, the overseas Chinese appeared as a threat both to nationalist identity and particularist economic interests.

The international context legitimized a wider stigmatization of Chinese immigrant communities. The rise of revolutionary China, which for years followed a declaratory policy of supporting radical change in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, raised the Overseas Chinese issue to a new level. In 1950, China had declared a *jus sanguinis* policy: all Overseas Chinese were to be regarded as nationals of

China. Five years later this was dramatically repudiated by Chou-En lai at the Bandung conference. The Chinese were asked to make a choice, and those who chose their country of residence forfeited all claim to Chinese nationality. The principle, as embodied in the Chinese-Indonesian agreement on dual nationality, effectively shifted the matter to a *jus soli* principle. But suspicion in Southeast Asia that the Overseas Chinese nevertheless might form a fifth column of China were not easily allayed, and were dramatically revived during the Cultural Revolution. From 1966 and onwards, Beijing's established policy towards the Overseas Chinese was thrown into disarray, and new forces in China gave at least "the appearance of an offensive to mobilize all Chinese abroad in the cause of revolution" (S.Fitzgerald 1972:169).

In the bifurcated world and hostile ideological climate of the cold war, the vision of communist Chinese expansion became axiomatic among the elites of non-communist Southeast Asia. China acted as a great power in the region, while the Southeast Asian countries were weak, internally divided, and several faced communist-led insurgencies. Some rebels had well-known support from local Chinese, as in Malaysia where the Malayan Communist Party recruited heavily from the local Chinese. Ethnic Chinese also controlled the Communist Party of Thailand and took their ideological cues from China, as later research has confirmed (Yuangrat 1981). In other cases, the links were exaggerated. The largest communist party in the region, Indonesia's PKI, did not have a substantial Chinese following and the exact nature of its relationship with Beijing remain unclear. The insurgency that peaked in the Philippines in the early 1950s, and was reborn 15 years later, was very much a local Filipino affair in terms of leadership, inspiration and recruitment. Nevertheless, the political lexicon of the era identified Asian communism as Chinese-led, and a shadow was cast over the ethnic Chinese. As Lea Williams, writing in 1966, put it: the ethnic Chinese were seen as "woven into a giant subversive net ready to paralyze and conquer Southeast Asia on command from Peking" (Williams, 1966,p.3).

The perceived threats associated with the Overseas Chinese are clearly demonstrated in the Malaysian case. The standard Malay perspective was that of a backward community which feared that the more advanced community — the Chinese — would by virtue of their numbers, skills and economic power eventually become dominant. In this communal calculus, security in the sense of the social, economic and political power of the Malay community was at stake. The result was the Alliance, a consociational formula worked out by the established leaders of the Malay, Chinese and Indian leaders and buttressed by departing colonial power (Milne 1980, Enloe 1986). The formula implied reverse discrimination favoring the Malays in education, politics and certain public sector employment. The entire structure — which remained the framework for Malaysian politics for decades — was anchored in a general concept of nativist (*bumiputra*) justice. The formula was designed to maintain the political dominance of the

Malay community, and, as later made explicit, also to advance the Malays economically.

Until well into the 1960s, Malaysia (then Malaya) also faced a serious challenge to the entire established order. The prolonged insurgency was based on a radical communist ideology which threatened the pillars of the social system — the traditional legitimacy of the Malay rulers, an economic development founded on integration with the Western capitalist system and aided by local Chinese capital and entrepreneurs, and a consociational formula among established communal leaders. Since the insurgents recruited heavily from the poorer Chinese segment of the population, and was at least verbally supported by China, the link between ethnic Chinese and national security threats seemed readily evident to the Malays and the British who helped defeat the insurgency.

Without doubt, national security scenarios involving local Chinese and communists were often inflated during the cold war years to mask narrow power interests. All kinds of strategies that served incumbent elites could be justified in terms of “national security”. The ethnic Chinese were often caught in policies designed to secure foreign assistance, suppress local opposition, or extract economic concessions from the ethnic Chinese themselves. In Thailand, for instance, the second military regime of Phibul Songkram (1948-54) targeted the ethnic Chinese partly to attract Western aid and bolster its own legitimacy, in the process using some of the nationalist symbolism of Phibul’s first regime (1938-44). In Indonesia, the Chinese became part of the complex power struggle that centered on the abortive coup in 1965. The legitimacy of the military-led “New Order” which followed was based on a particular interpretation of that coup, which identified China and its local allies as the principal national security threat. Although the primary local victim and suspect was the Indonesian communist party (PKI), suspicion also fell on the ethnic Chinese. The result was suppression and enhanced vulnerability to economic blackmail from military leaders and local competitors. Non-naturalized ethnic Chinese were especially exposed (Suryadinata 1978). The complexity of the situation was again revealed when Indonesia in 1989 prepared to normalize relations with China. In this connection, the Indonesian government moved to facilitate naturalization for an estimated quarter of a million alien Chinese on the grounds that this would remove any pretext for China to intervene to protect its citizens. The opponents of normalization, who cited security dangers if China again were permitted to open an embassy in Jakarta, all had vested economic interests in the status quo (Suryadinata 1990, Yahuda 1985).

In all the Southeast Asian states, relations with China affected the issue of the Overseas Chinese, and vice versa. Normal relations with revolutionary China, it was feared, would encourage the overseas Chinese to be more assertive, alternately subversive, and ultimately posed the threat of Chinese intervention under the pretext of protecting local nationals. In fact, and despite its intermittent *jus sanguinis* position, revolutionary China in the Mao years never attempted, and

hardly possessed the capacity, to protect the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the smaller Southeast Asian states which shared a land border with China could be vulnerable to a direct intervention. In the late 1970s, Beijing made an issue of the situation of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and eventually went to war against its neighbor in 1979 (see below). Also Burma, another state which shared a land border with China, had sharp difficulties with China over the ethnic Chinese.

Anxious to separate foreign policy from domestic minority politics, the post-colonial states of Southeast Asia adopted integrationist or assimilationist policies. Simultaneously, and in a contradictory vein, exclusionist policies were designed to mark ethnic boundaries and restrict economic options. This was especially pronounced in Indonesia, and only the Indonesian government in this period tried to avail itself of the expulsion option.³ Twenty years later, in 1979-80, also Vietnam tried to deal with the issue of overseas Chinese by expulsion, although this time it took the form of large-scale refugee flows.

Integrationist policies generally prevailed. While allowing for distinct variations within the region, by the late 1970s the local Chinese appeared as a hyphenated minority. They often adopted national names and usually were educated in the national language (Gosling and Lim 1983). The development signified a shift in terms of Chinese identity, Wang Gungwu argues, which was much less threatening to the local states than the previous Chinese nationalist identity which had an element of political exclusiveness, and Chinese cultural identity which did the same for culture (Wang 1988). Instead, ethnicity became the central paradigm for understanding the local Chinese. Ethnicity carried no particular connotations regarding political loyalty, could accommodate fused cultures, and focused on local minority rights and duties rather than foreign ties. Increasingly, the Chinese became viewed as just another and perhaps less troublesome minority than other minorities. It is indicative that in Malaysia, the most institutionalized plural polity of Southeast Asia, there were signs in the late 1980s of a vertical split in the consociational Alliance as a B-team of dissatisfied Malays leaders contemplated a rival alliance with likeminded dissidents of the other ethnic groups (Chee 1989).

In a reinforcing development, the regions' most distinctly Chinese insurgency had ended. The last flicker was formally extinguished in 1989 when Chin Peng, the long-time leader, appeared in Malaysian to announce it was all over. In Thailand, the insurgency collapsed under the weight of suppression and its own weakness

³ In the context of economic indigenization policies, mob violence and attempts to force Chinese out of the rural retail trade, president Sukarno negotiated with China "the return" of thousands of Chinese. The option proved unrealistic. The arrangement was shortlived and involved only a small fraction of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese. In 1960, about 100,000 went to China on Chinese-provided vessels, and were settled in southern provinces of China which their ancestors had probably left several generations earlier (Williams 1966:66).

in the second half of the 1970s. On the economic front, developments also generated a sense of national confidence and strength. Most of the non-communist countries in the regional ASEAN grouping experienced rapid economic growth in the 1970s to attain NIC status. Altogether, the result was to shift national security threats from the internal to the external realm. Simultaneously, the older "security" connotations attached to the ethnic Chinese in the 1950s and 1960s were attenuated.

The transformation in the nature of the "threat" was substantially helped by fundamental changes in China and the region which predated the end of the cold war. With the passing of the Maoist era, China turned to a policy of moderation and modernization based on greater economic openness to the capitalist world. The Overseas Chinese were now important chiefly as a source of remittances and a network for China's trade with the region. While this underlined the continuous ties between China and the diaspora, it was rather less threatening in Southeast Asia than a call to revolution. Simultaneously, Beijing ordered some local Chinese revolutionaries to cease the struggle, and cut off supplies to others in order improve state-to-state relations with non-communist Southeast Asia.⁴

The latter had reasons of their own to reciprocate. During the second half of the 1970s, the ASEAN states undertook a foreign policy reorientation. The new stance reflected the altered balance of power in the region brought about by communist victory in Vietnam (1975), the latter's invasion of Kampuchea (1978), and a short but nasty Sino-Vietnamese war the following year. Responding to the new power realities, China and ASEAN formed a quasi-alliance against their common enemy — Vietnam.

The conjuncture of events in domestic and foreign politics during the late 1970s started a transformation in the nature of the diaspora problem. With economic growth and political consolidation on the domestic scene, and new enemies and allies on the regional horizon, the Chinese in Southeast Asia appeared in a new light: from being a potentially subversive fifth column of earlier decades, they were now the useful middlemen in a lucrative China trade. From being Overseas Chinese, they had become ethnic Chinese.

⁴ It is "almost certain" China helped arrange Chin Peng's appearance on the Thai-Malaysian border where vintage rebel leader announced the end of the Malaysian insurgency in 1989 (Wang 1990:72). In a similar gesture, China had already in 1979 shut down the clandestine radio station Voice of the People of Thailand insurgency which for years had urged the Thai people to support the revolutionary struggle of the Communist Party of Thailand.

3. Migration in the post-colonial era

Chinese migration to Southeast Asia generally came to a halt by about 1950. For the next three decades, international migration in the region almost ceased. There was neither economic demand nor political space for large-scale importation of foreign labor. In the political sphere, migration was measured against integral concepts of state and nation that characterized the early independence period. National sovereignty was seen as absolute and indivisible. Exclusionist nationalist ideology was promoted to legitimize the new states and integrate the development process, however defined. Informal settlements on the outer rim of the polity, or recognized foreign quarters within the cities as occurred in earlier times, were now unacceptable.⁵ The political importance of ethnic identity, moreover, was accentuated by the legacy of colonial migrations and the problem of defining a formula for power-sharing once colonial rule ended. Ethnic additions would complicate the rules and were not welcome. Indeed, the very concept of migration had a colonial imprint, and the problems associated with the Overseas Chinese constituted a continuous warning against future in-migrations.⁶

With some modifications, these concerns defined the framework within which the refugee flows of the post-colonial period were judged.

3.1 Refugees

Until the late 1970s, the closed migration policies of the Southeast Asian states were not seriously challenged. The major sending country, China, had strict prohibitions on outmigration. Some regional population flows, as from Mindanao in the Philippines to Sabah in West Malaysia, was accommodated for special reasons (see below). Several thousand refugees from French Indochina arrived in Northeast Thailand immediately after World War II, and was allowed to settle. Thai policy represented a continuity of the "classical" mode of free immigration to the periphery of the Kingdom; it also reflected a political decision of Pridi's liberal government to aid the struggle against French colonialism and its victim. When he was replaced by a strongly anti-communist and anti-Vietnamese regime, policy was reversed in a striking illustration of the impact of foreign policy on refugee policy (Poole 1970).

⁵ For instance, 17th century Thai kings readily permitted foreigners to settle in the capital for trade and other services. Kings of the Chakri dynasty in the late 18th and early 19th century allowed an entire Vietnamese rebel army to settle, likewise a few thousand Vietnamese fleeing political and religious strife (Dhiravat 1990, Poole 1970).

⁶ The restrictive naturalization policies in Southeast Asia reflected such concerns, although only the Philippines adopted an pure *jus sanguinis* principle, and even made it retroactive in 1947 to overrule the preceding *jus solis* under American rule (Golay 1969:43).

The big challenge came in the aftermath of the Second Indochina War (1960-75). Arguably the longest, most devastating and most internationalized war in the region since World War II, the conflict produced millions of internally displaced peoples and a sustained outflows of persons classified alternately as refugees or illegal migrants. Seeds of future conflicts were sown to produced renewed war in Kampuchea already in 1978, which in turn produced massive waves of refugees.

The migration movements of this period illustrate with great clarity the complex and close relationships between population flows, on the one hand, and fundamental political issues. In this tangled web, migration sometimes appear as an instrument of foreign policy, sometimes as a cause of power struggles within and among nations, and always as a consequence of such struggles.

The Indochinese population flows are well-known and documented (Zolberg, Suhrke, Aguayo 1989, Sutter 1990, SJSS 1990, Suhrke 1991). During the second Indochina war, relatively few international refugees appeared. After the war, fear of retribution and the new social order produced massive outflows, mainly to neighboring ASEAN states and Hong Kong, and a one-time flow into China. The ASEAN states rapidly adopted a common policy which categorically denied the arrivals refugee status. Temporary asylum was only given on condition that the refugees moved on. This position, first formulated at an international conference in Geneva in 1979, was reiterated at a second Geneva conference in 1989.

A range of concerns, often publicly identified as "security" issues, shaped ASEAN's exclusionist stand. Part of the problem, as seen in the receiving country, was the fact that most flows were seen as irreversible rather than temporary insofar as the refugees fled a new social order, not a passing upheaval or repression. Unless made conditional on resettlement elsewhere, asylum would in practice mean permanent presence. Given the very large numbers involved, this meant a sizable addition to the local population. For instance, 60,000 arrived per month during the 1978-79 peak period in Malaysia alone, a country of only 13 million people.

Unlike the Southeast Asia of the late classical period, the ASEAN states were no longer deficit population countries. A secular trend of growing pressures of population on resources had formed the backdrop for the region's insurgencies after World War II, whether reflecting divisions cut by class formations (as in Thailand and the Philippines) or mainly ethnicity (as in Malaysia). The upsurge in economic growth of the 1970s in most ASEAN states had relieved some pressures, but certainly not enough to create large-scale demand for labor that might justify a relaxed immigration policy. Even in Thailand, which traditionally had been enjoyed a surplus of land to people, expansive agricultural growth had come to an end by the late 1970s (IBRD 1979).

Still, the vehemence of the ASEAN rejectionist stand, and the ruthlessness with which it was pursued, requires further explanation. Much poorer countries have regularly opened its borders to refugees, e.g. the African states against which the ASEAN response often was measured. The critical factor lies in the political calculus made in the receiving area.

The key state was Malaysia, and the calculus plainly ethnic. The Muslim Malay-dominated government had admitted several Muslim refugees, but no others. The Muslims included some smaller groups from the area (about 7,000 Cham from Cambodia, and about 2 500 Burmese Muslims); the only large community was nearly 200,000 Filipino Muslims who in 1968 were given refuge from their war with the Manila government and — importantly — in the context of tense relations between Malaysia and the Philippines. Angered by a Philippine territorial claim on the West Malaysian state of Sabah, the Malaysian government determined that sheltering and also aiding Philippine rebels made good foreign policy.

The first, large waves from Vietnam, however, consisted mainly of ethnic Chinese. To accept them would have upset Malaysia's communal balance. Although the Chinese question had been attenuated over the years, the political formula was still fragile. The New Economic Policy, developed in the aftermath of the devastating race riots in 1969 and designed to shifted more economic power to the Malays, had generated new tensions. In 1984 the government prohibited all public discussion of communal (racial) issues. To admit thousands of ethnic Chinese to the country under these conditions would have weakened the government in its Malay constituency and could have sparked riots.

Considerations of regime security and internal order were paramount, yet, they could not be officially articulated without courting the precise dangers they were designed to avoid. Instead, official Malaysian pronouncements focused on the external security implications. The population flows were seen as policy instruments of China, or Vietnam. Given Malaysia's customary security preoccupation with China and the Overseas Chinese, there was a short logical distance between the fact that the refugees were ethnic Chinese and the assertion that they were a "fifth column" of China. Alternately, Vietnam — the point of departure — was perceived as the underlying threat. Vietnam was said to have expelled ethnic Chinese in order to destabilize Southeast Asia and, especially, to wreck Malaysia's communal order. Vietnamese authorities indeed pressured and facilitated the Chinese to leave Vietnam before 1979 in a way that amounted to expulsion. It is unlikely, however, that the purpose was to destabilize the ASEAN countries — with which Vietnam was trying to mend fences so as to protect its flank in the imminent struggle with China — rather than to rid itself of an unwanted ethnic group. From Hanoi's perspective, salient reasons for expelling the ethnic Chinese pertained to Vietnam's relations with China, not ASEAN. The

decision by Vietnam in mid-1979 to cooperate with ASEAN to curb illegal outflows testified to these priorities (Sutter 1990:96, Zolberg et al, 1989).

The ethnic grounds for Malaysia's rejectionist stance were widely accepted as valid. This permitted the other ASEAN members to follow suit, often invoking the principle of ASEAN unity in an organization striving to mark itself as a regional actor. Regional cooperation thus lent legitimacy to the rejectionist stance. No state wanted a substantial, forced in-migration for economic reasons, ethno-political considerations worked in the some direction. Both Chinese and the Vietnamese were considered potential "fifth columns"; additionally, the Chinese represented a politically difficult minority situation throughout the region. Beyond this, each ASEAN member developed its particular rejectionist version which reflected a mix of "security" concerns.

Singapore was the most uncompromising, having only a refuge population of 345 in 1988, ten years after the exodus started. All others had been swiftly passed on, and countless denied entry. For Singapore it was a way to deny any legitimacy to the notion that a country could expel its Chinese minority. As the only Chinese-majority state in the region, Singapore would be subject to a flood of Chinese in the event other regional countries pressured *their* ethnic Chinese to leave. For the small city-state, forced migration of this kind was a threat to national survival. As Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew put it: "You must grow callouses on your heart...otherwise you will bleed to death" (cited in Sutter 1990:145).

Thailand conveniently cited ASEAN's rejectionist stand but developed a more nuance position in a traditionalist mode. Lowland Lao and hill tribes from Lao were treated more leniently. The Laotians had domestic kin in Thailand, and did not represent a domestic political complication. More importantly, they were seen as unproblematic migrants in that the mother country was too weak to use them politically or intervene to protect them. Laos was a small and weak state that traditionally had occupied a deferential position in relation to the more powerful Thai kings.⁷ For several years after 1975, Thai governments systematically sheltered and aided Laotian refugees in order to put pressure on Laos. The Vietnamese, however, were compelled to move on partly because the mother country in this case was a traditional rival and formidable adversary of Thailand. The Khmer were allowed to stay, but only insofar as the international community pressured Thailand to grant asylum, and only as long as they usefully formed an army of "refugee-warriors" to push back the Vietnamese (Mason and Brown 1983), Shawcross 1984, Suhrke and Klink 1987).

⁷ It is well remembered that Thai forces twice had invaded Laos and sacked its capital Vientiane, first in the late 18th century and again in the early 19th.

In the Thai case, relations with the sending country indicated whether the refugees would be viewed as a threat or an instrument of foreign policy. Refugees from smaller neighbors were useful instruments (Laos and Cambodia); refugees from at large neighbor and rival were inherently suspicious. The other decisive factor was the phase of the conflict in the sending country. In Laos and Cambodia, the conflict continued and the refugees could influence the outcome. In Vietnam the war was definitely lost.

With modifications, the logic also applied to Sino-Vietnamese relations. As relations between the two states changed from amity to hostility, the Chinese diaspora became an inflamed issue, a perceived threat for one, and a policy instrument for the other. Simultaneously, the diaspora were repressed — partly for reasons independent of state-to-state relations but certainly at an accelerated rate as these relations worsened. Repression produced massive outmigration which in turn had a negative feedback on state-to-state relations. The various sources of tension finally culminated in war. In narrative terms, the conflict can be briefly sketched:

By 1977-78, relations between the erstwhile communist allies were moving towards a breaking point (Benoit 1981, Chang 1982, Chanda 1986, Lawson 1984.) Their struggle over Cambodia also concerned the structure of power in the region, particularly Vietnam's role relative to China. In this context, the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam (*hoa*) assumed greater significance. China evidently tried to use the ethnic Chinese question, if not the ethnic Chinese directly, as a leverage to isolate Vietnam internationally and put pressure Hanoi in their bilateral relationship. China was among the first to charge that Hanoi was deliberately expelling the ethnic Chinese in order to destabilize its neighbours, and drew international attention to the deprivations of the ethnic Chinese. Possibly, China also sought to sow panic among the ethnic Chinese by spreading rumors of imminent pogroms, thus inciting even more Chinese to leave. The mass exodus, of course, served to stigmatize the Hanoi regime internationally where it was generally interpreted as the result of a malevolent policy pursued by a ruthless regime.⁸

Simultaneously, Hanoi pressured its ethnic Chinese to leave. Not only was the Chinese-controlled commercial sector of South Vietnam nationalized and former urbanites driven to harsh agricultural work zones. In the context of escalating Sino-Vietnamese tension, ethnic Chinese in both the North and the South were suspected of being a fifth column for China. When the war started, China cited among other things the need to stop the influx of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. By then, about a quarter of a million *hoa* had been resettled in Southern China. The refugees did strain Chinese reception facilities, but the principal reason for

⁸ Hanoi countered that the outflow was a necessary consequence of reconstruction and social transformation under unfavorable historical conditions.

war was Vietnam's prior invasion of Cambodia. China had to "teach Vietnam a lesson", as Beijing explained when its forces attacked.

As the Indochinese refugee movements show, population flows caused by primarily political or social strife carry some of the original conflict with them. Such flows have an inherently political impact in the receiving states. By extending asylum, the receiving state becomes at least indirectly a party to the conflict. Some actively utilize the refugees as instruments of foreign policy. For these reasons, refugee flows typically appear in international adversarial contexts. Some refugees have international patrons, others flee in the direction of greatest anticipated support. However, militant activity by refugees across the border may complicate the foreign policy of the host state and undermine asylum. Thus, the Thai government in 1991 returned some Burmese refugees to Burma (Myanmar) in the interest of maintaining good relations with Rangoon. The government of Papua New Guinea in the late 1980s restricted the activities of the West Irian separatist forces operating from the PNG-side of the border.

By contrast, international labor migration does not operate in the same adversarial context as between sending and receiving states. Nor do they impose a legal obligation on the receiving state to provide entry and various services, as international law requires for the treatment of refugees. In principle, refugees have to be admitted regardless of race and skills; migrants can be handpicked. This basic difference in the nature of migrant and refugee flows explains why regional states did not perceive the two as interchangeable. Countries with labor shortages would reject refugees, but regularly import foreign labor (e.g. Singapore and Malaysia). The migrants met the needs of the market and other criteria for entry, the refugees did not.

Yet, "other criteria" than economic also pertained to labor migration in the region. And while labor movements were not inherently political as were refugee flows, they clearly posed political problems. This was evident when Southeast Asian countries in the late 1970s became receiving states for migrant labor.

3.2 Labor migration

For the first time since the colonial period, rapid economic growth in Southeast Asia during the 1970s and 1980s attracted substantial labor migration to countries in the region (Hugo 1991, Stahl 1991). Most migrants came from low-income countries in the region (Indonesia, the Philippines and partly Thailand), others came from South Asia. The main receiving countries were the rapidly growing economies of Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei, increasingly also Thailand. Except for Brunei, these were also sending countries, and part of an increasingly complex network of Asia-wide migration.

Labor market differentials and migration networks largely explain why the flows developed; political factors are essential to understand the reception given the migrants. Two basic patterns developed on the receiving side.

One was the tightly controlled response exemplified by the Singaporean case (Gunasekaran and Sullivan 1990, Chiew 1991). A small city-state intensely preoccupied with national survival, Singapore formulated an immigration policy that was uniquely rational and ruthlessly implemented. Immigrants were graded according to skills and race, and fitted into slots designed to meet economic needs and maintain Singapore's racial balance. For instance, the government determined in 1989 that the country needed 25,000 Chinese from Hong Kong to compensate for outmigration of its own skilled Chinese, and the low fertility rate among Singapore's Chinese population compared to the Muslim minority. At the same time, the Hong Kong Chinese were supposed to meet property or skill requirements.

With the most advanced and growing economy in the Southeast Asia, Singapore needed a range of manpower. Each type — from maids to managers — were given a place on the official immigration ladder, from citizenship application to temporary work permits. Nevertheless, Southeast Asian realities of labor mobility and sharply uneven economic growth constantly pressed against the official regulations. Next door were Indonesia's uncounted millions of under- and unemployed, the Philippines had for decades been a major labor exporting country, and thousands of workers from Thailand and Burma were moving south in search of employment. Unless immigration was rigorously controlled, Singapore would become inundated, thereby jeopardizing its racial status quo and prized social order.

Possibly springing from a deep sense of vulnerability, social order had long been at the core of Singaporean concepts of national survival. Singapore was a small island of Chinese in a sea of Malays, as the picture was often drawn; a city state dependent upon an entrepot economy whose only resources were the skills of its people and lovely orchids. To regulate immigration was a critical test of governmental capacity and control, hence also a basic element of social order. The government resolved in 1989 to demonstrate its capacity by altering the constitution so as to permit corporal punishment for illegal immigration, applicable to both migrants and the employers who hired them.⁹

Generally, Singapore has been able to control both legal and illegal migration, as has the oil-rich Brunei. Temporary workers must leave when the contract expires,

⁹ At first, amnesties netted some 12,000 undocumented workers who were expelled without punishment. Subsequently, illegal workers from Thailand, India, Malaysia and Indonesia were punished by caning and jail sentences (Gunasekaran and Sullivan 1990, 64).

and illegal workers are summarily dealt with. This has been possible by exercising a commanding sense of political purpose and efficient instruments of social control in a territorially compact state.

In Malaysia, by contrast, immigration was not tightly controlled and increasingly became a source — as well as an instrument — of political conflict (Gunasekaran and Sullivan 1990, Vatikiotis 1992). This was evident in peninsular Malaysia, but more clearly in the East Malaysian state of Sabah. When Sabah in the late 1960s had opened the gate to Filipino Muslim refugees, local politics had harmonized with federal interests.¹⁰ Subsequently, a steady flow of undocumented workers from both the Philippines and Indonesia moved into Sabah and its burgeoning economy. By the late 1980s, they accounted for about 60 per cent of the service sector and 90 per cent of the agricultural plantation labor.

By this time, federal-state relations had change to an acrimonious dispute over who would control the rich East Malaysian state. The battlelines were drawn along communal lines. The leading state party, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), led by a member of Sabah's "indigenous" Christian Kadazan-Dusun community, charged that the federal government permitted illegal migrations in order to register the workers on the electoral rolls. The charges were probably correct. The undocumented workers were mainly Muslims and could be expected to support the Malay-Muslim federal UMNO party, which had instituted a vigorous campaign to unseat the PBS in Sabah. Sharp increases in voter registration further substantiated the theory that a process also observed in India's Assam was at work: the electoral contest drew illegal migrants into the vortex of political conflict.¹¹ Good relations with the Philippines, however, ensured that the potentially explosive issue did not spill over into foreign affairs.

In different ways, Malaysia and Singapore illustrate the complexities of labor migration in multiethnic states where ethnicity has been highly politicized or institutionalized. Asymmetries in economic and political power between sending and recipient country may also create international tension — the major sending country (Indonesia) is also a large power, while the main recipient countries (Malaysia and Singapore) are not. Despite these problems, present regional trends clearly point towards increased migration. High income NIC states experience shortages of labor and declining fertility, while other countries have abundant labor supply. Economic growth thus poses a major domestic challenge for the

¹⁰ The then Chief Minister of Sabah, Tun Mustapha, was hostile towards the Philippine government and a fervent Muslim.

¹¹ Voter registration in Sabah as a whole increased with 28.5 per cent from 1986 to 1989. In some constituencies the electoral rolls grew by 43 per cent over five years. (Vatikiotis 1992, 30). The PBS had openly challenged Malay-Muslim power on the federal level by leaving the National Front coalition in 1990.

successful ASEAN states. The perceived problem is no longer how to keep people out, as during the Indochinese refugee crisis, but how to bring in the “right” kind.

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