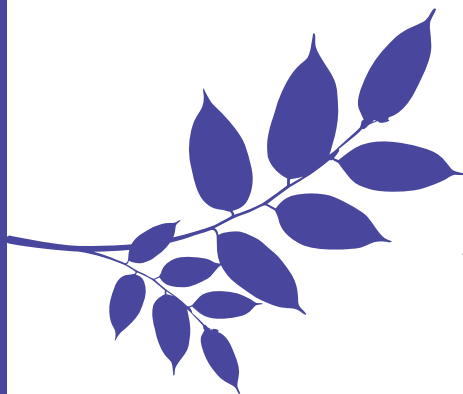


Bridging the Disciplinary Divide: 50 years of Research at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies

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Bridging the Disciplinary Divide: 50 years of Research at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies

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Abstract

This paper traces the birth of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) approach to Area Studies, explores how the institution evolved to consolidate and institutionalize its activities, and introduces its methodological responses and research initiatives that have evolved over the past 50 years. Since before the founding of CSEAS in 1963, Kyoto University researchers had been involved in multidisciplinary, field-based investigations of Southeast Asian society and nature. The origins of CSEAS's philosophy and commitment to the region lie in the individual researchers at Kyoto University, their empirically-based studies, and shared interests in ever more integrated and multifaceted understandings of local society. The paper traces and offers an overview of the large-scale projects that framed and guided research to present fundamental approaches towards issues in the region. This is through a commitment to long-term field-based studies in and of local societies; empirical studies grounded in local languages; and multidisciplinary, team-based research that has bridged the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities. This paper also shows how these approaches arose in response to changes and processes transforming social and environmental systems of Southeast Asian societies. This has informed the development of conceptual and theoretical work that has developed as a response to empirically grounded understandings emerging from those societies.

Keywords: Southeast Asian Studies; Areas Studies; Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS); Multidisciplinarity; Japanese Area Studies, Methodological Eclecticism

Introduction

This paper aims to overview the development process of Southeast Asian studies¹ in Japan during the last six decades and discussing their emerging research agenda within the framework of the development of the Center for Southeast Asia (CSEAS)². This reflection is done as Area Studies is challenged in terms of theoretical and methodological legitimacy as well as funding cuts in modern academia in the Global north. The contemporary relevance of Southeast Asian studies, in particular, is continually questioned as the mainstream of the field emerged as a response to United States security concerns and approaches toward the region. In this context, Area Studies has been construed as and continues to be haunted by the image of an imperial project; as a relic of European-style Oriental studies; as part of a historical colonial project to reinforce power imbalances between the developed and developing worlds; and as suffering from the constraining effect of “defined geographical borders” (Chua et al 2019, 45). Other scholars have taken arguments one step further to argue the very concept of “area” has ended (Sakai 2019). Within Western academic mainstream discussions on Area Studies there has, and continues to be, an increasing and awkward focus on and call for further theoretical discussions (Jackson 2019; Harootunian 2012b). Some go so far as to claim that Area Studies has been on ‘life support’ for a generation and suffering from both *crisis* and *ancestral sin* (Chua et al 2019). These have had an overt focus on identity politics and geopolitical interests in and on Southeast Asia as a region. Notwithstanding, scholars within the humanities and social sciences have noted the rich scholarship that individual disciplines have contributed to Area Studies: one that has the “potential of moving into the *center of scientific research* instead of remaining a rather peripheral undertaking within the knowledge factories of the contemporary world” (Houben 2013, 4 italics our emphasis).

¹ In this paper we do not discuss the conceptualization of “Southeast Asia.” For general discussions on this, see Kratoska et al. 2005, Chou et al. 2006, Shimizu, 2005, Woo et al. 2013; Mielke et al 2014. For a historical overview of studies of Southeast Asian history in contemporary Japan see Insun (2013). Insun’s review, while thorough, fails to note the rich multidisciplinary work that intersects with historical scholarship through collaborative work between Japanese scholars from different disciplines working within the region. For a comprehensive article that engages in Japanese contributions to Southeast Asian Studies see Hayami (2005). For a detailed overview of the ways in which Japanese natural scientists have contributed to Southeast Asian Studies see Yanagisawa (in Japanese) (2009).

² Although CSEAS is known as a Center, it is officially designated and acknowledged as an institute by the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT).

Observing discussions that focus on the origins and practice of Area Studies in Southeast Asia and theoretical critiques that aim for ‘new’ forms of study in rapidly reconfiguring regions (Jackson 2019), Japanese contributions remains curiously absent³. Is the lack of visibility due to a dominant mode of knowledge production that has sidelined Japanese scholarship? This question sits uncomfortably with those who are familiar with the deep rich empirical research that has been conducted over the past 50 years in Japan. Whilst deeply informed by theoretical debates that developed in the West, Japanese Area Studies have advanced largely outside of and in parallel to mainstream Western Area Studies. Furthermore, Japanese-style Southeast Asian Studies and Area Studies approaches on the whole have, for some time, been at the *heart of scientific research* (italics our emphasis), taking multidisciplinary as a shifting framework of *methodological eclecticism*⁴. We take this approach to be one that is sensitive to different disciplinary domains and their existent paradigms which, when in dialogue, create conditions to question the basis of empirical research and subsequent theorization that arises from it. Different disciplinary domains will adhere to different notions, ideals and methodological research processes that produce knowledge at different speeds and on different registers. An eclectic approach makes possible the constitution of an arena of dialogue not tied to specific domains that can constrain approaches.

The ‘crisis’ narrative that Chua et al (2019) have noted unfurls across multiple disciplines and lays out an argument to explain why, globally, this has arisen. Yet, this concern for the legitimacy of Area Studies has mainly been anchored in a social sciences / humanities framework which has dominated approaches in the mainstream study of ‘Area.’ Berg-Schlusser (2018), writing on comparative Area studies, notes the fine-grained discussion that has underlined social science approaches to Area Studies in epistemological considerations of other cultures and regions (Schlusser 2018, 33). In these discussions of Area studies however, Japanese scholarship is largely invisible. Here we ask, in what ways has Japanese scholarship on the region differentiated itself from other traditions? This paper argues that a more holistic and methodologically eclectic

³ A number of scholars have placed Japan in discussions on Southeast Asia. The historian Craig Reynolds has stated that from the view of Southeast Asian historiography the region is mostly a ‘Euro-Japanese construct.’ (See Reynolds 2006, 5). We thank Caroline Hau for pointing this out. Ben Anderson has also noted how Japanese scholarship and education on Southeast Asia has been crucial for formulating an approach and understanding of Southeast Asia that has run parallel to Western educational institutions. See Anderson (2016).

⁴ Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein have proposed analytic eclecticism as an approach that seeks to integrate analytic elements of different theories and within different paradigms to “address related aspects of substantive problems that have both scholarly and practical significance” (Sil & Katzenstein 2010, 10). We have modified this to reflect upon CSEAS’s constitution which includes both the medical and natural sciences as two domains of engagement in addition to the humanities and social sciences.

approach toward ‘Region’ and ‘Area’ has been developed by Japanese scholars and applied within a broader philosophy of science. This has been part of a more granular empirical-analytical focus that has allowed for a plurality of methodological approaches and epistemological discussions to co-exist and feed into one another. This has encouraged researchers to question assumptions about how areas are constituted. Over the decades, a grounded inter- and intra-disciplinary dialogue has enabled researchers to refine, and where necessary, challenge epistemological and methodological approaches.

At CSEAS, and in Kyoto University more generally, since the inception of post-WWII studies in Southeast Asia, the natural and medical sciences have deeply contributed to scholarly discussions on how to frame and understand the region. Yet Japanese scholarship remained on the margins. This is not for a lack of publications by Japanese scholars working in Southeast Asia and writing in English⁵. It may be due rather to a persistent hierarchy in knowledge production that privileges both writing and publication in an Anglo-American continuum. Our intention is to foreground Japanese Area Studies approaches toward Southeast Asian studies in order to facilitate a more fruitful and productive dialogue between scholars working in different streams and from diverse disciplines.

This paper aims to contribute to discussions by drawing on the experience of Southeast Asian Studies conducted primarily, but not limited to Japanese scholars⁶ at CSEAS. It explains, examines, and outlines the alternative approaches to Area Studies that have developed in a Japanese continuum: ones that have maintained a strong commitment to long-term fieldwork,

⁵ It is beyond the scope of this paper to present an overview of English language articles or books authored on Southeast Asia. Figure 2 in this paper provides a cursory overview of the numbers of books that have been written by Japanese scholars in CSEAS publications, excluding articles published in English over the years.

⁶ This paper presents the development processes of Southeast Asian studies in Japan by discussing the wide range activities of CSEAS over its 50 years of academic work, and discussed the challenges it faces. To celebrate its milestones, CSEAS has published a self-history for its 25th, 35th, and 50th anniversaries (CSEAS 1993, 2002, 2018). Of these, the 25- and 35-year histories were produced in Japanese, while the 50-year history resulted in two substantial overviews in English and Japanese (2016). Additional reflections and interviews on Southeast Asian Studies have been conducted with former directors and staff and published in the CSEAS newsletter (Ichimura 2016, 10-24, Shibayama 2012, 3-7, Tanaka, 2012, 5-10) and as parts of special issues (Hayami 2013, 18-20). In addition, CSEAS periodically publishes annual reports and newsletters, which introduce on-going research and education activities and are accessible through Kyoto University repository, *Kurenai*, and the CSEAS website. This paper draws on these materials and others as its main sources. Arguments presented in this paper are the personal reflections of the authors and do not represent the official view of CSEAS.

research agendas elaborated within the ever-changing contexts of local reality, and investment in partnerships with Southeast Asian researchers.

The Formation of Southeast Asian Studies within Kyoto University

In the late 1950s a group of researchers began to meet at Kyoto University to organize a seminar series on research being conducted in various parts of Southeast Asia⁷. This movement resulted in the establishment of the Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) in 1963. CSEAS aimed at pursuing holistic understandings of the societies, cultures and natural environment of Southeast Asia. This mission sharply contrasted with the Southeast Asia studies that arose in the United States at almost the same time with a strong focus on geopolitical research that excluded environmental and ecological concerns. Since then, CSEAS has developed into a research organization initiating large-scale projects and disseminating their results through publications. At the core of its philosophical, methodological and strategic operations are the three principles of an emphasis on long-term field work conducted in local languages, the promotion of interdisciplinary research, and research agendas defined by local contemporary issues. The story of CSEAS is then how these principles have been applied to meet the changing times.

In his address at the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in 2017, Emeritus Prof Tachimoto Narifumi, former director of CSEAS from 1998-2002, used simple but poignant language to describe the style of research conducted – *barabara de issho* [ばらばらで一緒] . At the time, we translated this into English as “unity in diversity,” slightly clichéd perhaps. Yet, it is formed from non-academic words and carries more nuance than the jargonistic technical terms usually used to describe research endeavors. The word *barabara* means “scattered, many things acting independently without cohesion,” while *issho* has various readings such as “together, as one, or the same” In other words, many research interests, projects, field sites

⁷ This was headed by Hirazawa Ko 平澤興 (1900-1989) the then President of Kyoto University and included Inoki Masamichi 猪木正道 (1914-2012), Iwamura Shinobu 岩村忍 (1905-1988), Usi Jijo 臼井二尚 (1910-1997), Motooka Takeshi 本岡武 (1915-1978), Mizuno Koiichi 水野浩一 (1933-1979), and Yano Toru 矢野暢 (1936-1999) among others who went on to found CSEAS.

and methodologies may appear to be scattered over a wide ranging disjointed intellectual space, however they are united by the core principles of Area Studies research that bring researchers together: to encourage interaction across a range of academic, geographic and programmatic boundaries. What captures the situation best in this phrase is the impression of disorganization that is implied, but this is, in fact, a *methodological eclecticism* that sits at the heart of CSEAS's approach to Southeast Asia. It is a diversity in which each is encouraged to pursue their own interests, yet share the same desire to work together in ongoing dialogue based on empirical data, first-hand field experience and open thinking.

This requires deeper contextualization. The above diversity is foregrounded by Kyoto University's approach to its intellectual endeavors. The motto of Kyoto university is *Jiyu-no-gakufu* 自由の学風 which might be loosely translated as 'freedom in studies.' However, this phrase is composed to capture a subtler philosophy. Instead of study as "discipline" (*gakumon* 学問) with rigid theories and methodologies, the university has promoted study within the "spirit of learning" – *gakufuu*, a Sino-Japanese compound formed from the words "learning" and "wind." Students and researchers are free to be blown around by the many winds of learning. In this milieu, creative, yet critical approaches to academic inquiry are fostered to produce insights and form the basis of basic academic principles wherein theory *facilitates* discussions between researchers. While basic principles are not denied, they are not allowed to dominate discussions at the empirical level, where researchers bring the insights their own experiences, as well as voices from the field, into their analysis. Under the history of this motto one also finds a call for the freedom to conduct intellectual inquiry outside of the control of government, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that Area Studies invokes a similar freedom to do its research outside of the hegemony of dominant theoretical and methodological constraints, as well as the a-la-mode jargon of discourse. Indeed, the university-wide focus on empirical research driven by the commitment of individual researchers, has produced the largest number of Nobel Prizes (10) in Japan, and this is a key environmental factor that has led to the flourishing of Area Studies at the University.

One part of the intellectual heritage of CSEAS as a research institute in Kyoto University is the critical and creative philosophical explorations that commenced in the late 1800s, developing into what is now known as the Kyoto School. Among the key thinkers⁸ of this intellectual tradition are Nishida Kitaro (西田幾多郎 1870-1945), Naito Konan (内藤湖南 1866-1934) and Imanishi Kinji (今西錦司 1902-1992). These, and others affiliated to this school, theorized and developed some of the core foundations upon which Kyoto University academics has developed over the years. Beyond Kyoto University, Chinese studies in Japan represents an even longer tradition integrating the study of classics, philosophy, history and a diverse range of issues. These characterize a deep and complex cultural history shared between Japan and the Asian mainland, evidenced in the requirement for students in some Western institutions (for example Berkeley) of Chinese studies to study Japanese in order to access the rich tradition of Chinese studies in Japan. Thus, Kyoto University's work in Chinese studies, distributed across several institutions, has provisioned another complimentary intellectual layer within which Southeast Asian studies evolved. In addition to Southeast Asian studies, African and Latin American studies have continued to pursue research frameworks that share similar basic principles. The Graduate School of Asian and African Studies (ASAFAS) works closely with CSEAS to train the next generation of researchers and teachers of Area Studies.

However, while Kyoto University has played a large role in pioneering Area Studies in Japan, it is by no means the only center of momentum in the field. For example, The Slavic-Eurasian Research Center at Hokkaido University has been conducting Area Studies since its founding in 1952. After being incorporated into the Faculty of Law in 1955, it was reborn as an independent institution with the University as the Center for Slavic Studies and then assumed its current name in 2014. Moreover, the Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies conducts research, as well as processing and producing data materials and providing language training. While a full review of the development of Area Studies in Japan is outside the scope of this paper⁹, it should be noted that institutions in the country

⁸ The Kyoto School has a wide range of 'satellite' scholars who have contributed greatly to philosophical and theoretical discussions on region and area-making. Watsuji Tetsuro's (和辻哲郎 1889-1990) work on climate (風土 *Fudo*) has, for example, had a strong and lasting impact in some of the philosophical and theoretical considerations and use of this term in Japanese scholars' approaches toward study in the region (和辻 Watsuji 1979).

⁹ For a comprehensive bibliographic and chronological review of Japan's engagement with area studies within the framework of its deeper historical interactions within Asia and the West, see Urano Tatsuo's detailed recent study

have a long history of engaging and shaping Area Studies that spans a geographically broad scope and reflects a deep commitment to knowledge production¹⁰ through fieldwork and data intensive analysis that are closely linked to educational programs which have their own historical trajectory. Japanese academic institutions and knowledge production are not free from a Japanese “ancestral sin” that resides closer to home. Japan’s own imperial pretensions toward empire building brought it into direct contact with East and Southeast Asia through the “Southern Expansion Doctrine” (南進論 *Nanshin-ron*) of the early Meiji period. In the late 19th century, agricultural research institutions affiliated to universities and schools were set up in Japan’s acquired territories, to research tropical resources and crops, improve cultivation techniques and produce higher yields, especially rice (Tanaka 2006, 100-37). What should be noted here is from the outset of Japan’s incursion into the region, academic knowledge and the production of researchers who had worked directly in the region through the early to mid- 20th century informed how knowledge gathered fed back into academic education programs and research initiatives.

The 50-plus years of development at CSEAS is a combined product of the efforts of the individual faculty over those years, through Japan’s relations with Southeast Asian countries, and the research support mechanisms of the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT). At the same time, this development, especially over the last 15 years, reflects the social development of different regions of Southeast Asia and the surge of interest in Southeast Asian studies. The MEXT Grant-in-Aid funding framework has been a crucial part of the Center’s ability to carry out sustained research in the field. These grants allow researchers to propose individual or collaborative research projects, defined by the researchers themselves and implemented with flexibility to pursue broad academic inquiry. Since the first Grant-in-Aid was awarded to Ishii Yoneo at CSEAS for a “Map creation of the distribution of religions in Southeast Asia” in 1970¹¹,

(Urano 2018). Urano situates a deeper engagement that stretches back at least 250 years through exchanges with mainland Asia.

¹⁰ For example, the notion of a “Kanji/Hanzi Cultural Area,” is not a direct product of Kyoto University per se, but a concept used in Japanese Asian Studies that reflects the view of an area defined in terms of a tradition of literacy and social, political and cultural worlds that have spawned across much of Asia.

¹¹ The first Grant-in-Aid for a project in Southeast Asia at Kyoto University was in 1965 (芦田讓治 Ashida Jouji, Botanist (1905-1981). タイ・マレーシア生物相の調査 *Tai, Mareshia Seibutsu sou no Chosa*. [Research on biota in Thailand and Malaysia]. Overseas Scientific Survey.

981 grants had been awarded to Kyoto University for research in the region as of 2018¹². A detailed inventory is beyond the scope of this paper, yet many of these projects have been multidisciplinary with teams of researchers cutting across disciplinary divides, different faculties and departments both within and outside of Kyoto university. Research approaches and agendas suggest that an ‘area,’ as constituted as the focus of research, would be analyzed across and through a broad range of disciplines to create holistic approaches toward understanding and disseminating new knowledge. More often than not, a fundamental recognition of a deeper historical relation to the region and commitment to collaboratively engage with local researchers has been integral aspect of research.

At the heart of research development was an ongoing discussion about whether Southeast Asian studies itself, constitutes an academic discipline or not¹³. Within CSEAS there have been two ways of thinking about this question. The first is that Southeast Asian Studies should be recognized as a multidisciplinary field of academic inquiry premised upon methodological eclecticism not limited to discussion within the humanities and social sciences. The second is that Southeast Asian Studies is composed of a shared geographic research focus with a shared set of research questions that are theme-based emphasizing process. These two perspectives on the field have co-existed at CSEAS throughout its development.

On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of CSEAS, a basic historical narrative that outlined the historical trajectory was developed that has framed these on-going discussions and dilemmas. The narrative divided CSEAS’s institutional development into four broad stages to capture the influential forces of the changing times and how CSEAS responded to evolve: an Institutional Development stage (1960s to early 70s); a Joint Studies Development stage (late 1970s to 80s); an Integrated Area Studies Development stage (1990s to 2000s); and a Multilateral and Global Area Studies Development stage (2000s until 2016) in addition to the current stage of Reintegration and

¹² Data on Grant-in-Aids for projects relating to Southeast Asia conducted within Kyoto University was sourced with help from Fujieda Ayako at the Kyoto University Research Administration (KURA).

¹³ One of the noteworthy criticisms of area studies is the assertion that it cannot be considered as a discipline in its own right. For a detailed discussion see Miyoshi and Harootunian (2002). However, discussions in Japan have focused explicitly and intensively on whether Southeast Asian Studies can constitute a discipline in its own rights (See Yano 1992, 1-25 for detailed argument).

Expansion (2017 to present). Figure 1. provides an overview of the constitution of CSEAS by fields and disciplines. This paper follows this temporal framework to highlight the transition from a group of common-interest field researchers, to a national center and finally an international hub.

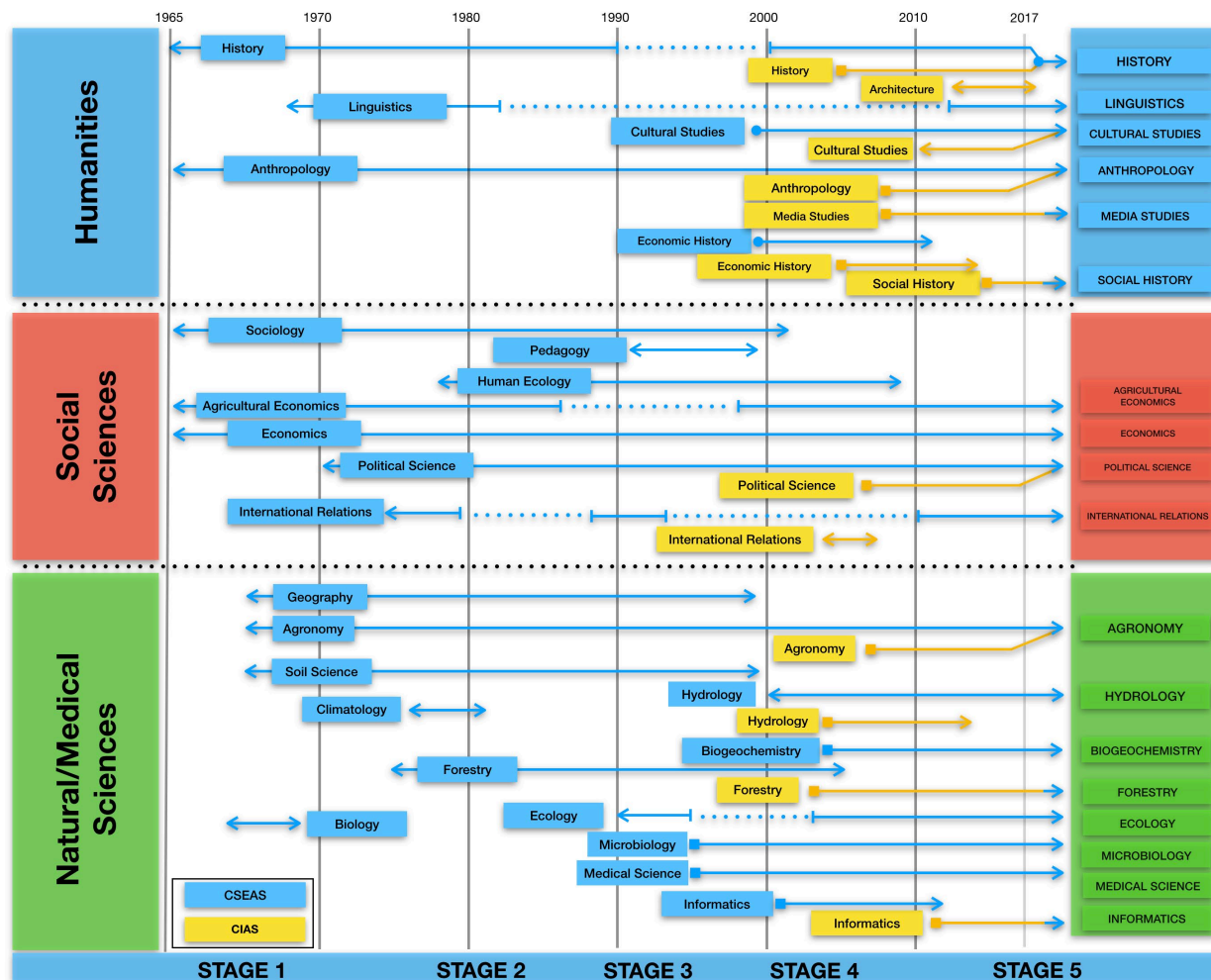


Fig. 1 Constitution of CSEAS faculty by fields and disciplines (1963~2019)

Source: CSEAS (CSEAS and Center for Integrated Area Studies (CIAS) merged in 2015 and established a new research institute which retains the English name as CSEAS).

Institutional Development stage (1960s to early '70s)

The history of CSEAS predates its official establishment. In the spring of 1959, a group of scholars in Kyoto began to organize monthly seminars on various aspects of Southeast Asian culture and society. As the seminars gradually attracted an increasing number of faculty members and graduate students from universities in and around Kyoto, the enthusiastic participants sought the possibility

of organizing the informal gathering into a more institutionalized forum. A preparatory committee was formed in 1961 to organize a systematic program of Southeast Asian studies, one that from the outset included the natural sciences (CSEAS 1964). Historically, this has been a domain that was completely neglected in most Area Studies programs in Western universities and research institutes. These developments culminated in the creation of CSEAS in January 1963 on the campus of Kyoto University as a semi-official body for coordinating Southeast Asian studies and its establishment as an officially recognized research center in 1965. These were sensitive times in Japan, with the local political situation greatly influencing the thinking of Kyoto faculty and students. Former professor, Shibayama Mamoru noted how, in 1970, protests against the revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty and universities escalated, spreading from Ritsumeikan University to Kyoto and Doshisha Universities and making it difficult for students to take classes (Interview with Shibayama Mamoru 2012). CSEAS itself was targeted by campus rioters with students from the Federation of Students' Self-Governing Association protesting against its establishment. The center was accused of being in bed with "U.S. imperialism" due to having received \$350,000¹⁴ in 1963, from the Ford Foundation towards its establishment. Nonetheless, during this formative period, its mandate would be conceived through a different approach from the Area or Asian Studies that were developing in the West. Research would not take place solely through the humanities and social sciences, but would focus on the region's natural environment, eco-systems, cultures and political economy (Ichimura 2016). The aim, at the time, was to cover society and nature and importantly include the medical sciences, all disciplinary areas which are now covered by faculty at CSEAS.

From the mid- 1960s, research activities were carried out mainly in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia based on individual researchers' academic concerns and networks. Projects organized at this stage consisted of those in the Social Science and Natural Science Sections. The former covered such broad themes as "political organization and governmental processes," "system and structure of education," "modernization factors in economic development," and "religion in Southeast Asia." The latter included "medical surveys¹⁵," "geological surveys," "studies for

¹⁴ This is equivalent to \$2,265,138.00 in 2018.

¹⁵ This included research, for example, on leprosy in Thailand by leprosy researchers based at Kyoto University and the Leprosy Control Division, Thailand (See Nishiura et al. 1965).

agricultural production,” and “biological surveys.” These were carried out in collaboration with researchers and scholars from other departments and institutes of Kyoto University as well as from other universities in Japan, and through bilateral cooperation with counterpart agencies and institutions in Southeast Asian countries.

Through these research activities, researchers with backgrounds in different academic disciplines employed the methodologies of their respective fields to carry out research in their own areas of interest. Research fell into the broader areas of history, agriculture or economics of Southeast Asia. Thus, at this time, the question of whether Southeast Asian Studies should be considered a discipline in its own right or a series of disciplines nestling in broader fields had not yet arisen in the collective consciousness of CSEAS.

It was through these incipient research projects and the push to hone a multidisciplinary spirit of collaboration that CSEAS initiated official programs and established a publications office, a library, and exchange and training programs to strengthen its institutional base. The publication program, beginning with the inauguration of the first issue of Southeast Asian Studies in July 1963, was responsible for publishing the annual bulletin of CSEAS in both English and Japanese, as well as occasional/discussion papers reporting the tentative results of intensive fieldwork in the region. The monograph publication series was launched not only in Japanese but also in English, the latter from the University of Hawai'i Press. It was during this time that CSEAS recognized the need to liaise with and develop academic relations with scholars from the region and established a CSEAS fellowship¹⁶ to invite scholars from abroad to visit the center.

Joint studies development stage (late 1970s to '80s)

The increase in governmental financial support for scientific research such as Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (*Kakenhi*) from MEXT helped promote and strengthen joint studies after the early 1970s. Carrying out individual research related to each researcher's concern and

¹⁶ To date, CSEAS has invited over 400 scholars to stay at CSEAS. Over three quarters of all fellows have been from Southeast Asia. This attests to the spirit of fostering dialogue with intellectuals and researchers from within the region and is reflected in the strong inter-university linkages that exist between Kyoto University and those in the region.

organizing and participating in joint studies became a principle by which every CSEAS staff worked. In line with this principle, CSEAS organized team projects such as “Agro-environmental studies of the Mekong delta of Vietnam” (Project Leader Kyuma Kazutake 1974), “Study on the development processes of Islamic rice societies under a tropical rainfed climate” (Project Leader Tsubouchi Yoshihiro 1978), and “The role of education in the agricultural communities in Southeast Asia (Project Leader Ichimura Shinichi 1974). These were carried out on a ‘team’ basis, in the sense that they consisted of researchers from different fields working closely together, and engaging with local researchers. During this period, the experiential aspect of fieldwork with researchers from different backgrounds allowed them to develop and hone a framework that prioritized and encouraged multidisciplinary dialogue. Former director Tanaka Koji has noted this took place while literally “eating from the same bowl.” Disciplines can be seen as presenting boundaries with theoretical borders and differing methodologies (both qualitative and quantitative). It was not the case of just bringing together scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds, but creating opportunities conducive to “stealing” disciplinary ideas and terminology from each other, something that informed the dynamic interplay between researchers (Tanaka 2012, 7).

I came to realize that when people come together to do research, they don’t just try to understand it from within the boundaries of their own disciplines. They have motivation to look at a region through a variety of perspectives. In the field, you experience a variety of things: through different disciplines, what do people observe, what kind of data do they search for, how do they prepare it, and what kind of words do they use to explain it? This in itself is study. (Tanaka, 2012, 8)

Through these kinds of experiences, the cross-fertilization and sharing (stealing) of methods and approaches for those working within Area Studies, fostered expectations that new knowledge and scholarship through discoveries, would emerge through this fusion/mixing of disciplines.

Building on these experiences and drawing from these team projects in the second half of the 1970s, CSEAS began to promote institutional joint research projects in 1980 by organizing researchers by themes for five-year internally designated projects. The joint studies exemplifying this approach were “Dong Daeng Village in Northeast Thailand” (Project Leader Ishii Yoneo 1981) and the “Environment and Human Migration in the Tropical Archipelago” (Project Leader Maeda Narifumi 1980). These projects adopted contrasting methodologies for conducting team

projects. In the former project, a village in Northeast Thailand, Dong Daeng, was chosen as a single research site in which intensive village-level surveys were implemented by a cohesive interdisciplinary team consisting of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, agronomists, and irrigation scholars. In this research a diverse range of researchers lived together in a rural Thai village, experiencing daily life together in their collaborative research. The village has been continuously researched for over 50 years by a diverse mix of human, social and natural scientists from not only CSEAS, but other institutions in Japan. Over this period, they have amassed a qualitative and quantitative dataset of an empirical richness and historical timeline that is unparalleled in Area Studies. This unique understanding of social, economic and agricultural change in Thailand is still being constructed by CSEAS researchers¹⁷. In contrast, the latter project drew on more wide-ranging and flexible perspectives in geographical terms, with members consisting of anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, soil scientists, agronomists, and historians covering a wide range of ecosystems, such as coastal areas, mountainous regions, and watersheds in Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. Although both projects were interdisciplinary, their focus and operation differed diametrically.

These presented valuable opportunities to learn what questions researchers from other disciplines asked, what information they collected and how they analyzed that data. The findings that emerged from each of these disciplinary inquiries were brought together and synthesized. In the process of working through their outputs, researchers experienced and came to develop a multifaceted understanding of what constitutes a research area that could not be achieved through the consideration of each individual inquiry. This experience created a more sensitive approach toward empirical knowledge generation among the researchers that expanded beyond their own individual disciplines, leading them to search for a more integrated stance toward Southeast Asian Studies. Concurrently, these early researchers began a shift from research situated in research questions and applying established methodologies of a certain singular discipline, to research approaches that were conceived and developed in the reality of the research site. Methodologies were then chosen and developed in a flexible way that best met the data needs of the research. In

¹⁷ For overview of past and ongoing research in the village see (Watanabe 2010, 7-9). It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an exhaustive list of works carried out, however for details of representative studies and scholarship see (Mizuno 1968, 1971, 1978, 1981, Fukui, 1993, Watanabe 2017, Watanabe et al, 2008, Kono et al, 2018).

this way, a shared awareness of the unique characteristics of Area Studies emerged among the community of researchers working together.

The unique contributions of multidisciplinary projects developing through this area studies approach with a solid base in the natural sciences, further emerged during this period. Takaya Yoshikazu's *Agricultural Development of a Tropical Delta: A Study of the Chao Praya Delta* first appeared in Japanese in 1982, with the English edition following in 1987 (Takaya 1982; Takaya 1987), announcing the arrival of the natural science approach to Area Studies. Originally a geologist, Takaya¹⁸ expanded his research interests and methodological approach through his interactions with Ishii Yoneo, a polyglot historian and Buddhist scholar and others. Takaya's publications brought together geology, geomorphology, water resources development, land use and agriculture to illustrate a comprehensive picture of the basic structure of the Chao Phraya Delta and the history of its development. The scope and methods of this study provided researchers from the natural sciences with a foundational approach to a natural science inflected Area Studies.

It was also at this stage that CSEAS was able to make significant progress in creating a vernacular to communicate the emerging practice of Area Studies being developed by researchers. CSEAS received a grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) to enhance the exchange of scholars between Japan and Southeast Asian countries and to expand CSEAS's research network in the region. A series of JSPS Core University Programs, "In Search of a Collaborative Framework for Southeast Asian Studies," were initiated in 1986 within a bilateral framework of cooperation with Thammasat University (1986-89). The first half of the program's ten-year term covered the exchange of scholars between Japan and Thailand and was later expanded to other countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. This reflected the changing academic context, with increasing intellectual interest among Southeast Asian scholars in their own fellow colleagues in the region. Through this and subsequent programs, CSEAS came into contact with many prominent scholars in the region.

¹⁸ Takaya Yoshikazu (高谷好一 1934-2016) is also well known within Japanese Southeast Asian Studies and Area Studies for his theoretical work on developing the concept of "Unit-world" as a substitute for area and to divide these up according to their ecologies, factors of land-use and types of agriculture (Takaya 1993). This was a product of global area studies which developed during the multilateral and global area studies development stage. For a detailed introduction to these ideas in English see Tachimoto (1995).

Integrated Area Studies Development stage (1990s to 2000s)

The movement to establish Southeast Asian Studies through the gradual recognition of Area Studies came about with the publication of the “Southeast Asian Studies” series between 1990-92. The series comprised of 10 volumes covering nature, society, history, culture, philosophy, politics, the economy, international relations and so on, and each volume was authored by representative Japanese researchers with CSEAS faculty in charge as an editor. *Methods for Studying Southeast Asia* (Yano 1990), and *Introduction to Southeast Asian Studies* (Yano 1992) were two volumes that stood out. Both these and others authored by CSEAS faculty, carried “Southeast Asian Studies” in their titles and illustrate the spirit of the early ‘90s.

At the same time, natural scientists were increasingly dissatisfied with research achievements that were limited to their own disciplinary arenas, and made continued and concerted efforts to reach out beyond their individual research domains. This manifested itself in works such the *The Asian History of Rice Culture* (3 Vols, Watabe 1987) and the *Encyclopedia of Southeast Asia* (CSEAS 1997). These were put together through the efforts of natural scientists at the time and done so from the perspective of the natural environment and human-nature relations to systematically present the formation processes, characteristics and current issues of Southeast Asian societies. Working in collaboration with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), CSEAS researchers undertook a broad-based study of biological diversity within Lao rice farming landscapes, developing the concept of *kasikam thammawat* – “natural agriculture,” where wild and cultivated diversity coexist and interact in agroecological systems – which is still heard in Laos today (Tanaka 1993; Tanaka 2008). Thus, while adding a unique set of perspectives to the practice, they also worked to push the boundaries from within the individual studies in collaboration with social scientist and humanities specialists.

As a result of these activities, CSEAS was selected in 1993 as a core institution for a four-year project under the title “An Integrated Approach to Global Area Studies: In Search of a Paradigm for a Harmonized Relationship between the World and Its Areas” (1993–96). Generally referred to as “Global Area Studies,” this project was funded by MEXT through the Grant for Scientific Research on Priority Areas. Although this program was designed mainly for promoting

and supporting priority areas in natural and applied sciences, the CSEAS project was the first institutional proposal selected from the field of humanities and social sciences. This project involved some 130 area study specialists nationwide in an endeavor to delineate clearly the form and substance of global Area Studies.

While focusing on Southeast Asia, the project was grounded in the cumulative research of wide-ranging Area Studies, encompassing regions other than Southeast Asia. The project sought to define the leading domains of Area Studies through subprojects titled “Area and Ecological Environment,” “Theories on the Formation of Area Identities,” and “Indigenous Theories of Area Development.” It also examined the formation and interrelations of areas in Southeast Asia through subprojects titled “External Civilization and Internal World” and “Theories of Area Interconnections,” and to establish a methodology and logical framework for research through the organic integration of these themes under the sub-project “Concept of Global Area Studies.” A new monograph series *Chiiki Kenkyu Sosho* (Series on Area Studies) was launched in 1995 by CSEAS together with Kyoto University Press, in response to the need for a suitable outlet for disseminating accumulated research and knowledge, and for presenting exemplary and original research. Takaya, for example, proposed the idea of a “unit-world” by focusing on the diversity of modes and depth of human-nature interactions within various regions of the world. This now forms part of a basic theoretical framework that informs Japanese Area Studies. However, Japanese Area Studies scholars have pointed out that there is difficulty in capturing both the impact of human societies and modern forces if emphasis is placed primarily on ecological foundations. To respond to criticisms, Takaya introduced two axes of development and transformation to his theory. Thus, the unit-world theory became a dynamic one that was used to discuss and analyze developments in the West as well as socialist systems (Takaya 2001). This theoretical framework carried over into subsequent large-scale projects to offer a departure point for rethinking development paths in different regions in the mid-2000s under the GCOE projects (see section 6 this paper).

The second JSPS Core University Program started in 1999 with the general theme of “Region-making in East Asia.” Recognizing the importance of the relationship between East and Southeast Asia, the program incorporated a wide network of scholars from both Southeast and Northeast Asia in nine subprojects over 10 years. The program covered topics clustered around a

number of big themes: hegemony and technocracy, the middle classes, regionalism and networks, state, market and society, flows of people, goods and information, entrepreneurs and rent-seeking, and family. These all reflected emerging important issues in the region and incorporated broader regional comparisons. The publication of *After the Crisis: Hegemony, Technocracy and Governance in Southeast Asia* (Shiraishi et al. 2005) and *Dislocating Nation-States: Globalization in Asia and Africa* (Abinales et al. 2005), represented major scholarly contributions to region-building in the face of global economic and political uncertainty and shifting regional orders. With the steady increase in the number of participating scholars and countries involved, this program greatly contributed to the extension of CSEAS's academic networks within and beyond Southeast Asian countries, and played an important role in bridging Southeast and East Asian academics.

As such, within CSEAS' 50 years of history, the integrated Area Studies development stage was one of the periods where the movement to establish Southeast Asian Studies and Area Studies as a field was most active. It was during this period that the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies (ASAFAS) was established in 1998. Issuing doctoral degrees in Area Studies, CSEAS played a crucial role in supporting education with teaching, knowledge and access to research materials. However, education at ASAFAS had the common requirements of learning local languages and conducting long-term fieldwork, but this was not the teaching of Area Studies as a discipline. The contents of courses for graduates corresponded to fostering so-called gradual common knowledge that could help young scholars reflect upon the scope of Area Studies and different ways to approach areas in question. Thus, in addition to Area Studies, students at ASAFAS are required to learn a discipline that is related to their research topics. In regards to this, other graduate schools with Area Studies have been established at other universities, and education including Area Studies are spreading. However, what they are teaching is almost the same as what has been done at ASAFAS (Inoue 2017). During this period, with the emerging topics of public health, CSEAS added faculty with specializations in medicine, and now medical doctors are an integral part of the institution.

Multilateral and Global Area Studies Development stage (2000s to 2016)

On entering the 21st century, MEXT started to create a large-scale education and research support scheme that aimed at strengthening Japanese universities international competitiveness. As a result of this, in 2002, a 21st Century COE program was launched and a number of departments in Kyoto University established regional hubs in Southeast Asia to promote education and research exchanges with universities in the region. In 2002 CSEAS, in collaboration with the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, received new funding under the 21st Century COE program “Aiming for COE of Integrated Area Studies,” (Project leader: Kato Tsuyoshi 2002-2007).

In addition to the liaison offices in Bangkok and Jakarta, this program facilitated the establishment of field stations in Yangon, Vientiane, Bogor, Makassar, the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, Manila, and Kuala Lumpur to facilitate research, training, and collaboration by students and faculty in the field and with local scholars. It promoted network building in each locale, connecting researchers and providing opportunities for young scholars to conduct fieldwork as well as present their findings and conduct discussions with local and Japanese researchers. The above was, in a way, a turning point for the multilateral and global Area Studies development stage and arose as a response to initiatives within Kyoto University to forge stronger intra-departmental relations. For example, this included research groups working on energy and biological systems to set up an office in Bangkok resulting in the deepening of relations between researchers in Kyoto university and the further development of collaborative large-scale initiatives.

Running alongside these initiatives to develop richer networks in Southeast Asia, other researchers were also incorporating new cutting-edge technology to research the region’s history. One new discipline, “Area Informatics,” was developed that integrated different areas studies approaches across a number of academic disciplines including human ecology, sociology, history, cultural studies, economics and political science. One outcome of this was a project that analyzed the historical urban formation of Hanoi, Vietnam during the 19th and 20th centuries (Project Leader: Shibayama Mamoru 2005-2009). The project produced new types of spatial analysis based on historical and present-day maps, satellite images, cadastral maps, historic ruins and vestiges all

analyzed through rapidly developing GIS (Geographical Information Systems) and RS (Remote Sensing) technologies.

Following the 21st Century COE, in 2007 CSEAS received MEXT funding to initiate a five-year project for a Global COE program titled “In Search of Sustainable Humanosphere in Asia and Africa” (Project Leader: Sugihara Kaoru 2007–11), which aimed at an integrated multidisciplinary approach to the ‘humanosphere’ (生存基盤 *Seizon Kiban* literally the foundations for survival). In the research program, the term ‘humanosphere’ was theorized to refer to the integrated whole made up of the geosphere, biosphere and human society (three areas covered by CSEAS’s interdisciplinarity). This program marked a turning point in the center’s research in that there was a shift in emphasis in research from Southeast Asian studies for understanding Southeast Asia as a region and object of study, to tackling questions emerging from the region that speak about global issues. Research questions emerged from pressing realities and issues in the region, and aimed to generate scholarship that could enhance our knowledge and provide solutions toward a Sustainable Humanosphere at a global level and across different regions. This took place through a wider multidisciplinary collaboration than previously experienced at CSEAS and included applied and earth sciences, while maintaining the field-based approach as well as cooperation with those outside academia. A number of key questions framed discussions over a five-year period. How can we reinforce and realize the potentialities of nature while controlling and managing it in coordination with others? How is plural coexistence of cultural, religious and other differences possible? How can we better connect the knowledge and power of local communities to larger decisions and global dynamics? In what ways can a better future in the region and around the globe be envisioned? Researchers engaged in topics covering environment, disaster and sustainability, democracy and governance, aging society and care, economic disparity and urban development through cross-regional, multidisciplinary research. These are now recognized as some of the major issues Southeast Asian societies and the world more generally are now confronting.

Within this dynamic framework, ASAFAS and CSEAS also coordinated to make regional research the primary concern, however, researchers from other departments within Kyoto University, particularly those who specialize in energy science, material science, climatology, ecology, and history also participated. This approach aimed to promote research through a

multidisciplinary approach to cover areas that CSEAS faculty could not adequately respond to. To compliment research initiatives, 27 Post-doctoral fellows also participated in this project. Many other participating researchers were already involved in educational and research exchanges in Southeast Asia, but at the time, this was not in the context of Southeast Asian studies or regional studies.

The above also included geo-environmental researchers who set up equatorial atmospheric observation stations in Indonesia; forestry researchers aiming to develop tree species suitable for plantation forestry through genetic modification technology; and life science researchers working on the development of bio-refinery to realize the multi-purpose use of tropical biomass resources. From these researchers and initiatives, Southeast Asian researchers learned the potential of the region's natural environment and the very limits of present-day technology. Obtaining a new perspective on Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian studies itself, was also the direct acquisition of knowledge linked to the current issues that Southeast Asian societies are facing. However, this was an opportunity for discipline specific researchers to enter into discussion with area researchers and realize the necessity of considering the broader multiple significances of their research in the context of societies in the target areas.

The results of the GCOE Program (2007-2011) were published in the “Humanosphere Series,” six volumes published in Japanese¹⁹ (Sugihara et al. 2012). These were authored by Area Studies specialists, but the central themes, cutting across the volumes, were aiming toward a comprehensive understanding of those societies that were the subject of focus. Two theoretical threads that underpin the conceptualization of the Sustainable Humanosphere were the following. First, the recognition of the need to move away from a “production to survival” perspective. The second is a shift from a “temperate to tropical” perspective. To that end, the central arguments asserted throughout the program were the need to relativize the development of human societies

¹⁹ From these volumes some chapters have been published in English. Volume 4 was updated and translated to form the basis of *Catastrophe and Regeneration in Indonesia's Peatlands: Ecology, Economy and Society* (Mizuno et al 2016). From volume 5 (*Seizon kiban Shisu -Ningen Kaihatsu Shisu wo Koete-*) [Humanosphere Potentiality Index – Going beyond the Human Development Index] (Sato et al, 2012), research continued leading to the publication of updated research in English and an online database (Sato et al. 2016). From volume 2 (*Chikyuken, Seimeiken no Senzairyoku – Nettai Chiiki Shakai no Seizonkiban-*) [The Potentiality of the Geosphere and Biosphere: the Humanosphere of Tropical Societies], chapter 10, “The Mechanisms of Agricultural development in the tropical humanosphere” (Kono et al 2012), was revised, updated and published in Lopez and Suryomenggolo (eds) (2018).

after the industrial revolution and re-examine the experiences and knowledge of regional communities in the world.

Leading on from the Global COE Program, the Southeast Asian Studies for Sustainable Humanosphere program was initiated (Project Leader: Kono Yasuyuki 2011-16). It aimed to further enquire into what constitutes a Sustainable Humanosphere through making use of context specific knowledge found in Southeast Asian societal contexts. This extended to investigations on plural co-existence in the region, the usage of tropical biomass, its capitalization and circulation within and beyond the region, and regional networking that led to the creation of the Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies (SEASIA). This program, as with the previous GCOE, also functioned to accept post-doctoral researchers who collaborated with CSEAS faculty to further theorize from the ground up. In tandem with the above project, several other cutting-edge programs also ran. In line with the above, the program “Multidisciplinary Study of Southeast Asian Planted Forests and Local Societies” (Project Leader: Ishikawa Noboru 2010-2014) was also initiated to examine the transformation of high biomass societies in maritime Southeast Asia²⁰. Highly interdisciplinary, both social and natural scientists work together across different scales to look at how the geosphere, biosphere and human habitats converged in new emerging landscapes of plantations and planted forests.

Continuing to explore multidisciplinary dialogues within and beyond academia, CSEAS was awarded large-scale funding to initiate the “Japan-ASEAN Platform for Transdisciplinary Studies” (Project leader: Hayami Yoko 2016-2021). This new program was set up to advance transdisciplinary research that integrates academic, governmental, and civil societies to create new collaborative research ventures that brings together the expertise of scholars working in Southeast Asia. Participants in the initiative include scientists and engineers as well as Japanese and ASEAN political and business communities. In particular, this platform emphasizes the establishment of new relationships, especially between Japan and Southeast Asia, and identify problem-solving “wisdom” from local realities through empirically grounded research. One of the features of this approach has been prioritize local realities and focus on the production of new knowledge through synergistic research with local researchers and practitioners on the basis of equal partnerships.

²⁰ This resulted in a recent edited volume on human-nature interfaces on plantation frontiers (See Ishikawa et al 2019).

Another important key project entitled “Infectious Diseases Spreading across International Borders in Southeast Asia: The Elucidation of Area-specific Features Based on Multifactorial Analysis (Project Leader: Nishibuchi Mitsuaki 2007-2011). This was a unique and original collaborative attempt to map the trans-regional spread of food-poisoning bacterial enteric pathogens (found in mollusks) that arise through cultural food practices in a number of Southeast Asian nations by a team of microbiologists, food experts and industries based within the region. In terms of methodology, this project opened up a new collaborative toolbox forged from various disciplines to tackle complex trans-boundary issues to improve regional safety practices. This synergistic and dynamic approach toward research is characterized by the need to develop new hybrid approaches that can work across borders and frontiers (boundaries which are highly porous where pathogens are concerned).

Another trend that characterizes the multilateral and global Area Studies development stage is the strengthening of activities as an international hub for Southeast Asian studies. While previous JSPS Core University Programs had been designed as bilateral exchange, primarily with Thailand, the active exchanges and network building had far exceeded the bilateral framework. By the end of the second Core University Program, “Region-Making in East Asia” (1999–2008), the CSEAS was ready for a multilateral framework to widen its network. The Asian Core Program “Asian Connections: Southeast Asian Model for Co-existence in the 21st Century” (2009–13) made this possible. In addition to Thailand represented by Thammasat, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and Taiwan’s CAPAS Academia Sinica joined to respectively represent mainland Southeast Asia, insular Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The projects reflected current debates and emerging issues, with such topics as cross-border connections and regionalism, politico-economic transformations, and resources management. While the projects were varied in their focus and outcome, a common realization was that in this region with rich ecological resources and varied social capital—characterized by plural coexistence through regionally specific globalization—negotiations and connections are made in dynamic and layered interfaces. These interfaces need to be analyzed as emerging on the ground rather than based on taken-for-granted units, paradigms, or indices.

During this period CSEAS relaunched and strengthened its journal and publications. The journal *Southeast Asian Studies* (*Tonan Ajia Kenkyu*), which had started in 1963 as a bilingual quarterly journal, gained international recognition as a peer-reviewed journal²¹ and received increasing numbers of submissions from all over the world. In 2012, with due respect to the journal's function and recognition, both domestically and internationally, the center opted to maintain the journal's multidisciplinary content, but re-fashioned the journal. CSEAS launched the triannual English journal *Southeast Asian Studies* and the biannual *Japanese Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (*Tonan Ajia Kenkyu*), both open-access, peer-reviewed and open to contributions from scholars all over the world. These journals showcase the best research conducted in the region. CSEAS also established the Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia to promote exchange among researchers of the region, including articles published in English, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, Filipino, Vietnamese and Japanese²².

In addition to the existing monograph series, CSEAS launched the Kyoto CSEAS Series on Asian Studies in 2009. This was in recognition of the strong need for an Asia-based publication on Southeast Asian studies, in response to the rising quality and quantity of scholarship from the region. The series aims to reach a wide audience with innovative questions and analyses supported by meticulous research. CSEAS have now five book series on Southeast Asia. The number of books published (both in English and Japanese) under these series has increased (Figure 2).

²¹ The English journal is now available in both SCOPUS and EBSCO research databases.

²² KRSEA received over 400,00 views and almost 300,000 visitors in 2018.

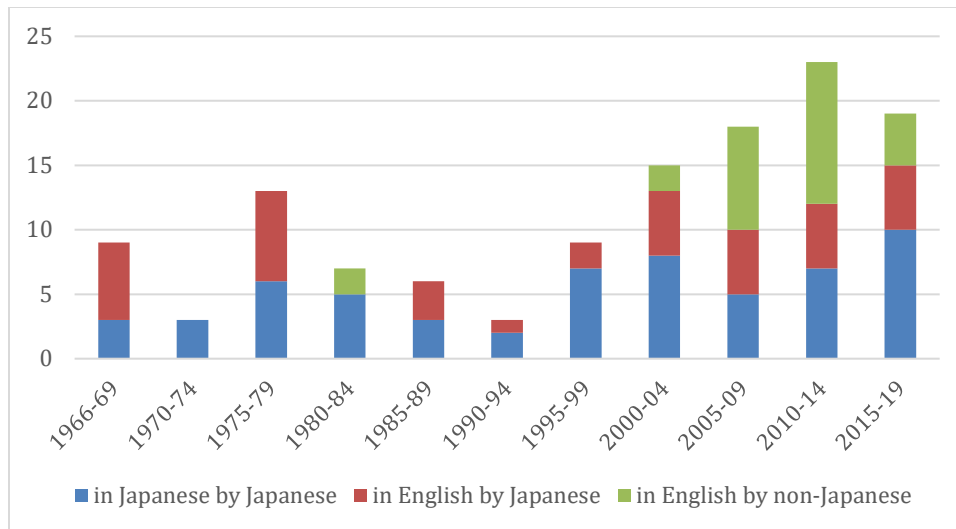


Figure 2 Number of books published by CSEAS Book Series Source: CSEAS

Continually building on the imperative to promote regionally-based Southeast Asian studies, CSEAS, in partnership with nine leading Asian and Southeast Asian studies institutions in the region, established a consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia (SEASIA) in 2013. The consortium charter was signed by 10 universities in the region²³. SEASIA has been established to allow closer networking between scholars and stakeholders in the region and in particular foster exchanges that are not just limited to the social sciences and humanities, but also engage with the natural sciences and medicine. The inaugural event was held in Kyoto on December 2015 with the participation of more than 500 participants from around the region including Hong Kong and China. An Asian network of Southeast Asian studies scholars and institutions is a clear example of how a dominant paradigm of imbalanced power relations can be overturned when the focus of intellectual exchange is located more closely with stakeholders. While bringing together not only the ‘internal’ institutions of Southeast Asia is itself a challenge, to expand this to include East Asian institutions makes the management of such a network very challenging. However, because of the personal networks and institutional linkages that have been nurtured over the years, CSEAS has been able to propose a common platform for the study of Southeast Asia that is based in

²³ The founding institutions were as follows: The Center for Asia-Pacific Studies, Academia Sinica; the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University; LIPI; the Korean Association of Southeast Asian Studies; the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University; the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore; the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University; the Taiwan Association of Southeast Asian Studies; the Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam; and the Asian Center, University of the Philippines.

collegial exchange around empirical studies and locally-derived research agendas. Since the inception of the fellowship program in the mid- 1970s, CSEAS has fostered a dynamic environment between staff (as counterparts) and visiting scholars. The networks developed through this program have strengthened and deepened the ties that Kyoto University has through university to university MOU arrangements with 31 universities in Southeast Asia (including departmental level).

Exploring a New Stage: Integration with Expansion

In January 2017, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies was relaunched in a new institution that integrated the former Center for Southeast Asian Studies and the Center for Integrated Area Studies (CIAS). In addition to the integration of the research agendas and information production and management, the new CSEAS is also an expansion of the geographic coverage of the institution. In the pursuit of fostering cross-regional dialogue and larger scale comparison of data and analysis, Latin American Area Studies faculty, their projects and networks became integral parts of the center, as the institution continues to adapt to the changing world and adopts a more inter-regional comparative approach towards its research agenda.

In response to the need to further pursue scientific research, CSEAS, together with several graduate schools and research institutes at Kyoto University, launched the “Japan-ASEAN Science, Technology and Innovation Platform (JASTIP): Promotion of Sustainable Development Research” within the framework of the Collaboration Hubs for International Research Program (CHIRP) in 2015 funded by the Strategic International Collaborative Research Program (SICORP) of Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) (Project Leader: Kono Yasuyuki 2015-2020). JASTIP promotes Japan-ASEAN collaboration on science and technology research and accelerate the application of its outcomes to social innovation in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A synergistic Area Studies approach has impacted within the university as well, drawing on resources that are close at hand.

Along with these science oriented large-scale projects, there has also been the need to situate and understand the ways in which new technologies, political realities and aspirations have

altered how Southeast Asian's represent current issues they face within the region. Since 2012, CSEAS has also initiated the Visual Documentary Project (VDP) and has received close to 500 documentaries from across the region (Project Leader: Mario Lopez 2012-). VDP acts as a bridge to connect filmmakers to research scholars to offer a complimentary platform to how to perceive and engage with issues that people face in the region. Each year the project has put forward themes to encourage debate with Area Studies specialists in Japan and importantly, with an interested public. It collaborates actively with international film festivals and schools as well as providing materials for teaching Southeast Asia. To date, under different themes VDP has received high quality works engaging in politics, the environment, urbanization, care, popular culture, human movement, and plural co-existence. The project ultimately aims to bring academics and cultural collaborators together to help shape discussions on knowledge production that strengthen linkages between Japan and ASEAN nations.

Through JASTIP and other ongoing initiatives, CSEAS continues to strengthen cooperative research and foster links between ASEAN and Japan; to train researchers to become leaders in their subsequent fields; and accelerates research that will be a driving force with the shared goal to attain sustainable development through closer collaboration between Japan and ASEAN countries. Nonetheless, most members are Japanese researchers specializing in environment, energy, biological resources, biodiversity, and disaster prevention in the context of Southeast Asia. The role of Area Studies researchers in this kind of team environment is to reveal local community issues and to consider what scientific research is necessary to solve them through collaboration with researchers in each field. This role can only be achieved by Area Studies specialists who can develop research topics from the reality of the target area and only through accumulated experience by flexibly selecting and developing research methods according to the actual situation of target areas. These frequently require a multidisciplinary approach that individual disciplines fail to cover. And this kind of collaboration between Area Studies researchers and cutting-edge scientists is an essential process for constructing sustainable human societies based upon the on the premise of diverse communities found in Southeast Asia.

In this context, CSEAS provides a major arena for researchers with various disciplines and non-academic stakeholders to share knowledge (both theoretical and empirical), to locate suitable

research partners and carry out collaborative research. CSEAS has become a place of academic pursuit, intellectual exchange and network consolidation between researchers from Japan, Southeast Asia and beyond. Its networks extend through all of the Kyoto University system, where other research is conducted in different fields across the region²⁴. Even as the institutional frameworks for funding, collaboration and regional interaction change, the fundamental CSEAS methodological approaches remain solid, based on core values that represent a commitment to study of the region. In the research agenda for the current stage of work, there are four main elements.

- 1) Understand how people live, construct, manage and develop societies within the natural, historical and cultural continuum of an area.
- 2) Propose large, empirically-based locally appropriate ideas that can contribute to the healthy and sound evolution of Southeast Asian societies.
- 3) Learn from unique and diverse Southeast Asian forms that are practiced locally and link into exchanges with other parts of the world to consider the future directions of global society.
- 4) Learn from the local knowledge systems within our situated knowledge of the region and allow Southeast Asia to be a lens to comparatively observe diversity in other tropical regions in the world whilst questioning what constitutes the region.

The first two represent CSEAS' traditional stance, while the latter two form part of an emerging arena within which methodological frontiers and empirical realities are engaged through collaborative work with other partners. The world does not need a fixed blueprint for the future. Rather, it requires a deeper understanding of the *modalities* that exist to think through and across regions comparatively by way of disciplinary approaches that co-presence multiple perspectives. We believe that this vision of Southeast Asian Area Studies reflects changes underway in the world. Just as the position of Southeast Asia is evolving as a significant part of Asia, a global identity (if

²⁴ To date there are approximately 190 faculty spread across Kyoto University who although not affiliated directly to CSEAS or Area Studies, work in Southeast Asia in collaboration with other researchers in the region. To this CSEAS has just under 190 outside of the university who collaborate with CSEAS. This excludes the Japanese association for Southeast Asian Studies (approximately 600+ scholars based within Japan). Kyoto University has also recently established an ASEAN Center in Bangkok and an active Network Committee with 20 representatives from across different faculties (including medicine and engineering) to promote research initiatives and foster linkages within the region.

it exists) and the role of the region is undergoing a paradigmatic transformation. A view on Southeast Asia from Japan is a view that is closely intertwined with views from within other parts of Asia, including crucially those from within Southeast Asia itself. Concurrently, looking out from Southeast Asia, one sees Japan within Asia, and part of the rapidly changing global architectures of nature and society. At present, within Japan, political exigencies have placed pressure on producing “social contributions” and institutions doing Area Studies are challenged to articulate their vision for internationalized, innovative and engaged research. It is precisely at this moment in time that CSEAS is reconsolidating its approaches and expanding its networks to engage in constructive and productive collaboration with institutions of Southeast Asian studies across the globe.

The need for Southeast Asian studies will continue to dramatically increase. The ASEAN region is now home to more than 600+ million people. As numerous nations undergo economic, socio-political and ecological transformation, the region will increasingly become an important political and economic entity. In spite of ongoing political uncertainties, security issues and ongoing inequality, the region has shown immense progress over the past 20 years. It is one with a vast wealth of biomass resources provisioned by an abundant solar energy supply. CSEAS recognizes and understands the need to consider political, economic, and ecological possibilities in the region and this demands an integrated multidisciplinary approach. This recognition arises from the research mandate that continuously evolves together with the rigorous theoretical and methodological positions of scholars sharing a concern with environmental harmonization, the wise use of energy and resources and sustainable socio-ecological development for life in the broadest sense. Responding to imperatives in the region and at a planetary scale, we recognize the need to continue assessing situated methodologies while keeping in mind the ‘knowledge vectors’ that shape research practices.

Conclusions

As this is written in 2019, we face an unprecedented range of global problems. The natural environment cannot sustain the trajectories that societies are pursuing: biodiversity is undergoing a collapse, climate change is intensifying, and weather patterns are increasingly more unpredictable

with astronomical costs testing the resilience of communities. Social systems are becoming stretched past their capacity, with economic disparities deepening and poverty growing. Cultural and religious conflicts have been expanding and communicable diseases and transboundary environmental problems are now major threats to public health. These challenges are interrelated, which means that individual measures have had only limited effects in helping societies cope. Southeast Asian societies are attempting to realize economic development based on loosely structured societies, flexible governance and a mixture of traditional and modern technology. The political systems in which these challenges need to be met are themselves being challenged by political instability. This comes with the understanding that democratic institutions of governance created in the post-colonial era cannot adequately confront these. Experience suggests that it is time for us to reconsider the social paradigms that have been premised upon abundant resources, a stable natural environment, and strong governance that sustained the growth of the region in the latter half of the 20th century.

The transformative nature of Southeast Asian studies is to provide an arena where researchers from diverse backgrounds and specializations can meet and work together to examine the realities that Southeast Asian societies face. However, discussions must move beyond the concerns of scholars in the humanities and social sciences to include broader scientific dialogues. Bridging disciplinary divides as a holistic approach has been at the heart of research with the longer-term goal of constructing understandings and producing perspectives based on the multiple realities of Southeast Asian societies and nature. This is possible, and as this paper shows, has been empirically done for many decades. Interactions need to comprise a transdisciplinary, regional and global approach that can derive proposals for human society as a whole, through empirically grounded and situated knowledge. Furthermore, future human societies should not be grounded solely in science and technology originating in the West (nor from Japan), but synthesize the disparate experiences, wisdom and adaptations of the world's various regions to realize the coexistence of diverse societies and coexistence between humanity and nature. This should be attuned to the exigencies of a region in perpetual flux. The knowledge of facts presupposes a knowledge of values. We can only hope that strategic alliances between researchers in collaboration with regional scholars, policy-makers, government organizations, agencies and civil society can foster synergistic knowledge production and engagement. This will contribute toward

strengthening our commitments to the core values of long-term field research, the cultivation of understanding through local languages and the integration of multiple perspectives through close collaboration.

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