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THINK PIECES

INTRODUCTION:

Emerging and continuing trends in Southeast Asian Studies Southeast Asia Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) Roundtable

10th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 10)
20-24 July 2017, Chiang Mai, Thailand

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On 20 July 2017, the Southeast Asia Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) organized a roundtable at the *10th International Convention of Asia Scholars* (ICAS 10) in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 20-24 July 2017, on “Emerging and Continuing Trends in Southeast Asian Studies” to contemplate the directions and state of the economic, political, and cultural dynamism of the Southeast Asian region both as an academic field of study as well as a geopolitical force in the globalizing and consolidating world of the twenty-first century.

The panel is broadly themed to reflect the multi and interdisciplinary nature of twenty-first century Southeast Asian studies. New paradigms and new ways of interrogating, framing, and examining persistent and unfolding issues were discussed as well as the challenges of dealing with these contemporary issues in the region. In this light, the panel posits a reflective stance on the future of Southeast Asian studies.

The Roundtable was divided into two sessions. The first panel focused on some of the larger questions of what constitutes Southeast Asian Studies, how the field has developed and evolved during the past few decades, and how Southeast Asian Studies dealt with issues of identity, regionalism, and post-colonialism. The vital

issue of sustaining Southeast Asian studies undergirded the study. The second panel focused on two broad areas: teaching and learning of Southeast Asian Studies, the institutional structure and funding support to academic programs in institutions of higher learning in the region, and new research trends and areas of study that hold the promise of developing and further enhancing the field of Southeast Asian studies in the future.

Nguyen Van Chinh's think piece provides an overview of the development and evolution of Southeast Asian studies against the backdrop of the rapidly changing Southeast Asian region and the need for Southeast Asian studies to be able to grapple with these changes. Chinh nevertheless ended his piece with optimism, believing that the field of Southeast Asian studies will continue to be relevant even as the study of the region will continue to be undertaken with shifting scholarly emphases. Rommel Curaming's piece raises the perennial question of the position of Southeast Asian studies alongside studies on the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) as he similarly raised the issue of who owns Southeast Asian Studies. As the latter continues to gain popularity in institutions of higher learning, altogether these two subjects of academic inquiry also caused some disputes over the primacy of research focus between the two. In other words, Curaming brings to the fore the question of which of the two is a sub-division of the other.

Hermin Indah Wahyumi's think piece also discussed the development of Southeast Asian Studies by highlighting cyber space and its impact on the region, and the role of Southeast Asian studies in addressing issues relating to it. Hermin's think piece, in this regard, enjoins Southeast Asianists to pay close attention to this subject as an important component of Southeast Asian studies in the future.

In Maitrii Aung-Thwin's piece, we see a broader picture of Southeast Asian studies as he reminds Southeast Asian area studies specialists of the need to situate their work in the larger context of Southeast Asian studies, and to

have a strong conviction in the field. He also offers some glimpses into new approaches to Southeast Asian studies such as public history and the need to engage with the “community”. Regionalism and nationalism is another issue raised in the piece.

Theara Thun followed up with a discussion on possible new approaches to the study of the region. Since the region largely shares similar features and historical experiences, a multi-movement approach that emphasizes what he refers to as multi-connectivity may be a fruitful approach to the study of the region.

The sixth piece by Farabi Fakhri returns to the question of common ground and common culture as he posed the issue of a Southeast Asian identity. Farabi also touched on the possibility of having a Southeast Asian history textbook by Southeast Asians.

Helena Varkkay’s think piece leads the second session of the roundtable. Varkkay directed her presentation to the issue of haze as a regional concern and the challenge of having a sustainable environment particularly for the ASEAN, as a vital and primary institution that could deal with this environmental issue even as she lamented the lack of research attention and time in school/academic curricula in addressing environmental issues.

Ma. Mercedes Planta’s piece suggests a need for Southeast Asian studies to vigorously undertake new areas of study, particularly the history of medicine in the region, highlighting the merits of such undertaking, the challenges that this area of inquiry faces, and the possible limitations of Southeast Asian studies in general in the undertaking of such area of study.

In her piece on democratization in Southeast Asia, Chantana Wungaeo puts forward the idea that Southeast Asians have yet to come to terms with studies on political development, civil society, and governance. For Wungaeo, Southeast Asian Studies will gain merit in encouraging more in-depth scholarly work on

this subject, particularly in promoting the study of human security, and the question of land grabbing.

Pham Van Thuy's devoted his piece to a discussion on the state of Southeast Asian Studies in Vietnam. He stated that generally, Southeast Asian studies essentially focused on two countries, namely, Thailand for mainland Southeast Asia and Indonesia for the island Southeast Asia. Thuy elaborates that Southeast Asian studies is becoming more attractive in Vietnam. Hanafi Hussin's piece also focused on the state of Southeast Asian studies on a particular country by tracing the development of Southeast Asian studies in Malaysia. Hanafi emphasized the importance of learning of Southeast Asian languages in the curricula as an important component to address the challenges of sustaining the field in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

The discussions in general highlighted recurring issues relating to the development of the field of Southeast Asian Studies even as the think pieces also convey that the continuing issues that are woven in each of the think pieces reflect the continuing concerns of Southeast Asianists on the importance of Southeast Asian studies.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES:

Looking forward, looking back

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THE EMERGENCE OF LOCALLY-PRODUCED KNOWLEDGE

Although the term Southeast Asia appeared around 1837, Southeast Asian studies as a field of academic inquiry came out only after World War II (Emmerson, 1984). From this development academic institutions were set up and resources were mobilized in North America and Europe to support research projects on the region. The 1950s and 1960s are considered the golden age of Southeast Asia (McVey, 1998, 44). From the end of the 1970s onwards, academic interest in Southeast Asia gradually decreased in the West (Anderson, 1978). The reasons for this are: (1) the rationale for area studies and shift in the programs of funding agencies (Reynolds, 1998, 12-13); (2) “Southeast Asia itself has changed far more massively and profoundly than have Southeast Asia[n] studies” (McVey, 1995, 6); (3) lack of methodological and theoretical sophistication in area studies and its distance from disciplinary specialization (Anderson, 1978, 232; Emmerson, 1984, 7-10); (4) Area studies as a product of American post-war and Cold War involvement and intervention in the developing world (Anderson, 1978, 232).

After World War II, American-led area studies were developed to serve political programmes. The concerns of Southeast Asian studies in the US during this period mainly concentrated on the identification of Southeast Asia, primarily questions on what is Southeast Asia and whether the region is a historic-cultural entity with its own distinct features. History and culture became the first priority themes of Southeast Asian studies during the 1950-1970s. Researchers sought answers in pursuing their view that examines Southeast Asia as a unique historic-cultural

entity because such suggestion might be useful and necessary to draw a political interference to stop the expansion of communism in the region. When the Cold War ended Southeast Asian area studies lost its political support. In reality, this reflected the fact that Southeast Asia studies in the West were not, even during its golden days, built as a durable discipline and institution in universities and academic bodies. In that context, academic concerns on Southeast Asia gradually changed towards looking at a different Southeast Asia, one that is more diverse and rich in terms of its cultures and histories.

While academic interests on Southeast Asia decreased in the West, we have witnessed a rise of Southeast Asian area studies within and from neighbouring regions such as Japan, Greater China, and India (Suryadianta, 2007; Hayami, 2013; Hong, 2013; Park & Lee, 2013). This trend contrasts with Craig Reynolds' observation and his admission that "Southeast Asia is not, generally speaking, a domain meaningful for study in countries within the region, where national histories are of primary concern" (Reynolds, 1995, 420). Together with leading research centers that were established early on in the region such as the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore (1968) and Vietnam (1973), the establishment of the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) in 1994 may also be seen as a pioneering effort to create a new generation of local scholars from Southeast Asia to conduct researches about their own histories and cultures. For more than twenty years now, SEASREP remains the longest standing regional organization of Southeast Asian scholars in the humanities and social sciences. A good number of young Southeast Asians residing in the region have received SEASREP grants and now contribute in producing and disseminating new knowledge about the region.

If we think that Southeast Asian studies means the production and dissemination of knowledge on the region to the world, then we can see that for decades the knowledge on Southeast Asia was produced and disseminated by scholars who are not native Southeast Asians, who looked at the history and culture of the region from the view of outsiders. In the beginning of the second half of the

twentieth century, Southeast Asia has been able to train their own researchers in the social sciences and humanities who are able to approach the region from within. This is one of the more important academic directions in twenty-first century Southeast Asian studies. From this point, however, the contested issue on the relationship between native and non-native Southeast Asianists is raised. There have been discussions on the difference between these two categories: the foreign and the local, Western and homegrown Southeast Asianists, the old Southeast Asian studies (SEAS) and the emerging locally-produced scholarships on the region (King, 2006). Ariel Heryanto, an Indonesian scholar based in Australia, assumes that non-SEAS scholars engage with the region on the basis of difference, foreignness, and otherness while native Southeast Asian scholars “are not simply fictional figures authored by outsiders, or submissive puppets in the masterful hands of Western puppeteers (2002, 4, 5). I will not go further into the discussion on the difference between local and foreign Southeast Asianists, but I do agree with Heryanto that in the recent decades, home-grown Southeast Asian studies have expanded in almost all Southeast Asian countries, and this has created the difference between “the old Southeast Asian Studies”, based on “the old structures of area studies” (2002, 4) and the new Southeast Asian studies with locally-produced knowledge.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES IN A NEW CONTEXT

The rise of centers for Southeast Asian studies within and in the neighbouring areas of the region indicate that Southeast Asian studies remain relevant and necessary, not only because of the increasing trend of regional integration but also because of the geopolitical importance of Southeast Asia. Instead of looking at Southeast Asia as a unique entity or distinct identity, the new trend of Southeast Asian studies today examines Southeast Asia as a dynamic region of diversity. While Southeast Asian studies continue to be shaped by values and agenda (Thum, 2002), this new research trend focus on a stratified Southeast Asia, pay more attention to different segments of population and issues that affect them ranging from cross-border mobility, labor migration, indigenous peoples, newly emerged middle class, gender issues, old and young ages, civil societies, and democratization, among

others. These focuses are necessary in understanding Southeast Asia at a deeper level as these also marginalized groups to bring attention to their concerns.

Southeast Asia, however, is on the cusp of rapid change at least from two major aspects: the intensive participation of Southeast Asia into the world economy, the foreign direct investments pouring into the region, and the increasing presence of global superpowers in the region. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic community in 2015 and the regional associations and linkages became an irreversible trend. Southeast Asia has become “the realm of the multinational company” and a map of the “financial world”.

In this context, a search for an alternative approach to Southeast Asian studies is necessary. Normally, when we talk about Southeast Asia, we think of a certain geographical space, with different nations within it. Such way of thinking has been superseded by the view that the “world regions are artifacts of human history” and Southeast Asia is just a meta-geography—a shared mental construct but not a physical reality: “South East Asia is an extreme case of a “region” that in history has been interstitial to other civilizations. I’ve put “region” in quote marks because it is not an objective geographical term, but a mental construct or a meta-geography.” (Matteucci, 2012, 2)

This new concept of region could be useful if we can apply it into Southeast Asian area studies. We can see that in the conditions of a dynamic and changing world, we should not limit Southeast Asian studies in Southeast Asian region only. We also need to pay more attention to areas beyond Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia today is expanding its contacts with the world on a much larger scale. Together with the influx new cultural influences into the region, we now see the emergence of new Southeast Asian communities in other parts of the world and we need to thank marriage and labor migration from this region to the world in bringing such influences to the region.

As said earlier, the realization of ASEAN as a regional security and economic community should be considered an important theme in Southeast Asian studies. In response to this new development, a number of universities and research institutes in Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia have established new education and research programs called ASEAN studies. Although ASEAN studies and Southeast Asian studies do not mean the same thing the ASEAN integration is an obvious reflection of a globalizing movement and processes that the Southeast Asian area studies should not ignore.

Initially, ASEAN emerged as a regional organization of nations to ensure regional security and uphold and preserve peace in the region. ASEAN's cultural and economic conjunction, however, was relatively flexible and weak. Nevertheless, the potentials of a regional market with 600 million consumers, if well connected, will give ASEAN a new position within the world economic system. ASEAN, however remains an organization of governments. The main approach of regional connection is mainly from top-down while its people remain out of the regionalization process. It is expected that a combination of both state-led development and an increasingly liberalized market economy will contribute in creating a development trajectory in the region. It is in this regard that ASEAN studies can make its contribution to supplement the new knowledge on a dynamic and creative Southeast Asia on its way towards regional community.

SUSTAINING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

No matter how Southeast Asian Studies mean, either as a broadly defined undertaking for the production and dissemination of scholarly knowledge about Southeast Asia, or as a more narrow undertaking of being framed within a certain geopolitical context, the fundamental questions that should be addressed in Southeast Asian studies have are to do with the patterns of knowledge production and dissemination as well as the use of Southeast Asia as an epistemological unit. If we bear in mind these questions when we start a research project about the region, we will see the importance and necessity

of the knowledge we produce, for whom and by whom (institutional, societal-structural, national, etc.) is this knowledge for, and how that knowledge is used and what kind of elements might influence the process of knowledge production.

Without a doubt, Southeast Asian studies have involved various institutions in the process of knowledge production such as foundations, professional associations, publishers, journals, research institutes, governments, and multinational entities. These institutions continue to play an important role in Southeast Asian studies because they are creating various inter-institutional networks through collaborations at different levels and contribute to the process of decentralisation of production and dissemination of knowledge of Southeast Asia. However, apart from global institutions, there have also been professional associations of local Southeast Asianists that have emerged such as the Association of Southeast Asian Studies for instance. Meanwhile, the ASEAN remains marginal in the process of producing knowledge of the region. It is not yet ready to play a role within the geopolitical context and make its imprints through funding and agenda setting on the intellectual landscape of Southeast Asian knowledge. I do believe the combination and expansion of global and regional networks in Southeast Asian studies will not only help distribute financial, political, intellectual and social resources for the generation of knowledge about Southeast Asia, but also mediate how such knowledge is disseminated, preserved, and accessed (Hau, 2013).

To end, while the departments, programmes and institutes of Southeast Asian studies and ASEAN studies continue to be the primary media for carrying out research and education on Southeast Asia within the region and beyond, the new type of regional institution such as SEASREP is important to foster aspirations for local scholarship. As I see it, until the present day, attention to the achievements of local scholarship on the region is somehow insufficient. I am, however, convinced that SEASREP's commitment to the study of the Southeast Asian region will continue to influence the contribution of studies from local scholars who do not only keep the future of Southeast Asian studies on their

hands but who will also push the global enterprise of Southeast Asian studies to a new stage of development.

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FROM SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES TO ASEAN STUDIES: A changing geopolitics of knowing?

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The ASEAN Studies boom in recent years mark an intriguing development in Southeast Asian Studies. This boom is evident in the proliferation of ASEAN Studies in various universities or research institutes across the region and appears anticipatory of the launch of the ASEAN Community in 2015. Five Open Universities in the region, for instance, have collaborated to develop and offer via online ASEAN Studies at the graduate diploma or master's level. Earlier on, Thammasat University and University of Malaya have established their own international programmes of Master of Arts in ASEAN Studies. Naresuan University in northern Thailand launched the College of ASEAN Community Studies and currently offers doctoral degrees in ASEAN Studies. It is probably the first of its kind, at least in name. In addition to degree programs, ASEAN Studies centers have also multiplied, focusing on policy-oriented research and facilitating academic exchange and collaboration. In Indonesia alone such centers were reportedly established in five universities (Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Gajah Mada, Andalas, Airlangga, Hassanudin) while in Thailand, a similar facility was set up in Chulalongkorn University, among others. Beyond the region, Josai University in Japan put up its own center in 2015 while earlier and since 2009, the American University has launched the ASEAN Studies Forum, a pioneering effort in North America (School of International Service, n.d.). In addition, ASEAN Studies a journal that explicitly uses the name of ASEAN has been inaugurated (Journal of ASEAN Studies, 2016).

Given the fairly long institutional and academic history of Southeast Asian Studies, this recent development raises intriguing questions about its implications. One may say that it is just a pragmatic, rather faddish name change that rides on the hype surrounding the launch of the ASEAN Community. Thus, it is without much meaningful difference. The significant overlap between the contents and structure of the ASEAN Studies program offered by the five open universities noted above, and those of “conventional” Southeast Studies programs seems to bear out this observation. On the other hand, the ASEAN Studies program offered by Thammasat University has a largely institutional studies orientation, with emphasis on ASEAN as an international organization. This case makes one wonder whether a demarcation line may be drawn between ASEAN Studies as a form of institutional studies, on the one hand, and Southeast Asian Studies as a conventional area studies, on the other. Pending a close examination of the contents of various ASEAN Studies programs, and comparing them systematically with their counterparts, the purported area-organizational studies divide can only be conjectural.

In this brief note, I wish to speculate if there could be something more substantive in the rise of ASEAN Studies beyond the hype and pragmatism generated by the launch of the ASEAN Community. I recall William van Schendel’s insights on geographies of knowing and the geographies of ignorance that it engenders (2002). These ideas refer to the power of geographic concepts such as a region or nation to frame and organize knowledge production in ways that includes, enables, and empowers, but simultaneously excludes, prevents, and emasculates certain groups that subscribe to particular ways of knowing. Given that Southeast Asian Studies have long and largely been an externally-driven enterprise, one may be tempted to guess if the use of ASEAN Studies as nomenclature heralds the coming into the surface of impulses from beneath or within the region. These impulses are deeply rooted in the region’s decolonizing history and seek to wrest from outsiders the control over a range of things including the engine of knowledge production.

What is disturbing is that by foregrounding the ASEAN as the central object of study, ASEAN Studies effectively legitimizes the institution and lays the ground work for effacing or eliding issues that did not fit the ASEAN frame. Knowing how politically conservative ASEAN has been, and aware of the extent to which it was used by leaders and member states to protect and promote their self-interests, ASEAN Studies may serve as a perfect vehicle to naturalize and justify those interests. One may counter that since conventional area studies such as Southeast Asian Studies have also proven to serve certain political purposes, it cannot thus pretend to be politically more innocuous (Szanton, 2004). One may argue that at least by calling this field of study ASEAN Studies, it is transparent or honest about the interests it serves.

I recall that since the 1980s, the late Ben Anderson had observed that the gravity of developing into Southeast Asian Studies was shifting from outside to inside the region (Anderson, 1992). The rise in the past two to three decades of the number of important departments and research institutes in the region seem to confirm Anderson's observation. I remember Ariel Heryanto who, in early 2000, raised a provocative, politically loaded but rhetorically phrased question of whether there could ever be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies. By now, with the quickening pace of knowledge production in the region and the increasing number of scholars and organic intellectuals from therein, Heryanto may be happy to have found an affirmative answer to his otherwise rhetorical question. He and many others may not be pleased with the possible implications of the rise of ASEAN Studies, but this development appears to be a logical conclusion or crystallization of the trend that Anderson had already observed as early as the 1980s. With ASEAN Studies, the prime movers seem to be pushing the logic of "owning the region." They may have gone too crass and too far, but that is an issue that deserves a separate discussion.

If indeed the rise of ASEAN Studies coincides with a reconfiguration of power relations, it merely affirms that groups with particular interests, be it political, economic, or whatever, will find ways to naturalize and justify such interests.

So when the proponents of ASEAN Studies readily accepted ASEAN as a given both as an institution and as region, and at the same time take it as the area boundary of their epistemological geography, it was part of their interests, conscious or not, to relegate other things to the confines of the geography of ignorance, following again van Schendel's terms. This suggests that whatever ways we reconceptualize the notion of Area to make Southeast Asian Studies more relevant, it will inevitably reflect, sometimes without us being aware, the deep-seated desires, anxieties, and interests of groups vying for better position in the matrix of power relations. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, I suppose. It may be a nature of human beings, political animal as they are, to have self-interests and to work hard to pursue and nurture them. What seems worse is to deny it and mobilize scholarship to conceal such denial. In the process, well-meaning scholars end up doing harm in their pursuit of a public good.

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REFLECTIONS TOWARDS SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES: Persisting hope and anxiety

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The nature and orientation of Southeast Asian Studies (SEAS) has already changed for decades since it was conceptualized and still continues to change. These changes were largely influenced by efforts over the years to integrate the region politically and thus has provided opportunities to evaluate its relevance and in the process present resolutions to regional problems that largely affect regional stakeholders, among others.

The idea of “hope” refers to positive developments in regional integration and the role of agencies in deliberating the standard discourse of SEAS. At the same time, “anxiety” is brought about by regional issues that need to be resolved through continuous evaluation of knowledge production in SEAS.

From the perspective of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, the complex issues in the region that need to be examined comprehensively as objects in Southeast Asian Studies are:

- South Chinese Sea dispute that needs to be examined from several perspectives
 - law, culture, and communication;
- Refugee issues have to be analysed through different of thinking and logic - public policy, culture, religion, and gender;
- Global maritime fulcrum as a potential agenda in Indonesia - as natural resource and state sovereignty;

- Non-traditional security problems, such as trans-boundary haze pollution issues and transnational terrorism;
- Proprietary debates on cultural heritage and territorial disputes.

Despite the complexities of these issues there is “Strength” in pursuing a single communal identity for the Southeast Asian region, which has been of late strongly highlighted. In addition, the community of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has also been largely involved in the discourse to promote integration in the region.

There is a perceived “Threat”, however, in the rise of ASEAN Studies that is now largely seen as having reduced and simplified the value and direction of SEA. “Weakness” refers to the seemingly limited research methodologies in the study of Southeast Asia. Most researchers are seen to have failed to move out of perceiving SEAS as an object of research, along with issues on the continued exploitation of the subject, which, in some instances, involve researchers, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the commodification of Southeast Asia.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN SEAS

In the twenty-first century, the South East Asian region is confronted with many challenges, more than ever, because of the uncertainties that are brought about by an even more globalizing context, diversities, digital platform, and global warming. Some of the problems of uncertainty in the global context are also brought about by a multi-polar world such as geo-political and middle class pressure, aging population, urbanization (i.e. green-smart city), technology revolution 4.0 (new energy, biotechnology), mega-Free Trade Associations and regional linkages, regional and global institutional reforms, resource competition (e.g. water and energy) and climate change, and rising Asian powers such as China and India. These perceived problems create uncertainties that demand Southeast Asian countries to find ways to confront the challenges these uncertainties bring. And it is along these lines that the issue of diversity will be addressed. The diverse cultures, politics, ethnicities, religions, and interests

that make-up the dynamics of these countries and their characteristics make the exploration of Southeast Asia challenging.

Issues on digital platform reflect that around 321 million internet users are in Southeast Asia and make up 3.81 billion of internet users in the world. The popularity of social networking in Southeast Asia is such that according to the *Internet World Stats*, five of the countries in the region are considered the five largest internet populations in Asia and includes: Indonesia (4), Philippines (6), Vietnam (7), Thailand (9) and Malaysia (10). (Abbott, 204). The digital landscape in Indonesia, for instance, develops at a very fast rate, at least since 2009. Internet profile in Indonesia also shows some interesting data. Internet users have reached a total of 71, 900, 000 people in 2013, a figure that has since increased to 74, 500, 000 in 2014. Interestingly, the use of the internet in Indonesia is only 28% of the total population. Indonesia has the fourth largest Facebook users in the world and the most popular online activity is sending email. The profile of Indonesian internet users by age is dominated by digital natives ages 25 - 29 years old, that seems to be trending in cyberspace. The second group consists of those within the 30-34 years old bracket and are categorized as digital immigrants. New media in Indonesia is also getting very dynamic, especially since discourses on the subject offers open public discussions that add to the vibrancy of the Indonesian public sphere. In many occasions, new media becomes the main actor to empower public interest, especially with new media activists who use social media to push social movement. In this regard, new media becomes the new favourite medium in Indonesia and so carries potentials for various causes in in Indonesia. Although new media becomes increasingly relevant in many aspects of social life among Indonesians, the potential of new media to create a better society remains a challenge. Those using new media are still oriented towards its entertainment function instead of optimizing its functions to create connectivity as a common ground for Indonesian society.

Global warming is another important issue for countries in Southeast Asia that should be addressed. Global warming brings about problems such as climate change, food and energy crisis, as well as natural disasters. Some countries in

Southeast Asia, for example, face serious climate change problems. For Indonesia, climate change affects dimensions of social economy such as transportation, agriculture, health, and industry. Sea level rise, surface air temperature increase, extreme weather, drought, and forest fire are some of these problems (Bappenas, 2010). Deficient sectoral policy coordination across government agencies and jurisdictional levels in Indonesia, as well as inadequate local capacity building efforts are some of the institutional constraints that need to be negotiated as part of addressing climate change (Paulus & Hindmarsh, 2016). As the dynamics of these challenges in Southeast Asia are increasingly felt, there has to be a change in perspective and methodology in Southeast Asian studies, as well as more reflexivity on the part of scholars to better confront the challenges that the region is currently facing.

In the context of a changing perspective on SEA studies there have been new ways of investigating the subject that has reoriented it from one that was area studies based to one that is taking on new trends, such as: a) studies that have become more non-Euro/Anglo-American centered; b) emerging studies focused on national, sub-regional, and regional interests; c) ASEAN studies have become stronger in many countries in Southeast Asia. ASEAN studies has three pillars: economic communities, sociocultural communities, and political and security issues, that are attracting the attention of scholars in area studies. These studies, however, focus more on the institutional aspects of ASEAN. Somehow this trend has reduced not only the social dynamic aspect of ASEAN studies but also its substantive aspect; d) within the domain of studies on national interest are issues on the impact of geographical proximity and their potentials for conflict, although this directions needs further academic exploration. Some of these issues involve Indonesia and Malaysia; Malaysia and Thailand; Thailand and Myanmar; Thailand and Cambodia; Cambodia and Vietnam; and Philippines and Malaysia.

Methodological issues is also an aspect of SEAS that should be further explored. In line with the continuing academic thrust to development a SEAS perspective, the question of methodology is also changing from one that is specific in orientation

to the exploration of country and sub-regional studies, or comparative studies on two/more countries, as well as regional studies. The new trend is now attracting attention from among those working on regional studies as well as those who study inter-connectivity between states and regions. Globalization also brings to the study of global interconnectivity a more challenging method on how to study the ASEAN and the European Union (EU), ASEAN and China, and ASEAN and India.

On the various issues that characterize the Southeast Asian academic landscape, scholars are being challenged to search and construct several realities in order to develop new methods to explore the complexities of the region. In this regard, broader perspectives and methods are not only necessary but also fruitful to in order to develop a SEAS that is in line with contemporary SEA society with its new trends dynamics. Adaptiveness and transforming perspectives and methodologies are important factors that could empower SEAS that can contribute towards a more rigorous SEAS.

CENTRE STUDIES AS AN AGENCY IN SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

The Centre of Southeast Asian Social Studies (CESASS) Universitas Gadjah Mada prioritizes the promotion of social transformation in the Southeast Asian epistemic community in order to become a hub for SEAS network in the global scale. In Indonesia, the Center is committed to promote hope despite the prevailing anxieties and to improve innovation in SEAS by empowering the agencies concerned and the Indonesian government by prompting a national satellite network for the studies. Based on these assertions, CESASS puts forth the following observations and positions:

A. The development of Southeast Asian studies in Indonesia.

1. Lack of awareness of the people towards regional integration;
2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs released some ASEAN research centers in Indonesia since 2012; and
3. Indonesian studies still dominates the field of SEASS because of the substantial lack of publications that examine other countries.

B. Role of CESASS: develop alternative perspectives in studying SEA, increase the capacity of agencies, and support governance;

1. Epistemological alternatives beyond the prevailing approaches and perspectives may be developed by engaging post-modernism or critical theory, which are needed to further interrogate Southeast Asia in order to produce contemporary knowledge to continuously examine the SEAS. Through discussions, research disseminations, workshops, conferences, Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), and publications, the Center intends to promote the development of new perspectives to view Southeast Asia.
2. Increase agency capacities
 1. Organizing the *Mengajar dan Meneliti Asia Tenggara* (MMAT/Teaching and Researching Southeast Asia) to contribute to the existence of an epistemic community.
 2. Language training and cultural exchange for students as an agent of knowledge production.
 3. Involving NGOs as non-state actors in academic activities through workshop collaboration.
3. Constant support to the government
 1. Improving local government capacity by conducting lectures and workshops.
 2. Proposing policy recommendations to the government on contemporary social issues.
 3. Collaborating with other countries' representatives to raise awareness about other countries.

C. How to resolve the problems: synergy between CESASS in Indonesia and the building of scholars' network on SEAS and innovation in teaching and research method through an online device.

CESASS will also try to map reflection on these undertakings in order to further enhance this multidisciplinary approach to understand and resolve regional issues. A institutional roadmap is explained below to visualize the steps that will be undertaken for the future plans of the CESASS.

Raising awareness towards borderless communities

1. Spread information and disseminate knowledge to raise awareness toward the construction of Southeast Asian communities and focusing on people-oriented activities to calibrate a social trend.

- SEA Talks, research dissemination in SEA Studies
- SEA Movies, Southeast Asian film screening
- SEA-GATE, Southeast Asian Language and Cultural Training Program
- SEA Chat, exclusive chatting about one respective country in SEA
- Visiting Program, summer course in Southeast Asia countries
- Thai Language and Cultural Course for Indonesian

2. Hub for research collaboration and epistemic community

Integrating the scope of Southeast Asia Studies and Social Studies (SEASS) , with research focus on Information and Communication Technology (ICT), social, cultural, and political security, and economy and social welfare.

- Bi-annual teaching and researching Southeast Asia (MMAT).
- Bi-annual ASEAN Workshop for local government.
- Annual international conference on SEAS.

3. Developing intellectual product to foster social transformation

Conducting business-related research projects as a product of intellectual formulations based on each particular field in order to realistically establish a system to guide society in its transformation.

- Economic products by empowering Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and improving entrepreneurship to boost social welfare.
- Skilled product through training for skilled workers based on the Mutual Recognition Agreement of the ASEAN Community 2025.
- Technological product through the establishment of the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in Southeast Asian Social Studies.

Southeast Asian museum and laboratory as campus techno-park

The CSEASS at the Universitas Gadjah Mada campus aims to be the focal point of reference and resource repository for any Southeast Asian related data.

- Southeast Asia Resource Center
 - o Digital catalogue
 - o Online courses
- IKAT, Indonesian Journal for Southeast Asian Social Studies
- Southeast Asia Corner in CESASS' Library

Finally, all these undertakings are made to signify that the beginning of real work towards the realization of these aims are now underway. The role of CSEASS to push these efforts and to share these perspective are directed towards the achievement of the end goals of pursuing and developing further SEAS. The two aspects in pursuing these undertakings are substantive and empirical. In the substantive aspect, the goal is to develop new perspective in exploring and deepening research focus on SEAS. In the empirical aspect, the challenge is to engage in more empirical research as a means to broaden the landscape of regionalism in creating an ASEAN community.

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES AND ITS VICISSITUDES: ENVISIONING THE FIELD

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The way in which we define Southeast Asia as a field of study continues to be an issue of concern for scholars of the region. Over a century after the founding of the field's earliest research institutes in Europe and over fifty years after the founding of area-studies centres in North America, scholars today still grapple with issues over agency, representation, perspective, and authenticity in Southeast Asian Studies.¹ Some of the more interesting versions of these older conversations are occurring within the region itself.

As recent discussions at the 2017 International Conference of Asian Scholars indicate, sufficient uncertainties persist over the roles and contributions of locally based scholars to Southeast Asian Studies. Domestic scholars tend to privilege proximity and subjectivity to distinguish their vision of the region from the forms projected by foreign scholars. Different orientations to Southeast Asian Studies and assorted understandings of what the field stands for continues to divide scholars (and their work) into intellectual hierarchies that perhaps limits the potential for a more inclusive picture of the field.

For those of us trained in area studies centers of North America, Southeast Asia was considered to be a territorially bounded space, with a definitive history,

¹ Some of these early institutes include the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asia and the Caribbean (KITLV, 1851) in Leiden, the French School of Asian Studies (EFEO, 1898) in Saigon, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, 1916) in London, and the National Institute of Ethnic Studies (Minzoku-Kenkyūsho, 1942). The point here is that Southeast Asian Studies, as a field, was imagined at different times and in different places.

a distinctive climate, a shared material culture, a recognized community of language families, a unique social structure; and when compared to South or East Asia, a region that was noted for its higher status of women. With doyens such as George Coedes, DGE Hall, Robert Heine-Geldern, Paul Mus, Edmund Leach, Harry Benda, John Smail, and OW Wolters leading the way, the field of Southeast Asian Studies seemed to resemble a great spiritual tradition; a calling with its own founding fathers, a representative canon, privileged centres of learning, institutional bodies, and perhaps, over the decades, a growing notion of authority and orthodoxy about its basic tenets.²

Like a spiritual tradition, Southeast Asian Studies also has its vicissitudes, variations on that canon, its rituals, and practices that developed independently in some cases or through disciples sent off to spread the faith (Spiro, 1970). Recognizing that there are different forms of Southeast Asian Studies, with varying understandings of that canon and a range of ways of expressing affiliation, creates an accommodating space for Southeast Asian Studies; one that recognizes the different priorities and understandings of the field that have emerged over time and space. Like the great world religions, Southeast Asian Studies has a global presence with shared features, local practices and most importantly, believers.

As a global field of inquiry, followers of and advocates for Southeast Asian Studies (SEAS) might be understood through the different contexts in which they received their training via the intellectual principles they endorsed. In the same way we acknowledge the multiple strands of Buddhism (the many forms of Theravada for instance), so too does Southeast Asian Studies have varying intellectual

² The “golden age” of Southeast Asian Studies, in its American form, was shaped by many of the intellectuals mentioned here and the work they produced. The area studies centres and programs at Yale University, Cornell University, the University of Wisconsin, The University of Michigan, Ohio University, The University of Washington, Northern Illinois University, UC-Berkeley and Arizona State University represent some of the oldest programs in North America who might claim such an authority.

genealogies; each shaped by institutional, historical, and methodological leanings that would manifest differently in the field, the classroom, or the policy forum.

While North American expressions of Southeast Asian Studies might have been born out of Cold War priorities, the subsequent development of the field's global infrastructure, its professional associations, research conferences, journals, graduate programs, book series, research chairs, centres and funding initiatives, was and continues to be connected to a range of institutional motivations, intellectual trends, and individual agency. In other words, the establishment of an area studies infrastructure and its appropriation in Kyoto and Singapore might have initially been linked to particular strategic policy interests of the Cold War, but that political lineage alone did not drive that generation nor others that followed to study the region. As Ho Chi Tim has convincingly argued, the changing of the name of the Journal of Southeast Asian History to the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies had as much to do with local administrative, intellectual, and individual agency as it much as it was a response to growing trends in the United States (Time, 2008).

This spread of Southeast Asian Studies has taken on local characteristics, priorities and angles of view: North American, European, and Australian adherents have begun to emphasize a transregional perspective (or sometimes termed Inter-Asian viewpoint), part of a broader spatial turn that has urged us to rethink the intellectual and political boundaries that have shaped how we think about Southeast Asia. Comparative work across regions, charting movements of people, goods, technologies, and ideas between multiple sites, or demonstrating the ways in which spaces and social assemblages are connected to a range of networks across the globe are some examples of this research. While not entirely a new approach for scholars of the region, exploring the types of networks and flows that extend beyond contemporary boundaries to chart the connections between Southeast Asia and South, East, Central, and West Asia are seen by many to be an important and emerging trend in the field.

Some practitioners of Southeast Asian Studies have focused their attention more deeply into the social landscape rather than by widening the perspective as described earlier. Scholars aiming to fill gaps within the regional experience have either chosen to work on peripheral spaces, such as in the highlands and other non-state spaces or focused on marginalized communities and borderland groups to demonstrate the complexities of what it might mean to be Southeast Asian. Conversely, more recent scholars have begun to relook at cities more closely, not only through delving more deeply into the urban landscapes of the region's key metropolitan centres, but by examining the different neighborhoods, suburbs, and locales that are part of broader networks of community. In both cases, attention to non-elites, minorities, women, and subalterns have been part of a broader trend of filling in the gaps in the story that had previously focused on elites in the centre.

Within Asia, the establishment of new consortia, scholarly associations, PhD programs, and conference circuits highlight the rise of new centers for research on Southeast Asia. Based in Kyoto, Japan, the Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia (SEASIA) links institutions and scholars in Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines via regular conferences, symposia, and workshops. The twenty-year-old Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP), based in Manila, Philippines, announced the establishment of a new regional association (Southeast Asian Studies in Southeast Asia/SEAS-n-SEA) and an online journal (*Regional Journal of Southeast Asian Studies/RJSEAS*). The newly established Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Busan, South Korea, one of several Korean Southeast Asian centres founded in the last decade, hosts annual international conferences and focused workshops in order to forge its own network of regional universities.

In all three examples, there is a common affiliation to Southeast Asian Studies. While North American, European, and Australian denominations of Southeast Asian Studies have grown weary of a fixed notion of the region, Southeast Asianists within the region are becoming more receptive to the idea of a

distinctive and inclusive analytical unit; pursuing its delineation through a range of innovative programs and institutional connections. As mentioned by a colleague, a new trend in the region might very well be the rise of ASEAN Studies as a response to the transregional turn that is promoted in Europe and America. Where national spaces once served as the operating framework for many of the region's institutions thirty years ago, regional universities today are actively promoting more regionally oriented research projects that affirm the territorial boundaries of Southeast Asia. These regionally situated collaborations are producing new interpretative communities whose orientation to the field will no doubt reflect these local institutional configurations and priorities.

At the same time, it would be remiss to suggest that the idea of Southeast Asian Studies does not have its detractors, those who resist the call of the field and the pressure to submit to its core doctrines, spatial parameters, and its epistemologies. The presence of new scholars who are joining the field from different intellectual entry points (communications, environmental studies, journalism, international relations, and visual media) join Southeast Asian Studies from different conceptual and methodological positions. While affiliation to a humanities or social science field has always been a point of intellectual cross fertilization, now we are engaging scholars whose scholarly traditions stem from different genealogies, without any relationship to those core ideas and discussions that originally shaped the field. For many of these scholars, situating their work within the field may not involve an OW Wolters, a Benedict Anderson, or a Clifford Geertz.

Another point of resistance to this great tradition of Southeast Asian Studies comes from the other side of the spectrum, from scholars who are more concerned with the nation as a unit of analysis. This form of Southeast Asian Studies is concerned with developments at the national level, sometimes framed by chronology, at other times by space, or by simply having the quality of having occurred within national borders. For these adherents, the pursuit of Southeast Asian Studies is achieved through the nation (be it spatially,

historically, linguistically, culturally, socially, or politically) because the nation, in certain contexts, is still in production and under contestation. In institutions throughout the region, the idea of Southeast Asian Studies still has to take root due to domestic intellectual priorities that reflect the geopolitical concerns of the times.

Differences in the field's global infrastructure are mirrored by variances in how scholars envision the region. Fifty years ago, earlier generations of scholars promoted a coherent, unified vision of the region in an effort to shape the conceptual boundaries of the new field. Working upon the disjointed foundations left by colonial scholar-officials, scholars who built the area studies tradition provided structure and direction for the region based on an idea of a region that stressed shared experiences, dynamics, and characteristics. Approaches that demonstrated the uniform and coherent quality of Southeast Asia was the preferred perspective of the day, an approach that continues to have traction within regional universities.

The postmodern turn toward multiplicity, variety, and difference has fundamentally challenged these earlier conceptions of the region. Today, these unities are being challenged from within and without via a shift to border-crossing, trans-Asian, and inter-Asian approaches that departs from the static categories and territorial boundaries associated with the region. Stressing methods that transcend regional/national borders, these interventions encourage us to recalibrate our angles of view in order to focus more sharply on the spatial interconnections and linkages that move along and beyond the boundaries of Southeast Asia. Envisioning the region as a field of fluid assemblages linked by global flows could fundamentally transform how we understand and pursue the study of Southeast Asia (Tagliacozzo, Sue, & Perdue, 2015).

Many scholars are involved in promoting these new and exciting ways of reconfiguring the field and those who do research on transnational topics will think of publishing research in different destinations that cater to their work

according to the audiences and languages of their readership. Other scholars will continue to pursue research on Southeast Asia in more familiar ways. While some of these enduring conversations or questions may feel out-dated, it is important to recognize that these earlier discussions will still appear fresh and inspiring in intellectual settings where the idea of the region is only now beginning to take root.

Moving forward, it might be worthwhile to think about the field of Southeast Asian Studies as a great tradition with its various vicissitudes: constellation of institutes, universities, and interpretive communities, each with their own intellectual hinterlands, geo-political contexts, and local institutional priorities. By doing so we will be able to engage and appreciate scholarship produced in Ithaca, Kyoto, Kunming, and Copenhagen alongside scholarship cultivated in Manila, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Yogyakarta. Acknowledging these multiple genres of Southeast Asian Studies will enable us to engage different methodologies, priorities, and expressions of the field.

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MULTI-LEVEL MOVEMENTS AND MULTI-LEVEL INTERCONNECTIVITY APPROACH

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In the course of working on my PhD dissertation project, I stumbled on the work of Nhuk-Thèm (1903-1974), who spent most of his childhood being educated in Buddhist temples in Băttambang province and had eventually moved from one place to another in order to seek opportunities to further his career. At sixteen and as a monk he studied Buddhism in Bangkok, Thailand. After more than ten years of studying in Thailand, Nhuk-Thèm returned to Cambodia in 1930 and worked for the colonial-established Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh. As a trilingual scholar who spoke Khmer, Siamese, and French, he was employed by the French-Indochina government and was sent to Ho Chi Minh (what was then Saigon in South Vietnam) to translate documents on the territorial conflict between French-Cambodia and Thailand during World War II.

Since my research is on the evolution of the historiographical genres in colonial Cambodia during the first half of the twentieth century, local intellectuals such as Nhuk-Thèm who translated a number of history texts from French and Siamese into Khmer during the 1940s, is one of the key intellectuals whose works are vital for my dissertation project.

In the course of my research I became interested in how Nhuk-Thèm was able to move from one place to another across mainland Southeast Asia during the colonial years. Nhuk-Thèm's experience in places such as Băttambang, Bangkok, Phnom Penh, and Saigon, had transformed his individuality to become a person who had travelled across different territorial and social domains. He, in fact,

had moved from being a local monk in Bättambang to become a key national scholar in the Buddhist Institute. In the territorial conflict between French-Indochina and Thailand, he became an international figure who assisted the colonial government to deal with the Bangkok political regime. Nhuk-Thèm's story reflects a multi-level movement that he, as an official-intellectual, had moved across local, national and international social and territorial domains. His case suggests a long-existence of "multi-level movements" which have become a "paradigm" of social movements in Cambodia and elsewhere in the twenty-first century.

There are numerous cases that have a similar pattern of multi-level movement in Cambodia today. These include the land rights movement in Phnom Penh by Tep Vanny, who has engaged in local, national, and international spheres to campaign for the rights of the Boeung Kak Lake communities. Another case is the Spanish environmentalist Alex Gonzalez-Davidson, a fluent Khmer-speaking activist who has become well known in Cambodia for his efforts to protect Areng Valley in Koh Kong province. As an international figure, Gonzalez-Davidson has engaged in various activities at local and national levels to urge for the environmental protection of the valley.

Another example is the case of the Prey Lang activists who have fought for years to protect their community forest which covers an estimated 3,600 square kilometers. Some 200,000 people share the activists' economic, cultural, and spiritual lives with the forest, which has been threatened by illegal logging for timber. As part of their conservation efforts, a grassroots movement the Prey Lang Community Network was formed. Over the past few years, this network, besides conducting frequent forest patrol, has engaged in local, national and international-level activities to attract attention of the Cambodian public and its government as well as the international community about the significance of their forest heritage. In 2011, the network conducted a rally in Phnom Penh with outfits of the film "Avatar", to manifest their struggle to save their community forest from exploitation from the outside.

These cases reflect a complex structure of social movements, which are no longer associated with one specific social or territorial domain. The advancement of technology, especially in the area of mass media and social network, have furthered the advocacy of these activists and networks who have already moved across the local, national, and international spheres to advocate their rights for housing and environmental protection, among others.

I therefore propose a “multi-level interconnectivity” approach, a framework that is designed to examine the different structures or layers of these movements, and then connect these layers together in order to build a more thorough understanding of the movements. The idea of breaking down these movements or networks into different layers is also to take into account the perspectives at each of these layers, which can be local, national, and international. The intention to connect these layers together is to unravel the interconnectivity between these levels and among actors to draw a broader understanding about these movements in order to map out the complexity of these twenty-first century movements.

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TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES: Pushing the potential for creating a shared and unified region

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As a geographical region that was “conjured” by military planners during the Second World War and “filled-in” mostly by American area study experts in the post-World War period, there appears to be a persistent anxiety about the efficacy of Southeast Asia as a geographic or civilizational unity. The discussion has developed toward understanding Southeast Asia as a theoretical approach, an intellectual enterprise in which the act of formulating questions pertinent to the idea of Southeast Asia goes toward reifying its imaginaries and boundaries, helping it to determine what it actually is. The presence of the Cold War-rooted Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community helps to institutionally solidify this region, giving it an easy and central perspective based on the grouping of the nation-states of the region. Yet, as Willem van Schendel notes, this national/geopolitical focus creates areas of absence, places that are unimagined from the perspective of the national/regional center such as, for instance, in the Zomia highland, which straddles and connects the highlands of Tibet, South Asia through to those in the Southeast Asian mainland (2002). With this lack of institutionalized presence, the Zomia had to be discovered by specialists, who with the help of local guides, set new borders, reified new binaries, and contemplated new questions. These sets of measure and seriality appears in the cross-eyed act of looking askance from the conventional, national/regional perspectives. This is not something new. The great Dutch historian on Indonesia, J.C. van Leur, gave the call to look not from the deck of the colonial ship, but from the gaze of the indigenous ramparts, already writing in the 1940s

(1967). John Smail pleaded again for the indigenous gaze within an intellectual exercise he named autonomous history decades before postcolonial theory became a commonly accepted approach in academia (1961).

These periodic reinvestments into reifying new ways of gazing Southeast Asia has developed alongside new intellectual trends such as globalization study and transnationalism. Studies of diasporic networks have uncovered a wealth of geographies and relationships within Southeast Asia and outside the region; the Indian Ocean world, the Overseas Chinese network and, of course, the various colonial networks linking Southeast Asian colonies with their Western metropolis. Yet, the development of these new geographies has instead added to the anxiety of the relevance of the term Southeast Asia. These geographical linkages confirm the many frivolities and conjectural nature of the idea of Southeast Asia. Even the Zomia connects interior highland Southeast Asia with the highlands of South Asia and Tibet, in the process disconnecting them with the rest of Southeast Asia. The Indian Ocean world and the Islamic nature stretch many parts of Island Southeast Asia toward a new center based outside of the region. Even ASEAN itself is changing with the rise of the ASEAN +3, and the maturing of China as a regional hegemon, the regional gaze based on the institutional presence of that multinational organization is beginning to have a doubtful future.

Thus the question on the idea of Southeast Asia or if there such a thing as Southeast Asia, or Southeast Asian or even Southeast Asianists, loom large in the minds of some academics who have come to call themselves Southeast Asianists. I personally have yet to refer to myself with such an esteemed title. Having studied in Indonesia for my bachelors degree and then continuing my education following on the well-trodden “colonial path” of pursuing a graduate and postgraduate degree in the Netherlands, my education has echoed the old colonial-metropolitan one that have its own set of unique questions. Under Sartono Kartodirdjo when a new history program was crafted for a new regime in the 1970s, the national gaze was central (1995). When Indonesian

historians in the 1980s wanted to find new narratives away from the nationalist historiography, they experimented with local history, but unfortunately did not develop a coherent and theoretical approach. My personal foray into Southeast Asian studies happened under the aegis of the Southeast Asia Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP), a regional network of likeminded Southeast Asian intellectuals, with their wonderful conferences and workshops. It is in this new network and relationship that my understanding of the geography of Southeast Asia has come to light. Meeting bright and intelligent academics from other Southeast Asian countries, old established ones and young up-and-coming scholars, I have come to realize the important role they have in the new chapters of reifying Southeast Asia in the twenty-first century. The act of creating Southeast Asia is one that is performed in these personal and organizational relationships that fly academics around the region to particular cities there not only to mingle with one another but also to experience the differences, and more important, the similarities that are ever present in this rather similar region.

Perhaps one of the more enlightening trends that have come up in Southeast Asian studies in these past decades has been exactly in the kinds of research that Willem van Schendel and others have in reimagining new possible geographies for Southeast Asia (2002). Much of this has been done under the aegis of scholars working on other areas, such as those studying South Asia or the Islamic world. Yet this creative act of discovering connections, flows, borders and divisions, transnational and transregional connectivities in over they years and into the contemporary period represent a trend that has the potential to open up new ways of reimagining the regions and allowing new intellectual and emotive forms of empathy and solidarity amongst the wide variety of people in the region. Scholars such as Eric Tagliacozzo and those working on studies of the borderlands have provided a wonderful example of how to deal with these phenomena that are often outside the gaze of the administrative state and their productive archive-making exercise (2009). The idea of Southeast Asia as a “borderland” that exhibit processes and exchanges that are not just limited to the national borders but in various transnational forms is a perspective that

potentially produce questions pertinent in a regional sense. It requires one to think of Southeast Asia not as a patchwork of nations, but as processes amongst people inhabiting different kinds of borders sharing basic commonalities that are strong enough as a basic unifying experience. In other words, the idea is also about a Southeast Asian experience. As such, these kinds of work should be seen as collaborative and cooperative. This requires the effort to write together the histories of various connectivities that transcend the regions. Collaborative efforts by various people from around the region to work together in developing ideas of networks, connectivities, and shared trends. It requires thinking about borders as an intellectual exercise in understanding how it work as a membrane of differential permeabilities with political, social, cultural and psychological frameworks determining divisions of what can and what cannot cross. Not just a physical border between two sovereign states, but also mental and cultural borders that determine behaviors of different populations, economic borders determining who can enter and who cannot. Moreover, these ideas are also about connections; how ideas traverse the region and affected one another, how political movements and state policies affected one another through the act of looking and imitating, for instance how the development of such regimes as the New Order in Indonesia affected and were imitated by the State Law and Order Restoration Council regime in Myanmar; or how policies to obtain Foreign Direct Investments in many countries in the region followed on the successful heel of Singapore's economic development.

None of these is new. The important aspect of this trend though, in my opinion, is the importance that it be commandeered amongst Southeast Asian intellectuals themselves. No doubt that the discussion will always be affected by the brilliant contribution of intellectuals from outside the region, but it should primarily be a Southeast Asian discussion. One important reason for this is that the production of such connective narratives has a very practical purpose: it is essential for the creation of a Southeast Asian identity based on empathy and solidarity. For this to succeed, intellectuals must develop an interest amongst many people that the region is worth having. Thus in order to start developing the kinds of questions

that would help in achieving this goal of reifying shared boundaries of Southeast Asia, there is a great need to continue the discussions and fora that allow people from Southeast Asia to talk to one another. These fora should not only allow for intellectuals in various parts of Southeast Asia to know what kinds of research and writing are being done, but also to collaborate on new projects, conducting joint research and writing on shared topics—topics that are the result of intensive joint discussion on the kinds of shared processes, phenomenon, and connectivities that bring forth a sense of solidarity and common values. Such common values may include questions pertaining to differential development in Southeast Asia, whether liberal democratic society in the region are possible, the role of women in Southeast Asian societies, and so forth. By taking the rein and setting the Southeast Asian gaze amongst Southeast Asianists, perhaps a shared regional common value could be agreed upon and this could be the start of producing a common narrative that could unite it as a region. Efforts for this kind of project have been undertaken over the past years, yet these should be iterative for the region is constantly evolving and its boundaries are always in fluid motion. The discussion of what is Southeast Asia has to be conducted in a generational and historical setting.

Future trends that should be encouraged within Southeast Asian studies thus should place importance in the efforts to write about the region together. We should perhaps look at the importance of writing together regional historical textbooks that explores commonalities, connectivities and shared regional values and futures. Perhaps more important, these textbooks should be affordable and accessible. It should consider that Southeast Asia is a multilingual region and perhaps translation of materials from the dominant English language medium to other national languages would allow for broader consumption to segments of the population that need to be convinced of the importance of a regional identity. While no doubt there is a potential to talk about and reify this “Southeast Asian experience”, it has to be put into words and string into a compelling narrative. It has to be a narrative that could talk personally to the readers and their daily experience of living in the region. This project is

in the hands of the current and future Southeast Asian intellectuals to make into reality. This is a project that should be seen with a positive viewpoint, to render a shared and caring region into being in the minds of those that inhabit the region itself. While no doubt such an act of bringing forth a metanarrative of shared history is dangerous and riddled with power play, as postmodernism has pointed out years ago, the act itself is open to criticism, reinterpretation and should get the discussion ball rolling, allowing for the sedimentation of future discussions to develop layer and depths of differing interpretations and counter-narratives to flourish. The question of whether Southeast Asia is real would be moot if this point could not be reached and it should be one that is not based on the monopoly of the one “true” Southeast Asian experience, but is open to discussion and counter-narrative. On this future bed of narrative and counter-narrative soil, the Southeast Asian experience could hopefully reach a point of germination; a truly shared Southeast Asian identity and experience could be the basis for regional unity and acceptance of difference.

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TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE, ASEAN AND SINGAPORE UNILATERALISM

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Haze is defined by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat as “sufficient smoke, dust, moisture, and vapor suspended in the air to impair visibility”. In Southeast Asia, most of this haze originates from land and forest fires in Indonesia and to a lesser extent, Malaysia. These fires can either occur naturally or are intentionally lit to quickly and cheaply clear land for small scale or commercial agriculture such as pulp and paper and palm oil. Haze becomes transboundary when “its density and extent is so great at the source that it remains at measurable levels after crossing into another country’s airspace” (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008). Southeast Asia has been experiencing more frequent and severe episodes of transboundary haze since the 1980s. Especially bad episodes can affect the health of some 75 million people and the economies of six Southeast Asian nations. Generally the countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore suffer the brunt of haze every year (Mayer, 2006).

The ASEAN member states began to acknowledge haze as a regional concern in 1985, with the adoption of the Agreement on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The member states first began collective activity to mitigate haze in 1992, with the Workshop on Transboundary Pollution and Haze in ASEAN Countries. Other activities and agreements followed, the most significant of which was the legally binding ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (ATHP), which was brought into force in 2003 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2004). The ATHP’s stated objective was to “prevent and monitor transboundary

haze pollution as a result of land and/or forest fires which should be mitigated, through concerted national efforts and intensified regional and international cooperation” (ASEAN Secretariat, 2002).

From the very beginning, it was already clear that haze cooperation at the ASEAN level would be bucking several major regional trends. Firstly, regional cooperation over the haze was lauded as the earliest example of ASEAN cooperation over a trans-boundary environmental issue (Elliot, 2003). This was especially significant due to the prevalent developmental trends of the region, which relied on natural resource exploitation for economic growth. Indeed, at the ASEAN level, the protection of the environment and any attempts to block access to natural resources were normally seen as something that would threaten economic growth, development and social cohesion of most of the member states (Jones & Smith, 2002).

Secondly, the ATHP was ASEAN’s first ever legally binding environmental document. ASEAN agreements are general not legally binding, in accordance with the ASEAN Way norms, which prescribes among others an emphasis on informal and non-legalistic procedures (Kivimaki, 2001, 38). However over the years, the sustained outcry from the public and civil society over worsening haze conditions prompted member states to agree to try to find a collective solution for haze, and subsequently establish the ATHP (Kivimaki, 2001, 38).

Malaysia and Singapore were among the major proponents of the ATHP, with Malaysia being the first member state to ratify the agreement in 2002, and Singapore following closely behind in 2003. However, while Malaysia has over the decades remained committed to finding a collective solution to the transboundary haze problem, a close observation of Singapore’s attitude and actions towards ASEAN transboundary haze cooperation reveals an emerging trend which raises interesting questions pertaining to unilateralism in ASEAN.

With the ASEAN Way prescribing consensus, sovereign rights, non-interference, sensitivity, politeness, non-confrontational negotiation processes and flexibility, an ASEAN agreement was considered the “path of least resistance” to secure Indonesia’s cooperation and commitment in addressing haze issues (Kivimaki, 2001, 38). Indonesian commitment over the matter was pertinent as most of the haze-producing fires affecting the region originated from Indonesia. Unilateral or extra-regional confrontations were thought to be an ineffective and counterproductive way to engage with the “big brother” of the region especially considering the related economic and national sensitivities. However, ATHP ratification from Indonesia was not immediately forthcoming.

SINGAPORE’S UNILATERALISM OVER HAZE

After waiting for five years for Indonesia to ratify the ATHP, Singapore made its first unilateral move related to haze by calling for international assistance to combat haze at the United Nations in 2008. This move was angrily described by Indonesia as “tantamount to interference in the domestic affairs of Indonesia” (Koh, 2008). While the diplomatic furor over this move eventually died down, Singapore tested the limits of Singapore-Indonesia diplomatic ties again several times following this incident.

In August 2014, more than a decade since Singapore’s ratification (and Indonesia’s continued non-ratification) of the ATHP, Singapore experienced its worst-ever bout of haze in 2013, where the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) reached an all time record high of 401. This haze event disrupted daily life and economic activity in Singapore at unprecedented levels, and sets the backdrop to what followed.

During several haze-related meeting spanning the years 2013 and 2014, Singapore had suggested an ASEAN Haze Monitoring System (HMS) to further operationalize the ATHP. As part of their suggestion, Singapore proffered a highly-advanced technical platform that it had developed that would support open-access digitalized land-use maps and concession maps of fire-prone areas.

This would have served as a useful deterrent for errant companies, as members of the public could always keep an eye on their activities. This proposal however was shot down by Indonesia (and Malaysia as well) citing privacy and legal concerns of making maps publicly accessible (Feng, 2014).

Hence, due to these reservations, ASEAN adopted a watered-down form of Singapore's HMS idea during the 14th Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Haze. The revised HMS provided for maps to be shared on a government-to-government, ad-hoc basis only, and not publicly available. Singapore made its disappointment over this public, with its Minister for the Environment at the time, Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, openly expressing his grief ("disappointed but not surprised") through various interviews and press conferences (Woo, 2013), going as far as to accuse Indonesia of not caring about the welfare of its neighbours (Grant & Bland, 2014). Such vocal dissatisfaction runs contrary to the ASEAN Way norms of politeness, sensitivity, and non-confrontation in negotiation processes.

Furthermore, a few months later, the Singaporean parliament passed a Transboundary Haze Pollution Act (THPA), which criminalizes any conduct that causes or contributes to haze pollution in Singapore. This empowers Singaporeans to sue companies using fires that result in haze in Singapore (Tan, 2015). The THPA was a significant departure from the traditional ASEAN approach to resolving regional issues through diplomatic rather than legal means (Mayer, 2006). Interestingly, Indonesia did not rebuff Singapore at this point but instead chose to calmly (and finally) ratify the ATHP around this time (Soeriaatmadja, 2014).

Singapore's first attempt to use the act was in 2016, when it obtained a court warrant against the director of an Indonesian company linked to haze-causing fires. This however led to an immediate protest by Indonesia's Ambassador to Singapore in May 2016 (Ismail, 2016). Indonesia's Environment and Forestry Minister, Siti Nurbaya Bakar followed up by describing Singapore's actions

as “controversial” and did not show “mutual respect” in accordance with the ASEAN Way. She reminded Singapore that the ATHP has precedence over haze issues, and hence Singapore could not step into Indonesia’s legal domain over such matters (Ismail, 2016).

In response Singapore clarified that it in fact very much respects Indonesia’s sovereignty and values its bilateral relations with Indonesia. It clarified that the THPA was not directed at any individual or company based on nationality. However, Singapore pointed out that it only resorted to the court warrant only after repeatedly asking for information related to the case from Indonesian authorities. It argued that Indonesia should instead welcome this additional tool to address the haze issue (Channel News Asia, 2016).

UNILATERALISM AND THE FUTURE OF ASEAN

This emerging trend of unilateralism on Singapore’s part raises several pertinent questions for scholars of the region:

1. What do such acts of unilateralism mean for larger ASEAN regional governance processes and norms?
2. At the national level, do these acts reflect any fundamental change in Singapore’s confidence in ASEAN, its dependence on the ASEAN Way’s norms and national interests?
3. Would such actions encourage other ASEAN member states, for instance Malaysia, to follow suit?
4. What does this mean for Singapore-Indonesia relations?

I offer here some initial thoughts on some of these questions. Singapore’s changing patterns of engagement reflect the ever-changing nature of international relations, vis-à-vis national interests. In the early days of ASEAN cooperation, Singapore subscribed to the same approach to the environment and natural resources as the other ASEAN member states as detailed above. Despite not having much agricultural land on the island itself, Singaporean

companies did have substantial plantation interests (including pulp and paper and palm oil) around the region, especially in Indonesia (Hamilton-Hart, 2009). Hence, natural resource exploitation was an important part of Singapore's developmental trajectory as well.

However over time, as Singapore's human resources became more lucrative than natural resources, Singapore's national interests began to change. Transboundary haze affected Singapore's most important resource: its work force. Ever-worsening haze episodes effectively closed the entire tiny island, resulting in lost man-hours and the deteriorating health of its work force. The haze also reduced Singapore's attractiveness as an expat and investment destination. Hence, Singapore has developed political will to act more strongly (even unilaterally) in attempts to preserve its new national interest priorities, despite ASEAN norms and Indonesian protests.

That being said, it must be noted that Singapore and Indonesia has just celebrated its 50th anniversary of bilateral and diplomatic relations to much fanfare. While relations over the haze has been at best civil and at worse tense between the two countries for some time now, relations over other aspects important to both countries, especially trade, tourism, and security has been consistently cordial. Are conveniently spaced-out spats over a seasonal issue such as the haze enough to change anything in terms of larger regional governance processes?

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CONTINUING AND EMERGING TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES IN VIETNAM AND BEYOND

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CURRENT SITUATION OF SEAS IN VIETNAM

In 1997, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University-Hanoi (Hanoi VNU) established the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, which together with four previously established departments: Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, Korean Studies, and Indian Studies, formed the Faculty of Oriental Studies. The initial focus of Hanoi VNU-USSH Department of Southeast Asian Studies was on graduate students training. Since 2002, however, the Department has extended its activities to postgraduate programs, and in 2007 it developed its own PhD program. The Department is currently developing its Southeast Asian Studies (SEAS) program into an independent discipline separated from the Faculty of Oriental Studies.

The above reflects the progressive development of SEAS at Hanoi VNU-USSH, where I am working and teaching at the moment.¹ This is also the general trend in Vietnam where many universities and academic institutions have recently opened the field of SEAS or renewed and extended their existing research and education programs relating to Southeast Asia. As Vietnam has been increasingly engaging with ASEAN and other international

¹ This think piece is written as I am working on a project on the economies of Southeast Asia during the colonial period. I wish to thank the Vietnam National University, Hanoi for its generous support of this project.

organizations, SEAS has become a more attractive field of study in Vietnam. Vietnamese universities which have strong programs on SEAS include Ho Chi Minh City Open University, Hong Bang University, Ba Ria-Vung Tau University, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City (Ho Chi Minh City VNU), and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University-Hanoi. In particular, the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) has expanded its organization and research activities to include all the countries in the region. This institute together with the newly founded Center for Vietnamese and Southeast Asian Studies of Ho Chi Minh City VNU-USSH are two main research institutions in Vietnam specializing in SEAS.

Despite the progressive institutional development, training, and research activities in the field of SEAS in Vietnam, its focuses are still highly traditional. Most SEAS education programs still tend towards the study of one or two countries in the region. For instance, Hanoi VNU-USSH Department of Southeast Asian Studies intensively focuses on Thai Studies, whereas Ho Chi Minh City VNU-USSH Department of Southeast Asian Studies gives priority to Thai Studies (representative for Mainland Southeast Asia) and Indonesian Studies (representative for Island Southeast Asia). Moreover, SEAS education programs in such institutions tend to focus on language training and to some extent on history, culture, literature, and economics. For instance, the graduate programs of Thai Studies and Indonesian Studies of Ho Chi Minh City VNU-USSH consist of 132 credits each. Of these, 60 credits are devoted for language training and the rest is designed for general knowledge of social sciences and humanities, area studies, supplementary courses and skills, and thesis. No courses specifically deal with Thailand or Indonesia (Khoa Dong Phuong Hoc, n. d.). Likewise, the graduate program of Thai Studies of Hanoi VNU-USSH includes 139 credits, of which 79 credits are used for general knowledge, Oriental Studies discipline and related disciplines, foreign languages, and thesis. Among 60 remaining credits, 34 are used for Thai language training of

various levels and the rest for courses relating to Thai history, culture, arts, and economics (Khoa Dong Phuong Hoc, 2015).

It is perhaps due to the biased training programs that graduates in the field of SEAS are destined to work in non-academic sectors. The majority is employed in foreign companies operating in Vietnam, the embassies of Southeast Asian countries in Vietnam, as well as Vietnamese embassies in Southeast Asia, as well as tourist and media companies, and various government and non-government organizations. Only a few of these graduates work in academic institutions or continue to pursue postgraduate studies. It is ironic that most researchers of VASS-Institute for Southeast Asian Studies are not former graduates of SEAS. Likewise, renowned professors and lecturers of departments of Southeast Asian Studies in Vietnamese universities are originally trained in other fields such as history, international studies, literature, economics, or anthropology. It is noteworthy that the recent development of SEAS in Vietnam was brought about by the significant contribution of young researchers graduated from abroad.

Researches about Southeast Asia in Vietnam tend to follow similar trends in education and training. Thai Studies is perhaps the most powerful field for a relatively large number of researches published on linguistics, history, literature, and culture are on Thailand while there are a relatively few researches on other countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. These researches focus either on linguistics, ethnography, and general history and culture, or recent economic and political situations. It should be noted that Vietnamese scholars tend to deploy a one country-oriented approach for their researches about Southeast Asia, except for a small number of researches about Vietnam's relations with Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, as well as researches about the ASEAN. Comparative, trans-national, and trans-regional researches are still few. One also hardly sees studies that are interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary in nature and discuss one or more issues of the entire region and beyond.

PROSPECTS FOR SEAS DEVELOPMENT

Although there remain to be huge shortcomings, SEAS in Vietnam is at the crossroads of transformation and development. The intensified cooperation and integration within ASEAN, especially after the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community on 31 December 2015, brings forth the need for mutual understanding among the countries in the region. Moreover, with a population of over 600 million, ASEAN is the third largest market and an important partner of all countries and other communities in the world (ASEAN Up, n. d.). SEAS in Vietnam as well as in other countries needs to produce high-skilled laborers, who not only have professional knowledge and skills, but also have a profound understanding of history, culture, and language of the other countries in the region. Equipped with proficient English language skills, Southeast Asian laborers will be able to work in national and international companies, government, and non-government organizations in their home country, other countries in Southeast Asia, and the world.

Another prospect for the development of SEAS is the increased cooperation and coordination among universities within the Southeast Asian region. Several joint study, research and exchange programs have been carried out with the support of the Southeast Asia Regional Exchange Program Foundation (SEASREP), the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE ASEAN-EUR) scholarship, Darmasiswa scholarship, Academic Mobility Exchange for Undergraduate at Airlangga (AMERTA) scholarship, Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (Beasiswa Seni Rupa dan Budaya Indonesia/BSBI), Brunei Darussalam government scholarship, The Empowering Network for International Thai Studies (ENITS) and The Empowering Network for International Thai and Asean Studies (ENITAT) scholarship, ASEAN scholarship at Chulalongkorn University, and many others. Therefore, universities in the region need to internationalize their education and training programs, especially in the field of SEAS to help improve not only the quality of education but also to facilitate the implementation of exchange programs. Students in the field of SEAS need to be fluent in English and should have adequate knowledge of the language of the country they are studying.

As research and training are closely intertwined, the improvement of the quality of SEAS education has to be accompanied by good research. In addition to the general research themes such as national history, conflicts and wars, colonization, and decolonization, universities, government funds, and research foundations should support new research fields. In my view, the following fields will receive much more attention in the future, including urban studies, migration and mobility, social anthropology, economics, cultural heritage, medical history, environmental history, and comparative, trans-national, and trans-regional researches. Researchers, in particular, should also pay attention to the prevailing issues of the region, such as ethnic, cultural, and territorial conflicts, terrorism, South China Sea disputes, and ASEAN unity. These researches should be undertaken through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches and should not be restricted by the principles of national history or area studies. Joint researches covering the issues of the entire region and beyond should be encouraged.

More important, in an attempt to improve research quality, researchers and scholars are encouraged by their affiliated institutions and funding organizations to internationalize their research results. Therefore, academic journals in the region, especially those that are in English and cover the whole region will increasingly receive more interest from regional scholars. Scholars affiliated with educational institutions are also required to integrate new research findings into their curricula. Altogether, these initiatives help students to be exposed to contemporary knowledge about the region and more important, are able to cultivate collective knowledge and mutual understanding among countries that are necessary in resolving the critical problems of the region.

As a whole, SEAS has been an emerging field in Vietnam with regard to both education and research. Similar to other academic institutions in Southeast Asia, education and research activities in SEAS have been highly centralizing in Thai and Indonesian Studies, although there are a number of publications on Singapore, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnamese relations with Laos and

Cambodia. Moreover, educational activities have strongly aimed at providing practical knowledge rather than academic skills. As a result, graduates in SEAS tend to work in industry sector and not many of them pursue postgraduate studies. A balance between professional training and academic education will thus help SEAS to be sustainable. Similarly, researches in Southeast Asia have to pay attention to both traditional subjects and new emerging themes, especially those that involve critical issues of nations in the region. In addition, regional researchers need to collaborate with each other and with those outside the region to conduct joint researches. The support and assistance by governments, universities, research institutions, international organizations, and research foundations will ensure the sustainable development of SEAS in Southeast Asia.

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BETWEEN “CONVENTIONS” AND “INSTITUTIONALIZATIONS”: Southeast Asian Studies in Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, Southeast Asian Studies developed from western scholarship, particularly in the United States (US), where it was conceived as a study of the Southeast Asian region through multi-disciplinary approaches, drawing mainly from the social science disciplines such as geography, history, anthropology, sociology, and economics and later on, through the framework of cultural studies, among other areas of academic inquiry. Researches that came out of such approaches became recognized in the context of global discourse in the form of seminars, conferences, and publications in reputable journals and book publications. These approaches and discourses became the conventional model for Southeast Asian Studies in Malaysia.

The establishment of Southeast Asian Studies in Malaysia, particularly at the University of Malaya (UM) reflected the growing interest on the subject in Malaysia, at the same time that interest on the subject was slowly declining in the west. In Malaysia, and Southeast Asia in general, as well as East Asia, local scholars developed Southeast Asian Studies by putting together the “conventional” approach to Southeast Asian Studies along with its “institutionalization”. Institutionalization refers to UM’s Southeast Asian Studies as an academic program that grants bachelor and postgraduate degrees. A similar initiative is also seen in academic programs such as those at the University of Thammasat and Chulalongkorn in Thailand. In framing the

development of Southeast Asian Studies as a “marriage” of both “conventional” and “institutionalized”, this think-piece will discuss the development of Southeast Asian Studies in the region through the example of the Southeast Asian Studies program at UM.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES IN MALAYSIA: FROM THE WEST TO THE EAST

The establishment of Southeast Asian Studies in Malaysia, particularly at UM in 1975, credits UM as the only institution that offers a full bachelor and postgraduate degree program of study on Southeast Asian Studies in the region at that time. The program was designed alongside policy directions and the state of the economic, political, and cultural dynamism of Southeast Asia. In other words, its establishment was a response to the 1967 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration to promote Southeast Asian Studies. Up to now, the Department of History at UM remains the only department in Malaysia that offers these academic degrees. Over time, new paradigms and new ways of interrogating, framing, and examining the Southeast Asian region were developed even as the program continue to face academic challenges on its continued relevance to contemporary society. In particular, its major challenge is the perception that the program has no direction and offers no area of specialization, thus, its graduates are “premature”. As such, it has been labeled as *rojak* a Malay term for “mix” or *halo-halo* in Filipino.

It was through the combined efforts of a pioneering group of local scholars such as K.T Joseph, Krishen Jit, Shaharil Talib Robert, Khadijah Muhammed, among others, and with help from foreign academic visitors, the program produced its first batch of graduate in 1977. The program was conceived in a way that encouraged students towards multidisciplinary by exposing them to other disciplines within the social sciences or law and economy to develop their capacity to study and analyze issues in Southeast Asian studies in a broader perspective. Since the program was modeled after the conventional Southeast Asian Studies in the US, students were required to master a Southeast Asian language such

as Thai, Filipino, and Burmese, among others that were being offered by UM's Language Center, a program that distinguished its graduate students with those from other related fields of study. Moreover, because of the language program, the department's graduates were able to gain an advantageous position in the workforce. Many of these graduates were employed as diplomatic officers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia and other civil service departments as lecturers, teachers, and administrators as well as being employed in private companies.

Over time, Southeast Asian Studies evolved and developed along with developments in the national and regional levels. From the first batch of graduates, new graduates from within, as well as from other disciplines, were recruited to become part of the faculty. The current trend of Southeast Asian Studies students' base their interest to explore Southeast Asia according to varying motivations, marketability, knowledge gain, etc., and is reflected in the changes in the focus of study or academic inquiry that they pursue. In this sense, conventions and institutionalization have kept Southeast Asian Studies alive in Malaysia, particularly at the University of Malaya.

BETWEEN "CONVENTION" AND "INSTITUTIONALIZATION"

Since the establishment of the program to fulfill the requirements of a university degree, which Rommel Curaming (2017) refers to as "institutionalization", academics undertook efforts to match this "non-conventional" with the "conventional" orientation of Southeast Asian Studies through curriculum development. The structure of the program was designed based on the availability and eligibility of the academics and their compatibility with the current needs of Malaysia. The initial curriculum was divided as follows:

- Phase 1: Development and socioeconomic studies and sociocultural studies (1975-1990's)
- Phase 2: Four Disciplines—History, maritime, anthropology and performing arts of Southeast Asia (1990's-early 2000)

- Phase 3: General/multi-disciplinary study of the region (2000's – present)

EMPOWERING THE DISCOURSE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA STUDIES THROUGH RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

There is no doubt that the pioneering group of Southeast Asian Studies at UM was aware of the “conventional” Southeast Asian Studies developed in the west. These may be gleaned from the prevailing discourse on Southeast Asia as seen from seminar presentations, discussions, and dialogues with other scholars, local and international then. The international scholars were invited through networking and collaborative programs with partner universities, program and personal contacts from the region and other parts of the world. Charnvit Kasetsiri, Chaiwat Satha Anand, Pak Taufik, Azyumardi Azra, Carmen Abu Bakar, Virgilio Enriquez, Reynaldo Ileto, and Maris Diokno, among others, were invited as visiting professors, visiting research fellows, keynote speakers, etc.

These prominent figures in Southeast Asian Studies shared their research findings and understandings of the issues in Southeast Asia from their own field of study. Maris Diokno, for example, was invited to share her insights on the geography and history of Southeast Asia under the Southeast Asia Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP-Toyota Foundation) student mobility program called Asian Emporiums. This program also became a meeting point for other renowned scholars such as Charnvit Kasetsiri, who discussed his ideas on tangible and intangible cultural heritage; Johan Saravanamutthu on the ASEAN; and Maznah Mohamad on textiles. The program has also widened the horizon of Southeast Asian studies discourses through the International Conference on Southeast Asia (ICONSEA). Since its establishment in 2005, ICONSEA has been a platform to discuss varied topics under the themes: *Integrating Southeast Asia* (2015) and *Rebranding Southeast Asia* (2017). This conference gathered local and international scholars, both from the region and other parts of the world, to discuss and dialogue on their research findings based on the contemporary issues in Southeast Asia.

The current generations of scholars has continued to champion Southeast Asian studies through publications. These scholars also actively publish in reputable and internationally accredited journals. The *Journal of Southeast Asia* (JATI), which UM publishes, has also been a continuing platform for scholars not only within Malaysia but also in the region to actively engage with each other. There is also the *Borneo Research Journal* for those who work on the different scholarly aspects of Borneo Island.

FUTURE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES IN MALAYSIA

Charnvit Kasetsiri in his keynote on Southeast Asian Studies said Southeast Asian Studies is currently facing a great challenge in terms of relevance, especially in contrast with “ASEAN Studies” (2013). This current development challenges “Southeast Asian Studies” to confront issues beyond the “conventional” and “institutionalized”. If ASEAN Studies will replace Southeast Asian Studies, then the field will be reduced to a study of a particular association such as the European Union. As ASEAN Studies are in fact one of the components of Southeast Asian Studies, it might be good if the latter remain as a multi-disciplinary study of the region and ASEAN studies could be continuously pursued as a study on its own, with its contributions to Southeast Asian Studies itself.

To preserve Southeast Asian Studies as an area of study, however, it should continuously be affirmed. The Southeast Asian Studies Department at UM could help by enhancing its discourse and curriculum. Critical discourse should also be emphasized in the postgraduate degree by producing high quality research projects and publications. Theses and research projects should be also able to capture international readers.

As internationalization is one of the main agenda for recognition, the Southeast Asian Studies program in UM should play an important role in connecting and boosting partnership with other institutions in the region and the world through multi-type collaborations through faculty exchange,

joint research and publication, and academic discourse through seminars and conferences.

CONCLUSION

Southeast Asian Studies has proved its relevance and shall remain relevant in the future. More important, it could be further enhanced by arming it to face current trends and development in academic studies. Nevertheless as questions on the purpose of Southeast Asian Studies persist the program needs to rethink its contribution outside the academe and in government agencies, communities, and the world. Perhaps, the production of policy papers would be a venue for the program to expand its scholarly contributions. The possibility of current of grants or financial assistance from either within Malaysia or international institutions could indicate recognition of its contribution to the research output of Malaysia. By combining both the “conventional” and “institutionalization” backgrounds of Southeast Asian Studies in the production of critical discourse that could contribute to the academic world and community, the relevance Southeast Asian Studies is preserved.

Thus, in order to realize the vision of the Southeast Asian Studies Department at the UM to become an excellent educational and research center in Southeast Asia, the department should continue its objectives to: expose students to Southeast Asian studies and area studies based on a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning; enhance cooperation in the fields of teaching and research among local and foreign institutions of education; and, produce highly skilled graduates that could meet the needs of the current labor market.

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NOTES ON THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Within the related fields of study of the history of Science, Technology and Medicine or STM in the Philippines, the history of medicine, while a relatively new area in Philippine historiography is the most studied. Historically, as an agricultural country, the development of Science and Technology (S&T) was relatively slow in the Philippines. This was apart from the fact that the transmission of knowledge in terms of S&T was done by word of mouth. During the Spanish colonial period beginning in the sixteenth century, the development of knowledge of S&T was not a priority in relation to the Spanish colonial interest of evangelization. Such was the case until the eighteenth century, when the Bourbon Kings implemented reforms in their colonies through Governor-General Jose Basco y Vargas. Through his Economic Development Plan, Basco, envisioning a self-liquidating and self-sustaining Philippine economy worked to abolish the Manila Galleon and endeavoured to develop Philippine agriculture with a Research and Development (R&D) component (Diaz-Trechuelo, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966). Basco's Plan, however, faced intense opposition from the Spanish nationals in the Philippines who benefitted from the trade; he was torn between implementing reforms and pacifying the Spanish officials.

The myriad problems of colonial rule and the lack of funds in the Philippines, alongside the Spanish opposition to Basco eventually led to the failure of agricultural development. In effect, R&D was neglected and S&T remained largely non-existent. When the Manila Galleon was finally abolished in 1815, Spain had already lost almost all of its colonies, with the exception of the

Philippines. Realizing the implications of the loss of their empire, the Bourbon Kings of Spain decided to pour their development efforts into the Philippines not only to save Spain's credibility but also to determine whether or not the Philippines would become more profitable for Spain. By this time, however, it was already too late for Spain to implement reforms, the period already being the eve of the Philippine Revolution.

Shortly after the Philippines won its independence from Spain, the Americans decided to acquire the Philippines. Alongside the Philippine-American War that ensued after the American occupation of the Philippines in 1898, the Americans initiated programs such as those for the pursuit and development of S&T to develop the Philippines. The American vision of S&T was intended to transform the Philippines into an export economy of agricultural or raw materials but with the Philippine-American "special economic relations", almost the entire Philippine economy became dependent on the American market until 1941. S&T was thus, not developed. The brief period of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines showed concrete efforts to develop S&T largely as a critical reaction against the Americans. This notwithstanding, because the period of occupation was only three years, S&T programs remained largely in their initial stages.

Various aspects of the history of medicine in the Philippines have been written since the second half of the twentieth century. These works may be grouped into four areas: a) works on the history of medicine in general; b) disease-specific works; c) rise and development of medical institutions; and d) nature of health work in the Philippines.

MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN PHILIPPINE HISTORIOGRAPHY

At the height of Western colonialism in the twentieth century, studies on the history of medicine generally show medicine as an essential part of the "civilizing mission", and a significant discourse that justified "empire" (Amrith, 2006, 8). Beginning in the 1970s, however, scholars started to question medicine and its assumptions as a morally neutral and benign undertaking that colonial

powers employed to cure diseases and reduce bodily suffering and pain (Macleod & Lewis, 1988, 1; Ehrenreich, 1978; Navarro, 1982). As more attention was focused on the practice of medicine rather than medical theory, medicine's political and economic dimensions were made more evident (Macleod & Lewis, 1988, 1; Ehrenreich, 1978; Navarro, 1982; Rosen, 1958). Studies on the history of medicine in general and those that explore the connection of medicine, public health, and empire; however, remain largely confined to Africa, China, and India. In Southeast Asia, in particular, the history of medicine is not only generally understudied but also limited by the lack of a substantial body of works that explore patterns of diseases and institutional responses to them. While there are works that show the relationship between medicine, state, and society and their links to production as well as the politics of sickness and health, these are few (Manderson, 1996, 14). As most studies focus on Africa, China, and India, the historiography of medicine and empire, according to Lenore Manderson, is "geographically biased" (1996, 14). In the case of the Philippines, the history of medicine is not only understudied and underdeveloped but also limited as works on the history of medicine have not dealt extensively with medicine and state-society relations, particularly during the colonial period.

The limited accesses to archival sources, which are mainly found in Spain and the United States, are obstacles to most Filipino scholars. Moreover, archival materials on the history of medicine in the Philippines are generally in the form of official letters, government publications, institutional memos, and department correspondence. While these historical sources are useful in terms of being available government and official documents, they are still not enough because they are mostly government publications dealing with government activities. Hence, these sources cannot be expected to provide us with a more or less complete picture of the history of medicine in the country, in particular the historical figures involved. While a textual analysis is possible, the limited sources and materials necessitate a multidisciplinary approach. As such, it will be fruitful to draw broadly from other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies in crafting the critical framework for the study of

the history of medicine in the Philippines.

WORKS ON THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

General works on the history of medicine in the Philippines include Jose Bantug's, *A short history of medicine in the Philippines during the Spanish regime, 1565-1898* (1953), which explains and elaborates on the historical development of medicine, particularly western medicine in the Philippines; Michael Lim Tan's *Usug, kulam, pasma: Traditional concepts of health and illness in the Philippines* (1987), which presents the basic Filipino concepts of health and illness as a means to understand the Filipino medical system; Enrico Azicate's *History of medicine: A historical perspective* (1988), which sought to develop a working methodological and interpretive framework for the history of medicine in the Philippines; and my work, *Traditional medicine in the colonial Philippines, 16th to the 19th century* (2017), which focuses on traditional medicinal plants and herbs and spans the entire length of the history of medicine in the Philippines, as recorded, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Bantug and Azicate's works characterize traditional medicine and shows the development of western medicine in the Philippines. Both works show western medicine as the beginnings of "scientific" medicine in the Philippines. It was also a signifier of progress and modernity, and attributing these significations to the American colonial regime. Tan's work discusses the Filipino world view with regard to illness and how this was influenced by other cultures and groups of people. My work presents the plurality of medical systems in the Philippines through the continued use of Philippine traditional medicine alongside western medicine.

Even with these three important and pioneering works, the history of medicine in the Philippines remains an unexplored field of historical study in the Philippines. Yet, it is a field that is growing in importance and is attracting the attention of scholars from different disciplines working on Southeast Asia and Asian studies. While specialized, the history of medicine, in general, and the history of medicine in the Philippines, in particular, cuts across the political, economic, sociocultural, and religious aspects of Philippine and Southeast Asian

life, in general. No serious scholar of Southeast Asia or historian of medicine working in other areas can ignore the literature on this subject. At the same time, the history of medicine is always a fascinating subject as health, sickness, and disease concern everybody regardless of economic, political, religious, and social background.

CONCLUSION

By framing the works on the history of medicine within the larger context of Philippine history and along the theoretical developments on the subject, we see the development of the history of medicine as intimately connected to other social, political and cultural aspects within the globalizing world of the twentieth century. In this regard, the study of the history of medicine in general is not only integrated into the larger and interdependent accounts of Philippine history but is also largely integrated in the development of Philippine history.

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DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN SEA: Continuing and evolving trends

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Southeast Asia is regarded to be a relatively peaceful region in terms of positive peace in which social and economic conditions are taken into account than the absence of war alone (see *Global Peace Index* 2017). Most countries in the region are also considered the world's fastest growing economy as well (see *Forbes* 23 March 2017). Human development indicators in this region in general are above world average, except for some countries. Yet, at the same time, the region is considered in certain degrees of political freedom as not free and partly free (see *Freedom House Index* 2017). Some countries in the region are not doing well in the corruption perception index either (see *Transparency International* 2016).

The seemingly contrasting characteristics of countries in Southeast Asia invite a further examination of the quality of democratic governance in the region. Despite different forms of government, the region is labeled as semi-democratic. Political power is in the hands of a few elite groups or the so-called oligarchic democracy. The dominance of the military in politics has been prevalent in some countries. State centric public administration in most countries, on the contrary, does not necessarily reflect the capacity of the state. Governance index on the efficiency of the state is also quite low in socialist and new democracies and there is a variation of state capacity and governance within the region.

The drive to be an economic tiger during late 1980s following the developmental state model did not materialize. The financial crisis in the early 1990s proved

that the region did not make miracles. While the external factor of neoliberalism was to blame, the inability to deal with external forces indicates a weak institutional development as well as a moral hazard in public policy and business management. What made this moral hazard possible is the typical pattern of nepotism and social cleavages that form the basis of social and political practices. It is clearly understood now that the modernization driven by economic growth has not substantially changed the political tradition of most countries in the region. In this regard, the political regime and practices are areas that reflect the disjuncture of modernity and tradition. After the several decades long march toward democracy, political lag in the region has not been resolved.

Nevertheless, the continuity of existing political practices can still be maintained to serve the ruling elite provided that this does not cause too much social anxiety and extreme frustration among oppositional forces. In the long run the question still remains if this kind of governance is viable. While this question was already being asked in the West in the 1970s, this question still remains even more relevant for Southeast Asia (Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975). To date, there are still local features of governance that may seem to challenge existing styles of democratic governance.

For one, there have been incidents of political violence in the region notably in Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines, which could be related with the militarization approach to conflict resolution or terrorism. The concern is primarily about the rise of religious and ethnic intolerance leading to the escalation of conflicts and violence. There is a sign of Islamophobia so that political mobilization surrounding religious issues becomes convenient. Along with the ethnic conflict, the flow of refugees across countries poses a humanitarian responsibility for the region as much as the respect for human rights of the concerned governments. The regional human rights defenders community has raised a critical concern that human rights principle and practices have lost the ground in the region and must be reclaimed. (see SEAHNRN's 4th International

Conference on Human Rights, Peace and Conflict in SEA, October 10-12, 2016)

It is commonly understood that the violation of human rights can create a homegrown terrorism.

Second, studies show a tendency that people are willing to trade freedom for personal and economic security and safety (see Kampfner, 2009). Democratic values, such as freedom and tolerance, are contested against the idea of security. The regional atmosphere is also surrounded by the myth of traditional national security which is state centric, while the international emerging norms of human and comprehensive security has not taken root in society, not to mention universal human rights. The idea of borders and territory is still strong in spite of the influence of globalization and often leads to unnecessarily regional disputes. Methodological nationalism prevails in policy formulation on certain issues. Cross border problems are still problematic and are unable to transcend issues of human mobility, migrant workers, and specifically human trafficking. It seems that there is also confusion between norms and realities: new realities are not always compatible with traditional norms.

Third, free market competition under the neoliberalist economic scheme somehow has resulted in wider inequality. This is more explicit in the area of natural resources accessibility. Land grabbing by the state and private corporations is an emerging issue that test the resilience of democratic governance and social safety nets. More often than not, the exclusion of the marginalized in development process takes place especially where public participation is not well established. The liberal form of democracy is therefore vulnerable. In other words, electoral democracy turns out to be insufficient so that democratic governance and development is even more connected now. As such, sustainable development goals (SDG) have been invented to merge multiple development goals in order to prompt social and political actions. While the goals of the SDG can be debated, this is a test for existing political regimes if they can accommodate sustainable development. The challenge is whether inclusive development can be achieved without inclusive institution.

Fourth, a mild political reform can be seen in a few countries. Political adjustment by the government is market driven, which unfortunately seems to lead to the collusion of the state and corporations. Nevertheless, people's awareness and active role in politics and on development issues is on the rise. The opposition forces in a single party democracy in this region are waking up to voice their concerns. Mass mobilization, however, cannot conveniently find its place in the shrinking political space in the established institutions. The rise of discontentment in civil society and the awakening opposition political parties are somehow bridging and creating a political ambiguity causing unfortunately a legitimacy question. The contradiction of political participation in this age of globalization is observed in that participation is called for with a high cost. Political activism is closely under surveillance and a strict enforcement of all sorts of internal security laws. Forced disappearance, detained political activists or extra judicial killings are still common and unchallenged. In general, there is a lot of uncertainty in the political configuration despite a higher politically motivated civil society.

Fifth, the advancement and penetration of new communication technology has changed the political landscape of the people's sector. Freedom of expression has reached its virtual frontier. Politics has to a large extent moved into cyber space. This does not necessarily imply a higher degree of democracy. Paradoxically, cyber space can be used for political mobilization that can result in both a positive and negative outcome. Cyber politics can encourage informed citizen's social engagement at the same time that it can easily create fear and hatred. An observation is raised if the new media platform such as Facebook facilitates a higher degree of intolerance. There is a also fine line between freedom of expression and hate speech. This emerging trend calls for a more enlightened society. Once again, political lag is found in the advancement of media technology. There are only a few examples of the emerging situations concerning democratic governance that seem to outweigh the continuing political practices commonly shared in most Southeast Asian countries. After all these long years of democratic transition some relevant

questions are raised against the realities of the region. According to Chantana Banpasirichote Wungaeo:

As the pressure from neoliberalist globalization becomes stronger in the region, ‘democracy’ is both thriving and questioned at the same time. The diversity in terms of development levels and regime types may not allow for a very coherent picture, but when liberal democracy is not flourishing in this region, ... the lesson of its relationship with society can be shared. If no country exactly fits the model of a Western liberal democracy, what does this mean? If we see movements for and against some version of democracy, where are the nation states of Southeast Asia headed? If social movements pop up everywhere in the region, do they offer alternative models of democracy? (Wungaeo, 2016, 290)

Southeast Asia in these past few years has received attention in the evolving of democratic system for which a continuing for a deeper analysis can enrich theory of democracy in general.

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