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Can There Be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?

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Much has been written on the Western origins of Southeast Asian Studies and the constructedness of the object of this field of study. The essay by the American political scientist Donald Emmerson (1984) is one of the earliest and best deconstructive accounts on this history. A decade later, Australian-based American historian Craig Reynolds informed us that the attempt by various Western scholars to "authenticate Southeast Asia as a region and a field of study [...] is very much a Western, postcolonial project" (1995: 437). Reynolds added that the implications of Emmerson's essay about Southeast Asia as "a contrived identity, reified by scholars, publishers, and educational institutions in the West, have never been pursued" (1995: 439). Unintentionally, two fine essays, by American anthropologist John Bowen (2000) and his European counterpart Victor King (2001), further reaffirm this exogenous character of Southeast Asian Studies. Despite the disagreements in their views, these views reflect – as the authors reflect *on* – the history, character, and achievements of this domain of area studies as it unfolded largely in their respective continent of residence.[1] Consequently, only a few names of Southeast Asians appear in their discussions. Among this tiny minority, none is mentioned in either essay for any contribution of major significance to academic inquiry. Rather than resulting from Bowen's or King's oversight or deliberate disregard of Southeast Asian scholarship on the region, this represents the standard practice and reflects a reality that they set out to analyze.[2]

Few exceptions exist to this practice, and some new changes are occurring. As hinted to by many – including those cited above – but never adequately explored,

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Southeast Asians are not simply fictional figures authored by outsiders, or submissive puppets in the masterful hands of Western puppeteers. Emmerson already pondered whether, as "an externally defined region," Southeast Asia could in the future "become meaningful to its inhabitants" (1984: 18). Citing Smail and Van Leur, Reynolds suggests that Southeast Asians would "[...] 'write back' against the constructions of colonial historiography" (1995: 432). But have they? Should they? Where, in what ways, and how far have they done so?

The last decade or so has actually witnessed a slow but progressive growth of interest and activity towards locally-based Southeast Asian studies. Nonetheless, it remains true to say that, with the exception of Singapore, Southeast Asian studies is of little interest to Southeast Asians. For the last three decades, Singapore has remained the region's only major center of teaching and research in Southeast Asian studies. Not only has its famous Institute of Southeast Asian Studies continued to thrive when many teaching programs in American, European, and Australian universities underwent a crisis, but the National University of Singapore's Southeast Asian Studies Programme has also grown along with NUS' several other Asia-related departments and activities. Something similar can be seen at the Department of South-East Asian Studies, the University of Malaya. Select Books in Singapore is perhaps the world's only bookshop especially devoted to Southeast Asian studies. Thailand has made encouraging progress with the launching of new institutional commitments to degree programs in the same area studies (see Kasetsiri 1998). On a smaller scale, similar developments are taking place in several institutions in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Notwithstanding these developments, the world's main centers of gravity of Southeast Asian studies are still located in North America, Australia, and Europe.[3] The institutional crisis that has prevailed in these three regions has not been a major cause for concern to most Southeast Asians, nor has it undermined the intellectual dominance of Western, and particularly North American, area studies in Southeast Asia.

What does this particular historical conjuncture, as crudely sketched out above, mean for the prospects for home-grown Southeast Asian studies in Southeast Asia? The present essay seeks to answer this question by focusing on three thematic issues. *First*, some sort of area studies can be predicted to grow in scale and importance in most parts of Southeast Asia, although the name and boundaries of this area of analysis may be different from that of the American-led Southeast Asian studies of the Cold War period. However, such growth will take place gradually. *Second*, despite such possible development, the old Southeast Asian studies as it has matured on the other side of the globe will continue to have a bearing upon locally-produced knowledge on the region. In profound ways, it will become an intellectual legacy, historical baggage, source of inspiration, institutional assistance, and partner to the more locally-based institutionalized areas studies. *Third*, the issue of past and present unequal relationships in the production and consumption of knowledge on this region will be debated more seriously than before, prompting discussions of related issues such as agency, positions of difference, and

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representation. One would hope that this tension brings results that are more constructive and innovative than earlier debates on the indigenization of the social sciences (before the 1970s), or on the "Asian values" (in the 1990s).[4]

Emphasizing the activities and agency of the existing few Southeast Asian scholars and public intellectuals in Southeast Asia in building local Southeast Asian studies, this essay will make no attempt to survey – like the writings cited above did – the works of importance by Southeast Asianists from other continents. Because no Southeast Asian studies has developed institutionally in Southeast Asia on a scale comparable to that in North America, Europe, or Australia, many of the insights presented below have been informed by various unpublished sources and personal experience.[5]

Southeast Asians or Southeast Asianists

There can be important differences in the main orientations, constraints, and contributions of area specialists based on different continents, as the works of Emmerson (1984), Bowen (2000), King (2001), and Milner (1999) have separately shown. These differences, however, are not as important as those found to exist between, on the one hand, all of these scholars taken together and, on the other, Southeast Asian scholars. This essay is concerned with this latter set of differences. Southeast Asians are central to the operation and existence of Southeast Asian studies, and yet they have always occupied a subordinate or inferior position within the production and consumption of this enterprise. Although Southeast Asians have every right and potential to be legitimate analysts of themselves, their modern intellectual apparatus has largely been both indebted and subordinated to the West. Its further development has largely continued to be dependent on this unequal relationship with the West, although there are signs of important changes in sight.

One way to appreciate this unequal interdependence is to look briefly at the standard procedures in the making of Southeast Asianists through university training in the West, and at how such procedures apply differently to students hailing from Southeast Asia. Hardly distinguishable from the rites of passage for students of anthropology, the minimum requirements for becoming a Southeast Asianist include a good mastery of one of the living languages of the people in the region, and an extended period of residence there. In fact, anthropology has been one of the most important forerunners of Southeast Asian studies, and continues to be one of its key disciplines.

Formulated as such, the standard procedures expose the foreignness of the enterprise and its practitioners to the people studied. For decades, university curriculums in Southeast Asian studies have assumed – even more blatantly than in anthropology – that they train people who have neither achieved proficiency in a Southeast Asian language, nor lived in the region. These students are anything but Southeast Asians. This is understandable as nearly all these universities are located half a globe away from Southeast Asia, and the number of Southeast Asian people living near these institutions has been small. Major changes in the demographic

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composition of states (for instance, California or Hawai'i) or cities (for instance, Melbourne) with strong area studies seriously challenge the old assumptions, and render the educational structure that was previously built upon such assumptions outdated.

The number of Southeast Asian nationals in Southeast Asian studies has increased during the last decade or so. Most of these individuals are native speakers of one or several of the living languages spoken in the region, and have spent a large portion of their lives there. They meet some of the technical requirements for becoming Southeast Asianists very well. However, as "insiders" of the object of study, their double position becomes a source of tension. Within the dominant framework, Southeast Asians are overqualified (in terms of language mastery and residence) to be Southeast Asianists, but they also are – or are made to appear – under-qualified for other reasons, for instance, in terms of academic analytical skills and theorizing. They are assets (as colleagues, informants, connections, research assistants, fieldwork hosts) for foreign analysts, but also suspects (allegedly biased and partial in approaching the common objects of investigation). They cannot be totally ignored, neither can they be fully assimilated within the old structures of area studies.

As the number of Southeast Asians entering Southeast Asian studies has grown, it has become difficult to ignore the above ambivalences and tensions, or to conceal the ethnocentrism that contributed to the early foundation of Southeast Asian studies *outside* Southeast Asia. Of late, new policies and procedures have been designed in response to particular situations, and applied specifically to the increased participation of Southeast Asian nationals in the field. The most important examples of such policies are the requirements and institutional support for students of Southeast Asian background to study any part of the region except "their own." Although the early ethnocentrism in Southeast Asian studies was European and American, the logic of these policies is not restricted to European or American institutions. At the University of Singapore, students who are officially designated as "ethnic Malays," for instance, are welcome to major in Southeast Asian studies, but they can only do so by concentrating their work on any of the non-Malay speaking areas of the region. The same regulation applies in a number of new major grant schemes, sponsored by Japanese and American foundations, to encourage mid-career academics and professionals in Southeast Asia to study areas of Asia other than their own countries of origin.[6]

The rationality of such a policy is immediately apparent, and the potential benefits are beyond doubt. Nonetheless, its underlying assumption is subject to several complications. First, such a policy assumes that Southeast Asian individuals have only one clear-cut background (place, language, and culture of origin). Its resonance with the colonial census system in the invention of ethnicity among the colonized peoples is striking.[7] The policy also assumes that there is a significant degree of homogeneity among new recruits within a single nation-state; that they all have good knowledge about their fellow nationals; and that they are significantly differentiated from those in other nation-states. In overestimating the nation-state's

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homogenizing power, this policy downplays several other social divisions and inequalities that cut across each other and transcend national boundaries: gender, ethnicity, class, age, religion, geographical distance from capital cities, and so on.

Therefore, according to such logic, a Thai is not "truly" a Southeast Asianist, no matter how much s/he has studied about Thailand, until s/he has acquired a considerable amount of knowledge about at least one other country in the region as produced outside the region. S/he is "only" a Thai specialist, or an academic in a particular discipline. As indicated in a moment, few exceptions are made, when such a person's works form a significant contribution to a much wider international community of scholars. In contrast, an American may well qualify as a Southeast Asianist by virtue of a fairly deep understanding of a single aspect of social life in one small domain within the region (for instance, Balinese painting, Bangkok entertainment industry, or Sinakulo in Luzon), regardless of her/his knowledge of America.

The same logic makes it possible for a Jakarta-based Indonesian academic to be recognized as a Southeast Asianist because of her/his fairly deep knowledge about a subject familiar to Southeast Asian urbanites (for instance, corruption, traffic jams, radio broadcast, women or Islamic movements, or constitutional reform) in Bangkok, Manila, or Kuala Lumpur, although s/he has no clue as to what life is like for her/his fellow nationals in many of the islands away from Jakarta.

The foregoing indicates a number of facts. First, there is a wide gap from being a Southeast Asian to being a Southeast Asianist. A Southeast Asian can be trained to become a Southeast Asianist, but such training is never easy. It is not any easier than for a non-Southeast Asian. This and a few other obstacles to be elaborated on in the following sections explain why Southeast Asian studies has been predominantly Euro- or Americano-centric. Despite the various forms of politically correct rhetoric, it has never been easy for Southeast Asians to seek entry and equal standing with other colleagues in the production and circulation of authoritative knowledge about the region. Given this level of difficulty, and minimal incentives to overcome it, it is not surprising that there has been little interest in Southeast Asian studies among the locals, and so little progress towards improving this situation.

Nationalist Interests and Universalist Closures

For a large part of its history, Southeast Asian studies has been anything but a discipline that engages intellectually in any significant way with the people in the societies generally referred to as Southeast Asian. There may be many reasons, some better than others, why this has been so. While one would resist the temptation to equate Southeast Asian studies with "orientalism," it is difficult to entirely ignore or dissociate the two phenomena. In this section, I will elaborate on the points outlined above in four areas. All demonstrate the various ways – structural conditions, institutional policies, and individual practices – in which Southeast Asians and Southeast Asian studies are kept apart from each other. These

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four areas are: (a) the nationalist orientation of education in Southeast Asian nations; (b) the proclivity of Southeast Asian students in Western universities to focus their intellectual energy on studying their own countries; (c) language barriers; and (d) some of the legitimate mechanisms within established centers of Southeast Asian studies that have kept Southeast Asians at bay.

Lest there be misunderstanding, some clarification and repeated emphasis are necessary. There may not have been any conscious attempt to keep Southeast Asians out of the field. In fact, there have been generous and genuine efforts on the part of "Western" scholars and institutions to invite more Southeast Asians into the enterprise almost as early as the discipline acquired its credentials in the 1960s, if not earlier. Like everything else, this commitment has its own loopholes, and resistance from within and outside the system. What can be a cause for concern is the general complacency about the situation. For Southeast Asians, entry and participation in this intellectual exercise in Western-dominated international communities is not without serious restrictions and conditions not entirely distinct from what has generally been understood as colonial orientalism. This has become more acute since Southeast Asian studies in the world's major centers has experienced difficult conditions due to a series of budget cuts by universities and governments, making the field seriously vulnerable, and hyper-sensitive to threats to its survival in the increasingly competitive market of commoditized mass-produced knowledge.

Another point of clarification is worth reiterating. Far from advocating any form of nativism, I do not subscribe to the idea, which was popular in post-colonial Southeast Asia from the 1940s to about the 1970s, that the local Southeast Asian people, to all intents and purposes, occupy a better or privileged position compared with their Western counterparts to speak of realities or truths about Southeast Asia/ns. While their absence of and exclusion from Southeast Asian studies should be recognized as problematic, the simple inclusion and animated presence of someone coming from the region does not necessarily help make the situation any better.

Different Nationals, Different Interests

The condition of the social sciences and humanities in most countries in Southeast Asia has been rather disheartening, to say the least (see Booth 1999, Schulte Nordholt & Visser 1995, Tomasi 2000, and White 1997). This is familiar and predictable. It is mistaken, however, to gauge the problem of the region's scholarly pursuit by attributing it mainly to material and financial scarcity. This is perhaps not where one should begin or conclude an analysis of the problem. The capital cities of many Southeast Asian nations display abundant resources; this was especially true prior to the 1997 crisis. But even here, commitment to education, and specifically to the social sciences and humanities, is generally low in proportion to other spheres of modern and urban life.

Even in the region's more industrialized and prosperous areas, such as Singapore and Malaysia, where education is not particularly a luxury, intellectual inquiry in

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these disciplines does not enjoy the kind of support, prestige, and autonomy that other social institutions do. According to John Clammer (2001), Singapore has an extremely strong desire to "keep up" with the track records of the world's centers of excellence in the academic industry; perhaps this desire is stronger than in most Western universities. However, such a desire has been motivated more by a compliance with illiberal state policies based on economic calculation than by any passion for intellectual innovation and rigor, let alone by the social criticism so much valued in the liberal West. Malaysia's educational resources and achievements have also fared much better than most in the region, but as elsewhere, the best educational institutions succumb to the logic of market commoditization as soon as they become prestigious and saleable (Lee 2001).

Regardless of the levels of the nation's resources and economic achievements, for various reasons that McVey (1995) has lucidly discussed, the energy of the Southeast Asian intelligentsia in the modern social sciences and humanities has been directed towards more instrumental and applied agendas. Through nearly the whole history of the independent nations in this region, the projects of nation-building and modernization have been paramount. Post-Cold War global economics may have prompted some changes in the strategies and priorities adopted by different nations. None, however, indicates anything that forsakes the primacy of the commitment to the real and perceived interests of the nation-states, despite all the hype about "globalization."

So strong and rigid is the commitment to modernizing the fledgling nation that it has often been pursued at the expense of inter-national and sub-national issues.[8] For this reason, the long-standing exclusion or minimal representation of Southeast Asians in the Southeast Asian studies in North America, Western Europe, Japan, or Australia has not been a cause for concern to most Southeast Asian intellectuals. Understandably, neither has the recent crisis that has hit these institutions. Selected issues within Southeast Asian studies and the affairs of other nations occasionally gain serious attention from individuals and institutions within the region, when and if they have direct effects on one or more of the latter's national interests.

In this sense, the intelligentsia in Southeast Asia do not actually differ in any fundamental way from their counterparts in countries where Southeast Asian studies are best established. They all operate, if not homogeneously, with some significant degree of attention to the incumbent government's directives and of support for officially defined "national interests." The difference is that, in a given country at a particular moment, such interests call for the study of "others" half a globe away, only to be rapidly shifted or terminated when the same interests demand a different course of action and intellectual orientation. Analyses by Anthony Reid (1994) and Benedict Anderson (1992) illuminate this point sharply.

Having said all this, one must duly recognize the accomplishments of individual scholars in this region whose work on their own countries has made a strong impact on broader international communities of scholars. Recognition is also due to the growing number of Southeast Asian nationals who have demonstrated inspiring

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scholarship on countries other than their own. Included in the first category are people like Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo Kwame Sundaram (1997), Chua Beng Huat (1995), Resil Mojares (1983), Kasian Tejapira (2001), Julia Suryakusuma (1996), and Vedi R. Hadiz (1997).

In the second category, a few names come to mind. Jacqueline Siapno's forceful work on the intersection of religion, gender, and politics in Indonesia and East Timor (2001a/b); Sumit Mandal's insightful analyses of Indonesian art, politics of ethnicity, and literature (1998, 2002, and 2003); Ceres Pioquinto's investigation of the *dangdut* performance in Java (1995); Priyambudi Sulistiyanto's comparative analysis of Indonesian, Thai, and Burmese polities (2002); Filomeno V. Aguilar's innovative examinations of migration, hybridity and citizenship in several countries of Southeast Asia (1999, 2001); and Tan Joo Ean's original investigations of never-married women in several capital cities of Southeast Asia (2002) are some of the most recent examples of what promises to mark the beginning of a large and phenomenal change in the region's intellectual history. These new intellectual endeavors are taking place along with recent and rapid changes in the region itself since Rocamora (1974), Nidhi Aeosrivongs, and Withaya Sucharithanarugse (see Kasetsiri 1998: 35) completed their studies on Indonesia.[9]

It is significant that, with the exception of Sumit Mandal in the above list, currently active Southeast Asian researchers conducting studies on countries other than their own in the region, have pursued their careers outside their countries of origin. It is not easy to assess the extent to which such migration, particularly to North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australia, is a contributing factor to the recent intellectual trans-nationalization. Migration cannot be underestimated when one considers the accomplishments of scholars like Vicente Rafael (1988), or Thongchai Winichakul (1994). These are two exceptionally successful scholars of "Southeast Asian" origins, whose works have an impact beyond contemporary Southeast Asian studies, inside and outside the region. Just how far they are "untypical" of Southeast Asian nationals studying overseas can be seen from the next section.

Discovering "Home Countries" Abroad

Southeast Asians can only hope to take an active part in the production of Southeast Asian studies if they acquire the right intellectual training, rhetorical conventions, and cultural vocabularies of the American, European, or Australian practitioners, and pay due respect to all of these. Given the hopeless lack of institutional support in their home countries, for most Southeast Asians there has been no better way of acquiring all these skills than taking the pilgrimage to the world's centers of Southeast Asian studies located in North America, Western Europe and, lately, Australia, before Japan and Singapore opened more alternative venues. Such privileged opportunities usually come from scholarships and other grant schemes.[10]

As has been widely observed (Satha-Anand 1998, Kasetsiri 1998, Reynolds 1995: 437), Southeast Asians are inclined to study their own country while pursuing

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higher degrees abroad in the arts and social sciences, including (Southeast) Asian studies. This has drawn cynicism. Such a practice is seen as a sign of narrow-mindedness, chauvinism, or simply intellectual laziness. Studying societies other than "one's own" is not only perceived as more painstaking and thus more commendable; but also, more importantly, it supports to the overall rationales or *raisons d'être* for Asian or Southeast Asian studies a distinct and multidisciplinary scholarship in its own right.[11] Despite such cynicism and occasional proscriptions, the stubborn insistence among Southeast Asians on studying their own countries has resulted, as indicated earlier, in a number of major grant schemes in the region specifically devoted to encouraging and supporting (Southeast) Asians to conduct studies about and in Asian countries other than their own.

I have sympathy for many of these new grant schemes, and have formally supported some of them. I can also appreciate the concerns about Southeast Asians' inclinations to be myopically nationalistic in their intellectual endeavors. Nonetheless, it is wise not to push such criticism too far in any sweeping fashion, because in doing so one may overlook some of the more subtle and no less important points. I will consider two that I find most salient. Both question the all too familiar assumptions about the relationships between passport holders of a given country and the social life of that country.

First, many Southeast Asian students are keen to undertake serious study about their countries of origin not, or not only, for convenience purposes. Their motives can vary a great deal, but some have done so precisely because they and that country have not really "belonged" to each other in any meaningful way – beyond matters related to limited public service, formal state administration, or political turmoil. For various reasons that Southeast Asianists have analyzed, many citizens in this region (especially those who reside away from the capital cities or are labeled as minorities) have not been adequately "assimilated" into the official nationalist project and state apparatuses. They may have had little training in state-ideology indoctrination, or have been exempted from such indoctrination, or have simply been excluded from the public life of the nation-state. For these individuals, their nation-state is an externally created body. After gaining independence, and through several political upheavals, many of these nation-states have turned to one of several forms of authoritarianism that alienated the majority of the population.

After a quarter of a century of national independence, a large proportion of Southeast Asians still live under illiberal polities with severe restrictions on sensitive topics for public discussion and political prosecution. Under such circumstances, it is extremely difficult, or absolutely impossible, for those in local universities to have access to key texts and information about their "own" societies, which are easily accessible in selected centers of Southeast Asian studies overseas. For instance, for many Indonesians the opportunity to study in selected universities in the United States and Australia, where Southeast Asian studies were strong, and when the New Order government was in power (1966-98), meant a lot more than getting a prestigious diploma or intellectual enlightenment. It gave them their first and rare access to documents that were key to the single most controversial issue

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in the life of the nation, with or without direct consequences to personal and family life, namely the events surrounding the 1965-66 massacres and transfer of state power. For others, being outside Indonesia was their first education about Indonesia's invasion of East Timor or human rights abuse in West Papua or Aceh – things that were unheard of at home. Their experience abroad also provided them with their first encounter with other Southeast Asians in personal and politically enlightening ways that are reminiscent of the meetings of "fortunate natives" at colonial schools one hundred years earlier. Many Southeast Asians may subsequently develop an interest in studying their Asian neighbors, but quite reasonably they would not do so at the expense of gaining a new understanding of their own societies within the time constraints of their scholarship and the validity of their visas.

Second, for most Southeast Asians in the West, studying their "own" societies means first and foremost studying the foreign codes and conventions of one or more Western academic disciplines before learning empirically about any particular societies. It involves learning the bureaucratic machinery of the university system in the foreign land, and familiarizing themselves and engaging critically with central issues and concepts in the area of study in question. Most of these do not originate from Southeast Asia. It also involves learning how to comply with particular practices of reading and writing in formats and styles that are adequately acceptable as "academic" in a given context.

While for most the experience is gratifying, the magnitude of their difficulties, as Reid sympathetically recognizes (1994: 268-269), is not always obvious to others in the host countries. For most newly arriving Southeast Asians in North American, Australian, or European universities, the visit is also the first to a country that is so different from their countries of origin. Learning about their "own" country is never identical to continuing their previous intellectual engagements with issues in their home country, except at a higher level, in a different language, and in a different geographical space with more resources. Rather, it is learning how to think, to ask questions, and to speak properly and intelligibly about what has been defined in the dominant paradigms of Western academia as their "own" country. All of the above is done in ways that have no basis or equivalent at home. In fact, the process often involves the pain of unlearning some of the things already internalized and taken for granted in their home countries.[12]

Students of Southeast Asian studies, and their gurus, can be forgiven for not usually being keen on listening to what Southeast Asians turned Southeast Asianists have to say about the region, or their country of origin. Under the difficulties outlined above, the latter often appear to the former as poor imitators of the established practitioners who are not Southeast Asian nationals. What has traditionally attracted Southeast Asianists in studying the region is two social groups. The first is the "corrupt," self-righteous and ruthless elite, and the second is the subalterns (peasants, poor, minorities, women, and so on) who are victims of the former, or are perceived to be so. Despite their opposing positions, both unequivocally affirm their status as the West's "others."

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Corrupt state officials from Southeast Asia are quoted in order to be pilloried in the analysis of Southeast Asianists. Subalterns are presented in order to be inaugurated as hero(in)es or martyrs. The latter appear or are made to be seen as subjects who cannot speak for themselves, and therefore need to be represented by the politically correct scholars as their proxies. It is Southeast Asia's middle-class intelligentsia that pose a thorny situation for some Southeast Asianists outside Southeast Asia. They cannot be totally silenced and made mere objects of analysis, for they are neither purely "one of us" (Southeast Asianists in Western centers of Southeast Asian studies) and subjected to the pressure of Western academic ethics, traditions, and industry, nor are they completely separable and distinguishable from "us."[13]

From Father Blood to Mother-Tongue

One of the most obvious obstacles for Southeast Asians in taking full participation in the international communities of Southeast Asian studies has been the language barrier. While many regret that English – a non-regional language – has been the official language of Southeast Asian studies, just as it has for most other disciplines, no one knows any convenient alternative at hand. If blood and skin color served as markers for colonial racism in the past, a person's mother-tongue functions today as a discriminating factor in the unequal distribution of access to intellectual production across many disciplines, including Southeast Asian studies. The dominance of English also discriminates against diverse members of the modern intelligentsia in Southeast Asia, and justifies the continued imbalance of participation in this area of study and beyond.

The question of language is not reducible to the mechanical acquisition of one foreign language of the new empire of world scholarship. Non-Southeast Asians are also required to have a good command of at least one of the languages of this region. Despite this reciprocal learning, the status of the two is unequivocally not one of equals. Southeast Asian studies would have been a radically different – more plural, inclusive, and participatory – affair, if a significant number of major journals, university lectures and tutorials, published books, and conferences pertaining to the area studies had been multilingual and multicultural, with English as but one of several options along with several living languages of the region.

Although many non-Southeast Asian students of the region speak and write good Thai, Tagalog, or Malaysian, there seem to be embarrassingly few attempts to take these language skills seriously. For instance, the notion of using Southeast Asian languages for writing theses, teaching, or conferences has not been seriously and widely pursued. Surely such activities would generate a wide range of practical difficulties, extra costs, with perhaps no immediately visible benefits. These difficulties arise from something more systematic, precisely for the reasons of the imbalance referred to earlier. This deserves serious attention, but appears too daunting an issue for most of those in charge of Southeast Asian studies outside the region. It is always safer to concentrate attention on the region itself with objectivist commitments – and to speak critically of inequalities there, in order to

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partake of the production of knowledge within the status quo – rather than examining the procedures that one follows at home in producing such knowledge.

Practical difficulties in doing Southeast Asian studies in one of the languages of the region constitute the tip of the iceberg. The epistemological paradigms of the social sciences and humanities that gave birth to area studies are embedded and institutionalized in English grammar and vocabulary. No alternative meta-narrative of this scale and efficacy seems to have existed in Southeast Asian languages. This is not to deny that Southeast Asians have a range of other traditions of high learning. How can students of Southeast Asian studies *both* conceptualize an academic enquiry and pursue it in any of the Southeast Asian languages, *and* enjoy the benefits of formal recognition – for instance, through the conferment of a postgraduate degree – and intellectual engagements with wider circles in the same way as is the case with study in English and other major European languages? It is instructive that the administration of an English-speaking institution in Asia decided to provide their academic staff with editorial assistance service to boost their publication output – provided that these are staff in area studies who have publishable materials, but whose native tongue is not English.

The unacceptability of attempting to pursue Southeast Asian studies in one of the vernacular languages of the region has not only led to a general complacency and a reproduction of a monolingual academic exercise that is not very different from colonial orientalism. The same difficulty has also had the more insidious effect of normalizing intellectual misrecognition and misrepresentation of the object of study. Because languages are specifically and socially bound discursive practices (as opposed to an abstract system of codes, as generally misconstrued), they are never entirely and readily translatable. Different languages construct and present the world differently. The requirement of mastery in one of several Southeast Asian languages finds its best rationale here.[14]

One would like to believe that most Southeast Asianists are fully aware of the issues outlined above. However, under increased economic and bureaucratic pressures, today's universities demand that a more mechanical view of language be adopted in the administration of area studies. The situation in some of the best centers of Southeast Asian studies is no exception.

Theses on topics with empirical reference to one or several countries of Southeast Asia have been produced by a wide range of departments and faculties. In what ways can theses from students trained in Southeast Asian studies make a difference? I, for one, have been keen to see more theses from this field of study that offer the kind of intellectual insights that can only develop from a good command of one of the languages in this region. The essay on the Javanese concept of power by the young Benedict Anderson (1990) may now appear to be naively orientalist, but no one can fail to acknowledge its innovative qualities. This essay and Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) are perhaps the two works from this author that will be best remembered by Southeast Asianists and beyond. Significantly, neither could have come into being without the author's deep intimacy with the language(s) of the people analyzed.

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Unfortunately, it is difficult to find this kind of thesis produced by graduates of Southeast Asian studies. There have been outstanding theses from this field, but these could just as well have been produced by someone intelligent from any other discipline within the arts and social sciences. Here the question of language mastery and, for that matter, the entire training under the rubric of area studies, deserves serious interrogation.

It is not surprising that most serious attempts to use the languages of (Southeast) Asia in analyzing (Southeast) Asia have been advocated by (Southeast) Asians themselves *in* (Southeast) Asia. The motives for these have varied (not all have derived from blind parochialism, patriotism, or any inadequacy of fluency in English), and so have the degrees of their success. More than in other situations that I know of in Southeast Asia, Filipino scholars have been the most determined in promoting their own national language in the social sciences, including area studies, beyond the rationale of convenience, nationalism, or anti-Western sentiments. These scholars, of course, write and speak English with ease on the same subject matter.

The effort invested in the publication of journals devoted specifically to inter- and intra-Asian issues in multi-Asian languages, such as *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and *Traces* are commendable for being strategic interventions into the current situation. Far from being nostalgically defensive about their Asian origins and positions, or offensive towards the West, both go beyond the East-West dichotomy and seek a dialectics between the subject positions in the increasingly hybrid identities of world inequalities. Although both are based in East Asia, they commonly involve American and European intellectual sources as much as South and Southeast Asian ones. No doubt theirs is not an easy venture. The practical as well as intellectual challenges that they have chosen to take up have been daunting from their inception and may remain so in the next few years.

The Slippage of De/Re-Orientalism

One more factor that helps us understand the glaring absence or under-representation of Southeast Asian scholars in Southeast Asian studies is the series of developments that took place from about the mid-1980s within the countries and major institutions outside Asia. The familiar stories about state and university budget cuts, shrinking employment opportunities for graduates in the social sciences and humanities (including those in area studies), and increased pressures to compete for external funding have created considerable difficulties for devoted students of Southeast Asian studies in places like the United States and Australia (Anderson 1992: 30; Reid 1994, 1999: 148; McVey 1998: 44). These in turn have generated anxiety and protectionism that have implications of exclusionism.

Ironically, all of this is taking place at a time when it is no longer possible for students in this area to assume a neutral status, a distant and objective position, commenting on or analyzing some research object without taking the risk of being challenged by someone who claims to represent the people under study. In a related but distinguishable situation, the rise of intellectual challenges from the

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former colonized natives led anthropologist Joel Kahn (1989b) to question whether there is a future for anthropology – one of the founding disciplines of Southeast Asian studies prior to its takeover by American political science during the Cold War. Anthropology's past preoccupation was to investigate and make statements about and for the modern West's others. Starting in the last two decades or so, "[f]ieldworkers can't pretend anymore to be going in and presenting the truth about some pristine, untouched society, the members of which will never be able to contradict the anthropologist" (Kahn 1989b: 15).

Likewise, it is no longer forgivable for outsiders to engage in any scholarly endeavor in this area study without some consideration of the unequal relationships between them and those they study. There has been a general consensus on the need for expanding further the space and respect for Southeast Asians as speaking subjects and fellow analysts, rather than silent objects of analysis, although there is diversity in the degrees and kinds of such attitudes among Southeast Asianists outside Southeast Asia.

This is not identical, though it is related, to the older issue of whether or not Southeast Asians have some sort of authentic self or selves; what these are; and to what extent and in what ways modern Western-styled intellectual discourses are able to identify them within their non-Southeast Asian terms. The two concerns are related, because only if Southeast Asians do exist as fundamentally different subjects from the rest can we hope to hear different and significant viewpoints about many things, including their own region. However, the two issues are also distinguishable in that the older search for some sort of Southeast Asian subjecthood does not necessarily entail the rights for these subjects to speak for themselves and the moral imperative for their foreign observers to take their voices seriously. The older concerns belong to outsiders who study Southeast Asians in order to discover the latter's identities. They have the confidence of a scholarly objectivist in articulating the truth about what these identities are in ways that Southeast Asians presumably cannot speak about, or even comprehend. Loosely used, the term "orientalism" is apt here.

Accordingly, a few other questions come to the fore. While it is not possible for me to address any of these issues in depth, I would like to mention them as a way of hinting at the overall orientation of my concerns in the brief comments below. Is it possible for Southeast Asians to take an equal and active part in the existing institutional structure of Southeast Asian studies without at best, as McVey put it, "aping the international academic fashion" of their predecessors who are very foreign; and, at worst, being subjected to further "foreign intellectual domination" (McVey 1995: 6)? Is it desirable, even if it is possible? Must the nature and character of Southeast Asian studies (as it came to us from Europe in colonial times and from North America during the Cold War) first undergo major changes before Southeast Asians can hope to find a respected space in critical and constructive dialogues with their counterparts from outside the region? What sorts of changes are required? Are there reasons to believe that such changes will ever take place at all? Despite various attempts that have been made, why have there been no major

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developments in, and centers of, Southeast Asian studies in Asia (with a few, though prominent, exceptions, such as in Singapore) that are more locally rooted and constitute a critical supplement to those in North America, Europe or Australia, and Japan?

A decade ago, Paul Stange (1991) made a detailed and forceful critique of Western, mainly North American (and more particularly with links to Cornell University) scholarship of Java. According to Stange, these various works unwittingly "constitute yet another instrument of subordination" not dissimilar or unconnected to the past colonial tradition and orientalism. Stange provides a review of the Western intellectuals' unease with colonial orientalism, the moral and intellectual consequences that it entails, and the various measures already taken to rectify these. He does so fairly comprehensively, and without exempting Javanese/Indonesian scholars from the same critical scrutiny. In conclusion, he declares that "[e]veryone now disavows this aspect of colonialism in principle, though […] not necessarily in practice" (Stange 1991: 61).

Given the sensitivity of the issues, Stange's article is bold and daring. Although some of the points that he raises are open to further debate, his core arguments hit the nail on the head. A similar point is raised in Reynolds' essay about the general attitudes of Western historians of the old Southeast Asia towards local voices (1995: 421), although the comment is made only in passing and in much subtler fashion. Regardless of individual scholars' intent with regard to accommodating Southeast Asians as speaking subjects, the institutional formalities and institutionalized intellectual imperatives of legitimate scholarship in the West dictate what questions can or must be asked, what information should be sought, and what procedures of analysis should be followed. None of these have anything directly to do with the life and aspirations or concerns of the people under study. Regardless of how eloquently or accurately Edward Said (1978) may have articulated the problems of orientalism in the past, the imbalance of power relationships between students of Southeast Asia and the people studied is real and serious, and it will not be easily abandoned.

As indicated earlier, the same institutionalized imperatives apply to Southeast Asian nationals who wish to enter and take part in the enterprise. Understandably, the difficulties are doubly complex for them. The lack of educational resources in the former colonies in Southeast Asia and the novelty of modern academic institutions have impeded most Southeast Asians in their attempts to be on a par with their counterparts in more industrialized countries. These factors include basic training and research in the humanities and social sciences, adequate libraries, and publishing houses and bookshops.

These objects of all too familiar laments have become walls that keep most of the intelligentsia in Southeast Asia out of the centers of modern scholarship in general, Southeast Asian studies included. Less often admitted is the excessive degree to which such capital-intensive scholarship has been pushed by individuals in more advantaged positions. For instance, senior scholars in the West can easily discount certain works by Southeast Asians for failure to pay enough tribute to them, their

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gurus, colleagues, or friends by not citing their works, or not citing them in strongly complimentary ways. Given the confidential nature of the exercise, the precise magnitude of such self-serving practices in peer review for publication or thesis examination remains unknown, making it impossible to examine the situation with evidence and precision. What has struck me from private communication with colleagues and personal experience is not the frequency of such incidence so much as the level of frankness with which such demands have been made. Senior figures in Southeast Asian studies can take offence, and say so rather openly, if their works are not cited in the works of more junior scholars, even though the relevance of the former to issues in the latter may be either non-existent or minimal.

There is no doubt that such acts of discipline and punishment have affected both Southeast Asian and Western students alike. Even if these students were all willing to comply with these demands, for reasons mentioned above Southeast Asians would be more severely disadvantaged in comparison to their counterparts in Western countries. It is not enough for Southeast Asians to know something about their own village or country, or articulate what is common wisdom there. They must acknowledge in citation what some Western scholar has written about the same, even if inaccurately. These authoritative writings, however, are not evenly accessible across the globe, and are usually inaccessible in most parts of Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian scholars' home-grown perception and understanding of their own social environment is not legitimate until some outsider grants it recognition.[15]

The identification of "orientalism" as an intellectual disease of a particular moment in history and the recent rush to attack it have been indebted to the popularity of several currents such as post-structuralism, post-modernism, and post-colonial studies, as well as cultural studies. Craig Reynolds and Anthony Reid have expressed their concerns about the counter-productive effects of these new "isms" upon the status of Southeast Asian studies. Reynolds observes that "[t]he most trenchant critiques of Southeast Asian studies […] will come from the new anthropology and from cultural studies. This is already happening, as academics with little or no Southeast Asian language training step on to the stage from what we think of as nowhere to make smart, useful remarks about what is happening in the region today" (1995: 439). Elsewhere he reiterates his point: "[n]ew intellectual currents are also contributing to the devaluation of area studies. I am thinking here of the fashion for, among other things, postcolonial and cultural studies" (Reynolds 1998: 13-14). Likewise, Reid contends that while orientalism may have dethroned "the canon of European classics written by dead white males [it] has led not to a courageously pluralist exploration of the world's cultural and social diversity, but to a new canon of self-referential theory. […] Since Asians are[,] too[,] buying hamburgers and reading Foucault, do we still need specialists to understand them?" (1999: 148).[16]

Interestingly, Michael Aung-Thwin (2001: 488), a Burmese scholar based in North America, has also blamed the recent "post-ism" for the crisis in area studies, in an essay with a strong defensive tone and in support of "Asian values" and the

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now discredited orientalism and essentialism. In contrast, and more like Paul Stange (1991) cited earlier in this essay, Ruth McVey (1998) is more ambivalent towards these new approaches. I share the ambivalence of people like Stange and McVey. However, in contrast to all the authors mentioned just now, my ambivalence is based on an uneasy recognition of the *difference* and *inequality* in the production of knowledge about the region with regard to agency and sites. The reservations mentioned above refer mainly to the situation of Southeast Asian studies *outside* Southeast Asia. My concern is those *inside* it.

Inside Southeast Asian and many other Asian societies, these post-isms find enthusiasts among the intelligentsia minority for various reasons, including reasons that have to do with the fact that these new perspectives constitute the most radical critiques of Western intellectual hegemony. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Heryanto 1995), there is some irony in the ways these new approaches have been deployed by outsiders to analyze Southeast Asian realities. Many of these new post-isms, particularly Foucault's archeology of knowledge and account of the discourse of power and Derridean deconstructive strategies, are radical *self*-critiques. They consciously challenge some of the most fundamental givens in Western epistemology and social order from within the very structures and discursive practices they are critiquing. The main targets of these approaches as originally developed are not knowledge or domination in general, but specifically Western knowledge, violence, and domination (Young 1990: 17-19).

Ironically, in the hands of some children of the same dominant West (*i.e.*, Southeast Asianists), these new approaches have been twisted not only to make "smart, useful remarks" (Reynolds 1995: 439) or a "new canon of self-referential theory" (Reid 1999: 148), but to be "a handy methodological instrument both for ridiculing post-colonial despots," and depreciating those who live under these despots, while at the same time "enhancing professional credentials in the increasingly competitive academic industrial complex" (Heryanto 1995: 41). In doing so, they recuperate, most likely in unconscious ways, the sort of domination and discursive practice that these approaches were originally meant to attack.

Whatever flaws they may have, the recent intellectual insights inspired by Foucault and Derrida help disclose some of the problems with what appears to be liberal, democratic, and civilized in the modern West and its intellectual traditions. Foucault's writings attract many in the West because they bring to light new understandings of power and the normalization of power, which has previously been perceived to be external, distant and negative. Derrida's arguments are forceful because hierarchical and binary oppositions have been taken as given in the modern West.

In many parts of Asia, the state exhibits its power in a series of acts of vulgar repression and excessive violence that have not been seen or imagined in the West since the two World Wars. The dominant discourses in many of these Asian societies do not have the sort of pretensions of secular rationality, impartiality, and modernist universalism that the various post-isms subvert and deconstruct. Southeast Asians need neither a Foucauldian nor a Derridean philosophy or analysis

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to help them see that power is everywhere, that power produces knowledge, or how "carceral" their schools, offices, or factories are. Rather than suggesting that Foucault and Derrida are irrelevant, this is to argue that they are sorely insufficient. One must go far beyond them for any radical examination of the way power and dominant discourses operate in many post-colonial societies of Southeast Asia.

In this light, the essay by Stange (1991) is unusual because its critiques are self-critiques, directed mainly towards Western deconstructive practices as undertaken by Westerners and Asians alike. It takes the necessary precautions in (re-)presenting some Southeast Asian (in this case, Javanese) realities and agencies. Similar strategies have been well demonstrated in the works of Mark Hobart (2000) and Alton L. Becker (1995). However, no one has impressed me more with extended critical engagements with these difficult issues and their direct relevance to the study of Southeast Asia than Joel Kahn (1989a, 1993, 1994, 1998, and 2001).

Having noted all these exemplary works, one remains anxiously waiting for more assertive interventions from locally based Southeast Asians to fill in the space already made available by the works last cited. Some of the best Southeast Asian scholars, including those cited earlier, appear to have been preoccupied with other intellectual concerns, and perhaps rightly so. The old desire for indigenization of the social sciences has not entirely vanished in Southeast Asia (e.g., Alatas 2000 and Luna 1999), although it appears to have largely run its course in the region more broadly. What have appeared in its place are two distinguishable streams. One is the search for an alternative paradigm to current Western-derived practice by drawing inspiration from Islamic traditions (see, e.g., Ragab 1998, Stange 1991: 59). The other is the search for plural, non-purist, non-essentialist, but more hybrid and globally embedded (Southeast) Asian agencies (see, e.g., Ibrahim 1996, Goh 2002, Shamsul 1994 and 2001).

The search for Islamic alternatives to current Western-dominant paradigms is clearly a much more radical challenge to the currently dominant mode of intellectual thought than the pluralist and non-essentialist perspectives, or than the old indigenization project. I am not in any way competent to assess the potential and prospects of this Islamic agenda. However, I find this project timely. As Stange (1991) and Clammer (2000) have observed, religiosity is one salient feature of social life in Asia that analysts of Asian societies have blatantly failed or refused to deal with in any satisfactory way. Even some of the most radical perspectives of Western epistemology now in vogue (post-structuralism, post-modernism, cultural studies) have tended to overlook or dismiss it, despite their claims and credentials to privilege and celebrate the West's Others, as well as the disadvantaged, subaltern, or minorities.

The second and non-essentialist kind of search for Asian agency is undeniably indebted to the more recent wave of post-ism. While this move is highly attractive and promising, so far it has remained under the shadow of strongly non-Asian biases. Various arguments about the existence and identities of the presumed "Asian" agency have been presented by Asians, but mainly by citing arguments from intelligent and authoritative voices of non-Asians and non-Asianists.

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The search for agents of difference within Asian contexts is valid and will continue to haunt us. It is clearly formidable, but politically necessary. Past failures, misguided or even deceptive projects under the same rubric in the past, abound, but they need not deter Southeast Asians from continuing their endeavors. There is a lesson to be learned from the "Asian values" debate that initially appeared to be vulgarly essentialist, pathetically orientalist, and politically self-serving. As Joseph Chan (1997) and Khoo Boo Teik (1999) have argued with equal eloquence, sobriety, and insightfulness, one does not need to throw away the baby with the bath water, as most critics of the debate have tended to do. Proponents of "Asian values" or Islamic critiques of Western modernity may not have articulated a fully-fledged formulation of a convincing message to many of us (Western-trained Southeast Asianists), and some of them may have maliciously attempted to fool us, as their critics allege; but this may be neither the end of the story nor the whole story.

As Kahn (2001) has brilliantly demonstrated, even the most universalist Western modernity and modernization have not been as inclusive as their advocates intend and claim, nor will they ever be. Various groups of people in Asia as elsewhere have been, and will continue to be, excluded, deprived, and denied across different modernities, Western or otherwise. These agents will be in search of new articulations, recognitions, and representations in response to their subordination. If we have not found any particularly articulate expressions of these from Southeast Asians in the social sciences, and particularly in Southeast Asian studies, perhaps we have looked in the wrong place or at the wrong time.

Into the Future?

If the foregoing sections in great part have sounded more pessimistic than intended and warranted, this is because they focus on the problems faced by Southeast Asians in taking an active part in the production of knowledge about the region. It is perhaps predictable that this essay argues that, as a unit of academic inquiry, Southeast Asian studies is not of any major concern to Southeast Asian intelligentsia. However, as noted, the situation has been slowly but steadily changing.

Some sort of area studies can be predicted to grow in scale and importance in most of what is today's Southeast Asia, although the name, geographical reference, and character of such an entity may be different from those of the American-led Southeast Asian studies of the Cold War years. For instance, international associations of scholars in Malay languages and literatures have been fairly active in recent years. Recent developments in the film, theater, and music industries and cultural studies have also brought small groups of artists and academics together in self-financed intra-Asia (rather than Southeast Asia) meetings and collaborative projects. I wish to conclude this essay with a little elaboration of these new signs of what may transpire to be a new history of Asian studies in Asia (in which Southeast Asia may continue to be a distinctive but not a prominent component), identifying some areas of potential strength, expanding and recapitulating some of the points presented above.

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Earlier, in considering the positions of difference for Southeast Asians in comparison to their Western counterparts with reference to area studies, I have suggested some of the major areas of handicap that they face. It is necessary now to emphasize their comparative advantages and potential strengths by virtue of these very same characteristics. Being native speakers of at least one of the living languages of the region, and natives of the region (in the sense of birth and residence), local scholars would do best in several areas of academic pursuits. These include language-based cultural and sociological analyses of contemporary life, oral history, ethnography, religion, popular culture, and the media. They may be less advantaged in other areas, such as universalist theorization, topics that are politically sensitive to their immediate environments, macro and comparative studies across the region, or studies that rely on old archives that are currently conserved in a few old libraries in France, Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, or North America.

Ruth McVey (1995: 6) has correctly observed that "Southeast Asia itself has changed far more massively and profoundly than have Southeast Asian studies, whether carried out by indigenous or foreign academics." Never before has there been more interaction (with occasional tensions) and mobility of people, information, and capital across the region. The problem of the haze emanating from devastated Kalimantan forests; tensions related to illegal migrant workers, which have damaged relations not only between the states of Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore, but also between these states and various non-governmental organizations in these countries; and tensions emanating from the aftermath of 11 September in the forms of heavy measures of surveillance, campaigns and counter campaigns, all attest to the new times.

To McVey's observation one must add that the global capitalism that the West dominates has also changed much more rapidly and dramatically than have the structure, outlook, and administration of Western-style universities in the West and their counterparts in Southeast Asia. While ironic, it is not entirely surprising that the old centers of Southeast Asian studies should have been in dramatic decline as Southeast Asia has gained more visibility and vibrancy. The end of the Cold War and the decline of governments' strategic interests in the region and support for studying it have often been suggested as the main cause of this decline. This is true, but I believe that there are other factors at work.

One such causal factor has been described, if rather loosely, as the condition of post-modernity (Harvey 1990). This is to be distinguished from post-modernism as a particular school or mode of thought "in the mind" that one can personally choose to adopt, ignore, or resist. Of course, the two are compatible and mutually reinforcing. If this interpretation has any validity, we can consider a different and broader perspective in appreciating the concerns of alleged "attacks" by post-modernism or cultural studies against Southeast Asian studies. Again, this is a reference to a situation *outside* Southeast Asia, at a time when both post-modernism and cultural studies have found enthusiasts *inside* Southeast Asia, and where Southeast Asian studies is slowly growing.

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The condition of post-modernity does not alter the world completely anew. As Harvey has argued (1990: 44), it is revolutionary in the sense of restructuring our social order globally by bringing to prominence a host of practices, ideas, languages, values, tastes, and institutions that were previously repressed, forgotten, marginalized, or denied. It is this condition of post-modernity – more than remarks by a few seemingly eccentric post-modernist "freaks" – that has undermined the dominant modes and sites of learning across disciplines that came with little change from nineteenth-century traditions and institutions in the West.

It is not possible for me to explore this vast and complex issue in further detail, but for illustrative purposes one or two specific trends and familiar phenomena shall suffice. It is not accidental that cultural and media studies should have been on the rise as studies of class structure, nation-states, political parties, or modernization have been in decline. The former privilege subjectivity, agencies, literary interpretation, communicative aspects, discursive practice, difference, ambiguity, and self-reflexivity. The latter stress high theorization, structures, standardization, quantitative measuring, hierarchy, accuracy, objectivity, consistency, and efficiency. In more mundane terms, the new conditions of life – marked by a high degree of electronic communication and transport – have assaulted some of the key nodes of the high modernity that produced our universities, polities, and economies: originality, authenticity, history, authorship, authority, copyright, and privacy. By accelerating our time and compressing our space, the new conditions have ruthlessly promoted fragmentation, superficiality, hybridity, dispersion, plurality, and simulation. It is not difficult to imagine how painful all this can be for the children of the high modernity in the West. It is easy to understand how the same global change that the West has helped propel might yield more favorable effects for the various practices, values, and consciousnesses in most non-modern or "inadequately modernized" parts of Asia.

The tension between traditional academic disciplines in Western high learning and area studies stems from what Reid has described as "an uneasy marriage between core believers in the uniqueness of the discrete cultural traditions they study, and universalising social scientists for whom 'Asia' is at best an arbitrary subdivision of the globe, at worst an obfuscation" (1999: 142). The tension that prevails between (Southeast) Asian studies inside and outside the region stems from the fact that "universalising social scientists" in the equation are either absent, marginal, or negligible in number in (Southeast) Asia. Area specialists in the West must find themselves in a paradoxical position. At home, they must strive for survival by challenging the hegemony of universalist theorization of the social sciences. However, to maintain their residual authority and credentials within the existing institutions, they suspiciously question the works of Asianists from Asia for lack of "universalist theorization."

It is not easy to predict with any precision how large and strong (Southeast) Asian studies will grow in Asia in the next few years. It is easier to anticipate that, in the event of any significant and sustained growth of area studies in the region, this will not simply continue or reproduce the preoccupations of their colonial and

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Cold-War predecessors outside the region. Local Southeast Asianists will concentrate on areas where they can do best. These include cultural and media studies, or post-colonial studies and identity politics. They may not emphasize universalist theorization, and when they do so they will not pursue replicas of the dominant paradigms that have thus far prevailed in Southeast Asian studies outside Asia. Any attempt to do so will be neither possible in the current condition of post-modernity, nor desirable in the consciousness that such condition generates. For these same reasons, we can be optimistic in anticipating that (Southeast) Asians will not direct their energies towards recuperating indigenization, essentialism, or exclusivism by intent. More productive collaborations with younger generations of their counterparts from outside Asia can be expected to flourish, although any results in the immediate future may be modest.

Notes

1 For a review of Asian Studies in Australia see Milner (1999). [A more recent analysis in Milner 2002 (Editor's Note)]. The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful editorial comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this essay by several people who do not necessarily agree with the views expressed here: Miriam Lang, Martin Richter, Sumit K. Mandal, Hong Lysa, Donald Emmerson, Paul Stange, Michael Laffan, and anonymous reviewers of the journal. The author alone is responsible for any persisting shortcomings.

2 The inferior academic standing of Southeast Asians within or without studies of their own region comes into sharper relief when one compares it with the works of their South Asian and perhaps East Asian counterparts. I am grateful to Hong Lysa and Itty Abraham for bringing my attention to this matter in separate occasions of personal communication.

3 Scattered reports of Southeast Asian studies in other regions, including China, India, Japan, South Korea, or Russia have attracted my attention. However, they are beyond the immediate concerns of this essay, and I do not have the adequate knowledge to offer any comments on them.

4 When this essay was about to go to press, colleagues informed me about a debate provoked by Ileto's essay on orientalism in the study of Philippine politics (1999). I am grateful to these colleagues, and particularly to Rommel Curaming for helping me get access to this provoking essay. Although I find Ileto's concerns important and his presentation engaging, I shall not offer comments here, because his concerns are distinct from mine in this essay.

5 As the present writer is an Indonesian national who grew up and worked in Indonesia during the Cold-War period, pursued Asian studies in North America, and later taught Southeast Asian studies in Singapore and Asian studies in Australia, his bias will be immediately obvious.

6 The first of such schemes was the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP), based in Manila and sponsored by the Japan Foundation and the Toyota Foundation. The second was the Bangkok-based and Ford Foundation-sponsored Asian Studies in Asia Fellowship Program (AFP), which in 2002 became the Asian Scholarship Foundation (ASF). The third program in the field is called Asian Public Intellectuals (API) Fellowships, sponsored by the Nippon Foundation and administratively based in Kuala Lumpur. The most recent at the time of writing is the Bangkok-based Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN), supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

7 Of the early colonial censuses that invented ethnic groups in the British and Dutch East-Indies colonies, Anderson observes: "These 'identities', imagined by the (confusedly) classifying mind of the colonial state, still awaited a reification which imperial administrative penetration would soon make possible […] The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place. No fractions" (1991: 165-166).

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8 The studies by Mary Zurbuchen (1990), Keith Foulcher (1990), and Ian Wilson (1999) illustrate the case in point with reference to cultural practices and their studies by Indonesians.

9 Needless to say, the examples above were selected purely at random and only for illustrative purposes. For samples of recent writings resulting from intra-Southeast Asian gatherings sponsored by SEASREP, as cited in note 6 above, see Ferrer (1999); for proceedings from an intra-Asian conference sponsored by the Trajectories Project, see Chen (1998), and another by the ASIA Fellowship Program, see AFP (2001). The list can be made a lot longer, especially if various unpublished research reports and postgraduate theses in progress are included. Deliberately excluded from the list are the many Singaporeans who have made significant contributions to Southeast Asian studies, as well as to the more conventional academic disciplines. They are excluded simply because, in Singapore, studying the region as a whole or specific countries in it other than one's own is a lot more common than elsewhere in this region. Also excluded from the list are Southeast Asian scholars and non-academic intellectuals whose works on their immediate living environment in one of their vernacular languages have gained public respect, but have not been presented or generally designated as specifically Southeast Asian texts.

10 While the number of full-fee paying students from Southeast Asia has been high in the last two decades, especially in Australia, these do not usually invest their capital in pursuing a degree in Southeast Asian studies, but predictably in the more materially rewarding disciplines such as medicine, commerce, engineering, or computer-related subjects.

11 In most academic institutions, the legitimacy of this area study rests on the presupposition that Southeast Asia is arguably a fairly unified entity, and a significant unit of scholarly enquiry of its own, rather than a total sum of individual societies.

12 Of course, young students from North America or Western Europe also experience uneasy cultural encounters when conducting in-country study in Southeast Asia. While the difficulty for Westerners studying Southeast Asia is usually presented as self-evident, its converse is not immediately visible or equally appreciated.

13 The general resentment and cynicism shown by many Southeast Asianists from the West towards what they refer to as "middle classes" in Southeast Asia may have a lot to do with this.

14 I recall the situation in our Tagalog class, though not the details, when our Filipina instructor had difficulties explaining in English certain Tagalog grammatical features, lexical items, and the social significance of certain practices. I was surprised and pleased to learn on more than one occasion that there were equivalents or parallels in the Javanese language, my native language, but none in English or Indonesian. Nonetheless, the instruction had to be done in English, as the class was held in an American university, and most of the students were North American.

15 In this respect, I am extremely fortunate to have received the generous assistance of many senior scholars in the West who are also exceedingly humble about their eminence and accomplishments, as best exemplified by those who assisted me in completing my postgraduate studies outside Asia. Nonetheless, from the broader circles of Asian studies, my classmates and I occasionally received criticism from other senior scholars for not citing certain authorities (including those who made the criticism) in our writings. What intrigues me most about this experience is that, as an Indonesian writing about Indonesia, I have not been criticized for failure to cite senior Indonesian authors, although I must have undoubtedly been guilty of inadvertently doing so. Little wonder, name dropping of Western scholars has been rampant in the works of many Southeast Asian scholars, especially those who have recently completed their studies overseas. Having said this, I must emphasize that egocentrism among Southeast Asian intellectuals is no less serious and pathetic, although this does not particularly find expression in academic activities.

16 Elsewhere, I have developed an argument in the opposite direction, proposing among other things that "[n]o consumption takes place in a purely natural, biological, ahistorical universe. Eating a McDonald's hamburger in Los Angeles never means the same as eating 'the same thing' at the same moment in one of its counter-outlets in Yogyakarta, supposedly the capital city of High Javanese Culture, or in Mahathir's Kuala Lumpur, or in Ho Chi Minh City" (Heryanto 1999: 159-160).

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Abstract: This essay addresses three thematic issues. First, some sort of area studies can be predicted to grow in scale and importance in most parts of Southeast Asia, although the name and boundary of this area of analysis may be different from that of the American-led Southeast Asian studies of the Cold-War period. Second, despite such possible development, the old Southeast Asian studies as it has matured on the other side of the globe will continue to have a bearing upon locally produced knowledge on the region. In profound ways, it will become an intellectual legacy, historical baggage, source of inspiration, institutional assistance, and partner to the more locally-based institutionalized areas studies. Third, the issue of past and present unequal relationships in the production and consumption of knowledge on this region will be debated more seriously than before, prompting discussions of related issues such as agency, positions of difference, and representation. One would hope that this tension brings results that are more constructive and innovative than earlier debates on the indigenization of the social sciences (before the 1970s), or on the "Asian values" (in the 1990s).

Peut-il y avoir des Sud-Est Asiatiques dans les études sud-est asianistes ?

Résumé : *cet essai aborde trois points. D'abord, l'on peut prédire que des études régionales se développeront un peu partout en Asie du sud-est, quoique l'intitulé et les limites de cette aire d'étude puissent être différents de ceux des études sud-est asiatiques emmenées par les États-Unis durant la Guerre froide. Ensuite, en dépit d'un tel développement, les études sud-est asiatiques « à l'ancienne », telles qu'elles ont mûri à l'autre bout de la planète, continueront d'influencer la production locale de savoir sur la région et, de façon profonde, constitueront pour les études régionales institutionnalisées basées en Asie du sud-est un héritage intellectuel,*

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un bagage historique, une source d'inspiration, un soutien institutionnel et un partenaire. Enfin, la question du déséquilibre des relations, passées et présentes, dans la production et la consommation de savoir sur la région fera l'objet de débats plus sérieux qu'auparavant, soulevant la discussion de questions telles que l'agent opératoire, les positions de différence et la représentation. Cette tension, espérons-le, produira des résultats plus constructifs et innovateurs que les débats antérieurs sur l'indigénisation des sciences sociales (dans la décennie 1970) ou sur les « valeurs asiatiques » (dans la décennie 1990).

Key words: agency, post-Cold War, inter-Asia, mother-tongue, re-orientalism, post-modernity.

Mots clés : *agent opératoire, période post-Guerre froide, inter-Asie, langue maternelle, ré-orientalisme, post-modernité.*