CSEAS Colloquium

Can area studies compare?

That is the question. Or put another way, did area studies ever have comparative promise? And if they did, do they still have it, or can they recover it? My answer is that they did, they might, and if they don't, then they can. In this talk I explain why I think so, by revisiting the work of one of the luminaries of Southeast Asian studies: Benedict Anderson; and specifically, his essay on the logic of seriality in *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998). There, he opposes two types of seriality, one unbound, the other bound. I locate in this opposition the rudiments of a method for comparative inquiry. I refer to this method, after Anderson, as unbound comparison. The logic of unbound comparison rests in its locus: the somewhere that is its area. I contrast this logic with the logic of bound comparison. The latter I associate with some modes of disciplinary inquiry that insist it is possible and necessary to begin inquiry nowhere; something that is not only practically impossible but also from an area studies standpoint, illogical. In closing, I address the question of what unbound comparison does that bound comparison does not, and what area studies have the wherewithal to do better, in my view, than other modes of inquiry.

■ Nicholas Cheesman

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Thursday 28 November 2019
13:30-14:30

Middle-sized Meeting Room, 3F,
Inamori Foundation Building, Kyoto University

CSEAS