

## **Abstract**

In the Western world, journalism is inextricably linked to democracy. This connection has fostered an abundance of normative assumptions and expectations as to what journalists should and should not do. These norms have made it particularly difficult to discuss and study journalism in non-Western or non-democratic countries where the profession is often being defined as a Western “other” – as what it is not. This dissertation takes another approach and investigates journalism in Southeast Asia from the bottom-up leaving room for journalists’ own interpretations and understandings of their profession. Through a comparative study of journalism in Singapore and Vietnam, the dissertation uncovers perceptions of journalism, role orientations and role struggles among journalists in the two countries. It furthermore discusses how, and to what extent, similarities between Singapore and Vietnam reflect a particular Southeast Asian model of journalism.

One of the dissertation’s primary focal points is the states’ role in structuring and conditioning the journalistic profession. The states’ active involvement in the profession in both countries through laws and regulation and with promotion (and to some extent enforcement) of normative scripts influence journalists’ perceptions of ideals, routinized practices and role orientations. But with different approaches to media management, the states’ interference in the two countries’ media environment manifests itself differently with Vietnam taking a more hands-on, yet inconsistent, approach compared to Singapore’s subtler self-administered approach where the media take part in enforcing rules and regulation.

Although the dissertation cannot provide evidence of the existence of a Southeast Asian model of journalism, it does find parallels between the two journalistic fields which could lead to the conclusion that they might be different reflections of similar conditioning forces or even of related media systems. These similarities might have nothing to do with the countries’ shared location in Southeast Asia but instead mirror their complex state-media relationship. The dissertation therefore closes with suggestions for expanding existing media system frameworks to better account for systems with strong state interference similar to Singapore and Vietnam.