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“Southeast Asia”: What’s in a Name?

DONALD K. EMMERSON

What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

—William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 2.

Words like “Southeast Asia” and “unicorn” enable us to discuss topics about which we would not otherwise be able to hold a conversation, but we should be wary of attributing any more solidity to these concepts than the facts will allow.

—J.R.E. Waddell, *An Introduction to Southeast Asian Politics*
(Sydney: John Wiley, 1972), p. 3.

Some names, like “rose”, acknowledge what exists. Others, like “unicorn”, create what otherwise would not exist. In between lie names that simultaneously describe and invent reality. “Southeast Asia” is one of these.

Some who study the region treat it as if it were Shakespeare’s rose: a reality existing independently of its name. Others would agree with Waddell that an observer of “Southeast Asia” who uses the name incautiously risks hallucinating unicorns: projecting homogeneity, unity, and boundedness onto a part of the world that is in fact heterogeneous, disunited, and hard to delimit.

Most Southeast Asianists, myself included, would sooner consider themselves botanists of the real, writing science, than zoologists of the unreal, writing fiction. But each self-image is incomplete. To combine the two is to understand that those who first named and depicted the region as a whole wrote, without realizing it, a kind of science fiction, in which “Southeast Asia”, like “spaceship”, labeled something that did not exist — but eventually would.

In short, if joint reality is the sum of separate fictions,¹ students of “Southeast Asia” are implicated in the addition. By reviewing the making of the name, I hope in this article to bring out some of those implications, to indulge in a little sociology of knowledge, and thus to complement in a small way a much larger and more straightforwardly empiricist literature on the making of the region.²

For critical comments on an earlier draft, or for help in gaining access to fugitive materials, I am grateful to Benedict Anderson, Bernard Dahm, Russell Fifield, David Marr, Gayl Ness, Douglas Pike, David Szanton, John Smail, Heidrun Wilde, and O.W. Wolters. Surviving inadequacies, alas, are mine.

¹Paraphrasing Stanislaw J. Lec, *Unkempt Thoughts*, trans. Jacek Galazka (New York: St. Martin’s, 1962), p. 93.

²Noteworthy in that literature are H.G. Quaritch Wales, *The Making of Greater India* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1951 and 1961); George Coedes, *The Making of South East Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967 [orig. pub. 1962 in French]); and D. J. M. Tate’s projected three-volume work, *The*

Mainly, I will argue that the crystallization of “Southeast Asia” into a set of nation-states enabled agreement on the term’s boundaries, but inhibited the holism needed to change a cartographic convenience into an entity with an identity internal to itself.

While not necessarily superior to nationalism, regionalism can help to contain and moderate the destructive effects of narrower self-identifications. In that spirit, for the sake of region as a rose, I will conclude by recommending a return to the “prepolitical” outlook of those European scholars whose synoptic vantage point permitted the imagining of “Southeast Asia” in the first place.

But I am getting ahead of a story that begins millennia ago...

The Making of a Place-name: Early Origins, Late Recognition

In the binomial expression “Southeast Asia”, the etymology of each term is eloquent. The second word, “Asia”, has been traced back through more than 3,000 years of written records to a plausible prototype: “Assuva”. Around 1235 B.C., a Hittite king reported having conquered a place or people of that name — apparently a league of states or tribes (the term may have meant “allies” or “friends”) somewhere to the east of the Aegean Sea.

Gaps in the evidence preclude certainty, but there is reason to believe that the Greeks took the word “Assuva”, pronounced it more like the modern name “Asia”, and applied it to the eastern outskirts of their world, across the Aegean. In ensuing centuries, lacking inland limits, the toponym could — and did — become a conveniently elastic label for Greek explorers and poets to stretch over a landmass that extended farther and farther eastward in their consciousness. If this reconstruction is correct,³ not until colonizing Westerners brought “Asia” back to Asia millennia later did the people who lived there readopt the term.

Less ancient than “Asia” but no less interesting is the first element, “Southeast”, for it implies additional peripheries: south of China, east of India. Westerners used these more “familiar shapes of India to the West and China to the north”⁴ as mammoth landmarks to define the resulting zone in their perceptions — not only “Southeast Asia” but, by the same logic of adjacency, Malte-Brun’s “Indochina”, Logan’s “Indonesia”, and Purcell’s less successful “Indosinesia”.⁵ Variations in the rendering of “Southeast” — it has been

Making of Modern South-East Asia (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971 [vol. 1]). Compare Russell H. Fifield’s unique, brief, and little-known “The Concept of Southeast Asia: Origins, Development, and Evaluation”, *South-East Asian Spectrum* (Bangkok) 4, no. 1 (1975): 42–51. Compare also the views of O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), who warns against overgeneralizing about “Southeast Asia” or reading that modern notion too far back into the past.

³It relies heavily on the noted toponymist George R. Stewart’s *Names on the Globe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 205–208. Cf. “Asia”, in Eric Partridge, comp., *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (4th ed., London: Routledge, 1966).

⁴Dennis Bloodworth, *An Eye for the Dragon: Southeast Asia Observed, 1954–1970* (New York: Farrar, 1970), p. xiii.

⁵On the French geographer Malte-Brun’s coinage, see Louis Malleret, “The Position of Historical Studies in the Countries of Former French Indo-China in 1956”, in *Historians of South East Asia*, ed. D. G. E. Hall (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 301. A more convoluted example is “Cochinchina”: According to Abel Bergaigne (“L’ancien royaume de Campā dans l’Indo-Chine, d’après les inscriptions”, *Journal Asiatique* 11 [1888]: 6–7), “Cochinchine” did not refer directly to China but was instead a French rendition of a Chinese name (“Tchen Tching”) for the Indianized state of Champa. Modern scholars (notably K. W. Taylor, personal communication, 3 Oct. 1983) posit an even more complex lineage: that the French name “Cochinchine” was derived from a Portuguese rendering of a Japanese version of a Chinese term (“Chiao Chih”) for Vietnam. Whatever its exact ancestry, “Cochinchina” delineated

spelled a dozen ways in English alone — have even reflected political differences between Western governments.⁶

Embodying a Greek viewpoint inherited by Anglo-Saxons impressed with India and China, "Southeast Asia" honors more the perceptions of powerful European namers

an administrative area. But "Indonesia" was vaguer and more anthropological; the Englishman who invented it, J. R. Logan ("The Ethnology of the Indian Archipelago", *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* [Singapore] 4 [1850]: 254), defended it as "a shorter synonym" for "the Indian Archipelago", which then covered far more than the independent nation of Indonesia ever would. For Adolf Bastian, writing in the 1860s, the Philippines were part of "Indonesia", and for W.J. Perry, *The Megalithic Culture of Indonesia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918), so were Assam, Burma, and Formosa; see Helmut Loofs, *Südostasiens Fundamente: Hochkulturen und Primitivstämme Geisterglauben Religionen Grosse Politik* (Berlin: Safari-Verlag, 1964), p. 19. By the 1920s, in the Netherlands Indies, "Indonesia" had become a bone of academic and political contention. While colonial officials rejected the term for its revolutionary connotations, for example, a Dutch professor argued that for clarity's sake one should not apply to the Indies a word that had already acquired a broader meaning. But if "America" had been accepted to mean both a continent and a country, replied the nationalist Mohammad Hatta (*Nama Indonesia: Penemuan Komunis?* [Jakarta: Yayasan Idayu, 1980], pp. 11–14 [orig. pub. 1928]), surely "Indonesia" could also serve double duty — especially since those parts of cultural "Indonesia" lying outside political "Indonesia" already had their own distinctive names (the Philippines, the Straits Settlements, British Borneo, and Madagascar). (See also Justus M. van der Kroef, "The Term Indonesia: Its Origin and Usage", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 71 (1951): 166–71.) On the eve of his country's independence, Muhammad Yamin argued, in effect, that political "Indonesia", which Hatta and other nationalists had shrunk to fit the Indies, should now be enlarged to include its cultural periphery; Yamin, comp., *Naskah-persiapan Undang-undang Dasar 1945*, I ([Jakarta: Jajasan Prapantja, 1959]: 191–92, 214. Although the Body to Investigate Indonesian Independence voted to include Malaya, North Borneo, Papua, and eastern Timor in the political definition of "Indonesia" (Angus McIntyre, "The 'Greater Indonesia' Idea of Nationalism in Malaya and Indonesia", *Modern Asian Studies* 7 [1973]: 81–82), Hatta's preference ultimately prevailed, and found final fulfillment in 1963 when the Republic incorporated ex-Dutch New Guinea. Nevertheless, in 1976, when ex-Portuguese Timor became an Indonesian province, the ghost of Muhammad Yamin may have smiled. (For more on Yamin's vision, see Bernard K. Gordon, "The Potential for Indonesian Expansionism", *Pacific Affairs* 36 [1963–64]: 378–93.) Even though it expands upon "Malaya", modern "Malaysia" also illustrates the shrinking effect of political upon anthropological usage, for the Malaysian nation today is dwarfed by the full range of ethno-linguistically Malay peoples once implied by writers on "Malaysia" or the "Malaysia archipelago", from the first volume of Bastian's *Indonesien oder die Inseln des Malayischen Archipel* (Berlin: Ferd. Dummlers) in 1884 to Fay-Cooper Cole (*The Peoples of Malaysia* [Princeton NJ: Van Nostrand] in 1945. For "Indosinesia", derived from India (Indo-), China (-sin-), and the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagoes (-esia), see Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. xvi, and *The Revolution in Southeast Asia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), p. 17.

"Southeast Asia", "South East Asia", "South-East Asia", "South-east Asia", "southeast Asia", "south-east Asia", "Southeastern Asia", "South Eastern Asia", "South-Eastern Asia", "South-eastern Asia", "southeastern Asia", and "south-eastern Asia" can all be found in the literature, but not with the same frequencies over time. The rising visibility of the region as a whole, which has inclined Westerners to write about it more often in more popular media (where brevity is prized), and the parallel rise of administrative or political over geographic or cultural definitions of the region have made the adjective shorter, more pronomial, and spatially more precise by encouraging English-speakers to drop the suffix and the hyphen, to spell it as one word not two, and to capitalize its initial letter. This basically American solution was resisted in England, where the name is still generally hyphenated or spelled as three words. Conversely, the demise of the hyphen in America may be traceable to a case of orthographic pique when, in Washington in 1945, officers of the U.S. Department of State created the first "division of Southeast Asian Affairs", using the unhyphenated form on purpose not to copy the colonial British. See Fifield, p. 45, and compare the comment by Britain's unregenerate hyphenist, D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (1st or 2nd ed., London: Macmillan, 1955 or 1964), p. 3. The issue of capitalization was also trans-Atlantic. Although "southeast Asia" was still being used in America in the 1940s — in some publications by the Institute of Pacific Relations, for example — it soon became capitalized. But the British equivalent, "south-east Asia", persisted in the columns of *The Times* of London, where as late as 1965 the name was dismissed as "an

than those of the people in the place so named.⁷ Non-European christeners, too, engaged in a kind of autocartography, fancying the region an El Dorado, locating it “behind” or “beyond” India, or calling it the “southern” seas or a “northern” land.⁸ Finally, the name recalls the linguistic debt owed by Americans to Europe, and American tardiness in following Europe’s imperial example — factors that combined to rule out “Southwest Pacific” in favor of “Southeast Asia”.

Specialists who take the name for granted may be surprised to learn the extent to which, despite its venerable Greek if not also “Assuvian” ancestry, it is still not fully legitimate. For a Southeast Asianist to reach this humbling conclusion, it is necessary only to compare “Southeast Asia” with its nearest equivalent, the “Middle East”, another young, crisis-associated toponym that has had to compete for recognition with an older sibling, “Near East”, just as “Southeast Asia” has with its senior, “Far East”. Since 1921, the University of London has offered an honours degree in the history of the “Middle East”, but a counterpart for “Southeast Asia” became available only in 1950.⁹ In the *International Index* to humanities and social science periodicals, “Middle East” has been used as a subject heading from the 1931–34 volume onward, but not until the edition for 1958–60 was “Southeast Asia” so recognized.

In the 1960s, through the 1970s, and as late as 1983, standard reference works included an entry on the “Middle East” but not on “Southeast Asia”.¹⁰ Beginning with its volume

upstart cartographically”, to cite *The Times*, 22 Feb. 1965, as quoted by Charles A. Fisher, “A View of Southeast Asia”, *Southeast Asia: An International Quarterly* 1 (1971): 9–10. For adopting the “upstart” but refusing to capitalize it, the *Times* editors were described by Fisher (p.9) as classicists “bowing part way to the pressure of lesser mortals’ parlance” while at the same time continuing to pay “homage to the traditional Orientalism” according to which anything Asian but not Indian or Chinese could only be culturally lower-case. In the present article, unless otherwise indicated, “Southeast Asia” stands for all twelve alternatives. Quotation marks signal a reference to the name; without them, the region is meant.

⁷Illustrating what might be called, after its well-known advocate, the “Humpty Dumpty position”: that names are rooted neither in reality nor custom, but express instead the power of the namer over the thing named. See Lewis Carroll, *The Philosopher’s Alice*, annotated by Peter Heath (New York: St. Martin’s, 1974), pp. 192–94. In fairness to those who find Humpty’s position unsupportable, it should be recalled that shortly afterwards he fell off the wall.

⁸Among such names and, between parentheses, their main users are “Further India” (British), “Hinterindien” (Germans), “l’Inde ultragangetique” (French), “Nanyang” (Chinese), and “Nanyo” (Japanese). Less well known are “Suvarnabhumi” (Indians), “Zabag” (Arabs), and “Terra Septentrionalis” (Australians), cited respectively by Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1961), ch. 11; Tate, *Modern South-East Asia*, 1:8; and Nicholas Tarling, *A Concise History of Southeast Asia* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. xii. A few of these toponyms (e.g., “Zabag”) are obscure; some are ancient; most are obsolete; and all are vague. But together they represent a problem of more than philological interest, for each one carries with it the unique perspective of an outside party. By implication, to prefer one name is to lend credence to that namer’s claims to a proprietary relationship with the region. This version of the “Humpty Dumpty position” may help to explain David Marr’s discovery that area specialists in China in 1980 still thought it necessary to oppose the use of “Greater India” to describe classical Southeast Asia — apparently not aware that the entire polemic is *passé*; Marr “Chinese Study of Southeast Asia in Transition”, in Wang Gungwu et al., *Southeast Asian Studies in China: A Report* (Canberra, Australia: Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1981), p. 30.

⁹C.D. Cowan, *South East Asian History in London* (London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1963), pp. 10–11.

¹⁰Among them: *The Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1966); *Webster’s New Geographical Dictionary* (Springfield MA: Merriam, 1977); *The Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary* (rev. ed., New York: Bantam, 1979); *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary* (New York: Signet, 1980); *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (7th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield MA: Merriam, 1983).

for 1943, *The New York Times Index* listed "Middle East" to refer readers to the standing entry "Near East", and from 1956, probably in response to the Suez crisis, all items on that region were collated under its newer name. But not until the *Index* for 1946 was "Southeast Asia" even listed, and in 1983 an area specialist who looked it up still found: "Southeast Asia. Use Far East".

The Period before World War II: Separation and Synthesis

In the literature on the subject in English, the debut of "Southeast Asia" (including the equivalents listed in note 6) may have occurred in 1839 in Boston, the year and place of publication of *Travels in South-Eastern Asia* by Howard Malcom, an American cleric.¹¹ In the actual text of his two-volume travelogue Malcom did not, to my knowledge, either use the name or explain it. Though still generally unknown, apparently the term was self-evident enough to need no definition. Not until 1847, so it seems, did the British anthropologist J.R. Logan, in the first of a series of articles in *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, inaugurate the scholarly usage of the name.¹² Yet even these early appearances are dubious clues to the identity of the name's actual inventor, for the simplicity and utility of "Southeast Asia" make the term thinkable enough to have occurred, independently but simultaneously, to several people.

For much of the rest of the nineteenth century, historical conditions postponed the spread of the new name. As western imperialism matured and its hold deepened, as each dependency became more thoroughly and exclusively oriented towards its respective metropole in Europe, it became harder for Europeans, to say nothing of people in what is now Southeast Asia, to think of the region as a whole. From the days of Malcom and Logan, roughly a century would elapse before "Southeast Asia" could become an office or classroom let alone a household word.

However, in Europe, the Germans and Austrians were important exceptions. Owning no territory, they were not hampered by the geographic limits that preoccupation with a specific possession tended to place on the perspectives of land-controlling colonizers. In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while German traders operated from coastal enclaves scattered about Southeast Asia, the Germans Adolf Bastian and Franz Heger and the Viennese P.W. Schmidt travelled widely in the area and innovated the comparative study of its myths, religions, and artifacts — for example, its bronze drums.¹³ Another Viennese, Robert Heine-Geldern, would later be called the founder of Southeast Asian Studies,¹⁴ for his long monograph, "Südostasien", published in 1923,¹⁵

¹¹ Malcom, *Travels in South-Eastern Asia Embracing Hindustan, Malaya, Siam, and China, with Notices of Numerous Missionary Stations and a Full Account of the Burman Empire*, 2 vols. (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1839).

¹² Logan, "The Present Condition of the Indian Archipelago", *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 1st ser., 1 (1847): 3.

¹³ See: Adolf Bastian, *Die Völker des östlichen Asien*, 5 vols. (Leipzig and Jena: 1866–69); Franz Heger, *Alte Metalltrommeln aus Südostasien*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: 1902); P.W. Schmidt, *Die Mythologie der austronesischen Völker*, Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien, 39 (Vienna: 1909), and *Grundlinien einer Vergleichung der Religionen und Mythologien der austronesischen Völker*, Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 53 (Vienna: 1910). Heger's is the earliest use I have found of the term "Southeast Asia" in the title of a German-language book.

¹⁴ By Bernard Dahm, *Die Südostasienwissenschaft in den USA in Westeuropa und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Verlag Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 13–14.

¹⁵ Robert Heine-Geldern, "Südostasien", in *Australien und Ozeanien Asien*, vol. II, pt. 1 of *Illustrierte Völkerkunde*, ed. Georg Buschan (Stuttgart: Strecker und Schroder, 1923), pp. 689–968. See also Heine-Geldern, "Südostasien", in *Ethnologischer Anzeiger* I (1928): 110–54; II (1929–1932): 348–92; IV (1937): 150–299.

was the first scholarly collation of the evidence then available regarding virtually all aspects of the would-be region's cultures.

These contributions in German were not unique. In the 1920s, articles expressly about "Southeast Asia" were also published in English and Dutch,¹⁶ and by the 1930s, the name was being used in titles written by American, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, and Vietnamese¹⁷ as well as European authors, in Italian and Russian¹⁸ as well as other European languages. But when the Viennese Heine-Geldern emigrated to America at the onset of World War II, "Southeast Asia" was not widely studied in Europe, still less in the United States. Only in 1941, almost exactly a century after the appearance of Malcom's book, did the name finally occur in the title of a doctoral dissertation accepted by an American university.¹⁹

In his new home, Heine-Geldern began actively promoting American awareness of Southeast Asia — as the author of the now-classic "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia",²⁰ as a Director of the East Indies Institute of America,²¹ and as a Research Associate of the Southeast Asia Institute,²² the first American scholarly organization to focus on the area by its new name. Also influential in publicizing the nascent region among intellectuals in the United States during World War II were the work of the Institute of Pacific Relations, which began issuing the results of research on Southeast Asia it had sponsored in the 1930s,²³ and the publication, in

¹⁶J.W. Gregory, "The Evolution of the River System of South-eastern Asia", *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 41 (1925): 129–41; Milton Katz, "Genna in Southeastern Asia", *American Anthropologist* 30 (1928): 580–601; P.V. van Stein-Callenfels, "Bijdrage tot de chronologie van het neolithicum in Zuid-Oost Azië", in *Verslagen Oudheidkundige Dienst N.I. 1926* (Batavia: 1927), Appendix J, pp. 174–80. German-language works appear to have predominated, however: For example, K. Haushofer, *Zur Geopolitik der Selbstbestimmung in Südostasien* (Munich: 1923), also published as *Zum Freiheitskampf in Südostasien* (Berlin: 1923), and studies by F.W. Mohr, W. Ule, and W. Volz.

¹⁷Respectively: Rupert Emerson, "The Outlook in Southeast Asia: Netherlands Indies, French Indo-China, British Malaya", *Foreign Policy Report* (1939), pp. 206–16; Fang Si Sun, *Die Entwicklung der chinesischen Kolonisation in Südasiens (Nan Yang) nach chinesischen Quellen*, diss., Jena, 1931; R. Mukerjee, "Indian and Chinese Labour in the Agriculture of South East Asia", *Modern Review* (Calcutta), ser. 2, 54 (1933): 669–74; Nguyen Van Huyen, *Introduction à l'étude de l'habitation sur pilotis dans l'Asie du Sud-Est* (Paris: 1934).

¹⁸E. Malesani, "L'Asia di Sud-Est", in R. Almagia, ed., *Geografia Universale Illustrata* IV, pt. 2 (Turin: 1936): 381–86; S.E. Lir, "Air Circulation in Southeast Asia" (in Russian), *Meteorologiya i Gidrologiya* (Moscow) I (1936).

¹⁹Paul King Benedict, "Kinship in Southeastern Asia", Harvard University, cited in the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index 1861–1972*. In their compilation, *Theses and Dissertations on Southeast Asia* (Zug, Switzerland: Inter Documentation Company, 1970), D. R. SarDesai and Bhanu D. SarDesai do mention one master's thesis accepted by an American university in the 1930s: F.J. Lancaster, "The Rubber-plantation Regions of Southeastern Asia", University of Chicago, Economics, 1932.

²⁰*The Far Eastern Quarterly* [henceforth *FEQ*] 2 (Nov. 1942): 15–30. Remarkably, in this article, Heine-Geldern bothered neither to define "Southeast Asia" nor justify its use; having done that in previous works, he could take the name for granted. In contrast, two American scholars writing in the same journal at about the same time felt obliged to explain in their first paragraphs what they meant by the name: For John L. Christian ("Recent Literature Relating to Southeast Asia", *FEQ* 1 [Aug. 1942]: 378), the Andaman Islands and part of Yunnan lay within the scope of the term, while Kenneth Perry Landon ("Nationalism in Southeastern Asia", *FEQ* 2 [Feb. 1943]: 139) used it to refer only to continental Asia south of China and east of India.

²¹"Notes and News", *FEQ* 2 (Nov. 1942): 114–15.

²²"Southeast Asia Institute", *FEQ* 5 (Feb. 1946): 219–24.

²³For example, in 1942: Helmut G. Callis, *Foreign Capital in Southeast Asia*; Rupert Emerson, Lennox A. Mills, and Virginia Thompson, *Government and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*; John S. Furnivall, *Problems of Education in Southeast Asia*; Bruno Lasker, *Welfare and Freedom in Postwar Southeast Asia*; all published in New York. On the work of the Institute, see Christian, "Recent Literature", p. 380.

1943 in New York, of *The Future of South-East Asia: An Indian View*, by K.M. Panikkar.²⁴

World War II: SEAC

Notwithstanding these contributions, warfare not scholarship made "Southeast Asia" popular. Before 1942, the name had been mainly a geographic convenience, a logical product of "South" and "East" Asia. Western statesmen felt little incentive to standardize the boundaries of the term, for it was esoteric, and Western scholars, Heine-Geldern and his colleagues aside, did not justify its use on grounds of distinctive content, for it was overshadowed in their minds by impressions of India and China. By destroying colonial distinctions between individual trees, Japan set off the long process whereby Western politicians were forced to recognize the forest, as a whole and in its own right, and to specify its borders.

Making war meant making maps. The National Geographic Society made them in unprecedented numbers, nearly twenty million in 1941–44, including for the first time a Society map of "Southeast Asia" to enable Americans to "follow every move by our land, sea, and air forces to crush the Japanese".²⁵

The global scale of those moves required the demarcation of regional theaters, one of which was Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command (SEAC), created in 1943 at the Anglo-American Quebec Conference.²⁶ Replacing as it did an American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) Command, SEAC by name advanced the regional idea.²⁷

But making war also meant making political decisions that ignored the logic of the compass. If a lack of attention had postponed the precise definition of "Southeast Asia" before the Pacific War, an eruption of interest complicated the same task afterwards.

SEAC illustrates the complication. The Command's role in popularizing the regional name has been widely remarked.²⁸ But the new theater of war bore little resemblance to "Southeast Asia" as it would eventually come to be understood. SEAC never covered the Philippine islands, and for most of its life it excluded the Malay archipelago east of Sumatra as well. (The latter islands were placed under the Command in 1945 not because they seemed to the Allies a natural part of "Southeast Asia" but because doing so would

²⁴Fifield, "The Concept of Southeast Asia", p.43; Charles A. Fisher, *South-east Asia: A Social, Economic and Political Geography*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 746. Also in 1943, Lennox Mills edited "Southeastern Asia and the Philippines", the first issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (vol. 226), explicitly devoted to the region.

²⁵"The Society's New Map of Southeast Asia", *The National Geographic Magazine* 86 (1944): 449–50. For other cartographic signs of suddenly heightened interest in the area, see Jan O.M. Broek, comp., *Readings in the Geography of Southeast Asia* (New York: 1943); and George B. Cressey, *Asia's Lands and Peoples: A Geography of One-third the Earth and Two-thirds its people* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1944), pp. 495–548.

²⁶Louis Mountbatten, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff* by the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, 1943–45 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951) [henceforth *Report*], p. 3.

²⁷Although, as postwar efforts to regain lost colonies would show, the earlier, compartmentalized view remained strong. On the ABDA, see *Report*, p. 6.

²⁸By, for example, Robert O. Tilman, "Introduction", in *Man, State, and Society in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed. R.O. Tilman (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), p.3; and David Joe Steinberg et al., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 5. Also see Hall, *History*, p. 3; and Paul M. Kattenberg, "South-East Asia Reconsidered", *South-East Asian Spectrum* 4, no. 2 (1976): 21.

free General Douglas MacArthur, until then responsible for prosecuting the war in them, to concentrate on defeating Japan.)²⁹ Aside from thus omitting territory later placed in "Southeast Asia", SEAC included four future countries or parts of countries that would ultimately fall outside the generally accepted scope of the term.³⁰

If the Command-drawn limits of "Southeast Asia" were unsustainable, they were also unclear. At first, they included Siam and French Indochina, which had been allocated to the China theater in 1942.³¹ But on the last day of the Quebec Conference, Indochina was returned to the China Command. This did not satisfy Chiang Kai-shek, who insisted that both territories belonged to his theater. In the end, the Generalissimo and the Admiral purposely blurred the border between their respective spheres of authority in a "gentlemen's agreement": Where Chiang's purview ended and Mountbatten's began would be specified if and only if "the Chinese and South-East Asian forces approached one another [in the disputed area], and seemed likely to make contact".³² SEAC's own maps disagreed over whether or not its northwestern limit included the waters of the Persian Gulf,³³ and Mountbatten himself may have regarded Hong Kong, for which he was administratively but not operationally responsible, as an extreme northeastern piece of British "Southeast Asia".³⁴

In sum, World War II affected the idea of "Southeast Asia" in three important ways. First, the region was made visible.³⁵ In 1945, for example, a Division of Southeast Asian Affairs was born in the U.S. Department of State, and in 1946 and 1947, respectively, Southeast Asian Studies units were established at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies and at Yale University.³⁶ By providing incentives for scholars and officials to work across disciplinary bounds,³⁷ the war made it easier for them to think about Southeast Asia as a whole.

Second, as the name "Southeast Asia" was legitimated, its range was reduced without being fixed. A century earlier, Logan and Malcom had used the term to include all or much of India and China. In the 1920s, the same parts of Southeast Asia could be located

²⁹*Report*, Maps 1 and 36 and pp. 181–82. The extension brought under SEAC's authority all of present-day Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei, and Indonesia except for the island of Timor.

³⁰There were Christmas Island (Australia); Sri Lanka (where the Command was headquartered in 1944–45); the Andaman, Laccadive, and Nicobar Islands (India); and the Maldives (fully independent since 1965).

³¹*Report*, pp. 3, 6–7, 227–28.

³²*Report*, p. 7. In 1945, the border between SEAC and the China Command in Indochina was finally drawn at the 16th parallel. See Evelyn Colbert, *Southeast Asia in International Politics 1941–1956* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 53.

³³Compare Map 2 in the main body of the *Report* with Map 38 in its separately published Section E, *Post Surrender Tasks* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969).

³⁴*Report*, pp. 183, 216–17.

³⁵As one observer remarked at the time: "Southeastern Asia had little interest for the majority of Americans until a little more than a year ago. ... The spectacular conquests of Japan and the consequences to ourselves have completely changed this attitude." Mills, "Introduction", in "Southeastern Asia", ed. Mills, p. vii.

³⁶Dahm, *Die Südostasienwissenschaft*, pp. 39 and 32, respectively. Also see Centre of Southeast Asia Studies, *Southeast Asia Studies in London* (London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1972); Robert van Niel, "Southeast Asian Studies in the U.S.A.", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 5, no. 1 (1964): 188–94; Russell H. Fifield, "Southeast Asian Studies: Origins, Development, Future", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 7 (1976): 154–57.

³⁷Cora Du Bois, *Social Forces in Southeast Asia* (1949 [written in 1947]; rpt., Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 10–11.

in "South Asia" by one writer and in "East Asia" by another.³⁸ By war's end, the Allies had at least solidified the regional concept enough to lower the likelihood of its being so grossly stretched or its contents so arbitrarily reassigned in future.³⁹ At the same time, as the story of SEAC shows, wartime imperatives had postponed and complicated the task of definition.

Third, the war gave to "Southeast Asia" a strongly political connotation. While still a minor scholarly subject, the region became a major policy arena. In 1943, Heine-Geldern used this imbalance between knowledge and significance to make the now-familiar case for Southeast Asian Studies as a foreign policy need. Research on the region's cultures and languages, he wrote, was a matter of "urgent practical necessity". Although "outwardly of purely academic character", it would provide Western decision-makers "with that sound basis of knowledge and information which, by necessity, we are now so frantically striving to improvise". It would also serve as "a link of good will" with the region's "awakening and emerging nations". Heine-Geldern predicted that research on Southeast Asia would prove as important as Latin American Studies, which had been developed in the U.S. for similar policy reasons.⁴⁰

Postwar Formulations: From SEATO to ASEAN

After the war, political events continued to shape "Southeast Asia". A case in point is the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Born in Manila in 1954 in a feat of cold-war gerrymandering, SEATO kept the name political and visible while further confusing its meaning.

In one sense, SEATO's purview was vast, covering as it did the otherwise unspecified "general area of Southeast Asia", the equally undefined "general area of the Southwest Pacific", and the member State of Pakistan, which had joined the Organization for essentially anti-Indian reasons. Yet, in a unilateral "understanding" of the treaty at the time it was signed, the United States in effect limited the "treaty area", where a "common danger" would justify action, to places subject to "Communist aggression". Lest the identity of those places be in doubt, the signatories unanimously placed under the treaty's umbrella Cambodia, Laos, "and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam".

Even adding to these units the only two plausibly Southeast Asian members of SEATO, Thailand and the Philippines, no more than a rump group could result. Nor would it last. In 1956 and 1962, respectively, the governments of Cambodia and Laos

³⁸For example: H. Bleackley, *A Tour in South Asia: Indo-China, Malaya, Java, Sumatra and Ceylon* (London: 1928); E. and L. Selenka, *Sonnige Welten: Ostasiatische Reiseskizzen: Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Indien, Ceylon, Japan* (3rd ed., Berlin: 1925).

³⁹Although as late as 1946, the year SEAC was dismantled, Clifford H. MacFadden et al., in their *Atlas of World Affairs* (New York: Crowell), could consign to "Southeast Asia" half the world's population at that time, including all of China, India, Korea, and Japan.

⁴⁰Dahm, *Die Südostasienwissenschaft*, pp. 17–18, citing Robert Heine-Geldern, *A Survey of Studies on Southeast Asia at American Universities and Colleges* (New York: East Indies Institute of America, 1943), pp. 28ff. More immediate goals were also used to justify scholarship. In 1944, for example, Leonard Unger concluded his survey of "The Chinese in Southeast Asia" (*Geographical Review*, vol. 34) by noting that a clear understanding of their position in the region could be "a useful tool in driving out the Japanese" (p. 217).

repudiated the Organization. In 1972, Pakistan withdrew. In 1975, South Vietnam ceased to exist. In 1977, so did SEATO.⁴¹

SEAC and SEATO were Anglo-American initiatives, respectively anti-Japanese and anticommunist. Neither was anticolonial. SEAC facilitated the reassertion of the status quo ante bellum.⁴² SEATO contradicted itself, for its members had sworn in Manila to “uphold equal rights and the self-determination of peoples” while opposing “any attempt in the treaty area to subvert freedom to destroy [the signatories] sovereignty or territorial integrity” — presumably including that of British colonial governments in Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo.⁴³

Only in the 1960s did indigenous forces take over the idea of regional organization. In 1961, the Southeast Asian core of SEATO — Thailand and the Philippines — joined Malaya in an Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) that lasted until 1967, when the two core countries combined with Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia to found the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁴⁴

All five ASEAN members eventually suppressed communism as a political option, opened their economies to foreign investment, and enjoyed closer relations with the United States and its partners than with the Soviet bloc. As a Muslim-sultanate-cum-British-protectorate, Brunei appeared more inward-looking than the ASEAN five. But the latter’s orientations seemed likely to characterize Brunei too when it became fully independent at the close of 1983, and to facilitate its joining the Association. That would complete the region’s articulation by policy type into “capitalist” ASEAN states, “socialist” Burma, and the “communist” countries of Indochina.

The destructive side of this region-forming process should not be forgotten. What had once been considered a culturally derivative periphery, vaguely east of India and south of China, was structured by colonialism and nationalism into a mosaic of specific states. Entities that had not gained independence were scheduled to receive it, or were mobilized to seize it, or did not survive the sometimes violent shaking down of the region into filled-out constituent units. Otherwise disparate, Dutch New Guinea, Malaysia-including-Singapore, America’s South Vietnam, and Portuguese Timor became casualties of this redefinition. “Southeast Asia” turned out to be an aggregate of nations — individually distinct and collectively a battleground in, first, the Pacific War, then the Cold War, including two Indochina Wars, and finally, in Cambodia, a Sino-Soviet “proxy war”.

The irony bears emphasis: By attracting world attention and creating a need to talk about the region, political disunity bolstered the semantic unity of “Southeast Asia”. International conflicts underwrote the popularity of the name in the very act of undermining its empirical prospects.

⁴¹Quotations are from the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and accompanying texts as reproduced in *Treaties and Alliances of the World* (New York: Scribner’s for Keesing’s Archives, 1974), pp. 196–98, where the history of SEATO is also summarized. Also see Peter Lyon, “Regional Organization and South-East Asia”, *South-East Asian Spectrum* 4, no. 3 (1976): 41. Specifically outside the Treaty’s scope was the Pacific area north of 21° 30’ north latitude. Drawn to exclude Taiwan and Hong Kong, this line actually placed China’s Hainan Island within the “treaty area” — an anomaly tactfully ignored by the parties concerned. See the map on pp. 10–11 of *Collective Defence in South East Asia: The Manila Treaty and its Implications* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1956).

⁴²Mountbatten tells this story in *Post Surrender Tasks*.

⁴³*Treaties and Alliances*, p. 197; *Collective Defence*, p. 33.

⁴⁴On ASA and the birth of ASEAN, see Bernard K. Gordon, “Regionalism in Southeast Asia”, in *Man, State, and Society*, ed. Tilman, pp. 506–22. A useful guide to the literature on ASEAN is Tan Sok Joo, comp., *ASEAN: A Bibliography* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976).

Boundary Disputes: The Triumph of Political Criteria

In the decades following World War II, foreign scholars and journalists who interpreted the emerging region disagreed about its boundaries. Because Ceylon shared Theravada Buddhism with much of mainland "Southeast Asia", and probably in part because SEAC not only covered Ceylon but was headquartered there in 1944–45, many authors defined the region to include that island.⁴⁵ Also, in line with SEAC's practice, some writers omitted the Philippines from the ambit of "Southeast Asia" — most notably D.G.E. Hall, in the first (1955) edition of his *History of South-East Asia*, on the grounds that the Philippines stood "outside the main stream of historical developments" in the region.⁴⁶

But while some thus sought appropriate borders for the region in religion and history, others turned to ethnology, geomorphology, and biogeography. In 1964 in a long review of the definitional question, Helmut Loofs argued on ethnological grounds that the region should include those parts of eastern India and southern China — for example, the Andamans, Nicobars, Assam, Yunnan, Hainan, and Formosa — inhabited by ethnic minorities that were, after all, distinguished from neighbors conventionally located in "Southeast Asia" only by lines drawn between nations. Loofs also wished to exclude from the region culturally foreign peoples that happened to live within its political limits — for example, the essentially Oceanic, rather than Malayo-Polynesian, Melanesians of Indonesian New Guinea.⁴⁷ Adding to this ethnological argument the physiographic, zoogeographic, and phytogeographic case for New Guinea's Oceanic character, Victor Purcell, too, omitted all of that island from what he meant by "Southeast Asia".⁴⁸

⁴⁵Among them: H. Duncan Hall[a British government historian], "Post-War Government and Politics of British South East Asia", *The Journal of Politics* 9 (1947): 695; W.E. Boerman et al., eds., *Grote Elsevier Atlas* (Amsterdam: Alsevier, 1950), II: 142; Santha Rama Rau, *View to the Southeast* (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 3; Emanuel Sarkisyanz, *Südostasien seit 1945* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1961); Jacques Decornoy, *L'Asie du Sud-Est* (Tournai, Belgium: Casterman, 1967). Along with Ceylon, Tibor Mende (*South-East Asia Between Two Worlds* [London: Turnstile Press, 1955], p. viii) included India and Pakistan as well. More expansive still was the definition of "Southeast Asia" given by the authors of an official East German publication, *Deutschen Aussenpolitik* (East Berlin: 1962) [as cited by Loofs, *Südostasiens Fundamente*, p. 20], who incorporated into the term not only Ceylon, India, and Pakistan, but also Afghanistan, Nepal, Hong Kong, and Korea. Among others, Tarling, *Concise History*, p. xii, has noted the likely influence of SEAC on the inclusion of Ceylon.

⁴⁶Hall, *History* (1955), p. 3; also Mende, *South-East Asia*, and Sarkisyanz, *Südostasien*. So influential was Hall's omission that as late as 1962 Harry J. Benda could cite it as evidence that, among the countries then generally felt to belong to "Southeast Asia", the Philippines appeared to be "a borderline case"; Benda, "The Structure of Southeast Asian History: Some Preliminary Observations", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3 (1962): 107–08. Nevertheless, in "Structure", Benda treated the Philippines as part of the region. Two years later, in the second edition of his book, Hall himself bowed to the growing tendency to include the Philippines, although not without remarking that they did not "come clearly into" Southeast Asian history until the Spanish conquest late in the 16th century, and that even their subsequent role in the region, oriented as they were toward Spain and North America, was "slight"; Hall, *History* (1964), p. 3.

⁴⁷Loofs, *Südostasiens Fundamente*, pp. 21–22. The New Zealander Tarling (*Concise History*, p. xi) and the Franco-Vietnamese Le Thanh Khoi (*Histoire de l'Asie du Sud-Est* [1st and 2nd eds., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959 and 1967]) also included the Andamans and Nicobars in "Southeast Asia".

⁴⁸*Revolution*, p. 17. In fact, all three of the lines that have been drawn through the area to distinguish an Asian from an Australian biogeographic zone cut across Indonesia: In the west, Wallace's line splits Bali and Borneo from Lombok and the Celebes; in the middle, Weber's line separates the Celebes from the Moluccas; while in the east, Lydekker's line divides the Moluccas from New Guinea. Geomorphically too, as part of the Sahul not the Sunda Shelf, New Guinea is more akin to Australia than to Indonesia or to mainland Southeast Asia; see the map in E. H. G. Dobby, *Southeast Asia* (2nd ed., London: University of London Press, 1969), p. 18.

Among the postwar authors who argued against an exclusively political definition of "Southeast Asia", Europeans were numerous, Americans rare.⁴⁹ If the noncolonial character of German made it easier for speakers of that language to imagine the region as a whole, so did the timing and nature of their own encounter with "Southeast Asia" influence what Americans saw in the name.

Notwithstanding Malcom's travelogue, Americans did not write about Southeast Asia with any frequency until World War II. Therefore, in America, the political character of the regional idea as it came out of the Pacific theater faced little competition from other disciplines. In Europe, on the other hand, Heine-Geldern and others had already begun to construct the biophysical and cultural underpinnings of the idea of "Southeast Asia". Europe itself bristled with ecologically and ethnologically meaningless international frontiers. Accustomed as they were to crossing such barriers at home — linguistically and through travel — European scholars may have been less inclined than their American counterparts to assign significance to political boundaries abroad.

In addition, by disciplinary training, according to a 1968 survey, American Southeast Asianists were disproportionally concentrated in political science, their European counterparts in anthropology, geography, and languages. By major occupation, government service was proportionally overrepresented among the Americans, academic research among the Europeans (especially the Germans).⁵⁰ These differences, too, may have politicized American compared to European perspectives on the region.

Finally, America's own "progressive" colonial tradition, and corresponding distrust of Europe's postwar designs on former colonies, probably helped to legitimate in American compared to European eyes the independent nation-state as Southeast Asia's defining unit, especially in the late 1940s.⁵¹

Eventually, the triumph of nationalism in Southeast Asia and the convenience of using national borders as regional limits overrode nonpolitical criteria. In the 1920s, Heine-Geldern could construct the region along mainly cultural lines to include Assam, parts of East Bengal, the Andamans, the Nicobars, and Formosa. The sharp geophysical break between the Himalayas' southward extension and the deltaic plain of Ganges served him in the west, where it reflected cultural discontinuities tolerably well. In the north, he adopted the border between China and Burma-Laos-Vietnam as a political short-cut through the ethnic welter there.⁵² But after World War II, such eclectic compromises were, in effect, elbowed out of the literature by nation-based definition — a process abetted by events within the region and by observers, especially Americans, outside it.

⁴⁹Even when "Southeast Asia" was defined by the Institute of Pacific Relations to include Hong Kong and Taiwan for the purpose of its prewar study of politics in the area, the American authors of the resulting volume (Emerson, Mills, and Thompson, *Government and Nationalism*) virtually ignored both territories.

⁵⁰Robert O. Tilman and Garry D. Brewer, "Southeast Asia Specialists of the World: A Profile and an Analysis", in Tilman, comp., *International Biographical Directory of Southeast Asia Specialists — 1969* (Ann Arbor MI: Association for Asian Studies, Interuniversity Southeast Asia Committee, 1969), pp. xii, xiv, xxiv.

⁵¹In 1946, a University of Kentucky political scientist — albeit of European origin — argued that all of the Netherlands Indies, Dutch New Guinea included, should be considered part of "Southeast Asia" because of "the convenience of including entire political and administrative units"; Amry Vandenbosch, "Regionalism in Southeast Asia", *FEQ* 5 (Aug. 1946): 427. Earlier still, Bruno Lasker (*Peoples of Southeast Asia* [New York: Knopf, 1944], pp. 4–5) and Leonard Unger ("Chinese", p. 197) outlined the region the same way.

⁵²Heine-Geldern, "Südostasien" (1923), p. 689.

Transitional between the prewar ("European") criterion of cultural geography and the postwar ("American") one of national politics was the redefinition of "Southeast Asia" proposed in 1942–43 by Heine-Geldern himself. Although he still used subregional names with imprecise cultural and ethnic connotations ("Farther India", "the Malay Archipelago"), his revised usage was otherwise strikingly modern, for it limited the region to Siam and the British, French, Dutch, and American colonies, all neatly bordered political units; only his omission of Portuguese Timor seems, in retrospect, an oversight. It is, I think, no coincidence that the European anthropologist redrew "Southeast Asia" in this manner after arriving in America and to facilitate reviewing the region's place in American curricula.⁵³

In the wake of Heine-Geldern's voyage, "Southeast Asian" studies followed westward, to be reconceived in a postwar world where American models held unprecedented sway. By 1960, on the eastern side of the Atlantic, the British anthropologist Edmund Leach would feel obliged to decry the tyrannical salience of politics for having led observers of "Southeast Asia" to expect international boundaries to be culturally meaningful, to read the nation-state back into history, and to assume that territorial sovereignty must be absolute, exclusive, and as precisely demarcated in life as on a map.⁵⁴ But in the realm of general usage, he was fighting a lost war.

By "making up" the region out of nations, Americans also tended to politicize the idea of "Southeast Asia" as a whole, concentrating on foreign policies, regional organization, and the like, rather than on transnational cultural zones or interactions. By the same token, American researchers who studied nonpolitical subjects tended to do so subnationally. The result was a now-conventional division of academic labor between "macropolitical science" and "microanthropology".⁵⁵

By the late 1970s, after the annexation of Portuguese Timor by Indonesia, most observers, in the United States if not elsewhere, considered "Southeast Asia" to consist of ten political units: Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and to-be-independent Brunei.⁵⁶ Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Andamans, the Nicobars, Assam, Yunnan, Hainan, and Formosa (Taiwan) had all fallen away, despite strong nonpolitical arguments for including them. In theory, the chance that Papua New Guinea might someday join ASEAN opened room for this definition to expand to the east, and the even less likely accession of Sri Lanka afforded

⁵³Heine-Geldern's definition and the circumstances surrounding it are described by Fifield, "Southeast Asian Studies", p. 152.

⁵⁴Edmund Leach, "The Frontiers of 'Burma'", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3 (1960): 49. For region-wide criticism in the same vein, see Robert L. Solomon, "Boundary Concepts and Practices in Southeast Asia", *World Politics* 23 (1970–71): 1–23.

⁵⁵In the United States, through mid-1968, of the doctoral dissertations completed on two or more Southeast Asian countries, including works on the region as a whole, 42 per cent were in political science, compared to only 24 per cent of the dissertations confined to any one country in the area. Calculated from data in Lian The and Paul W. van der Veur, comps., *Treasures and Trivia: Doctoral Dissertations on Southeast Asia Accepted by Universities in the United States* (Athens OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1968), p. 125. Politics colored not only American perceptions. The third edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (trans., New York: Macmillan, 1973) divided "Asia" geographically and politically. Only in the latter breakdown did "Southeast Asia" appear.

⁵⁶Among the many sources and organizations that have adopted this definition are *The CBS News Almanac 1978* (Maplewood NJ: Hammond Almanac, 1977), *The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), and the Association for Asian Studies.

the toponym a western prospect.⁵⁷ But for the time being, a roughly standard usage had — at last — emerged.

Southeast Asian Studies: Three or Four Shifts

In moving from etymology to sociology, from a name to its users, I have tried to show that "Southeast Asia" is at once the product and condition of many forces. The name's interpretation as a region of nations illustrates this point, for that definition both reflected and stimulated parallel trends in Southeast Asian studies: from European to American scholarship, and from anthropology to political science.

Alongside and affected by these shifts of nationality and discipline, academic interests also changed, especially as a rising proportion of the literature came to be written by Southeast Asians, or published in Southeast Asia, or both. This third shift appears to have accelerated the extension of the field from "traditional" into "modern" topics — that is, from history and culture into socioeconomic development. "Modern" interests also implied greater attention to politics in the sense of public policies.

Circumstantial evidence for such a "modernizing" trend can be found in the results of a survey of European, American, and Southeast Asian anthropologists who specialized in the region in whole or in part in 1965–66. According to the survey, the Europeans tended to concentrate on "traditional" topics that could be studied regionally or nationally. Although they too were interested in regional research, the Americans differed from their European colleagues in preferring "modern" subjects, especially if these could be studied nationally. Southeast Asian scholars were even more "American" in this regard, being almost totally absorbed in the study of "modern", national problems.⁵⁸

The notion that American observers have tended to focus on national policy issues is supported by a more recent study, which found that some 90 per cent of U.S. writers on Southeast Asian topics in 1955–80 wrote about only one country in the region. The bulk of this literature fell into two content categories: first, "macro human organization" (defined as "political institutions and the state, national economies and economic development, economic sectors, population, social stratification, law, education, and science"), and next, "supra-national systems" (covering "regional organization, world political position and international organizations, international trade, international alliances, diplomacy, imperialism, and colonialism").⁵⁹

⁵⁷The Philippines tried to promote closer relations between ASEAN and both of these countries in 1976–77, without much success; *Asia 1978 Yearbook* (Hong Kong: Far Eastern Economic Review, 1978), pp. 285, 310. Certainly the vast distance separating Sri Lanka from its nearest Southeast Asian neighbor militates against a westward extension.

⁵⁸Donald J. Tugby, "Ethnological and Allied Research Problems of Southeast Asia", *Current Anthropology* 11 (1970): 53; on the survey itself, see Tugby, "Ethnological and Allied Work on Southeast Asia, 1950–1966", *Current Anthropology* 9 (1968): 185.

⁵⁹Gayl D. Ness and Martha Morrow, "Notes on American Southeast Asian Scholarship 1955–1980", unpublished paper, pp. 6–7, 13, 16. These results gain impact from the fact that Ness and Morrow excluded from their calculations the many single-country pieces published in 1965–1972 on America's involvement in the Second Indochina War. As for the apparent anomaly between the very high percentage of authors who wrote on one Southeast Asian country only and the large share of writings on "supra-national systems", one should keep in mind that a piece on, say, China's relations with Indonesia could have been written by an author none of whose publications was on a Southeast Asian country other than Indonesia. In such a case, while the writer was considered a single-country specialist and counted among the 90 percent, his or her piece on Chinese-Indonesian relations was classified under "supra-national systems".

Much of Southeast Asia's own contribution to Southeast Asian studies falls under these same two headings. In Singapore, the publications and activities of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies reflect an agenda of political and economic topics that are national or international in scope. In Jakarta, the Center for Strategic and International Studies proclaims this orientation in its very name. A more recent example, from Bangkok, is Chulalongkorn University's program in Southeast Asian security studies. I do not mean to underestimate the work being done by autochthonous scholars on historical, cultural, and local topics.⁶⁰ But, on balance, the incorporation of Southeast Asians into Southeast Asian studies has deepened the emphasis on "modern" research — current, politico-economic, and national-policy-preoccupied — established by American writers in the quarter-century after World War II.⁶¹

Although the indigenization of Southeast Asian studies seems likely to continue, it remains to be seen how, in the rest of the present decade, the above-discussed shifts of site, discipline, and topic will interact; whether they will gain or lose momentum; and indeed whether some of them may already have reversed course.

Intriguing in this connection are the trends in American scholarship that David Szanton has been able to identify by analyzing and classifying the 680 Southeast Asia-related dissertation research proposals that were submitted to the Social Science Research Council's prestigious Foreign Area Fellowship Program from 1951 to 1976.⁶²

As my argument would lead one to expect, of the twelve disciplines represented, political science outranked anthropology as the one contributing the most applications in 1951–55, though not by much. In 1956–61, however, anthropology took over first place.

But then the earlier trend reappeared, and proceeded to wax and wane together with U.S. involvement in Vietnam: In 1962–64 (while Washington's Indochinese commitments escalated), political scientists again submitted the most proposals. By 1965–67 (at the height of America's military presence), political science accounted for more than half of all applications received — 29 in that discipline compared to merely five in each of the runner-up fields of history and anthropology — and retained first place in 1968–70 (from the Tet offensive through the invasion of Cambodia and the installation of Lon Nol).

But in 1971–73 (while Washington sought to withdraw without losing face), anthropology took the lead, widening it in 1974–76 (when Washington lost face and Saigon lost period) to 53 applications, more than any discipline had ever submitted, compared to nine each for the next-best-represented fields of history, linguistics, and education, and an all-time low of six from political science. Having submitted nearly a third of all proposals received from 1951 through 1973, political scientists proceeded, by this measure, to abandon the region, accounting for less than six per cent of all

⁶⁰On the interest of some younger indigenous historians in religion, for example, see my "Issues in Southeast Asian History: Room for Interpretation — A Review Article", *Journal of Asian Studies* 40 (1980): 59.

⁶¹According to a Singaporean scholar, for example, the precedence of applied research (on, say, economic development) over less instrumental work (on, say, culture or literature) is "an important constraint" on scholarship in that country; Chia Lin Sien, "Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore", in *A Colloquium on Southeast Asian Studies*, ed. Tunku Shamsul Bahrin et al. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1981), p. 132.

⁶²Szanton, "Southeast Asian Studies in the United States: Towards an Intellectual History", in Bahrin et al., *Colloquium*, pp. 72–87.

applications in 1974–76, while in the latter three years anthropology yielded more than half of all the applications.⁶³

Finally, when Szanton distinguished “applied” or policy-oriented research designs from “basic” proposals meant either to generate knowledge for its own sake or to illuminate a theory, a roughly similar pattern emerged: In 1951–70, “applied” research designs more or less consistently outnumbered “basic” ones, but in 1970–76, the balance shifted decisively in favor of the latter type.

To explain this most recent apparent swing of the pendulum of scholarly fashion in America, one would want to examine the effects on scholarship of changes not only in Washington’s foreign relations but in how different disciplines in the U.S. in the 1970s were understood, structured, and funded. Nor do I mean to infer from Szanton’s limited evidence that Southeast Asian studies in the U.S. have begun to be “Europeanized”, in the sense of retreating from nation- and policy-focused studies of politics and economics toward a more holistic view of the region’s culture and history. Only a tiny fraction of all those applicants in anthropology in 1974–76 were, after all, actually funded, while the recession may have driven many of the rest into jobs unrelated to the region or even to academe.

Nevertheless, if this latest shift is real, I find it intriguing. Perhaps the more qualitative, less instrumental, and more holistic sciences do fare best in metropolises that are noncolonial, as Germany was in relation to nineteenth-century Southeast Asia, or postimperial, as the United States appeared to be in Southeast Asia beginning in the 1970s.

I am also encouraged. For precisely when socioeconomic and political research is so manifestly the name of the academic game being played inside the region,⁶⁴ there seems to me to be a heightened need for studies that look beyond, and even ignore, official policies and national borders.

A Neutral Name: Virtues of Necessity

What “Southeast Asia” denotes is no longer truly controversial. Disagreements over which territories fit under the label and which do not will continue to occur — by negligence or design⁶⁵ — but within the limits of a narrowing range of disagreement. If, in the not too distant future, ASEAN were to go out of existence, its ex-members would almost certainly not cease being “Southeast Asian” in a cartographic sense.

In the long run, of course, anything could happen. Sometime in the twenty-first century, Southeast Asia could be redivided and ruled as a “Soviet Far East” and an “American Far West”, or be pulled apart, through association or annexation, into a combination of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Australian orbits. In the latter event, “Southeast Asia” could disappear into “South Asia”, “East Asia”, and “Oceania”,

⁶³As might be expected, the total number of proposals, including all disciplines, also rose and fell in tandem with America’s Vietnam war.

⁶⁴In this connection, the implications of “development” in ASEAN and of “Marxism-Leninism” in Vietnam are perhaps not so dissimilar as one might wish to think.

⁶⁵Thus, five years after Indonesia’s absorption of eastern Timor, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1981) could still define “Southeast Asia” to include “Portuguese Timor” (but not Burma), while a year later, a Cornell University brochure on its Southeast Asian collection (*The John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia* [Ithaca NY: Cornell University Publications, 1982]) could list “East Timor” alphabetically between Cambodia and Indonesia as the region’s 11th country.

if those names still exist, and if they do not, new ones will have replaced them.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, "Southeast Asia" should prove more stable than the region to which it refers. Unlike the "Near" and "Far East", the name does not betray the location of an outside namer. Because it is not a reminder of dependence, the term is easier for the region's inhabitants to use. The neutrality of the name also benefits specialists; it is easier to be a "Southeast Asianist" than, say, an "Arabist" (which could mean "pro-Arab") or an "Orientalist" (which could mean "procolonial").⁶⁷

"Indochina" and "Indonesia" were anything but neutral. Purcell proposed a more comprehensive neologism, but "Indosinesia" too implied particular cultural debts and loyalties that tainted its candidacy as a name for the region as a whole. In any case, by occupying the area, Japan swept aside such civilization-specific amalgams in favor of a military-political solution — which SEAC implemented.

If "Assuva" did originally mean "allies" or "friends", that turned out to be prophetic, for the Allies who reconquered "Southeast Assuva" from Japan were inclined to settle on a general term for the region that did not reassert the partial conception of one metropole over that of another. Reflecting as it did a joint military enterprise, the name "Southeast Asia" had to be neutral. In the light of later efforts to reparcel the area, that necessity turned out to be a virtue.

Apart from being neutral, "Southeast Asia" remains a conveniently residual category. In principle, anything south of China and east of India could belong to it. In this

⁶⁶If such speculations seem extreme, consider whether "Southeast Asia" would have survived World War II had Japan won that conflict and managed to institutionalize its "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere". Rather than locating an area south of one landmass and east of another, the region's postwar English name could have become "Southern Ocean" (*Nanyo*) in deference to Japan's maritime viewpoint. See my "Case for a Maritime Perspective on Southeast Asia", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11 (1980): 142. The possibility that "Southeast Asia" could be upstaged by other names is also illustrated by the history of the one-word toponym, "Eastasia". In his famous novel, *1984* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), George Orwell divided the world of what was then the future into three warring power blocs: "Oceania" (the novel's locale), "Eurasia", and "Eastasia". Made up of "China and the countries to the south of it", the Japanese archipelago, and "a large but fluctuating portion" of Manchuria, Mongolia, and Tibet, "Eastasia" was described as drawing its strength from "the fecundity and industriousness of its inhabitants" (pp. 186–87). Three decades after Orwell, and even more impressed than he with Asian industriousness, Roy Hofheinz, Jr. and Kent E. Calder wrote a work of nonfiction, *The Eastasia Edge* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), in which "Eastasia" is redefined to include only China (PRC/ROC), Hong Kong, Japan, Korea (DPRK/ROK), and Singapore: "the Chinese-culture area of the western Pacific" (p. vii). Along with the tendency of Western journalists in the late 1970s and early 1980s to refer to Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan as neo-Confucian "Little Dragons" or economic "New Japans", Hofheinz and Calder's revamping and advocacy of the name "Eastasia" on cultural and economic grounds suggests that the integrity of "Southeast Asia" as a set of ten countries with enough in common to warrant a single rubric will never be completely safe from the passing fancies of foreign neologists, least of all those who live in a mass-media culture powerful enough to circulate their inventions around the world. (For more on the "Little Dragons" and the "New Japans", see my *Pacific Optimism*, Part I: *America after Vietnam: Confidence Regained* [Hanover NH: Universities Field Staff International, 1982].) Not that "Southeast Asia" has much to worry about in this case. For the specialized, politically disparate, and spatially dispersed character of "Eastasia", and the still patently metaphorical ring of "Little Dragons" and "New Japans", combined with the volatility of intellectual fashions in the West, seem certain to keep these would-be toponyms out of the gazetteer.

⁶⁷Overreacting, I think, to Edward Said's polemical *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), Bernard Lewis ("The Question of Orientalism", *New York Review of Books* 29 [24 June 1982]: 49) has decried these changes in connotation as "word pollution". A neo-Marxist, on the other hand — less defensively than Lewis, and certainly more in tune with Humpty Dumpty — could read into the reconstruing of "Orientalism" not semantic defilement but a historically normal struggle for control over the means of symbolic production.

flexibility lies strength. If Burma were someday reclassified into "South Asia", for example, "Southeast Asia" would be diminished, but not destroyed. The fact that "Southeast Asia" is derived from no one of its members' identities protects the name from damage by defection.

Being residual also simplifies recruitment. There is no linguistic reason why Taiwan could not be considered part of "Southeast Asia". As noted, an ethnological case in favor of doing so has already been made. The problem is political: One cannot know what is south of China without defining "China". The island and the mainland would first have to abandon their pretensions to one another.

Region-Making: Some Obstacles

Artificiality has its advantages. But emotional appeal is not one of them. A residual category that fills space on a map may have trouble competing with deeper — ethnic or religious — referents for space in the minds of people. The future history of "Southeast Asia" will show whether an externally defined region can become meaningful to its inhabitants.

On this subject, I am agnostic. Independent nation-states have been both bridges and barriers to regional identity. They answered the map-maker's question: How should I *delineate* "Southeast Asia"? They made it possible for regional unity to become an indigenous decision.

But insofar as nation-states demanded exclusive loyalties from their citizens, they exacerbated the region-maker's problem: How can I *create* Southeast Asia? Furthermore, the acquisition and entrenchment of separate national identities opened the region to neocolonial versions of the outsiders' game of divide and rule.

ASEAN illustrates the capacity of nationalism simultaneously to enable and retard regional unity. On the one hand, the Association has managed to retain as members half of the ten entities that make up "Southeast Asia" on the map. If an independent Brunei joins, ASEAN will have a majority. Of 374 million Southeast Asians, 270 million or 72 percent already live in ASEAN countries,⁶⁸ and the Association has not ruled out prospective membership for Burma or the Indochinese nations.

On the other hand, ASEAN appears to have reached the limits implied by what its five members have in common — a "capitalist-anticommunist" orientation that differs from Burma's "socialist-neutralist" option and especially from the "communist-anti-capitalist" stance of Indochina. The longer the five countries remain a subregional political bloc, opposed by Indochina, the harder it will be to think of Southeast Asia as something more than the middle three letters in ASEAN's name.⁶⁹

Nor will a normalization of Vietnam's relations with China necessarily improve this situation. By abetting suspicions that Vietnam is culturally and ideologically too

⁶⁸ *Asia 1983 Yearbook* (Hong Kong: Far Eastern Economic Review, 1983), pp. 6–7.

⁶⁹ Illustrating this ASEAN-related tendency to think of "Southeast Asia" as something other than "Indochina" is *World View* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), the English-language version of a French political almanac (*L'état du monde* [Paris: Maspéro, 1982]), which revives "Indochina" in its pre-World-War-II European meaning of the entire mainland area between India and China (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma), and opposes that toponym to a "Southeast Asia" comprising the ASEAN countries plus Brunei, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Three factors appear to be at work in this case: French pride in a unicorn ("Indochina") of their own invention, French unwillingness to submit to the conventions of English-speakers, and a decision to sharpen the contrast between the two names by defining "Southeast Asia" in maritime terms as all those countries (except for Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and China) that border the South China Sea.

"northern" to be part of "Southeast Asia", such a development could actually enlarge the gap between ASEAN's and Indochina's identities, especially if Indonesia has not in the meantime repaired its own relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

In addition, apart from facilitating the cooptation of a regional name by a subregional bloc, the triumph of political exclusiveness over cultural ambiguity has undercut the legitimacy of placing Vietnam simultaneously in "East" and "Southeast Asia". Unlike civilizations, sovereignties are not supposed to overlap.⁷⁰

Yet another dimension of this problem is the isolation of decision-makers in Hanoi. Since World War II, technological advances have shrunk the region by multiplying and speeding flows of people, goods, and information. Yet the rest of Southeast Asia remains almost wholly unfamiliar to most of Vietnam's leaders, preoccupied as they have been for so long with the making of war in Indochina. If the capitalistic lifestyle of Saigon surprised its northern conquerors, and continues to frustrate their effort to socialize the south, imagine how they would react to a city like Bangkok or Singapore. Militarily, Vietnam may be ready for — indeed, superior to — ASEAN; but in economic and cultural terms, from ASEAN's standpoint, militantly austere Hanoi might as well be on the moon.

Vietnam's seclusion is not entirely self-imposed. Nor should it be overdrawn. With official encouragement, for example, Vietnamese prehistorians have been laboring with remarkable energy, considering the economic constraints, to reconstruct Dong Son culture as a major source of Viet identity in a non-Sinic, that is, "Southeast Asian", sense.⁷¹ Vietnam's dispute with China provides a political incentive to conduct archeology of this particular kind, but that fact does not make the effort any less interesting to a student of the region's future identity. Hanoi's apparent desire to emphasize the southern as opposed to the northern affinities in its past does not, however, in my judgment, represent a major initiative to build bridges to ASEAN.

Once Vietnamese scholars begin lavishing on the central and southern sites of Champa and Funan the kind of attention they have devoted to the more northerly repositories of Dong Son civilization, that assessment may have to be changed. Dong Son's claim to regional significance is largely circumstantial, resting as it does on the wide distribution of the bronze drums that so fascinated German scholars in the nineteenth century. Funan and Champa, on the other hand, could be used to associate Vietnam more directly with the "Malayo-Muslim-maritime" character of so many of insular Southeast Asia's polities and cultures.

Pending the implementation of such a research agenda, one can speculate that the Vietnamese may be reluctant to face the implications of their protracted southward

⁷⁰Even if agreement can be reached that Vietnam is simultaneously "East" and "Southeast Asian", observers will still be able to differ over which label deserves priority. On the "Southeast Asian" side of the latter debate, for example, stands John K. Whitmore, an anthropologically-oriented historian who argues that only in the 19th century did the Chinese model fully override the original flexibility and "looseness" — that is, the "Southeast Asianness" — of earlier Vietnamese society. Therefore, he concludes, "we must study Vietnam in Southeast Asian terms first, and only then from an East Asian perspective"; John K. Whitmore, "Confucian Thought and Social Organization in Vietnam", paper submitted to the Association for Asian Studies' annual meeting, March 1983, p. 12.

⁷¹For evidence, compare Jeremy H.C.S. Davidson, "Archaeology in Northern Việt-Nam since 1954" and "Archaeology in Southern Việt-Nam since 1954", in R.B. Smith and W. Watson, eds., *Early South East Asia: Essays in Archaeology, History and Historical Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 98–124 and 215–22, respectively. See also the article by the Vice-Director of the Vietnam Social Sciences Committee's Department for Southeast Asian Study, Pham Duc Duong, "How Southeast Asia is Studied in Vietnam", *Vietnam Courier* 4 (1982): 14–15.

movement against the descendants of the peoples of Champa and Funan — implications that still disquiet those members of ASEAN who fear having to bear the brunt of another such push in the future, and which could be used by the PRC to embellish its picture of Vietnam as “still” hegemonic.⁷²

Meanwhile, one could argue that the division of the region is in fact opportune. As a goal worth achieving, Southeast Asia’s unity may be as spurious as the unity of Pakistan was before Bangladesh seceded in 1971. Nations come and go — why shouldn’t regions? If it incorporates incompatible elements, expansion could doom ASEAN, and Southeast Asians in general could be worse off than when at least some of their governments were able to cooperate. “Southeast Asia” is only a name. Shouldn’t reality matter more?

Fair enough. The question is: Whose reality? Consider Indochina’s. Peace and stability are necessary, though not sufficient, conditions of welfare, and that is something a great many ordinary Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese desperately need. They are unlikely to get it so long as ASEAN’s “front-line-state” confronts Vietnam along the Thai-Cambodian border. Conversely, some sort of accommodation with Vietnam seems to me to be a necessary if insufficient condition of ASEAN’s own security in the long run.

It is for such practical reasons that I favor regional cooperation, not only in political and economic realms but intellectually as well. On the latter score alone, much more could be done. The founders of ASEAN made the cultivation of Southeast Asian studies one of the organization’s major goals.⁷³ But the Association has implemented that mandate more by circulating information about itself than by encouraging scholars in its five member countries to work with colleagues in Indochina — not to mention another outlier, Burma — to study the region as a whole.

⁷²The relative neglect of central and southern sites may also reflect their more recent incorporation into Hanoi’s jurisdiction, the unimportance of investigating them compared to mobilizing and feeding the southern population, and the difficulty of using them as bridges to ASEAN while Vietnamese intentions in Cambodia remain controversial. Among Chinese denunciations of Vietnamese “aggression and expansion”, see, for example, Wang Dadao, “Kampuchean Problem: Not a China-Viet Nam Issue”, *Beijing Review* 27 (4 July 1983): 10. Not that Vietnam is the only Southeast Asian nation subject to such charges. When Vietnamese troops moved towards Phnom Penh in December 1978, one of several options considered by the Thai military was to occupy western Cambodia; Frederic A. Moritz, “‘Domino Theory’ Fanned by Viet Cambodia Drive”, *Christian Science Monitor* (13 Dec. 1978), p. 3. That alternative was rejected, and Thailand has since followed a mainly defensive policy against Vietnam. Should mainland Southeast Asia in decades to come fall prey to a larger-scale war, however, it is not impossible to imagine Bangkok reacquiring territory lost to Indochina in the wake of World War II. I make this point not to be apocalyptic, but to note that although the general shape of “Southeast Asia” has been reached, agreement on some international borders has not, while the location of others could change. (See Lee Yong Leng, *The Razor’s Edge: Boundaries and Boundary Disputes in Southeast Asia* [Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980].) The future is, to say the least, unclear: Extrapolating present efforts to extend and demarcate national sovereignty off shore, one can picture the Tonkin Gulf and the South China Sea as blanks to be filled in and fought over in the late 20th and early 21st century, when the land boundary between “East Asia” and “Southeast Asia” will be completed at sea. But one can also imagine a post-petroleum world in which aircraft and satellites have superseded ships as means of transport and communication, in which case there would be less reason to contest sea-space, and the maritime boundary between “East” and “Southeast Asia” could be left conveniently undrawn.

⁷³“The ASEAN Declaration”, August 1967, in Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Regionalism in Southeast Asia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Proklamasi, 1975), p. 173. Encouraging scholarship on Southeast Asia had also been a major aim of ASA; Gordon, “Indonesian Expansionism”, p. 508. On the paucity of research and education cross-nationally within ASEAN, see, in Bahrin et al., *Colloquium*, Harsja W. Bachtar on Indonesia (pp. 90–95); Tunku Shamsul Bahrin on Malaysia (pp. 98, 100); Patrocínio D. Isleta and Milagros R. Espinas on the Philippines (p. 116); Chia Lin Sien on Singapore (pp. 132–33); Sombat Chantornvong and Thak Chaloemtiarana on Thailand (pp. 172–73, 178, 181).

These circumstances are saddening. For unless ASEAN and Indochina gain a stake in interacting peacefully with each other to further joint interests, the promise of "Southeast Asia" as something more than a cartographic category will not be fulfilled.

Rose-growing: What Scholars Could Do

I began by picturing Southeast Asia as a cross between a unicorn and a rose — partly imaginary, partly real. Is there anything that scholars can do to encourage the reality?

Compared to governments, not much. But I want to conclude by reiterating my concern that Southeast Asian studies, especially in Southeast Asia, have become too "modern" in the sense of being politically focused and limited. It is time, I think, to revive and update the "traditional" anthropological holism that first enabled European writers to imagine seeing a unicorn out there in the wilderness next to China and India.

I do not mean to suggest that "neotraditional" scholarship can discover a cultural synthesis on whose basis Southeast Asia will be unified. The region may never become that kind of rose. My aim is rather to help indigenous scholars increase understanding and reduce mistrust by getting out from under the imprint of the nation-state — for example, through collaborative research on Southeast Asian topics that are nonpolitical, crosscultural, and sub- or supra-national.

For, ultimately, the question is not whether regional unity is a fiction. The question is how to make the fiction useful enough to become true. And if that be wishful thinking, it is at least consistent with the extraordinary history of a name that preceded and helped to bring about the reality to which it now refers.