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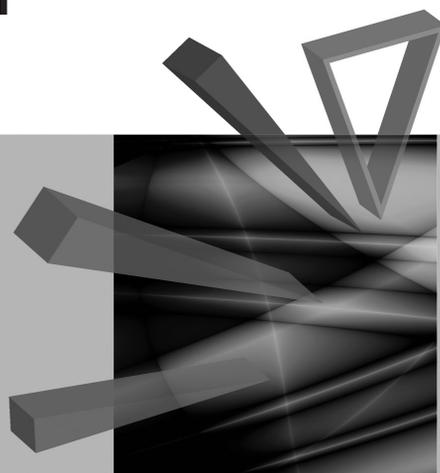
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SECURITIZATION OF NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY ISSUES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE EVALUATION OF THE CONCEPT

Abstract: The scope of security studies expanded significantly in the last few decades encompassing the new types of threats and problems. Among others, the theory of securitization became one of the most successful new theoretical approaches developed under the new security agenda. Thus, the securitization is used for the analysis of Southeast Asian security practice, mostly as a framework for analysis of non-traditional security problems. However, to improve the analytical power of the concept, more attention is needed, e.g., to reveal the motivations of the securitizing actors and the dynamics of conflicts within and between different actors in state's socio-political system. The evaluation of the concept shows that securitization is a highly context-dependent process.

Keywords: securitization, regional security, transnational threats, Southeast Asia.

1. Introduction

The scope of security studies expanded significantly in the last few decades encompassing the new types of threats and problems. The concept of security was widened (on new sectors, including economic, societal or environmental) and deepened (in the sense of the level of analysis and regarding the referent object of security). However, the debate on security still concentrates in the West, with the significant difference between the USA and Europe.¹ Among others, the Copenhagen School's theory of securitization became one of the most successful new theoretical approaches developed under the new security agenda. Nevertheless, as the concept of securitization was created for the purpose of security analysis in Europe, its application in other regions could be limited. Thus, the attempts to use the theory of securitization for the analysis of Southeast Asian security practice could be observed,

¹ O. Wæver, *Aberystwyth, Paris, Copenhagen: New 'schools' in security theory and their origins between core and periphery*, paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Montreal, 17–20 March 2004.

together with the effort to strengthen its theoretical background. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to present the possibilities and limitations of securitization theory in Southeast Asia.

2. Theory of securitization

The so-called Copenhagen School (CS) in security studies is mostly known for its concept of securitization, the regional security complexes theory, and security sectors. The securitization has gained a high level of popularity among scholars at least since the beginning of the 2000s, producing the academic debate regarding the concept itself and its practical and ethical implications.² Among others, the efforts are devoted to create more analytically useful criteria of achieving successful securitization, concentrating also on the explanatory power of the theory beyond the West.

Securitization theory is based on the assumption that concept of security is constructed during the intersubjective process of in-/excluding issues into the sphere of security. Threats became “objective” only when they are considered as such, and not because of their inherited feature.³ Therefore, security has no any given meaning “but it can be anything a securitizing actor says it is. Security is social and intersubjective construction.” However, it is far from being open to all actors and to all possible kinds of threats because “it is largely based on power and capability and therewith the means to socially and politically construct a threat.”⁴

For the CS, security is directly linked to survival, which makes possible the use of emergency measures, because “an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designed referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society).”⁵ Thus, the security is visible through the practice, through the representation of the issue as a threat, but not necessarily through the existence of the real existential threat.⁶ Also, the securitization dynamics will be different in each of the security sectors based on the differences between securitizing actors and referent objects. The former has legitimacy to “securitize issues by declaring something – a referent object – existentially threatened”⁷ and this role is most often played by “political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists,

² U.P. Gad, K.L. Petersen, Concepts of politics in securitization studies, *Security Dialogue* 2011, vol. 42, no. 4–5, pp. 316, 317.

³ B. Buzan, L. Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, pp. 32, 33.

⁴ R. Taureck, Securitization theory and securitization studies, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 2006, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 55.

⁵ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publisher, Boulder–London 1998, p. 21.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

and pressure groups.”⁸ Referent objects are “things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival”⁹ (traditionally, the state, the nation but in fact, “securitizing actors can attempt to construct anything as a referent object.”¹⁰).

The process of securitization is based on the activity of securitizing actor who designates the formerly politicized issue as an existential threat for a referent object.¹¹ Therefore, securitization could be described as a process which explains how and when the issues are perceived as an existential threat for security, and how and when they became a subject for specific actions. Thus, the securitization means “the positioning through speech acts (usually by a political leader) of a particular issue as a threat to survival, which in turn (with the consent of the relevant constituency) enables emergency measures and the suspension of ‘normal politics’ in dealing with that issue.”¹² Securitization theory has special focus on discursive dimension of security, and as O. Wæver puts it: “It is by labelling something a security issue that it becomes one.” So securitization is “the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects.”¹³ However, the possibility of successful securitization depends also on the position of the actor who “speaks” security and has the power to define what security is.¹⁴

3. Securitization in Southeast Asia

The adoption of the securitization theory for the purpose of the Southeast Asian security studies highlights the general problem of theorizing in international relations outside the West.¹⁵ But it also creates the possibility to test the theory in non-Western region.

Securitization in the case of Southeast Asia is mostly used as a framework for analysis of non-traditional security problems. But this situation is also a source of possible criticism (e.g. using new method for “old problems” without any new outcomes) as the general focus of the theory is on the discourse, not practice, which could be misleading in the case of Southeast Asia. Also important issue is who is an audience – relatively weak civil society organisations or the state? And thus

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹² M. McDonald, Securitization and the construction of security, *European Journal of International Relations* 2008, vol. 14, no. 4, p. 567.

¹³ O. Wæver, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁴ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. De Wilde, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁵ E.g. A. Acharya, B. Buzan (Eds.), *Non-western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia*, Routledge, London 2009, pp. 1–22; also B. Buzan, R. Little, Why international relations has failed as an intellectual project and what to do about it, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 2001, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 19–39.

securitization is sometimes treated rather as an instrument of manipulation in the situation of limited number of securitizing actors and dominance of the state and national security discourses. As L. Jones puts it, since the late 1980s, Southeast Asian states have appeared to embrace the trend of widening the security to encompass a wide range of “non-traditional” threats. But they also (mostly) failed to translate this discursive shift into concrete regional cooperation to tackle these new threats. So according to L. Jones “securitization” approach is unable to account for this gap due to its fixation on security discourse rather than practice.¹⁶

Most of the works on securitization in Southeast Asia are focused on the adjustment of the original analytical framework to security practice in the region. In general, this reveals specific relations between different social groups within and between the states.

The most ambitious scientific programme utilising the concept of securitization is so far the IDSS-Ford Project which has produced a volume providing the study of emerging non-traditional security challenges in Asia (for example: migrants issue, piracy, small arms and drug trafficking, AIDS issue, poverty).¹⁷ The members of the Project listed four shortcomings of the CS’s securitization theory,¹⁸ namely the problem with the answer to the question why securitization occurs (e.g. exploitation of securitization by political and military elites for their own benefits is one possible explanation); insufficiency of empirical research; Euro-centrism embedded in the concept; limited interest in policy effectiveness and in the unintended consequences of the processes of securitization. Therefore, the project seeks to move the concept of securitization closer to policy analysis.¹⁹

After the more detailed case studies the conclusion is that securitization theory is useful as an element of analysis, but at the same time is marked by a number of limitations, among others the problem “to address *why* securitization occurs, as opposed to *how* it occurs” (emphasis original) is mentioned.²⁰ To address this issue, it is necessary to consider “a facilitating conditions” to securitization, e.g. the nature and identity of securitizing actors, the concept of security which is assumed or used by these actors, the process of securitization itself and the outcome of the process, which involves the degree of securitization and the impact on the issues area or the “threat.”²¹ In general, the findings of the project are as follows: first, the securitization process is mainly state-centric and the Asian state is the main actor in any securitization process, which follows the “traditional” security practice in Southeast Asia. Secondly,

¹⁶ L. Jones, Beyond securitization: Explaining the scope of security policy in Southeast Asia, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 2011, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 403–432.

¹⁷ M. Caballero-Anthony, R. Emmers, A. Acharya (Eds.), *Non-Traditional Security in Asia. Dilemmas in Securitisation*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2006.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 5, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 6–8.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

the concepts of security used by actors to securitize a particular issue are quite “traditional,” invoking e.g. the idea of “national security” or “comprehensive security.” Thirdly, the existence of the prior security concerns or the more established frames of reference of actors are important to the securitization process. Fourthly, the securitization process produces serious functional implications. Securitization may enhance the efficacy and help to draw attention to the issue and mobilize greater resources. But it could also expand the role of the military and undermine the democratic procedures (especially in fragile democratic states like Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand, and marginalize others actors).²² The last finding is concentrating on the politicization and securitization spectrum, where both processes are not two separate or distinct outcomes. Because securitization means “the end of contestation and debate” the whole process should be easier to accomplish in non-democratic states. This brings the conclusion that “securitization is easier to achieve in Asia than in Europe, because of the relative paucity of democracies in Asia.”²³

R. Emmers, dealing with the securitization of transnational crime by the ASEAN (especially drug trafficking and terrorism), is pointing out the limitation of the ASEAN as a securitizing actor in terms of implementation of joint actions.²⁴ The obstacles for successful securitization are created by domestic circumstances in Southeast Asian states, ASEAN’s consensus model and resistance to institutional reforms.²⁵ In general, ASEAN’s strategy of securitizing the phenomenon and its declaratory anti-crime position has failed to produce an effective policy outcome and securitizing crime has simply been a convenient rhetorical device. Even if criminal activity has been securitized rhetorically, there is a little evidence that this has encouraged regional policy-makers to adopt common security responses.

In the case of transnational crime, the securitizing actors are limited to the state’s representatives and the prime referent object here is the sovereign state. However, as the ASEAN rhetoric adopts a multisectoral approach to security (in terms of comprehensive security) it is possible to adopt other referent objects. The relevant audience is essentially restricted to the elite of policy-makers. The actors who express an issue in security terms are the same as those who need to be persuaded of existential threat. This does not allow for a dialogue between securitizing actors and a separate audience.²⁶

The general findings seem to confirm that securitization has occurred mainly as a rhetorical instrument. The low level of politicization is characteristic for ASEAN’s cooperative response, despite the language of security used in the ASEAN rhetoric.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 247–249.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

²⁴ R. Emmers, ASEAN and the securitization of transnational crime in Southeast Asia, *The Pacific Review* 2003, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 419–438.

²⁵ Finally, the article suggests that the problem of transnational crime could be dealt with more effectively if it was approached primarily as a criminal matter than as a security issue.

²⁶ R. Emmers, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

R. Emmers harshly pointed out that “repetitive and empty statements on the need for cooperation have only given an illusion of progress.” Thus, without the policy outcomes he questions the purpose of securitization.²⁷

It is visible that R. Emmers evaluates the securitization theory through its capability to produce policy outcomes addressing the threats. He adds the additional requirement to successful securitization, concluding that “the issue is fully securitized when it demands discursive (speech act and shared understanding) and non-discursive (policy implementation and action) dimensions. A security act should depend on a language of security that persuades an audience of the nature of the threat and on the implementation of appropriate measures to address it.”²⁸

Third case also deals with the ASEAN as a securitizing actor, but also introduces the concept of collective securitization (namely the securitization within a regional arrangement, involving one or more securitizing actors within that arrangement identifying a particular development or issue as an existential threat to a security referent, making relevant validity claims, and finding a receptive audience among other regional actors. Thus, the authors deal with the “scale” of securitization, namely to what extent the securitization is shared by different actors within or across regions).²⁹

The subject of scrutiny is a problem of transnational security challenges. J. Haacke and P.D. Williams deal with the problems of transnational crime, terrorism, and communicable diseases (like SARS and avian flu). The problem in adoption of securitization is clear in the indication of securitizing actor, which is ASEAN, but also the incumbent governments.

ASEAN’s collective response to deal with transnational crime has focused on norm and capacity building and the search for improvements in legal cooperation.³⁰ While viewing terrorism as a shared threat faced by most incumbent regimes, ASEAN members have largely dealt with it in their own individual ways.³¹ Also, in ASEAN, securitization is more apparent with regard to terrorism, as well as SARS and avian flu (the references to transnational health issues are linked to the security referent of the regional economy of participant states). The securitization of transnational challenges has only involved agreement on cooperation deemed legitimate by their members. So, for J. Haacke and P.D. Williams, it is useful to move beyond the strict politicization versus securitization of an issue toward a more nuanced and graduated understanding of securitization as a process whereby some risks may gradually assume the status of the threats that require urgent responses.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 430.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 431.

²⁹ J. Haacke, P.D. Williams, Regional arrangements, securitization, and transnational security challenges: The African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations compared, *Security Studies* 2008, vol. 17, p. 785.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 799.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 801.

For instance, transnational crime was for the most part considered by ASEAN a concern but not an existential threat to the region, while avian flu has been seen as a potential existential threat.³² According to J. Haacke and P.D. Williams, collective securitization requires a clear regional referent or depends on a shared assessment of threat. In this sense collective discourses betray a continuing shared concern with state security and the survival of incumbent regimes.

In conclusion, the authors are willing to adopt securitization theory, but after the necessary adjustment to the specific case study. They underline that: “It is best not to base conclusions about whether collective securitization has occurred on the same basis as when securitization is being studied in a purely domestic context.” So there is a real difference on the process of securitization depending on context, namely internal politics and international one. The successful act of collective securitization is occurring when regional arrangements framed issues using unambiguous language of existential threat and agreed upon countervailing practical measures. But the requirement regarding the extraordinary measures is alleviated, instead the shared threat assessments are emphasized, as well as agreement on some form of practical response. In practice, the audience for multilateral arrangements is limited to the representatives of other members (the governments). Also, what is crucial here, the clear dichotomy between politicization and securitization should be rejected.³³ Moreover, the collective securitization can be ascertained on the basis of shared understandings about threats and the endorsement of special measures to address these (not necessarily implementation). Also, the collective securitization in each case reflects the existing security discourses, which could in effect produce the so-called silence dilemma.³⁴

What is clear so far, it is the gap between the declaratory and practical side of securitization. As L. Jones points out, the limitation of the securitization theory lies in CS’s fixation on discourse rather than security practice. This is especially important issue in the region well known for its rhetoric of cooperation and difficulty in moving from words to deeds. Possible explanation of this phenomenon is based on the distinctive nature of state-society relations. Southeast Asia state is a mixture of the postcolonial heritage, economic developmental goals and the state- and nation-building processes. Thus, the securitization studies focused on Southeast Asia have to acknowledge the specificity of the region and try to avoid “the Westphalian Straitjacket” syndrome. By saying that, I mean the greater focus on the security practice, and not only on the official discourse. The last one can produce the declarations identifying problems like transnational crime, drug trafficking and communicable diseases as serious threats to security, together with the illusion of progress in regional integration.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 804, 805.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 808, 809.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 778.

Explaining the often failures in the adoption of the special measures to cope with security problems, L. Jones acknowledges “that which phenomena count as security issues and how they are governed are strongly influenced by social conflicts.”³⁵ It means that states are not acting as unitary actors, but rather the way how they respond to security threats is an outcome of the power struggles between different societal groups operating upon and within the state. Different societal groups could ostensibly differ in the threat perception in relations to their own interests, identities and ideologists, and thus “one social group may perceive and discursively identify as ‘threatening’, while others may be indifferent or even view the issue positively.”³⁶ Moreover, security policies and discourses are “products of historical structures and processes, of struggles for power within states, of conflicts between the societal groupings that inhabit states and the interests that besiege them.”³⁷ Therefore, to improve the securitization utility as an instrument of analysis, the consideration will be needed, as L. Jones suggests, on the patterns of ownership and control over resources in a society; on the level of access to state power of different socio-political groups; and also on the social structure which can operate as a constrain on official policy.³⁸ All together present the social constitution of state power which is vital to understand the state’s security policy. The last one is the outcome of the broader constellation of interests and struggles within and between different groups. Thus, it can help to explain the successes and failures of securitization of transnational problems, and the existence of the gap between declarations and practice.

4. Summary

Securitization in Southeast Asian context is mostly adopted as a framework for analysis of non-traditional security concerns. The findings of the studies are clearly indicating the limitations of the original concept, but are also trying to improve its analytical utility. Therefore it is necessary to identify the motivations of the securitizing actors in order to understand why and how certain issues were securitized. It is also needed to examine the forms and interests of the government to reveal the dynamics of conflicts within and between different actors in state’s socio-political system. Also, there is no clear distinction between securitization and politicization because the nature of politics can differ from one country to another, and securitization is a highly context-dependent process.

Concluding, the specific features of securitization in Southeast Asia could be enumerated:

³⁵ L. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ R. Lipschutz (Ed.), *On Security*, Columbia University Press, New York 1995, p. 8.

³⁸ L. Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 410–421.

- the problem with the focus on discourse analysis (securitization as a rhetoric instrument), and with the implementation of emergency measures and/or shared assessment of threats;
- securitization is mostly a state-centric process;
- it is based on the adoption of well-known concepts of security;
- the rigid distinction between politicization and securitization processes is problematic, and should be relaxed;
- securitization could be treated as an rhetorical instrument used by state actors;
- securitization is mostly applied to non-traditional security issues (traditional security challenges are linked to the survival of the incumbent regimes, and non-traditional security issues gain more attention where are framed according to the existing security discourses);
- the criteria of successful securitization should be different according to the level of analysis (the differences between the securitization on the state and regional levels).

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SEKURYTYZACJA NIETRADYCYJNYCH ZAGROŻEŃ DLA BEZPIECZEŃSTWA W AZJI POŁUDNIOWO-WSCHODNIEJ. OCENA UŻYTECZNOŚCI ANALITYCZNEJ

Streszczenie: W ostatnich dwóch dekadach zakres studiów nad bezpieczeństwem znacznie się powiększył, obejmując nową problematykę, w tym nowatorskie ujęcia teoretyczne. Do tych ostatnich zalicza się teoria sekurytyzacji, która w przypadku Azji Południowo-Wschodniej wykorzystywana jest przede wszystkim w analizie nietradycyjnych zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa. Niemniej jednak, aby wzmocnić moc analityczną teorii, uwaga w większym stopniu powinna być poświęcona m.in. motywacjom aktorów sekurytyzujących i dynamice konfliktów pomiędzy różnymi aktorami w ramach danego systemu społeczno-politycznego. Ocena koncepcji wskazuje, iż sekurytyzacja jest procesem silnie osadzonym w wewnętrznych uwarunkowaniach regionu.

Słowa kluczowe: sekurytyzacja, bezpieczeństwo regionalne, zagrożenia transnarodowe, Azja Południowo-Wschodnia.