

representation. Perhaps it is time for anthologies to gravitate along themes and ideas instead.

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PARK SEUNG WOO and VICTOR T. KING (eds.). *The Historical Construction of Southeast Asian Studies: Korea and Beyond*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013. 468 pp.

If the debate on area studies in general and Southeast Asian Studies in particular has produced a new stream of publications during the last two decades (Rafael 1994, Bowen 2004, Goh 2011), it has rarely taken up the challenge that editors Park Seung Woo and Victor T. King set for this collection of essays. Whilst the large majority of existing works has examined “the history, current state, and the future of the study of Southeast Asia in the United States and other Western countries” (p. 6), the achievement of this edited volume is in providing a platform for scholars from East Asia; in refocusing our attention to the establishment of Southeast Asian Studies in predominantly Asian contexts; and in making relevant material written in Asian vernacular languages accessible to a larger international readership. The volume itself, having grown out of a long-term research project at the Institute for East Asian Studies at Sogang University (SIEAS) in the Republic of Korea, hence constitutes written proof of the impressive vitality of Southeast Asian Studies in that country in particular, amid observations of a persistent ‘crisis’ of area studies in Western academic contexts.

The introduction by Victor King and Park Seung Woo refers to important publications in the conversation on Southeast Asian Studies, but also clearly states that the volume is “not so much concerned with engaging in the central debates, theories and methodologies in Southeast Asian Studies or in addressing

such issues as disciplinary versus area studies” (p. 8). After providing a useful overview of the main themes and issues in subsequent chapters, the editors conclude by calling for a globalised form of area studies that enables collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. The chapter by Park Sa-Myung, a case study of ‘progress and problems’ in the development of Southeast Asian Studies in China, illustrates this globalized outlook, as well as the critical spirit and historical depth of many of the chapters. He traces this Chinese development to historical writings on the ‘Southern Sea’ and ‘Southern Ocean’ during the early dynasties and highlights the crucial role of overseas Chinese in establishing Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore in the 1940s. His hopes for a more pluralistic and institutionally strengthened Southeast Asian Studies in 21st century China, however, are still hampered by what he evaluates as an enduring predominance of Sino-centric perspectives.

Park’s analysis can be further contextualised when read in conversation with other essays in the volume. Whereas Victor King positively describes the British as “pioneers” in establishing Southeast Asian Studies in the region (p. 267), not least due to the privileged “strategic location of a British imperial presence” in Southeast Asia (p. 268), British influence is critically assessed in Lee Sang Kook’s chapter on the “contentious development” of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. Lee not only details the important contribution of Chinese migrants to Singapore’s history, but also unravels a British colonial legacy in the marginalisation of Chinese language education in post-colonial Singapore, which led to the closing down of the Chinese-medium Nanyang University in 1980. The loss of this “alternative heritage” of Chinese scholarship in Singapore (p. 172) provides an important background to understanding what Park Sa-Myung describes as the lack of alternatives to Sino-centric perspectives of Southeast Asian Studies in China.

Regarding future prospects for Southeast Asian Studies, Ariel Heryanto makes a passionate and original plea for scholars to transcend the limiting boundaries of academia by engaging with intra-regional flows of popular culture as well as artists and media activists (p. 227). In his call for a reformulation of area studies beyond nation-state boundaries, he is joined by Song Seung-Won, who documents controversies and debates in Southeast Asian Studies in the US, ranging from the notion of ‘autonomous histories’ to gender studies. One example of such intra-regional flows across Asia, mentioned by a number of contributors to the book, is the so-called ‘Korean wave’ of popular culture that has had great appeal in Southeast Asia. As Park surmises, South Korean scholars themselves have been at the forefront of analysing the wave and its engineering by the South Korean government. Now, even reverse ‘Southeast Asian waves’ in Korea have become an area of interest to Korean scholars of Southeast Asia (p. 128).

In another chapter, Freek Colombijn, who reflects on Dutch historians and their efforts to decolonise Indonesian studies, is explicit in lamenting the “shyness” of Indonesianists to take part in broader theoretical debates (p. 339), a point also made by Park Sa-Myung and Park Seung Woo regarding Southeast Asian Studies in China and Korea, respectively. It is precisely this ‘shyness’,

however, that characterises most of the essays in the collection: historical detail and empirical richness are largely not complemented by theoretical discussion or methodological clarity. By redrawing the frequently contested epistemological divide between a realm of theory vis-à-vis a purportedly applied type of area studies (Dutton 2005), the potential for the volume to reach beyond a readership already interested in Southeast Asian Studies thus remains limited. The value of the work, nevertheless, rests in documenting the plurality of historical constructions of Southeast Asian Studies throughout the Asian region and beyond, and attesting to the ‘Korean wave’ of engaged academics in the field of Southeast Asian Studies.

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