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**Defining Southeast Asia and
the Crisis in Area Studies:
Personal Reflections on a Region***

Victor T. King**

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Preamble

This paper is a development of some of the ideas which I raised at a workshop on the subject of 'Locating Southeast Asia' in late March 2001, held at the University of Amsterdam, in honour of Professor Heather Sutherland's contribution to Southeast Asian Studies in the Netherlands.¹ I was a discussant on the anthropology panel led by the American anthropologist, Mary Margaret Steedly (2001), who had then only recently published an excellent and thought-provoking overview paper on the theme of culture theory in the anthropology of Southeast Asia (1999).

There was a broad range of issues which we addressed in the Amsterdam meeting, and aside from written comments on Steedly's paper, I was prompted to reflect on my experience of over 30 years teaching and research in Southeast Asian Studies. Quite naturally I did this primarily from a British and to some extent a European perspective. These reflections were subsequently published in the French journal *Moussons* under the title 'Southeast Asia: an Anthropological Field of Study?' (2001). The subtitle was intended to acknowledge the important contribution which Professor JPB de Josselin de Jong had made to the study of ethnologically or anthropologically defined areas, a contribution which had special resonance in European anthropology. Rather more importantly what I wrote was, in part at least, in dialogue with American cultural anthropology; it was triggered by Mary Steedly's observations, but more particularly by John Bowen's two papers (1995, 2000) which attempted to trace a dominant style, perspective, approach and preoccupation in the anthropology of Southeast Asia, as well as in related disciplines. Bowen argued that there is a strong interaction between area or area studies and academic discipline, and, in the case of Southeast Asian anthropology, an overriding concern with comparative cultural interpretation in context, prompted by 'the ubiquity of publicly displayed cultural forms' (1995: 1047-48; 2000: 11-13). Steedly also confirmed in her 1999 paper that Clifford Geertz's writings, among others, 'have thoroughly associated this part of the world, and Indonesia in particular, with a meaning-based, interpretive concept of culture' (1999: 432). Bowen, like Steedly, was careful to qualify his remarks by stating that he was primarily concerned with American social science research on

¹ A selection of the papers from the Amsterdam meeting has recently been published in Paul Kratoska, Henk Schulte Nordholt and Remco Raben, eds, *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*, Singapore: Singapore University Press and Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005. The publication was not available at the time of writing this paper and any references to the Amsterdam contributions relate to the draft papers provided at the time.

Indonesia, and more specifically with a Cornell perspective, and had little to say about European or other traditions of scholarship.

Two issues immediately presented themselves in this dialogue; first, that, in some way, American social science of a particular kind was seen to define what is significant in a regional style of scholarship, and secondly, the assumption that research on one country in Southeast Asia, specifically Indonesia, and the character of that country or sub-region can be extrapolated to define a wider region. Given these assumptions from an American perspective, it seemed even more important to at least draw attention to de Josselin de Jong's and his colleagues' and followers' contributions to the study of the Malay-Indonesian world, and, in addition, to say something about distinctively European contributions to regional studies. It needs to be emphasized here that Dutch structural anthropology was primarily concerned with the definition and characterization of an important sub-region within Southeast Asia, and it is from this focus that it draws its strength.

Furthermore, in case I am seen to be engaged in a transatlantic war of words, I should also emphasize that in my recent introductory text on the anthropology of Southeast Asia written with William Wilder, a British-based and -trained American anthropologist, the American contribution to our understanding of Southeast Asian culture and society was fulsomely acknowledged and admired (King and Wilder, 2003).

However, our concerns about defining, locating, reflecting on, deconstructing, reconstructing, imagining and imaging Southeast Asia seem to be surfacing with alarming regularity. We speculate, sometimes amusingly to the outsider, whether or not the region should be likened to a rose, a unicorn, a rhinoceros or a spaceship (see, for example, Emmerson, 1984 and Solheim, 1985). Many of us have used and contemplated some of the key statements and texts on these matters; they include Ananda Rajah (1999), Barbara Andaya (1997), Benedict Anderson (1978, 1992), John Bowen (1995, 2000), Donald Emmerson (1984), Grant Evans (2002), Russell Fifield (1976, 1983), Ariel Heryanto, 2002), Charles Hirschman (1992), Charles Keyes (1992), Victor Lieberman (1993, 1995), Denys Lombard (1995), Ruth McVey (1995, 1998), Anthony Reid (1988/1993, 1994, 1999a, 1999b, 2001), Craig Reynolds (1995, 1998), Willem van Schendel (2001), Shamsul A.B. (1994), Wilhelm Solheim (1985), Heather Sutherland (2003), Wang Gangwu (2001), and Oliver Wolters (1992), to name but a few. Interestingly Southeast Asian scholars are in the minority; indeed most of those mentioned are American social scientists and historians,

and other Caucasians. This tells us much about the nature and focus of the debate about the Southeast Asian region and regional studies.

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Essentialism

As students of Southeast Asia our introspection is rather easily explained and has been referred to endlessly. With regard to this region lying between the Indian subcontinent to the west and the Chinese mainland to the north, we have always been the junior partner in Asian Studies, struggling to find positive criteria for demarcation in a primarily negatively-defined, geographically ambivalent, interstitial and residual region. More importantly, and linked to this client status, we always seem to be in crisis or under threat, or, if we are enjoying a brief period of happiness and success, we anticipate that the honeymoon is unlikely to last for too long (see King, 1990). Several of us have been obsessed by the constructed or invented nature of the Southeast Asian field of study, and some of us also have a desire to make it more than it is or should be; in Craig Reynolds's words, to 'authenticate' it. When we do this, we usually have recourse primarily to the disciplines of history and anthropology, and to some extent geography. We search for and reconstruct origins, prior to outside, particularly European intervention and influence, to reveal the 'real' or 'essential' Southeast Asia; we construct the cultural matrix or substratum or cultural continuities and commonalities; we pursue indigenous models of society and polity; we identify Southeast Asian agency, historical autonomy and the active domestication and localization of the foreign; we mark out the general categorical differences between 'the Southeast Asian' and others, particularly the 'Indian' and the 'Chinese'. We look for regionally defined 'genius'. More recently, we have proffered Southeast Asia as the site of a particular style or styles of scholarship, and for the generation of distinctive or dominant research questions and perspectives; in other words we have attempted to demarcate it as a discursive field.

In a paper published in 1978, Benedict Anderson referred to the state of area studies in the USA, and indicated that its academic position and profile had already been in decline for a decade prior to that. Ruth McVey's 'golden age' of Southeast Asian Studies in America in the 1950s and 1960s was drawing to a close (1998: 44; and see 1995: 1). Craig Reynolds, among others, then draws attention to anxieties among American regional specialists in the 1990s about the weakening of the intellectual commitment to and the questioning of the rationale for area studies, and the associated change in funding strategies (1998: 12-13). Anderson provides us with some reasons for this; the context-dependent, fragile nature of area studies as a product of American post-war and Cold War involvement and intervention in the developing world; area studies' lack of methodological and theoretical sophistication; and its distance from disciplinary specialization (1978: 232;

Emmerson, 1984: 7-10). The preoccupation with region is charged with being old-fashioned, ethnocentric, parochial, politically conservative, essentialist and empiricist in its mission to chart distinctive culture-language zones and draw boundaries in an increasingly changing, globalizing world. These allegations have been made with increasing intensity during the past three decades, including from insiders and sympathizers like McVey, who remarked in the mid-1990s that 'Southeast Asia itself has changed far more massively and profoundly than have Southeast Asia[n] studies' (1995: 6). In addition, the charge that post-war, American-led area studies is in the direct line of succession of pre-war European Orientalism has brought into question the ethics and underlying purpose of studying and characterizing other cultures at a distance (Kolluoglu-Kibli, 2003:101-107; Harootunian and Sakai, 1999: 596).

The Challenge of Globalization and Post-Structuralism

Yet another series of threats has emerged since the 1990s. Peter Jackson, in two substantial, interconnected papers, focuses on the even more serious and formidable challenge to area studies, specifically Asian Studies in Australia, from an amalgam of globalization theory, and post-colonialist and post-structuralist cultural studies (2003a, 2003b). With reference to Japanese Studies in Australia, Chris Burgess, also explores the link between globalization and the 'academic crisis' as he calls it, in Asian Studies (2004: 121). These post-modern and cultural studies fields have been ploughed by Joel Kahn in a very vigorous fashion in Malaysia and Indonesia during the past decade (for example, 1993, 1995, 1998; and see Reynolds, 1995: 18). In addition, Ruth McVey (1995,1998), Craig Reynolds (1998), Mary Steedly (1999) and Grant Evans (2002), among others, have also addressed these matters in relation to the definition of region.

Jackson says, with reference to processes of globalization, that 'Rapidly intensifying flows of money, goods, services, information, and people across the historical borders of nation-states and culture-language areas suggest that it is no longer possible to study human societies as geographically isolated culturally distinctive units' (2003a:17). With regard to Asian Studies in Australian universities, he draws attention to the 'intellectual climate' in which area studies is 'widely considered to be based upon false premises and to be an epistemologically invalid approach to understanding contemporary Asian societies and cultures' (2003a:2). In order to counter this decline he wishes to propose and develop 'a theoretically sophisticated area studies

project' which recognizes the continued importance of 'geography' or 'spatiality' as a 'domain of theoretically and discursive difference in the era of globalization' (2003a:3). I shall return to Jackson's observations shortly, but the threat to area studies is, I think, much more broadly based than in its theoretical and methodological inadequacies, which is in turn related to an intellectual climate of disdain and dismissal.

Changing Markets

A major difficulty which we face, and I speak here from a British perspective, is that we are not in fashion in the student market, and, although we may ponder the intellectual shortcomings of area studies, it seems to me much more to do with the lifestyles, tastes, career aspirations, financial pressures, and educational backgrounds of our students. I certainly do not think that, as a result of these market difficulties, Southeast Asian Studies will disappear from the academic scene, but I do believe that the landscape of area studies is destined to become rather different in character and appearance. Whether or not we manage to present a firmly grounded Jacksonian justification for and defence of area studies on the basis of the importance of 'localized, geographically bounded forms of knowledge, culture, economy, and political organization' (2003a: 2), it is my view that, for the immediate future, we will continue to lose market-share in specifically area studies programmes. Student demand is much more important than letters of protest and complaint about lack of funding and support from professional associations of Asian Studies to hard-hearted Vice-Chancellors, Rectors and Principals.

Therefore, we must not only dwell on our scholarly interests in the region, but also keep in sharp focus the institutional, financial and international context within which we teach and research. In this connection I want to emphasize the different ways in which we can approach and study Southeast Asia. These approaches may not necessarily depend on us protecting our borders and continuing to define our concerns in strictly regional terms. In other words, the future of teaching, research and scholarly activity on Southeast Asia or parts of it may rest on us neither defining the object of our study in the terms in which we have been used to defining it, nor on delimiting the institutional context within which we pursue it as 'Southeast Asian Studies'. We need to be much more pragmatic and versatile in our work, and we should not erect regional barriers and retreat increasingly into our area, nor attempt to dress it up in some readjusted, re-laundered post-structuralist clothing.

We should also recognize that there is some buoyancy in Southeast Asian Studies in certain other parts of the world. Anthony Reid, for example, has presented a vibrant picture of growth in the variant Asian-American Studies and its interaction with Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, and on other campuses, and the progressive Asianization of the Californian university system in the context of substantial Asian migration and settlement on the American West Coast (2001: 6-9). He also noted the ways in which the competitive American model of Federal funding produces strong graduate training, based on 'language study and regional sensitivity' and 'determines what is an area and what qualifies as success in studying it' (2001:4). In the Southeast Asian region itself, we all admire the success of the National University of Singapore and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies there, although both within and beyond Singapore there is increasing attention to Asian Studies rather than a separate Southeast Asian Studies, in for example, neighbouring Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as in Europe and Australia (Asia Committee, 1997; Milner, 1999). In Japan too, for obvious reasons, there continues to be a relatively healthy environment for the nurturing and development of Asian and Southeast Asian Studies.

West and East (or Foreign and Local)

A more serious problem which will simply not go away is the relationship between native and non-native Southeast Asianists, if these are indeed appropriate categories. A trenchant, though generally polite criticism of non-Southeast Asian Southeast Asianists by Ariel Heryanto gives us pause for thought (2002). It also has echoes of the debates, though it fights on rather different terrain, which were very alive in the 1960s and 1970s on the possibility of the development of distinctively Southeast Asian or domestic approaches to and perspectives on the region. I am not specifically targeting what Heryanto says for rebuttal, although I think that his remarks require some qualification. However, as a highly respected Indonesian scholar who has experience of teaching and research on Southeast Asia, both within and outside the region, he makes a number of points which need to be weighed carefully. He emphasizes, as most of us have from time to time, that Southeast Asia as a region has an 'exogenous character' (2002:3). He charges that when we discuss the region and who has contributed to making it a scholarly field of study and saying something significant about it, we rarely mention Southeast Asian scholars. Heryanto sets about explaining, in his

words, the 'subordinate or inferior position [of Southeast Asians] within the production and consumption of this enterprise', and, in an impassioned counter, proposes that 'Southeast Asians are not simply fictional figures authored by outsiders, or submissive puppets in the masterful hands of Western puppeteers' (2002: 4,5).

He also discusses the vexed issue of whether the region is becoming meaningful to Southeast Asians and whether they are responding to the constructions of Western scholarship? Indeed, he notes that Southeast Asian Studies appears to be of little interest to Southeast Asians, with the exception of Singapore and to some extent Malaysia, and the main centres are still in North America, Australia and Europe. He draws attention to the emphasis that local citizens place on the study of their own country, and their strong tendency 'to be myopically nationalistic in their endeavors' (2002: 11; and see Lombard, 1995: 11). Craig Reynolds too remarked in the mid-1990s that 'Southeast Asia is not, generally speaking, a domain meaningful for study in countries within the region, where national histories are of primary concern' (1995: 420). Wang Gungwu, in his Amsterdam paper, also made reference to 'the desultory efforts by local scholars to nail down a Southeast Asian regional identity' (2001: 9).

On the positive side, Heryanto anticipates gradual expansion in a home-grown Southeast Asian Studies in most parts of the region, but he says that 'the name and boundaries.....may be different from that of the American-led Southeast Asian Studies of the Cold War period'; 'the old Southeast Asian Studies', based on 'the old structures of area studies', with the dwindling advantage of 'old archives that are currently conserved in a few old libraries in France, Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, or North America', may well 'continue to have some bearing upon locally-produced knowledge' as 'an intellectual legacy, historical baggage, source of inspiration, institutional assistance, and partner' (2002: 4, 22). Debates about past and present unequal relationships and related issues such as 'agency, positions of difference and representation' are also likely to intensify (2002:4).

The Issues Revisited

Let me then return to the set of four broad issues which I have raised with regard to the plight of Southeast Asian Studies and area studies more generally, and make some comments, necessarily brief, on these; on essentialism, the challenge of globalization and post-structuralism, changing markets, and West as against East (or the relations between foreign and local

scholarship). Some of these issues have also been raised recently in a very thoughtful keynote speech by Charles Macdonald in his discussion of the definition of area studies, their relationship to disciplinary studies, the utility of the multi- and interdisciplinary study of regions, and the perspectives of native and non-native scholars (2004:1,4).

Essentialism

For many of us studying the Southeast Asian region, the desire or need to define and authenticate it is something of a non-problem, and I personally assign it a low priority. One of the main purposes of my article in *Moussons* (2001) and my comments on Mary Steedly's paper was to demonstrate that the definition and conceptualization of Southeast Asia have never loomed large in anthropology, despite the admiring references to early German and Austrian ethnology and its perceptiveness in discovering a Southeast Asian cultural area, and a few more recent excursions into regional anthropology (Reid, 1999b; Solheim, 1985; and Bowen, 1995, 2000; O'Connor, 1995). One result of this lack of interest was the absence, until recently, of any substantial anthropological text on the Southeast Asian region as a whole, and a positive rejoicing not in cultural commonality but in cultural difference and diversity. To my mind, anthropology, at its most successful and productive, has directed its comparative gaze on sub-regional categories and populations: the Kachin Hills, central Borneo, eastern Indonesia, the Mountain Province of northern Luzon, and the Malay Archipelago. Interestingly, although O'Connor calls passionately for a Southeast Asian regional anthropology, he dwells primarily on **mainland** Southeast Asian 'agro-cultural complexes' (1995). Anthropology has also been concerned, as we would expect, not so much with the 'heartlands' and political centres of the region, but with the borderlands, margins and peripheries, where, in Jackson's post-structural and globalized world one encounters very directly 'border-crossing flows' (2003a: 9, 17).

It is also not without interest that Steedly's paper in the Amsterdam workshop was not specifically about Southeast Asia as an area at all (2001), although her earlier overview article did address regional issues from an anthropological perspective (1999). Indeed, in most respects the later paper is an extension of the earlier one, and they need to be read together. Taking her lead from certain of Geertz's reflections on his career, she focused on the lack of engagement of anthropologists in current political and economic events and processes, on the problems of addressing turmoil, chaos, crisis and violence, and on examining the events of today as indicators of future

directions. The very important point that she made is that, in a world of 'constantly breaking news' (2001: 7), our treasured concepts of culture, community, nation, and region have been thrown into disarray. She makes these observations in a workshop on the theme of locating Southeast Asia not as a Southeast Asianist nor as an area studies specialist per se but as an Indonesianist, and as an American cultural anthropologist. Like others before her she extrapolates from country to region. In focusing on Indonesia she proposes that, though the recent political events there, suggest a situation, 'extreme and perhaps unique', there is a vision of the wider Southeast Asian region, both popular and to some extent scholarly, and perhaps peculiar to America, 'as a space at once incomprehensible and violent' (2001: 8). We have here another reading of Southeast Asia as a region; but, from other perspectives, it can be directly disputed, and it does not provide a readily manageable criterion of regional definition. To my mind, her paper gains no obvious advantage by widening the vision of violence and turbulence to what she calls 'the Southeast Asian postcolony' (2001: 21).

With regard to Steadly's earlier paper, there she draws attention to the more general American position that, for anthropologists, Southeast Asia is 'arguably the best place to look for culture', and to the attraction in regional and comparative terms of gender issues (1999:432-33, 436-40). We are perhaps being drawn into a declaration of what a Southeast Asian regional anthropology might comprise, and, as well as a place to look for culture, though we now have to look for it at the level of the state, it is also a place 'seemingly marked by violence' (1999: 444). However, the regional project then collapses; we might be able to discern a culture area in the strands of culture theory on which she focuses - gender, marginality, violence, and the state. But because of the very nature of 'cultural landscapes' ('open, plural, contested, interpretive'), and 'cultural frames' as open to 'notions of subversion, difference, porosity, doubleness, ambiguity, and fluidity', it is unclear how we might contain and comprehend them within a Southeast Asian regional frame of reference, or whether it is analytically useful to do so.

Let me move on to another case, which, in a different way, is also illustrative of the regional dilemma. I refer to one of my own main areas of involvement in Southeast Asia - Borneo. The Borneo Research Council, which is the professional academic association representing Borneo specialists, holds a regular international biennial conference. Yet I do not think that it is unfair to suggest that it often seems to live in a world of its own - apart even from Southeast Asia. In many of the conference sessions, one is only vaguely aware of the fact that the island is divided between three political states, and

that its two largest areas are part of larger nation-states with their capitals across the seas. Significant numbers of Bornean anthropologists still seem to be primarily concerned with 'salvaging', with gathering and recording fast disappearing oral traditions, with studying communities which have not been studied before, and with poring over European archives to help construct histories of pre-literate peoples. But many scholars working in Southeast Asia do precisely this; they are preoccupied with their 'local', with one part and often a small part of the region, with one group and often a small group of people; they rarely, if ever look beyond it. Do not mistake my intention in making these remarks. Some extraordinarily good and productive work has been done across Borneo and other cultures, but it has not often depended on contextualization within a Southeast Asian framework, nor have those involved in this enterprise felt the need to define and locate their studies within a broader cultural region. Indeed, the power of comparison is often considerably diminished if one widens one's comparative gaze too far. Moreover, there are many flourishing sub-regional scholarly constituencies, including Borneo Studies, which do not and will not depend on a Southeast Asian Studies frame of reference for sustenance or for academic credibility; some are defined in ethnic, some in sub-national, some in national terms and some across several neighbouring nations, often mixed with disciplinary criteria (and see Steedly, 1999: 434). Willem van Schendel has pointed to the status differentiation among Southeast Asianists: the 'big three' comprise 'Indonesianists', 'Thai experts', and Vietnamologists (2001: 6). These three sometimes embrace, sometimes exclude the neighbouring provinces of the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Myanmar and now Timor.

As I have pointed out elsewhere the recent re-evaluation of anthropology's imperialist and colonialist past, and the increasing concentration on 'the contextualized, particular local community and the ways in which it has been "constituted" or "constructed" ' has tended to move the discipline away from generalized cross-cultural comparison and from 'contextualizing "otherness" in terms of broad cultural areas and categories' (King, 2001: 5).

In contrast with most anthropological work in the region, it has been the discipline of history which has been most concerned to identify and delimit Southeast Asia, and as Reynolds notes, the involvement of senior historians in 'a discourse about origins', based primarily on reconstructions of the history of the heartlands rather than the margins of Southeast Asia, has been crucial in 'building and maintaining Southeast Asia as a field of study' (1995: 439). Interestingly a significant part of this debate has appeared in

Singapore-based journals, particularly the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, the successor to the *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, and Reid, in formulating his 'saucer-model' of Southeast Asia, has drawn attention to the special place of the heartlands of Singapore and Malaysia in this enterprise to define and characterize the region (1999b).

However, I suggest that it is neither necessary nor advantageous to examine social and cultural processes and institutions by using a Southeast Asian regional perspective. In our recently published regional anthropology of Southeast Asia, my co-author and I did not seek to justify the project in terms of socio-cultural commonalities and a Southeast Asian cultural region nor in terms of a distinctive intellectual approach and a set of dominant research questions (King and Wilder, 2003); rather we tended to echo Emerson's notion of 'a conveniently residual category' (1984:17). We recognized that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) serves to give some kind of separate post-war identity and interconnectedness to the region (see, for example, Fifield, 1976, 1983), and that, given the need to examine the impacts on and consequences of such processes as globalization on the 'local', one is often drawn into doing this in a convenient regional or sub-regional framework. After all, understanding the complexity of change requires local-level linguistic and other locally-grounded knowledge and expertise. This is what McVey refers to as 'context sensitivity' (1998:50).

Yet we could have divided up the Southeast Asian and adjacent regions in different ways for our investigation and we fully recognized the problem of the very fuzziness of socio-cultural borders in the politically defined, nation-state-based Southeast Asia. Evans's recent discussion of the East Asian rather than Southeast Asian character of Vietnam and its history is a case in point (2002: 151-157), as is the rather more well known commentary of Lieberman on Reid's thesis and on the historical differences between the Malay/Indonesian world and other sectors in the early modern period (1995). In our anthropology text we also examined the different kinds of contribution to the anthropology of the region from different constituencies and schools of thought, and from many scholars who had very little, if any interest in locating their work within a Southeast Asian frame of reference. Our book was much more about a differentiated rather than a unified region and anthropology. Although I would wish to debate Shamsul's recent observations that the construction of social scientific knowledge about Southeast Asia has been oriented to two key concepts – plurality and plural society (2005: 3), it nevertheless reflects the importance of attempts to address issues to do with cultural diversity, exchange, and interaction.

The Challenge of Globalization and Post-Structuralism

Peter Jackson, in full flow, can be rather alarmist. He says 'the passing of area studies would leave students of Asian societies in an extremely fraught situation, both theoretically and politically' (2003a: 2). As I have already noted, his way out of this impasse is to combine the area studies project with a more theoretically sophisticated approach to the study of place and culture. I do not find myself in disagreement with much of what he says, nor do I think that what he is saying is especially startling. Burgess too draws attention to the importance of area studies embracing cultural studies and, in this connection, refers to such networks as the Pacific Asian Cultural Studies Forum (1997), the Project for Critical Asian Studies (1996), the Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies initiative (1997), the Cultural Flows group (2004: 121-22) and the journals *Positions*, *Traces*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and the re-named *Critical Asian Studies*. I am sure that we would all concur that globalization does not lead to all-embracing cultural homogenization; local differences persist and others are generated, and we need to focus on the specifically 'cultural' to enable us to understand the context, nature and trajectory of globalized encounters. In the Amsterdam workshop of March 2001 we had already been discussing how we might address issues to do with border definition, cross-border flows, the porosity and openness of borders and cultural and spatial discontinuities. Van Schendel's paper directly and eloquently addressed the problems of borderlands, marches, lines on maps, the vagueness of the edges, the liminal places, interstitial zones, and hybrid regions, as well as the processes of marginalization, the relations between cores and peripheries, and the 'fringes of the intellectual frameworks known as "area studies"' (2001).

In our recently published anthropology of Southeast Asia, Wilder and I have made similar references to the interesting work on northern mainland Southeast Asia (Michaud, 2000; Evans, Hutton and Kuah, 2000) and on Austronesian-speaking populations of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Fox and Sather, 1996; Fox, 1997). What is more, it is interesting that, in Jackson's concerns to establish a theoretically informed area studies we are given no sense of what he means by 'Asia', nor what definitional and conceptual problems are generated by using this as a regional frame of reference. Van Schendel precisely addresses these issues in his concern to demonstrate how the metaphors we use to capture and present 'space' and culture areas make certain places and peoples 'invisible' (2001: 16). I cannot think of a more appropriate statement of how we should proceed in this regard than that of Heather Sutherland when she advises us 'to identify relative densities of

interaction [or 'webs of connection'] which are relevant to the specific subject under consideration'. This then enables 'the researcher to define the geographic boundaries [sic] appropriate to the question rather than operating within *conventional* but largely irrelevant and often misleading frameworks' (2003:19). It is very likely, indeed desirable, that the boundaries, or rather the cultural, social, political, economic and geographical/ecological discontinuities will differ depending on whether we are examining issues to do with, for example, urbanization, or labour migration and the transformation of the workforce, or new elites, or changing lifestyles, or concepts of the self and personhood, or environmental change, or knowledge transfer, or political violence or ethnic identities (and see Reynolds, 1998 and McVey, 1998).

Changing Markets

I am not optimistic about area studies programmes per se. However, if you were to ask various of my colleagues in the United Kingdom located in disciplines and working in ones, twos and threes in a scatter of British universities, some would undoubtedly point to the popularity of regional options in mainstream degree programmes. The pattern of provision has changed during the past 15 years or so in my country, and the dominance of multidisciplinary centres has declined quite dramatically. Now teaching and research on Southeast Asia is provided predominantly outside the Asian studies programmes and centres, and increasing numbers of younger scholars do not work in area studies. Membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Studies in the United Kingdom (ASEASUK) is now spread across some 40 institutions. In addition, interest in the region is kept alive in a range of non-area-based multidisciplinary programmes, in, for example, gender studies, media and film studies, development studies, business and management studies, and security studies. Policy-related and other more applied social science research is also being undertaken by non-area specialists who hire in vernacular linguistic expertise as and when it is needed, and often dip in and out of an area opportunistically.

There are some dangers in this changing pattern in that the environment is much more fluid and unstable, and despite the existence of professional associations and enhanced means of communication the lone-researchers may still feel relatively isolated from other regional expertise. Southeast Asian academic interests can quite easily disappear from a university with staff turnover. A more knotty problem is that usually Southeast Asian language courses are not part of these disparate portfolios. Language instruction is still

mainly or completely left to the remaining area studies programmes, and, it may well be that the provision of certain minority languages in these programmes will have to be subsidized if they are to be maintained. Finally, there is strength in numbers in the surviving area studies programmes, and specialist Southeast Asian expertise, including languages will need to be located in broader Asian or in some cases Pacific Asian studies programmes. The success of European research centres like the International Institute of Asian Studies in Leiden/Amsterdam and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen, and mechanisms for European-wide collaboration are cases in point. Asian Studies programmes also increasingly depend on seeking out and negotiating a range of more appealing and fashionable subjects for combined degrees. I find myself in some sympathy with Charles Macdonald's conclusions on area studies to the effect that they 'are useful but their importance should not be overstated' (2004:4).

West and East

Ariel Heryanto has argued that the differences between two categories - the foreign and the local, Western and home-grown Southeast Asianists, the old Southeast Asian Studies and emerging locally-produced knowledge - are greater than those between European-, American-, and Australian-based Southeast Asian Studies. I have some unease about this claim. He goes on to suggest that the cards are stacked against the local scholar because the patron-client relationships between foreign and local, and the arrangements and requirements for training Southeast Asianists in Western universities are founded on certain ethnocentric assumptions (interconnected with Orientalism), compounded by the low priority that educational systems in Southeast Asia assign to the social sciences and the humanities, and their emphasis on 'more instrumental and applied agendas' (2002: 9).

He claims that the protected circle of Southeast Asian Studies overseas erects other barriers to the entry of Southeast Asian nationals, particularly with regard to the academic requirements of area studies programmes, the credentials considered to be essential to be a Southeast Asianist and the use of English as the main medium of communication. Local scholars, he indicates, are expected to study, and, in some cases, are positively encouraged to do so by institutional policy and support, countries and cultures other than their own. I remember discussing this very issue in the 1990s when I was external examiner for the Southeast Asian Studies undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the National University of Singapore, where Ariel Heryanto

worked for a while. But the situation of the city-state of Singapore was acknowledged to be rather exceptional in the amount of social science research that could realistically be undertaken there. Approaches and attitudes to wider scholarly involvement in the region from within Singapore had also been firmly established through the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies from the 1960s. Heryanto also draws attention to the emphasis placed in Southeast Asian Studies programmes on the mastery of at least one of the living languages of the region and an extended period of residence there. He argues that the initiation process in these programmes assumes engagement with the region on the basis of difference, foreignness, and otherness.

The first point to make is that Heryanto tends to operate with too broad a contrast between non-Southeast Asian and Southeast Asian scholars and provision, though he does qualify this. He does not take sufficient account of the variations both within and across national boundaries with regard to Southeast Asian Studies and other related programmes, nor the more recent changes in the pattern of provision, nor the full range of consequences for Southeast Asian scholars of the decline in area studies programmes in the West. One of the points of my paper in *Moussons* (2001) was to try to demonstrate that there were and are differences between American and European approaches to and understandings of Southeast Asia, though I freely acknowledged that I too was over-generalizing. But by dint of the different histories and involvements of European countries in Southeast Asia and the wider Asia, our different political commitments, and the different ways in which higher education is organized and funded here, we are not a pale imitation of the USA in our support and development of area studies (and see Emerson, 1984: 12-13). I grant, however, that, in the early days of area studies in the United Kingdom at least, we were influenced by the American model.

In my view Heryanto has a rather narrow view of the character of Southeast Asian Studies programmes, and one which is increasingly out-of-date. The model that he has in mind still comes closest, I think, to that of a limited number of American area studies centres, although even American dominance has diminished more recently, and there was and is considerable variation in the organization of centres and programmes across the USA (McVey, 1998: 41-43, 55; Fifield, 1976:153-154). Furthermore, several Western-based research centres in Asian Studies or Pacific Asia Studies, for obvious reasons, do not have a language policy of the kind indicated by Heryanto. Nor have I detected any particular prejudice against Southeast Asian students studying their own rather than a neighbouring country. On

the contrary, in my long experience supervising Malaysian research students, they have been positively encouraged to focus on their own country and cultures, given the access that they have to field material, informants, and written sources, and our recognition of the contribution that they will make. Nor did I detect in the policies that were adopted by the European Science Foundation's Asia Committee (1997) any desire to exclude local scholars; in fact, there was positive encouragement for Asian scholars to participate in our activities, and everything that I have read in the Institute's Newsletter reinforces this collaborative stance towards our Asian colleagues and the desire to establish genuinely equal partnerships. I grant that this message is perhaps still not sufficiently clear and robust.

Another point has to be emphasized strongly about our relations with Southeast Asian scholars. It seems to me that it has been our very success in supervising, training and collaborating with Southeast Asian scholars which has, in part at least, contributed to our demise. I do not complain about this; it is as it should be. There are now established programmes and expertise in the region, and students who might previously have come to us from there no longer need to do so. What is more, I am daunted by the information that Southeast Asian scholars have at their finger-tips, their direct access to field-sites, and their command of the vernacular. So some Western modesty is required. In addition, the pressures on area studies, and particularly in Southeast Asian Studies programmes in the West, rather than leading to protectionism and the restriction of access to Southeast Asian scholars have resulted in positive efforts to establish more collaborative research, to find ways of securing funds in partnership, and to join in co-publications. I have also noted the very welcome trend of the physical movement of Southeast Asian scholars into Western academe.

The increasingly dispersed pattern of regional expertise in countries like the United Kingdom and the larger numbers of scholars who move in and out of Southeast Asian circles, also suggest that the guild-like, apprenticeship, gate-keeper pattern which Heryanto describes is a feature of the past. Disciplinary specialists, those who are interested in multi-disciplinary but non-area studies subjects, and those who have an interest in one country and/or one ethnic group, and who do not see themselves as Southeast Asianists are highly unlikely to expend any effort in excluding local scholars from an enterprise with which they do not themselves identify nor find analytically or empirically useful.

Concluding Remarks

Purely Southeast Asian Studies programmes are now few and far between, and those outside the region do not set the pace and tone of scholarship on Southeast Asia. There has been an increasing trend during the past two decades for amalgamations and for the emergence of wider Asian Studies programmes, although there has always been considerable evidence of institutional interlinkage between Southeast Asian Studies and South Asian or East Asian Studies or both. Some of these broader Asian Studies programmes may well survive and even flourish, but the future for most of us with an academic interest in regional scholarship, does not reside primarily, if it ever did, in stand-alone area studies programmes. Nor do I think that we should be devoting our energies to defining regions and defending the studies associated with them. Despite these remarks, of course I recognize that the institutional investment in such activities as Southeast Asian Studies will probably continue for a considerable period of time into the future; in designated journals, in professional associations, in grant schemes, and in institutional arrangements. Some sort of area studies commitment will remain, but this may well be in an environment of much more shifting and flexible academic identities. In any case, I have found myself regularly moving between identities, either self-generated or externally imposed or both, as a Borneanist, a Malaysianist, an Indonesianist, a maritime Southeast Asianist, a Southeast Asianist, an Asianist, an anthropologist, a sociologist, and even someone who moves in and out of development, environmental and tourism studies circles.

However, if Southeast Asian Studies is to continue in the form of departments, programmes and institutes, then I would venture to suggest that the future must be in the region itself, and although, I have disagreed with Heryanto on several matters I most certainly endorse his aspirations for local scholarship. Moreover, if the perceptions of an unequal relationship between foreign and local scholars are as strong as they appear to be in Heryanto's discussion, then we must find ways of changing those perceptions. The tendency to become overly preoccupied with the fate of regional studies in our own country or continent is to be expected and at times has led us to pay insufficiently explicit attention to the achievements of local scholarship on the region with which we engage. Heryanto is right to give us a sharp reminder of this. But I am convinced that those of us who have had a long-standing commitment to the study of the Southeast Asian region readily acknowledge the influence and contribution of local scholars,

and in my view, it is in their hands that the fate or fortune of Southeast Asian Studies resides.

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