THE STATE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

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Given the virtual absence of any academic programs on Southeast Asia in the United States prior to World War II, the development of international and area studies in the 1950s and 1960s increased tremendously the numbers of faculty members, students, and university programs with a focus on the region. By the late 1960s, there were Southeast Asia centers at seven or eight American universities, over 500 Southeast Asia specialists in the United States (Tilman, 1969a), and general optimism about the continued development of the field.¹ This state of affairs was not limited to Southeast Asian studies; two decades of expansion in higher education had led to favorable prospects for academic careers and more funding for graduate study in most areas and disciplines.

Two decades later, all of higher education appears to be in decline. A slowing of the rise of college enrollment, a tight labor market for new Ph.D.'s, a long period of national economic sluggishness, and limited governmental budgets have pinched almost everyone's toes. How bad has it been for Southeast Asian studies? In this paper, I attempt a preliminary assessment of this question, and try to analyze some of the reasons for the hard times experienced by Southeast Asian studies (and more generally, all area studies of peripheral regions) in American universities in the 1970s and 1980s.

THE NUMBER OF SOUTHEAST ASIANISTS

Any count of specialists in Southeast Asia presumes a definition of the qualifications to be counted as a scholar of the region. There is

¹ There was, of course, a national movement against American intervention in Vietnam, which coincided with the expansion of academic programs of Southeast Asian studies. This did create a broader interest in Southeast Asian studies among some students, but the origins of the rapid development of the field predated the late 1960s.
no agreement on this issue. Does authorship of a published article on a country in the region suffice, or must a specialist also know the national language (how much is enough) and teach courses on the area? Most efforts to count scholars have adopted simple criteria that could be measured without too much subjective judgment.

In his 1968 survey of Southeast Asia specialists, Tilman (1969a:viii) sent questionnaires to a large mailing list of "individuals and institutions throughout the world thought to be concerned with Southeast Asia." From those who responded and identified themselves as Southeast Asia specialists, Tilman counted 950 individuals, of whom 504 were from the United States. A different method, but relying on the same principle, is to count the members of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) who identify their region of interest as Southeast Asia or one of the ten countries in the region. Self-identification might contain an overcount by the inclusion of those who have only a slight interest and/or knowledge of the region. There is also certain to be an undercount of those who are not members of the AAS, but are active scholars of the region. Gosling (1991:38) reports that AAS membership includes about 80 percent of Asia specialists in the United States. Perhaps the major limitation of a count based on self-identification or membership lists is that there is not a distinction of relative contribution to the field.

In a rather ambitious effort, Ness (1984:27-28) attempted to count the number of Southeast Asia specialists by their writings. He compiled a list of those who published or presented papers on Southeast Asian topics, as indexed in the Bibliographies of Asian Studies, published by the AAS, and other sources. There is no certainty about the number obtained by this method, however. For example, this method yielded a total number of 959 Southeast Asia specialists in the United States for the period 1975-80. But Ness narrowed this figure by excluding conference papers to get a revised estimate of 595 specialists. Then, this list of names was reviewed by a panel of knowledgeable scholars for the National Council of Foreign Languages and International Studies (Kassof 1981) and reduced to 402 Southeast Asia specialists "who we considered were producing what we could call new information on the region" (Ness 1984:28). With such wide variations in estimates, there is little certainty of any precise number of Southeast Asian scholars in the United States.

What is most useful is the trend in numbers based on a common criterion. To my knowledge, the only really comparable time series data are counts based on membership in the AAS. According to this source, the numbers of Southeast Asia scholars were 713 in 1978, 710 in 1983, and 630 in 1988 (Ness 1984:27; Association for Asian Studies 1988). If the count is limited to those living in the United States, the numbers are 610 in 1978, 539 in 1983, and 528 in 1988. Incidentally, overall membership in the AAS grew from 5046 in 1983 to 6294 in 1988 (Association for Asian Studies 1989). Thus, while overall membership in the AAS has been growing, the number of AAS members with a professed interest in Southeast Asia has been declining.

By almost any standard, these figures are a bit alarming. There is a very thin academic base of scholars in the United States with any interest in or knowledge of Southeast Asia. The minuscule number of Southeast Asianists appears to have declined over the 1980s. Even more alarming are the numbers who claim a specialization for specific Southeast Asian countries. The 1988 AAS directory lists fewer than ten members with primary interest in a number of specific Southeast Asian countries: for example, Singapore (8), Laos (9), Cambodia (9), and Brunei (2). The numbers are only in the low two digits for Burma (31), Malaysia (44), and Vietnam (39), although another 16 identified their interest in Indochina. If additional qualifications of language proficiency and active scholarship were considered, I expect the situation would appear to be even more bleak.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Beginning with the earliest Southeast Asia programs at Yale and Cornell in the 1950s, a number of universities have initiated interdisciplinary programs or centers focused on the region over the last four decades. Until recently, only eight universities maintained a set of courses on Southeast Asia, offered instruction in some of the regional languages, and tried to develop a library collection (University of California-Berkeley, Cornell University, University of Hawaii, University of Michigan, Northern Illinois University, Ohio University, University of Wisconsin, and Yale University). In the last few years, three new university centers have been established at Arizona State University, the University of Oregon, and the University of Washington (the latter two as part of the Northwest Regional Consortium for Southeast Asia Studies, which includes the University of British Columbia in Canada).

A larger base of university interest in the area can be measured through other indicators. The current list of universities which pay a subscription to be affiliated with the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute (SEASSI) includes the above institutions plus the
University of Illinois/Champaign-Urbana and the University of Kentucky. The 1988 Association for Asian Studies Membership Directory includes a listing of Asian studies institutes, programs, and centers. While some university programs may be omitted from this list, self-nomination insures that any program can be included regardless of the level of activity. Under the Southeast Asia heading in the AAS institutional listing (counting only American academic institutions), there are an additional 16 colleges and universities that claim to have Southeast Asia programs (in addition to the 13 noted above). Some of these programs are fairly minor; the list includes Pacific Rim Studies at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage and the Asia and Asian Studies Department at Laney College in Oakland.

In addition to the 29 colleges and universities with identified programs, dozens of other institutions have faculty members who teach courses on Southeast Asia. In my judgment, a reasonable guess is that 100 institutions of higher education in the United States occasionally offer courses on Southeast Asia. Recall that Ness estimated there were about 400 productive American scholars in the late 1970s. The 1988 AAS Membership Directory included 528 members with Southeast Asian area identification who lived in the United States. Of the approximately 400 to 500 area specialists living in the United States, a fair number are graduate students, retired, or employed in nonacademic institutions. Many others may be on university faculties, but not teach courses on the region (sociologists and economists rarely teach courses on areas of the world). Of course, the eleven major centers have a disproportionate share of the most active Southeast Asia scholars. All in all, I think the estimate of 100 institutions offering courses by Southeast Asia specialists is a fairly generous one.

In 1989, more than 12 million students were enrolled at more than 3,400 institutions of higher education in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:149). Even if we double or triple the estimate of 100 institutions offering any courses on Southeast Asia, the conclusion remains the same. At the overwhelming majority—upwards of 90 percent—of universities and colleges, Southeast Asia is completely invisible. Perhaps this is an overstatement. There are books on Southeast Asia in most libraries, and on a growing number of campuses there are courses on the Vietnam War, albeit typically limited to the American experience in Vietnam. Nonetheless, the minimal presence of Southeast Asia specialists and courses at most universities precludes the choice to learn, formally or informally, about a significant world region that has (or soon will have) the demographic magnitude of Europe.

GRADUATE STUDENTS AND GRADUATE EDUCATION

The growth of Southeast Asian studies in the 1950s and 1960s also led to a parallel expansion in the number of graduate students in the field. Of course, starting from a base of almost zero, any growth seems tremendous. Compilations of the numbers of doctoral dissertations show rapid growth in the 1950s and 1960s, but a leveling off in the late 1970s and 1980s (The and van den Veur 1968; Shulman 1979; Shulman 1984). In the early phase of growth, most Ph.D.’s with a specialization in Southeast Asia were in the traditional liberal arts (history, political science, anthropology) and were recruited to teach on international and Asian subjects in American universities. While undoubtedly exceptional, the early career of Professor Norman Parmer represents the era of growth in Southeast Asian studies. Parmer was one of the very first American academics to specialize in Malaysia (then Malaya). Within a decade after receiving his doctorate in history from Cornell (1957), Parmer founded the Southeast Asia Center at Northern Illinois University, served as country director for the first contingent of Peace Corps volunteers in Malaya, and then founded another Southeast Asia Center at Ohio University.

By the 1970s, university growth had slowed and a Ph.D. was no longer a firm guarantee of an academic career. But graduate programs in Southeast Asian studies had another constituency that was growing as American recruits waned—namely students from Southeast Asia. In fact, the majority of Ph.D. dissertations on Southeast Asia in American universities are now awarded to Southeast Asian students. From 1976 to 1982, there were 200 to 220 dissertations on Southeast Asia produced per year at American universities; only a bit more than one-third were written by Americans (Shulman 1984:78).

An implication of the previous section on the small fraction of American universities with any academic base in Southeast Asia is that few graduate students in the leading research universities are exposed to the possibility of specializing on the area. While it is possible for graduate students to conduct their doctoral research on Southeast Asia in an institution with few resources on the region, this is unlikely except for those with a prior interest in the area (e.g., students from the region). Among leading American universities with Southeast Asia programs, Cornell University is clearly
dominant. Shulman's (1984:79) compilation of doctoral dissertations on Southeast Asia from 1976 to 1982 shows that Cornell University produced more Ph.D.'s on Southeast Asia than any other American university, including ten percent of all Americans who wrote dissertations on Southeast Asia over those years.

Not only has Cornell led in the number of Ph.D.'s produced, but the alumni of Cornell's Southeast Asia Program (SEAP) have played critical roles in starting and leading Southeast Asia centers at other universities in the United States and abroad (Feith 1986), so the changing character of Cornell's graduate program over the last four decades is of special importance. The availability of a SEAP directory of Cornell doctorates with a Southeast Asia specialization from 1951 to 1988 offers an instructive glimpse (Southeast Asia Program 1987) of the development of the field.

Almost 250 Ph.D.'s have been awarded to Cornell graduate students with an interest in Southeast Asia over the years from 1951 to 1988 (based on the data in the directory and the addenda and errata pages). While there are year-to-year fluctuations, there are four relatively distinct eras over the entire period, in terms of the numbers and disciplinary mix of Ph.D.'s. The first era spanned the 1950s, when Southeast Asian studies was in its infancy, both nationally and at Cornell. About two to three doctorates were awarded per year from 1951 to 1959 (with some year-to-year fluctuations; ten were awarded in 1957—an exceptional year). The largest single number was in anthropology, and most of the rest were in government and rural sociology, with a sprinkling in history, sociology, and linguistics. The second era—the first half of the 1960s (1960-66)—saw a major expansion to an average of almost six Ph.D.'s per year. Most of this growth took place in government with anthropology a close second.

The real heyday of Cornell's Southeast Asia Program, as indexed by the number of doctorates, was from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. During the twelve years from 1967 through 1977, an average of ten Ph.D.'s were awarded per year. History became the leading discipline during this era, followed closely by government, anthropology, and linguistics. In the most recent era, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, the number has fallen to about six to seven Ph.D.'s per year. The greatest declines in Ph.D. production occurred in government, history, and linguistics. Anthropology remains the major discipline for Cornell Ph.D.'s in Southeast Asian studies, followed by rural sociology and history. Throughout the entire period, graduate students from Southeast Asia have comprised a significant component of Cornell's graduate program, but they have come to represent a larger share of the total as the number of Americans receiving doctorates has declined.

The decline of Cornell's graduate program in Southeast Asian studies in the late 1970s and 1980s is part of a national pattern. While my analysis of the causes of the decline will be presented later in this paper, my hunch is that the ultimate reasons have much less to do with Southeast Asian studies as a field of study than with overall trends in higher education and the position of area studies of "peripheral world areas."

AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP ON SOUTHEAST ASIA

Any evaluation of the health of the field should cover not only the numbers of scholars and institutions, but also the quantity and quality of published scholarship. Clearly that task is beyond the scope of my present paper, but I do have some general comments. Perhaps most fundamental is the observation most forcefully expressed by Anderson (1984) that much of the most significant scholarship on Southeast Asia is now being written by Southeast Asian academics often in national languages. While his conclusion was based on the field of political science, the statement probably holds in most fields. American scholars who do not have access to the recent literature published on the region and/or the ability to read the relevant national languages are at a serious disadvantage.

A conspicuous aspect of the field is that there is no major journal on Southeast Asian studies, as a whole, published in the United States. There was a journal entitled Southeast Asia which has ceased publication. Crossroads, an interdisciplinary journal of Southeast Asian studies, is published by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University, but its publication schedule has not been continuous in recent years. There are a number of useful journals on specific countries: The Vietnam Forum (published by the Council on Southeast Asian Studies at Yale), Pilipinas (published by the Philippine Studies Group of the AAS), and Indonesia (published by the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell). With the exception of
I do not think any of these journals has had a broad effect on the field as a whole.

The most prestigious interdisciplinary journals for English language scholarship on Southeast Asia are, in my opinion, the *Journal of Asian Studies* (the official journal of the AAS), *Pacific Affairs* (published by the University of British Columbia in Canada), and the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (published by the National University of Singapore). Since the first two journals cover all of Asia, the proportion of articles on Southeast Asia is fairly modest. I examined the number of articles in the *Journal of Asian Studies* (JAS) from 1972 to 1989 by topic and location of author. Over these 17 volumes of JAS, about 17 percent of all articles were on Southeast Asian topics, and the majority of these (12 percent) were written by persons with an academic affiliation in the United States. There was no clear trend in these percentages over this period. Perhaps the location of JAS in the United States gives American-based authors an edge. A better test of the role of American academics might be in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (JSEAS), which is published in Singapore and in which, by definition, all articles focus on the region.

To evaluate the possible change in the role of American academics in the field, I counted all the articles published in the first 20 volumes of JSEAS and the number published by scholars listing an American academic affiliation. Of the 349 articles published in the 40 issues over 20 years, 29 percent or 102 articles were authored by American academics. While there is wide fluctuation from year to year, there is not a consistent trend over time. Dividing the 20 volumes into four, five-year periods, the percentages of American authorship are 27%, 25%, 34%, and 29%. The higher figures of American authorship for the 1980s may have been inflated by a few special issues, but I do not see any evidence of a marked trend. I had expected a downward trend with the rise in the number of Southeast Asian scholars, and the relative, if not absolute decline of American Southeast Asianists. Perhaps the many alternative publication outlets in Southeast Asia (there are dozens of new scholarly journals in every country) and the relative paucity of Southeast Asian area studies journals in the United States have kept the ratio of American authorship constant.

Another distinctive feature of the current period is the general absence of textbooks on Southeast Asia for university students. A number of books survey individual countries and a small, but growing number of specialized monographs address specific topics (the annual catalog prepared for the Southeast Asian Centers Joint Book Exhibit at the annual meetings of the AAS is an excellent reference). The newly revised edition of the Steinberg et al. (1987; first edition 1971) *In Search of Southeast Asia* is a notable exception. Two decades ago there were anthologies such as Tilman's (1969b) *Man, State, and Society in Contemporary Southeast Asia* and George Kahin's excellent edited collection, *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia* (first edition, 1959; second edition, 1964). While the reduced market for such books may be part of the reason for the decline in the publication of popular texts, I suspect that the real problem lies deeper in the overall weakness of the field.

All of these indicators may suggest a topic that we are loath to confront, namely, the possibility that the field has not only suffered a loss of numbers, but perhaps a decline in quality as well. Again, I do not wish to suggest that Southeast Asia is unique in this regard. The 1970s and 1980s were hard on all academic fields. I suspect that the decline in graduate school enrollments was bound up with a disinclination among the most able and talented students of this era to pursue academic careers.

The works by scholars of our region which seem to have found a wide and appreciative audience outside the area studies community are those by Clifford Geertz, Tony Reid, Ben Anderson, Jim Scott, Stanley Tambiah, and a few others. I worry that the scholarly accomplishments of the next generation of American Southeast Asia scholars will not equal, let alone surpass, the contributions of the pioneers of the field. I hope that I am wrong.

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4 The institutional affiliation of each author is listed on the back cover of each issue of JSEAS. In the case of jointly authored articles, I assigned the affiliation of the first named author (only rarely did this matter).

5 Interestingly, there were almost as many articles by academics in Australia and New Zealand as American scholars (the cumulative numbers were 90 and 102, respectively). Australia and New Zealand have a combined population of less than one-tenth that of the United States, and probably proportionally fewer academics. Of course, Southeast Asia is as close to Australia and New Zealand as the Caribbean is to the United States.
this interpretation, the government's policies stimulated the field by pouring dollars into the field and also by raising the consciousness of the college students who were opposed to the war. Both of these factors helped to create a new generation of scholars of Southeast Asian studies who entered graduate school in the 1960s and early 1970s. When the government was no longer interested in the region after 1975, and Vietnam dropped from the front page into obscurity in the eyes of most Americans, the field of Southeast Asian studies went into a tailspin from which it has yet to recover.

For those of us who have lived through the last twenty-five years, this interpretation has the ring of apparent truth. The sequence of events is correct, and the mid-1970s is the turning point from expansion to decline. But I doubt that American policies in Southeast Asia or the war directly caused the American academic base of Southeast Asian studies to decline. I suggest that the causes of the earlier expansion and later decline are far broader and more deeply rooted in the decline of American empire, the funding of higher education, and the position of area studies in the American universities. While Southeast Asian studies has probably suffered more than other areas, this is probably related more to the peripheral or marginal status of the field, even at the high point of its expansion, than to the unique geopolitical history of our field.

While billions of dollars of public funds were expended on the foreign and domestic fronts to prop up the credibility and survival of the South Vietnam regime and associated United States activities in Southeast Asia, my guess is that relatively little of this was spent on building Southeast Asian studies programs at American universities. There may have been attempts to support Southeast Asia scholars to bolster official American political views during this era, but I doubt that such a policy was either widespread or effective. Since most faculty and graduate students with any knowledge of Southeast Asia actively opposed American policy, often in very visible roles in the antiwar movement, this would have been a dubious strategy even for the muddled minds that made official policy during that era.

There was, however, a built-in momentum of expansion for higher education, including area studies programs of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The embarrassing lack of domestic knowledge of most of the world, with the exception of Europe, was evident to national leaders in the early post-World War II era. Led by support from the foundations, especially the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, there were efforts to create and strengthen interdisciplinary area studies programs on American campuses in the 1950s. Following the Soviet Union's successful launch of Sputnik in 1957, the federal government got on the education bandwagon and dramatically expanded funding for science and all sorts of educational programs. Area studies was included as a funding priority for higher education. While the amounts were probably small relative to everything else, they did fuel growth in academic programs for area studies, including Southeast Asian studies. The funding provided for graduate student fellowships and some faculty positions.

During this period of economic and academic expansion, the expectation was that growth would not end. Although economic growth had not been continuous over the postwar era, the overall trend had been upward. By the mid to late 1960s, most liberal economists thought that federal fine-tuning would avoid future recessions, and government spending would be the main resource to cure all society's ills. Across the wide range of political opinions during those times, there was shared optimism that money and resources were not a major restraint on achieving any national goal. This included the continued growth of university area studies programs.

For everyone in higher education, the 1970s was an era of slow growth, if not an actual regression. From the vantage point of 1990, however, the 1970s appear to have been very good relative to what followed in the 1980s. The shared optimism of the 1960s about the prospects for area studies had become unrealistic myopia in the 1980s. What happened? In brief, the American empire ended in the early 1970s, perhaps earlier. A series of recessions in the 1970s and early 1980s left the country, and the federal government, unable to pay for the upward spiral of military and social spending that was promised or expected. In the struggle for the available federal funds, there were a few big winners and many losers. Higher education did not fare well.

From 1970 to 1985, the number of students in higher education grew from 8.5 to 12.2 million, but this growth was disproportionately among students in two-year colleges, part-time students, and most of it occurred prior to 1980 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:148). Among the instructional staff of colleges and universities with the rank of instructor or above, the percentage employed full-time declined from 78 to 64 from 1970 to 1985 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:148). In constant dollars, the average salary of a full professor in either a public or private university was less in 1987 than it was in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:155, 462). Taking all university revenues as a ratio to the number of
enrolled students, per capita resources (in constant dollars) are up a bit in the 1980s relative to the 1970s, but this is due to higher revenues from tuition and state funding which offset the decline in the federal contribution (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:148, 462).

These changes, plus a saturated labor market in academia, lowered the incentives for bright undergraduates to pursue doctoral studies. Over the 1970s and 1980s, the number of students receiving professional degrees increased substantially, while the production of doctorates has held about steady (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:157-58). There has been, however, a substantial shift in the composition of graduate students and those receiving doctorates. The proportion of foreign students has certainly increased, although many of these remain in the United States and available for academic positions (the absolute number of foreign students enrolled in American universities doubled from 1976 to 1987 [U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:152]). Since 1975, there have been sharp declines in the numbers receiving doctorates in some fields, including the social sciences and foreign languages (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989:157).

When hard times hit any sector, those activities deemed nonessential are likely to go. While universities may be institutions with more inertia than most, the pressures are the same. When deans and other administrators weigh what they consider most important—money, enrollment, or national prestige—area studies are not likely to be on the priority list for expansion. In the current situation, maintenance of current resources is usually the most that can be hoped. From my knowledge of the situation at the leading centers of Southeast Asian studies, even this minimal goal of maintaining the status quo has not always been successful.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE GRIP OF IMPERIAL DISCIPLINES

Southeast Asian studies shares the structural dilemma of all university interdisciplinary programs, including area studies programs. Interdisciplinary programs can take two possible structural forms. One possibility is to give programs autonomy to organize in departmental-like units with their own budgets and the power to hire and promote faculty. There are a few examples in the United States (e.g., the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington), but these are relatively rare. Far more area studies programs are organized as secondary affiliations among faculty members having their primary appointments in disciplinary departments. The interdisciplinary centers often have teaching programs, seminar series, and considerable intellectual vitality. As "voluntary" associations, the strength of these interdisciplinary centers is typically dependent on outside (nonuniversity) funding and the energies of individual faculty members. What they lack is the ability to appoint new faculty or to influence directly the promotion of faculty.

The reasons for this structural arrangement are well known. Disciplines are part of national, even international, systems of scholarship. Even with considerable internal diversity, disciplines are usually able to organize a curriculum, measure the "quality" of research, and organize labor markets for graduates. It seems that these attributes are not necessarily inherent in the way that knowledge is currently subdivided, but rather simply a product of the fact that the current set of disciplines is reproduced, more or less, at every university. Academic journals, professional organizations, and peer communities reflect these structural arrangements. Variations in this structural arrangement are hard to maintain. Relatively few joint anthropology-sociology departments still survive, and those that do have divided the internal turf to avoid continuous arguments. Efforts to create new academic units of ethnic and women's studies have experienced extreme difficulty in resolving the basic question of who makes appointments and recommends promotions.

Ideally, the division of labor between interdisciplinary programs and disciplinary departments offers the best of all worlds. Departments serve to define the "basics" of higher education and evaluate appointments according to "universal" criteria, while interdisciplinary programs allow opportunities for innovation and individual specialization. In periods of faculty growth and expanded funding for interdisciplinary programs (as during the 1950s and 1960s), there is usually room for accommodation. My observations and discussions with colleagues involved with area studies suggest that the "problem" has become much more difficult to resolve in recent years. There are two key difficulties. The first is that area studies programs require a minimum critical mass to succeed; the second, that most social science disciplines have become indifferent (sometimes antagonistic) to area studies specialization among faculty and graduate students.

Area studies programs, as interdisciplinary programs, are expected to utilize the interests and energies of available faculty to formulate a teaching or research program. More than most other interdisciplinary programs, area studies centers have a fairly clear
definition of a minimum curriculum. This includes basic language and literature courses (at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels), early and modern history, anthropological surveys of peoples and cultures, and contemporary politics. Other valuable, but usually less critical courses are in sociology, geography, economics, and religion. For some world regions, for instance, European countries and even Latin America, there might well be sufficient qualified faculty members at many large universities to manage the basic area studies curriculum. But for most "peripheral" world regions in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, there are rarely enough faculty members to adequately staff the desired curriculum.

The area studies programs that were constructed at a handful of universities in the era of growth have come under considerable stress in the last two decades. Area studies specialists were often hired with some sort of outside sponsorship or funding, but the "line" was placed in a regular disciplinary department. When such a faculty member retires or moves, the department typically considers the selection of a replacement to be an internal matter guided by disciplinary needs and qualifications. There are many exceptions, of course. Greater student interest in China and Japan in the last fifteen years has created "demand" that many universities have filled by hiring additional area specialists. The Japan Foundation has been particularly effective in sponsoring the creation of university positions for Japan specialists. But the fundamental problem remains. How is it possible to maintain a critical mass of area specialists and at the same time grant full autonomy for disciplinary departments on all personnel matters?

It is important to realize that the present system has many virtues and the alternative of autonomous area studies units may create new problems. One of the great strengths of American universities lies in the flexibility of departments to shift priorities as new lines of inquiry emerge. To freeze each position into a particular specialty forever could lead to a fossilization of academic life. Almost all departments are heterogeneous with many areas of specialization. The struggle to balance continuity and innovation in academic appointments is institutionalized by a shared history within a department, an awareness of developments at other universities (reinforced by the rankings of top departments), and publications in leading disciplinary journals.

Informal conversations with colleagues at universities where area studies have departmental or college status (most of these are in other countries) have led me to doubt that such institutions are always preferable. For example, an Asia historian in a School of Asian Studies reported isolation from developments in his discipline and the lack of opportunity to discuss his specialty (social history) with colleagues who study other geographical regions of the world. Other colleagues have told me that other divisions appear within area studies departments (e.g., between humanists and social scientists) that reproduce the rivalries in disciplinary departments.

Another fundamental problem is the antipathy toward area studies in many disciplinary departments. While this attitude is most prevalent in economics and sociology, it can be found in many disciplines, including those with long ties to area studies (e.g., political science, linguistics). The attitude is not that scholarship on other countries is unimportant, although it is often considered esoteric, but rather that specialized knowledge of different cultures and societies is not a prerequisite for good scholarship on those countries (or using data from those countries). From this vantage point, the extraordinary time that area scholars invest in language skills and field work is not valued. What is important is the development of the critical theoretical and methodological skills applicable to all times and places on the globe.

In fields as different as archaeology, international relations, and demography, the efforts to formulate comparative models, test general hypotheses, and make broad generalizations across time and space follow a well-defined standard. Research in these fields that does not address these issues is considered simply descriptive and hopelessly old-fashioned. From this perspective, area studies knowledge may be useful (to explain why general models do not fit a particular case), but it is an insufficient base to contribute significantly at the frontiers of modern disciplinary scholarship. It may be asking too much for a scholar to keep up with both an area studies field and the latest disciplinary theories and methods. Given the current structure of universities and the power to hire vested in disciplinary departments, the balance is heavily tilted against area studies.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

A return to national prosperity and public investment in higher education would probably do more good for Southeast Asian studies than any innovative ideas we could dream up. A rising tide lifts all boats and more funds for fellowships and interdisciplinary programs would certainly help to relieve the economic pressures that have constrained the field for the last twenty years. The Luce Foundation
support for Southeast Asian studies over the last few years is fairly modest compared to the budgets in many areas of higher education. Given the state of the field, however, the Luce funding has created a minor boom in the fields of Southeast Asia history and library development. In fact, the full price of the last twenty years of neglect became apparent with the discovery of the very limited pool of Southeast Asia historians. Almost all of the applicants for the new positions had received their Ph.D.'s in the 1970s.

My real fear is that the field may experience increased funding and support in the coming years and we will not have new ideas to use the resources wisely. The intellectual and academic market in the 1990s will be dramatically different from the 1960s, and a replay of old strategies may not be successful. The major challenges of the 1990s are to develop a closer awareness of the scholarship on a global scale (especially in Southeast Asia), and to narrow the area-studies-disciplinary gap in American universities.

At present, most American Southeast Asia scholars follow closely only the literature on the region that is written in English. This is rapidly changing. Most scholars who live in Southeast Asia publish both in English and in their national languages. Eventually most ideas and important research findings are translated into English, but this is not guaranteed. Many more academic journals with Southeast Asian content—in every discipline—are published in Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese than in English. For most Southeast Asia scholars in the United States, it is difficult to keep up with this literature. Language skills grow rusty unless continually used and expanded. This problem will get worse in the coming years as the balance of published scholarship tilts more to journals in the region. Developing and expanding the language skills of American scholars is imperative. This is a career long process that will be time consuming and expensive.

There is also a growing body of literature on Southeast Asia in Japanese and in various European languages. With the support of the Toyota Foundation and the editorship of Professor Takashi Shiraishi, the Cornell Southeast Asia Program is publishing translations of some recent Japanese scholarship on Southeast Asia. This innovative effort should be only the first step in a broader international effort to translate Southeast Asian texts and scholarship on the region.

I do not think the disciplinary-area studies decision can be resolved without some fundamental changes of vision among area-studies specialists. I believe that area studies scholars will have to win this battle from inside disciplinary walls. This will require that the next generation of American Southeast Asia scholars learn all the necessary social science theory and methods (from econometrics to multidimensional scaling) with the same passion and commitment that they learn tonal languages and how to interpret cultural nuance. In the past, area studies scholars tended to make their careers on the margins of their disciplines. This is no longer an option given the structure of American universities. Area studies scholars will have to publish in the prestigious disciplinary journals and make their careers in the mainstream. This may mean a somewhat longer period of graduate study or perhaps postdoctoral training to learn area studies content. My guess is that with the right incentives (the recently announced Ford Foundation-Social Science Research Council Fellowship program is an excellent first step), it will be possible to attract the very brightest and most ambitious students with the challenge of mastering disciplinary knowledge and skills and with the thrill of learning about another culture. In the process, I think that the rather parochial mainstream of most disciplines will be transformed.

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