Southeast Asia is a vast and complex region, comprised of countries with remarkably diverse histories and cultures. Jacques Bertrand provides a fresh and highly original survey of politics and political change in this area of the world. Against the backdrop of rapid economic development and social transformation in several Southeast Asian countries, he explores why some of these countries have adopted democratic institutions, while others have maintained stable authoritarian systems or accepted communist regimes. Bertrand presents a historically grounded account of capitalist countries and state-socialist countries, delving into the historical experience of individual countries, while simultaneously providing a comparative framework with which to draw parallels and foster a better understanding of the political and economic dynamics both within and between the countries. With powerful yet accessible analysis and detailed coverage, this book offers students and scholars a thorough and thought-provoking introduction to the political landscape of Southeast Asia.

Jacques Bertrand is Associate Professor of Political Science and a member of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Toronto. For the last few years, his research has focused on the effects of democratization on sub-state nationalist mobilization in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. He is the author of Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia (Cambridge University Press, 2004) and co-editor of Multination States in Asia: Accommodation or Resistance (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
Political Change in Southeast Asia

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# Contents

## List of figures and tables

- Preface
  - ix

1 Understanding political change in Southeast Asia
  - European colonialism and its influence
    - 2
  - European encounters
    - 4
  - Nationalism, communism and the modern state
    - 10
  - Political change: alternative explanations
    - 17
    - Growth, development and political change
      - 20
    - Elites and democratization
      - 24
    - Civil society, oppositional politics and change
      - 26
    - Southeast Asia’s uniqueness
      - 27

2 Indonesia and Timor-Leste
  - Indonesia
    - 41
      - Liberal democracy and Guided Democracy, 1959–1965: elite divisions and ideology
        - 44
        - 50
      - The new democratic era: the emergence of the middle class?
        - 58
    - Timor-Leste
      - 64

3 The Philippines
  - Long but weak democratic tradition: 1946–1972
    - 71
  - The Marcos regime and its downfall
    - 77
  - The return to democracy
    - 82

4 Malaysia and Singapore
  - Malaysia
    - 95
      - 1969 riots, the New Economic Policy and the formation of the National Front (Barisan Nasional)
        - 98
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regime persistence and its challenges</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consolidating PAP rule</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The rise of opposition and the PAP’s institutional adjustments</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The classic “bureaucratic polity”</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic interlude and soft authoritarianism: the</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>erosion of the bureaucratic polity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 1991 coup and unstable democracy</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thai Rak Thai and Thaksin Shinawatra</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 2006 coup and return to semi-democracy</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divided Vietnam: effects of the Cold War</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Socialist Republic of Vietnam: institutionalization of</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the communist regime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doi Moi: economic reform and political continuity</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cambodia and Laos</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deep elite division and war</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Khmer Rouge’s radical alternative</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnamese-supported regime, civil war and United</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nations intervention</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fragile power-sharing: CPP dominance under unstable</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coalition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The rise of deep elite divisions</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The consolidation of the LPDR regime</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic reform and regime stability</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Burma/Myanmar</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic rule, 1948–1962</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 1962 coup and the military regime</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 1988 crisis, the rise of opposition and the new SLORC/SPDC regime</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New constitution, new regime?</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

9 Southeast Asia in the twenty-first century 209
   Ideology and Cold War politics 212
   Economic development 214
   Elites and institutional cohesion 218
   Do grass-roots movements create political change? 222
   Is Southeast Asia unique? 224

References 229

Index 237
Figures and tables

Figures

1 GDP growth in non-socialist Southeast Asia  
2 GDP growth in Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam

Tables

1 GDP per capita, 1960–2009  
2 GDP growth (%), 1960–2009  
3 Indonesia  
4 Timor-Leste  
5 Philippines  
6 Malaysia  
7 Singapore  
8 Thailand  
9 Vietnam  
10 Cambodia  
11 Laos  
12 Burma/Myanmar
Preface

This book provides a survey of political change in Southeast Asian countries, from independence to the twenty-first century. Any such book makes choices regarding the approach, historical material and nature of the analysis. I present an analytical framework that invites the reader to think about the role of several factors that can be compared across cases, and that frequently have been raised as broad explanations for political change. I also emphasize some of the concepts that specialists of Southeast Asia have introduced to explain more unique aspects of political change, its absence, or the character and quality of the region’s political regimes. At the same time, the book remains sensitive to history. The chapters present narratives of political change in each country, in order to both assess the explanatory value of comparative factors, as well as specific historical circumstances that have influenced political trajectories in significant ways. The book’s challenge is to provide a relatively cohesive, yet sufficiently complex, explanation that allows for comparison across different countries, while offering a broad historical survey. Southeast Asia is a vast, diverse and complex region that is composed of eleven countries. The book covers all of these except the small country of Brunei. By covering such a broad range of countries, in the exposition of political change I necessarily stress a more specific set of questions and issues that I carry from one country to the next.

The book is therefore by no means exhaustive. I chose to focus on changes in regime type, basic political institutions, as well as governments where they introduced significantly new directions. The presence or absence of democracy determines a terrain that allows or restricts other groups from advancing their interests or pursuing their goals. I view the right of political association and participation, restrictions on political organizations, the ability to express dissent, types of representation, and other such characteristics as basic parameters that define a space in which citizens and groups can operate. For these reasons, I
emphasize change in the country’s basic political institutions and types of government, while admittedly neglecting a host of other important forms of political action taken by diverse sets of groups in society. More specialized work is best suited for the analysis of these latter groups. I hope to provide with this book a solid base from which to understand the region’s diverse politics.