

# **Overview of Research and Studies on Southeast Asia in Thailand: “Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?”<sup>1</sup>**

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*...that the major contribution of Southeast Asian studies within the region itself could be the enhancement of one's self-awareness in order to assist one in reaching a better understanding of the present. Perhaps, in an age of great change, there is more than ever a need for self-awareness.*

*O W Wolters, Jakarta, November 1993*

*...we can hardly say that Southeast Asian studies do not exist in Thailand. The concept has long been bandied around albeit parochially - Thai-centric, parasitic, institutionalized, a by-product of world politics being pushed from the outside.*

In 1977, two years after the victories of the communists in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos, the Cold War seemed to be over. Meanwhile in Thailand the military government was trying to adjust to the new situation. At this important historical juncture, two leading Thai academics, Dr Sombat Chantornvong and Dr Thak Chaloehtiarana, both from the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, made an observation at a Colloquium on Southeast Asian Studies, held at the foot of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah - one of the highest peaks in Southeast Asia. This observation was that as far as Southeast Asian studies in Thailand were concerned - whether one looked at teaching, seminar, research, institutions - they were parochial, meager, and 'at square one'.<sup>2</sup> Patya Saihoo,

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank a number of people who helped in preparing this paper. Dr Corrine Phuangkasam, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, and the Thammasat-Kyoto Core University organizing committee, who kindly gave me the opportunity to do this study. My sincere thanks goes to Director Prof Yoshihiro Tsubouchi, his colleagues and staff at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, who made my one-month stay in Kyoto in October 1997, a memorable one. Prof Hayao Fukui, Dr Thanet Aphornsuwan, Dr Coeli Barry (and their happy Maya), Asst Prof Nakharin Mektrairat, all helped in different ways. My appreciation goes to Khun Kanchanaporn Chitsanga, a Thammasat librarian who was there in Kyoto and gave helping hands searching for books and articles. I also want to thank Khun Prajak Kongkirati, a Thammasat student who helped me as a research assistant for one month in September.

The subtitle of this paper is inspired by and taken from O W Wolters (1994), a pre-eminent cross-boundary Southeast Asianist; Professor Wolters took it from *D'ou venons nous? Qui sommes nous? Ou allons nous?*, the title of Paul Gauguin's picture in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, who "exclaimed in 1897, though his intention, alas, was suicide".

<sup>2</sup> Sombat Chantornvong & Thak Chaloehtiarana, 1981. In Bahrain, TS. et al. (Eds.)

another Thai academic who was at the same conference, agreed that there was still no 'comprehensive program' of Southeast Asian studies in Thailand.<sup>3</sup>

The problem, according to the first two Thai academics, was three-fold: firstly, there were no 'legal' institutions devoted to SE Asian studies (those that existed were merely adjuncts and 'parasitic-like'); secondly, there was no support either from the Thai government or university administrations, even though a good number of Thai academics during the Cold War era were trained in Southeast Asian studies (especially at American colleges); and thirdly, there was the problem of apathy among students and a lack of available reading and other instructional materials. The two academics went on to say that, however, "...the changing scenario of world politics in the 1970s bids that countries in Southeast Asia should view their future existence pragmatically, both individually and collectively".<sup>4</sup> To them it was "...quite obvious for there probably has never been a time when the importance of Southeast Asia as a region could be more readily acceptable to both the Thai Government and the general public as at the present time".

More than 10 years later, in 1991, another Thammasat academic (namely myself) made a similar remark at a Kyoto-Thammasat Core University conference entitled *In Search of a Collaborative Framework for Southeast Asian Studies*. My comment was made at an equally significant crossroads for the international community - the collapse of Western communism, coupled with tremendous changes in social and economic policies among socialist countries in East and Southeast Asia. This was also a time when Thailand was riding high, setting records for 'economic growth', and being labelled as one of those 'Asian Miracles'.

As this author noted, Southeast Asian studies (hereafter refer to as SE Asian studies) in Thailand was almost non-existent. It was very much like a Thai saying *klai kluu kin dang* (salt is within reach but one eats alkali). And it was rather curious that Thai academic institutions had not yet paid enough attention to Southeast Asia, despite the fact that Thailand belongs to the region. Given the new era of international politics, plus the then rapid economic growth in Thailand, with its trade and need for natural resources from neighboring countries, it was particularly surprising that the Thai government, elite and academics knew little of the economies, politics, societies and cultures of countries within their own region.<sup>5</sup>

My paper then went on to suggest that area studies seemed to be limited and self-centered. Traditionally and conventionally, Thailand has always overlooked its neighbors, preferring to focus on its relationship with leading world powers

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<sup>3</sup> Patya Saihoo is an English trained anthropologist, one of the first in Thailand; he was then working at Chulalongkorn University. Although his idea about problems and solutions for Southeast Asian studies in Thailand were similar to Sombat and Thak, he noticed that there was more going on in the field of Southeast Asian studies then. Sombat and Thak looked at only two universities: Chulalongkorn and Thammasat. Meanwhile Patya took a look at other universities as well; he found that at the two campuses of Sinlapakorn there was a master's program in Southeast Asian history, together with arts and archaeology courses. At Mahidol University, a program of Southeast Asian language and cultural studies had just started. Patya pointed out that they were more "incomplete programs of Southeast Asian studies", meaning they consisted of some individual subjects and courses within the humanities and the social sciences. They were in History, Geography (curiously though in Thailand, Geography was always attached to the History Department; therefore, it was seen as a part of Humanities), Arts and Archaeology (as compared to Political Science), International Relations, Sociology and Anthropology. But there was none in Economics. Patya Saihoo, (1981) in Bahrin, TS et al., (Eds.), p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 181

<sup>5</sup> Charnvit Kasetsiri, 1991

like the United States, Japan and European countries. Whatever the reasons for this, be it traditional distrust, colonial legacy (without having been formally colonized), or Thai centrism, there is a need to develop SE Asian studies from a different perspective.

Again in mid-1995, before the bursting of Thailand's 'bubble economy', a group of some 50 academics and students, mainly from Thammasat, and a few from Chulalongkorn and Sinlapakorn universities,<sup>6</sup> (with encouragement from the newly established Thailand Research Fund)<sup>7</sup>, gathered for a one day discussion. This is their conclusion which might be worth quoting in full:

"Despite a large corpus of books and articles on Southeast Asia by Thais, there exists an uneasy feeling that we do not really know much about our neighbors. Southeast Asian studies has never been regarded as a separate inter-discipline in its own right at our universities. What has been taught about the region stems mostly from 'local knowledge' rather than academic interest. This 'local knowledge' is based on such practical considerations as business, political interests, day-to-day relationship, and cultural counter - trends. It is tinged with biases, mistrust, and lack of real understanding.

In the past when we attempted a study of the region, it tended to be an "area study", dealing with bits and pieces rather than with the whole picture, reflecting topical concerns at the time, such as national security, fear and mistrust, and pan-Thai-ism. We tend not to see ourselves as part of a regional grouping, but as a nation that stands above others in the region. In other words, we are full of somewhat 'imperial knowledge' about the region. Historically, interest in the Southeast Asian region sprang from American political hegemony after the Second World War and especially during the Cold War years, manifesting itself in specific area studies, reaching its height in 1960s when a number of centers for Southeast Asian studies were created in universities in the United States, Europe, Japan, and Australia.

Now that Southeast Asia has become more and more of a regional entity, and now that it has received full recognition by universities in Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and elsewhere, is it too late for us to reconsider Southeast Asian studies as an inter-discipline that deserves full academic attention rather than a subject or a topic incorporated here and there in other disciplines? Indeed, are we too late to act?"

<sup>6</sup> The one-day panel discussion was attended by a number of leading Thai academics. Of course the majority were from Thammasat, mainly from the Political Science, History, Anthropology departments, and the Thai Khadi Studies Institute. This might reflect the type of academics who are potentially Southeast Asianists and whose interests lie in area studies. Those who were present include: from Liberal Arts (including History), Dean, Dr Chirapan Bunyakiat, Prof Phetcharee Sumit, Dr Thanet Aphornsuwan, Asst Prof Kanchani La-ongsri, etc ; from Political Science were Dean, Dr Seksan Prasertkul, Dr Corrine Phuengkasem, Dr Chulacheep Chinwanno; the Director of Thai Khadi Studies Institute, Prof Sumit Pitiphat; from Anthropology, Dr Paritta Ko-anantakul, Thirayut Bunmi; Dr Bunrak Bunyakhetmala from the Thailand Research Fund; from Chulalongkorn History Dept, Dr Sunait Chutintranond; from Sinlapakorn, Asst Prof Pranee Wongdses, Songyotte Wehongsa; and Dr Coeli Barry and Dr Peter Jackson of the Research School of Asia and Pacific Studies, Australian National University. There were 17 Thammasat graduate students (13 in History and four Sociology/Anthropology), eight undergraduates, and six from Mass Media. Dr Thongchai Winichakul from the Southeast Asia Program of the University of Wisconsin, and Dr Charnvit Kasetsiri of the History Department of Thammasat were the two main moderators.

<sup>7</sup> The Thailand Research Fund was established in 1992, during the Anand Panyarachun Government, which saw a need for academic research for the future of Thailand in its 'globalized role'. The Government put in one of the largest amounts of money for endowment of the Fund.

Judging from these three observations which evenly punctuate a time span of almost three decades, Southeast Asia as a field of studies hardly exists in Thailand.<sup>8</sup> Thus, at first glance one could easily and safely assume that there were no 'legal' (read formal) institutions for SE Asian studies; there was no support from the government nor the universities, and there was no "critical mass", ie academics and students, no research nor materials for teaching SE Asian studies. Therefore, it seems rather futile to talk about an "Overview of Research and Studies on Southeast Asia in Thailand", as the title of this paper indicates.

Nevertheless, we know full well that since 1974 a master's degree program in Southeast Asian history has been operating at the Faculty of Arts, Sinlapakorn University, Nakhon Pathom campus. In the same year, a Center for Southeast Asian Language and Cultural Studies was created at Mahidol University (formerly a Medical School). Earlier on, at the height of the Vietnam War, two area studies programs were created at two leading universities. These were: A program of Asian studies established in 1967 at Chulalongkorn; and, a program of Thai studies launched at Thammasat in 1971 (by 1975 it was already 'legal' and elevated to the status of Thai Khadi Studies Institute). There were seminars and discussions on Southeast Asia here and there; a few text-books in the Thai language, either written by Thai academics or translated from American-English ; also appeared. And most importantly, if one steps outside official and academic circles, one can find a kind of what Dr Thongchai Winichakul called 'local knowledge' or a Thai version of Southeast Asian studies which has been operating in Thailand for some time.

In this context, Southeast Asian studies in Thailand appears to have existed for quite some time. If the heyday of Southeast Asian studies in North America was during the Vietnam War, the starting point of such in Thailand was not that far behind. But why the grumbles? Why don't Thai academics feel that there are 'genuine' SE Asian studies in Thailand? Is it because of the 'odd existence' and, at the same time, dilemma of SE Asian studies within the Thai academic community itself? Is there a need for a different kind of Southeast Asian studies when working with fellow Thais and viewing the situation from the 'inside'? Is it true that 'inside' we cannot talk about or see Southeast Asia in the same manner as we do while in Ithaca, Madison, London, Kyoto or Canberra? Do the Southeast Asian centers dotted around the world, making their voices heard and their existence known, represent a kind of Westernised SE Asian studies? And are even those concepts of *Nanyang* or *Nanyo* and *Suvarnabumi* in the great Asian traditions of China, Japan and India, merely of the East (and South Asia)? Do all these understandings/constructions of Southeast Asia come from outside the region? Do they merely reflect the various historical contexts and needs of countries/empires beyond SE Asian borders?

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<sup>8</sup> It should be pointed out here that as far as institutional building of Southeast Asian studies in Southeast Asia is concerned, Singapore was the first, in 1968, to found the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies as a research organization with no teaching or students. In 1974 Thailand started its MA degree program in Southeast Asian History at Sinlapakorn University, Nakhon Pathom. In 1976 Malaysia established a bachelor degree program in Southeast Asian Studies, the first of its kind, in its Faculty of Arts and Social Science at the University of Malaya. In 1992 Vietnam established the same kind of bachelor degree program at the Open University of Ho Chi Minh City; and the National University of Singapore came up with a similar degree program at the same time.

Looking from 'inside', is there always the 'other', or rather 'another' Southeast Asia as perceived by the Thai, Burmese, Indonesian, Malay or even those 'minorities', Mon, Karen, Kui, Lue, etc? And what about the 'local knowledge'? If SE Asian studies are to be of any value to the people of the region, it might be worthwhile to ask "What (or how and why) is Southeast Asia?" in the Thai, Tagalog, Malay, Teochiu, etc languages. This is probably a topic of another paper in itself but I will try to come up with some ideas when discussing this "overview on research and studies" in the following pages.

What then is this 'odd existence' and dilemma of Southeast Asian studies in Thailand? To answer this question one has to survey academic activities, policy planning, and institutional building among Thai universities in the period stretching from the 1960s to the 1990s. In addition, the question should be seen in connection with the emergence of Thai studies in Thailand during the same period; how are Thai studies viewed within the context of Southeast Asia? Is it the same as, or a substitute for SE Asian studies, or are they separate no matter how related?

On the other hand, if SE Asian studies do exist in Thailand, no matter how odd their position has been, what is the 'body of knowledge', who are the Thai Southeast Asianists, what have they produced in general, and what is the research trend in particular? To answer these questions, again one has to look into the works of some personalities as well as the activities of the academic community, both formal and informal - their publications, their aspirations and their manifestations.

### **Institution Building: Its Problems**

Sombat and Thak were partly correct when in 1977 they observed that there were no 'legal' institutions handling SE Asian studies in Thailand. They looked at the two leading Thai universities: The Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University and the Thai Khadi Studies Institute at Thammasat University. These two institutes were founded on 'informal' programs in 1967 and 1971 respectively, at the height of the wars in Indochina. The Chulalongkorn Institute of Asian Studies evolved from a program attached to the Faculty of Political Science. Its active and leading figure was Dr Khien Thiravit, an American-educated China expert and a political scientist. Dr Khien received a Harvard-Yenching scholarship to study at Harvard, and he brought home Asian studies (ie Chinese studies).

At Thammasat, the Director of the Thai Khadi Studies Institute was Dr Neon Snidvongs, a historian with the Faculty of Liberal Arts. Dr Neon received a Thai government scholarship to study at the School of Oriental and African Studies; she brought home SE Asian studies (ie Thai). Thus area studies in Thailand came into being when the first generation of the post-World War II overseas-educated Thais began returning home. They were influenced by Anglo-American academic models.<sup>9</sup> It became normal to hear big 1960s academic names like John Fairbanks, Edwin Reischauer, DGE Hall, etc mentioned among the small circle of foreign-educated Thais.

<sup>9</sup> I am told, but cannot yet confirm, that in 1955 another English-educated academic (a phonetics graduate, 1948) MR Saengsom Kasemsri, was the first person to teach an introductory Southeast Asian history course in Thailand while he was a staff member of Chulalongkorn's Faculty of Arts.

It took each institute some years to be formally and legally recognized by the universities and by the government (five years in the case of Thammasat, which was quick since it received the blessing of Prince Wan, an influential personality who was one-time Deputy Prime Minister under the Sarit-Thanom regimes and a Rector of Thammasat). The recognition of Thai Khadi received the support of MR Kukrit, then an extremely popular editor-writer, a royalist intellectual and a future prime minister. Chulalongkorn's Asian Studies was not recognized until 1985, some 18 years after it first began. On gaining formal and legal status they could now receive a budget allocation, researchers, staff and offices. Chulalongkorn's 'lengthy' experience in formally establishing Asian studies highlights the frustrating nature of developing 'legal' academic institutions in Thailand. In this light, one can better understand why some academics just ignore and shy away from such institution building.

Dr Khien took patience and time to nurture and develop his Chulalongkorn Asian Studies; he helped to make the Institute respected and well-known, both nationally and internationally. The Institute of Asian Studies has managed to attract cooperation and funding from foreign foundations, especially American (the Asia Foundation and the Ford Foundation) and Japanese foundations (the Japan Foundation). However, as far as Southeast Asian studies is concerned, the Institute was not an ideal place for such studies since its main focus was China and Japan; Southeast Asia was only supplementary and complementary. Given that Dr Khien's directorship of the Institute was in the 1970s when things were very politically active on the international front and when it was crucial for Thailand to readjust its pro-American, anti-Communist foreign policy, it is understandable why East Asia, especially China and Japan, loomed much larger than Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup>

Besides research projects and regular seminars on East Asia and occasionally on Southeast Asia, the Institute has been active in its publications, mainly in the Thai language: *Journal of Asian Review*, a quarterly established in 1979; *Asia Yearbook*, launched in 1985; and, the quarterly *Asian Studies Bulletin*, also introduced in 1985. It now has five researchers (with master and doctorate degrees) working full time; they act like Southeast Asia watchers on Laos, Vietnam, Burma, Cambodia and Malaysia. However there are no researchers focusing on the Philippines or Indonesia as yet. As we will see below, in a comparison between Chulalongkorn's Institute of Asian Studies and Thammasat's Thai Khadi, the establishment of a functioning research center, complete with research staff, presents problems and dilemmas to both the research center and the researchers themselves.

For a long period of time, the Institute of Asian Studies, under the directorship of Dr Khien, served as almost the only Thai research center on Asia. It is now headed by Dr Witthaya Sucharitanarugsa, an Australian-educated historian-political scientist, who has been its Director since 1993. As an

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<sup>10</sup> However, it is important to mention that though the focus of the Institute is East Asia, Southeast Asia, especially Indochina, received much more attention in the 1980s. This was when Vietnamese troops were in Cambodia and when Thailand felt its security was alarmingly threatened. This situation made it possible and logical for the Institute to expand its activities to cover Indochina to fit the situation. This is also when Thailand, under the Prem Tinsulanond Government, re-arranged its alliance with the US and China, recognizing the three Cambodian factions, including the Khmer Rouge, which were fighting, along the Thai-Cambodian border, against the Heng Samrin-Hun Sen regime supported by Vietnamese troops. As a result, the Institute produced a great number of works concerning Vietnam and Cambodia on a range of subjects including boat people, the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge, and the problem of a peace settlement in Cambodia.

'Indonesianist' who speaks *bahasa* Indonesia fluently (a very rare case in the small Thai academic community of Southeast Asianists), Dr Witthaya has added a Southeast Asian dimension to the Institute. In December 1996, the Institute held a very historic first conference with the Burmese Historical Commission, on the Rangoon University campus (funded by the Japan Foundation). A short time later, in February 1997, the Institute coordinated a visit to Thailand by 10 Vietnamese scholars to attend the first Thai-Vietnamese studies conference (supported by the Thailand Research Fund).

In short, works at Chulalongkorn tend to be in the social sciences, for example international relations, security, political and contemporary issues. Because the focus of the Institute was the international politics of big powers, Southeast Asia was secondary. The disciplinary focus of the Institute has mostly been political science and history (more political science under Dr Khien, but there has been a recent shift towards history under Dr Witthaya). Other than these, no other disciplines in social sciences or humanities, not to mention natural sciences, have played any part in the studies.

In order to support its research, the Institute depended heavily on foreign foundations and outside support since Chulalongkorn University's budget for research has been unbelievably small. This was and remains the case at Thammasat and elsewhere. It is one of the most serious problems and dilemmas for higher education in Thailand. If being modern and international means establishing research centers, it will always be done. But whatever there is on the inside of such centers does not matter much in the eyes of administrators. To them the main function of any university is teaching and getting students graduated; research is extra and luxurious. To them new knowledge, ideas and technology can easily be borrowed or copied from abroad - Europe, America or Japan. It had been so when the country faced colonialism and the questions of modernization. Why should it not remain so? In this light, it is easy to understand why area studies which require research work have become dependent on external support, making it difficult and slow for such endeavors to develop and flourish. The situation remained like this throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It was not until the early 1990s, that the concept of original research was accepted and the Thai government (under Anand Panyarachun) set up a huge endowment for the establishment of the Thailand Research Fund (to be discussed below).

Initially in 1974, it was a policy of the Institute of Asian Studies to create a minor Southeast Asian study program for BA students majoring in political science. Sombat and Thak discovered that in 1981 there were 14 courses on Southeast Asia offered at Chulalongkorn at the undergraduate level (three in the Faculty of Political Science and 11 in the History Department in the Faculty of Arts, excluding courses on Thai and other Asian languages). In 1994, more than 10 years later, I reported that 15 such courses were running (six in Political Science and nine in History-Arts, again excluding courses on Thai and other Asian languages). Given the fact that there were many courses, there ought to have been more life and meaning in the area studies. But because of faculty and student apathy, and a lack of support from the administration, the minor program was quickly dropped; no major programs, undergraduate or graduate were ever initiated. The Institute remains a research center, with no teaching or

degree granting involved. As Sombat and Thak again observed, until Southeast Asian studies was properly integrated with teaching, "...other activities such as seminars or research would seem to be of limited use".<sup>11</sup> This is, again, the odd existence and dilemma of Southeast Asian studies in Thailand.

To an international audience it may not sound unusual to have a center devoted solely to research since there are centers purely for research in North America, Europe, Japan and Australia for example. But for Thailand, with its long-term dependency on *nakrian (hua) nok* (overseas educated) academics and the 'importation' of new higher education knowledge, there is a concern that after the leadership of Dr Khien (who is now retired) and Dr Witthaya (who is approaching retirement), it might not be easy to find suitable replacements. This not unfamiliar situation also exists at Thammasat and other national universities, which by the late 1990s and early 2000s will see great numbers of their academics retired. Most of these universities have not yet come up with a genuine solution to this exodus of knowledge and experience. With overseas funding drying up, coupled with the fact that little energy has been devoted to training a new group of academics domestically, Thailand is now facing a big problem.

At the time of the Cold War in the 1960s and early 1970s, aid poured in from the US and it was not difficult for bright young Thai graduates to secure scholarships from foreign foundations and philanthropic organizations like Ford, Asia, Rockefeller, Fulbright, the East-West Center, Hawaii, or from institutions in Japan, Europe and Australia. These students could easily move on to pursue their studies at MA or PhD level.<sup>12</sup> This was fine for a certain time but later it became a dilemma. Because Thai area specialists are the products of the Cold War, very few are home-grown, therefore Thai universities have become dependent on outside assistance in cultivating experts, relying on Europe, America and more recently Japan and Australia. By the late 1970s and early 1980s such financial support seemed to have dried up and new by-products rarely turned up from the United States or from Europe and Australia (though there are still Thai students pursuing post-graduate degrees in Japan). Since Thai universities cannot and have not yet filled in the role of producing their own faculty members with MA or PhD qualifications (in area studies), this is becoming a major problem. Though, in the long run, one wishes that it might work out positively for Thai academia to have to depend on themselves. This is the reason why Southeast Asian studies in Thailand, or in Southeast Asia in general, will have to take teaching and degree granting into consideration if they are to be of any value to the region.

Let us now look at Thammasat and its attempts to cultivate Southeast Asian studies. Thammasat started with a focus on Thai studies; it is more on the side of humanities, oriented towards history, art and culture. This is partly because of its leader, Dr Neon who is a historian, and partly because of MR Kukrit

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<sup>11</sup> Sombat and Thak (1981), p. 176.

<sup>12</sup> See note 10 for some names of American-educated Thai academics. If Dr Khien and Dr Neon are the first post-World War II generation; Boonsanong, Akin, etc could be called the second. I think that Dr Thongchai Winichakul of Wisconsin, Dr Kasian Tejapira and Dr Seksan Prasertkul of Thammasat Political Science, and Dr Sunait Chutintranond of Chulalongkorn, represent the third and latest generation. The first generation have all retired after the age of 60, as is the practice within the Thai civil service. In the second generation, some have retired and some are about to retire within the next few years. The third are in their late forties, and probably the most active for the time being. I am not sure if we can talk about a fourth generation as yet.

Pramoj and his role as a 'special' Professor at Thammasat. Kukrit was very active, lecturing in courses like Thai civilization along with Dr Neon's teaching and research team. In fact in the late 1960s, prior to the Student Uprising of 14 October 1973, Kukrit successfully promoted Thammasat nationally as a center of arts and culture. Under his guidance and supervision the *Khon Thammasat* or student Ramayana troupe, a form of court-tradition masked dance, performed annually and occasionally received royal audience. It was unfortunate for Thammasat, that unlike the long tenure of Dr Khien at Chulalongkorn, Kukrit entered 'real' politics and became Prime Minister soon after the 1973 Student Uprising. And likewise that, with student politics boiling up at Thammasat and elsewhere, Dr Neon left to join the teaching staff at the Chulachomklao Military Academy Cadets.

At about the same time there were plans at both Thai Khadi Studies and the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat to expand and incorporate Southeast Asian studies in their activities and curriculum. These plans were being formulated during the turbulent years of Thai politics of polarization, 1973-76, and when the University was under the Rectorship of Dr Puey Ungpakorn (1974-76), an economist and respected former Governor of the Bank of Thailand. Thai Khadi was:

"...seen as a possible avenue for the establishment of an Asian studies program through internal structural changes... In 1976, a university-level committee was set up to engage in a feasibility study of a possible Asian studies program. The initial findings of this committee indicated that Thammasat had the manpower and library resources to start such a program with particular emphasis on Southeast Asian studies. Several members of the committee were advanced degree holders from major Southeast Asian studies programs from the United States and Europe."<sup>13</sup>

In the wake of the Bloody Coup of October 6, 1976, Thammasat became a target of political criticism. Accused of being communist and for committing *lese majeste*, the Rector was forced into exile in England (he later had a stroke and became partly paralyzed and speechless). With active faculty members dispersed (few ever returning) and some students fleeing into the jungle, not surprisingly the plan for Southeast Asian studies was hastily dropped.

The plan for the expansion of the Thai Khadi Studies Institute has never been revived. The Institute has instead developed as a leading center for Thai

<sup>13</sup> Sombat and Thak, p. 179.

A by-product of US hegemony and its 'Containment Policy' (especially the wars in Indochina), was that a good number of Thai students were awarded scholarships to continue their graduate studies in the US. Cornell University, with its Southeast Asia Program, became a center of training for new Thai academics. A few names of potential Thammasat Southeast Asianists at that time included Boonsanong Punyodayana, PhD in Sociology, who after the Student Uprising of 1973 left Thammasat to join the newly established Socialist Party of Thailand. In February 1976 he was shot dead while driving home late at night. The murderers were probably from a Government counter-insurgency intelligence organization. His then colleague, Dr Pramote Nakhonthab, PhD in Government, also left Thammasat to set up a liberal political party by the name of *Phalang Mai* (New Force). The Party was attacked for its left leanings and after the bloody military coup of 1976, Pramote never returned to academic life. Dr Thak (the much-quoted author in this article), also with a PhD in Government, hung on for a few more years, then left in the early 1980s to pursue an administrative career at Cornell (very successfully I might add). MR Akin Rabibhadana, PhD Anthropology and well-known for his published 1969 MA thesis, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Bangkok Period 1782-1873*, stayed on and became the Director of the Thai Khadi Studies Institute. He later left for Khon Khaen University in the Northeast and never returned. Bantorn Ondam, MA in Rural Sociology, also eventually left to pursue an NGO career and he is still working actively with the peasants and the poor.

studies, heavily oriented towards history. Five out of its six researchers were trained in history in Thailand.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to ask why it remains so. Perhaps the case of Thai Khadi may give us some insight into the problems and dilemmas of SE Asian studies in the region. Certainly the usual explanations can be sought, such as a lack of interest, leadership and funding. However, I believe there is something more fundamental underlying the perception of the role and importance of SE Asian studies within Thailand, as well as in Southeast Asia as a whole.

I think there is a kind of peculiarity in the connection or disconnection between Thai and SE Asian studies in the Thai academia. This might explain why there are hardly any 'genuine' Southeast Asian studies in Thailand according to the prescribed models of advanced industrial nations. It may also explain why over the past three decades there has been continuous and often repetitive debate concerning the problems of establishing SE Asian studies in Thailand - a debate which continues even today. It is here that I want to illustrate two sets of questions and answers. Firstly, as previously raised, are Southeast Asian and Thai studies one and the same? Can one be a substitute or a stand-in, or they should be treated separately? Secondly, being Thai, are we automatically Southeast Asian or do we need to know as much about Southeast Asia as we do about ourselves? Let me try to answer these complex questions.

Most of the potential Southeast Asianists in Thailand have been trained first in North America and Europe, and later in Australia and Japan. As mentioned above, they (we) are the by-products of the Cold War era centers (schools or programs, or whatever you call them) in these advanced industrial nations which are aimed at area study 'specialization'; one must know their special subject in depth to be successful in this environment - one must become an 'expert' of the region. But Southeast Asia is so enormous (500 million people in the 1990s), with hundreds of languages and dialects and a huge diversity of cultures. Therefore, most academics have to be content with 'one country', especially the big three: Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. Usually, these 'experts' know one national Southeast Asian language, at least enough for their PhD thesis research. In their studies most of these experts rarely cross cultural or national boundaries. And it seems that there is no need or pressure for such crossing, though a few manage to do so.

What about the Thais, Indonesians, or Filipinos, who went overseas for their advanced education at these Southeast Asia centers. While being outside they (we) were duly placed back 'inside' Southeast Asia, or more specifically, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines respectively; they now belonged to a certain Southeast Asian studies program. They were to study 'themselves', something which would not have usually crossed their minds if they were in

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<sup>14</sup> I would like to raise some points here about researchers in the Thai context. It would seem logical that a research center would have researchers working full-time, but assumptions about the role of academics in research centers in Thailand has become a problem for both the researchers and the centers they are employed by. In advanced countries like Australia (The Research School of Asia and Pacific Studies, Australian National University) and Japan (The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University), researchers can be promoted and placed on par with other regular faculty members, ie they can climb the academic ladder to become an assistant, associate and eventually a full professor. This academic career pathing explains, for example, the status of one Professor Anthony Ried or one Professor Hayao Fukui. In Thailand, however, researchers are placed under the hierarchical *sakdina* system and hence remain researchers for life. Even if they teach, write articles and/or publish books, they still remain 'second class' citizens of the Thai academia. There is no Prof Sunthari or Prof Ponthimon-only researchers.

their home country. It was already a long journey having to cross cultural, linguistic and national boundaries to study in the American-Australian-English languages (or Japanese, etc., depending on where one studied). They, like their non-Southeast Asian counterparts, usually ended up studying 'one country' which in this case was their own. In light of the demands of having to study and write theses in the language of their host country, they were not expected to learn a SE Asian language (as required of local students) because they already knew one Southeast Asian language (their own) so this more or less met the degree requirement. Likewise, because their 'local knowledge' conveniently fitted with the interests of these Southeast Asian programs or of the interests of their academic advisers, most of them ended up doing research and theses on their own country. To my knowledge, very few Thai students have ventured across the cultural and national boundary for their theses. Those that have can be counted on two fingers - Dr Nidhi Aeosrivongs of Chiangmai University, who pursued Indonesian literature at University of Michigan, and Dr Withaya who studied Indonesian contemporary politics at the Australian National University (ANU). My guess is that this pattern of being 'co-opted' into SE Asian studies via the study of your own nation, has probably been repeated many times over for students from neighboring SE Asian countries who have ventured abroad.

For practical reasons the one-country model remains intact. Upon returning to their home country, most of them (us) turn into what Taufik Abdullah, an Indonesian academic who has been promoting SE Asian studies in Southeast Asia, terms *a satu pisang*, or a banana tree which gives fruit once and dies - reflecting the common situation in Indonesia where academics who have completed their MA or PhD theses, rarely go on to produce any real major works. I believe this is also the case in Thailand. For a combination of reasons - no budget, no support, low salary, apathy, temptation, administrative burden, 'moon lighting', social and political involvement (all of which are known among us) - Southeast Asian studies (research, writing, teaching) as practiced in their overseas *alma mata* seem rather irrelevant once home. Occasionally, if there are regional or international research projects or conferences on Southeast Asia, and if a Thai is invited, they will certainly contribute their knowledge of Thailand, but not because of their merit in crossing culture or national boundaries. In short, a Thai studying and writing a thesis on Thailand while overseas was already a 'Southeast Asianist' when back home doing (or not doing) the same studies. Viewed from the outside they are Southeast Asianist. Thus, Thai studies can be interpreted as SE Asian studies, and vice versa. Here is where Southeast Asian studies in Thailand usually stop. Perhaps Dr Puey's plan of putting Thai and Southeast Asian studies together, with some internal administration arrangement in the case of Thai Khadi Studies, might not be a bad idea after all.

From the inside, however, the one-country approach has generated some crucial functions in its own right. As Benedict Anderson (1984) pointed out, there was an interesting process going on which he termed the 'indigenization' of the study of politics in Southeast Asia. He was critical of area study progress in North America where for a period of 10 years (1974-1984), he could only cite three good works.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, there was something very interesting unfolding but this process

<sup>15</sup> They are J. Scott's *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, B. Kerkliet's *The Huk Rebellion*, and John Girling's *Thailand: Society and Politics*.

was going largely unnoticed in the Anglo-Saxon world. For Thailand, Anderson pointed to works by Thai academics Thaemsook Numnonda (history), Chatthip Nartsupha (economics), Cholthira Kladyoo (*Sattayawatthana*, literature) and Nidhi Aeosrivongs (history), who were actively contributing to new knowledge and new interpretations of Thai society. He paid particular attention to works by Nidhi on the early Bangkok period, its monarchy and its 'bourgeois' character.<sup>16</sup> These Thai academics who write in their own language about their own country are, strictly speaking, seen in Thailand as Thai rather than Southeast Asian specialists. And they probably do not care which label is applied to their work. Thaemsook and Nidhi, with BA qualifications from Chulalongkorn, were later educated in England and the US respectively, at universities where there are Southeast Asian studies. They are potential Southeast Asianists of Thailand, but they chose to work on their own country. And here is where I think they must feel the need, the urgency and relevancy of working within the context of their own country. They have a place here and they are needed for their ideas and academic prowess.

Scholars like Thaemsook, Nidhi and Chatthip are not common; their devotion to Thai studies does not mean they are not interested in SE Asia studies. The lack of interest in Southeast Asia stems from different causes. The 'no-need to learn' perspective can be traced to two deeply rooted problems: first, Thai centrism; and second, role-model searching. The Thai elite are proud, and they have good reason to be proud that their country is the only one in Southeast Asia which managed to remain independent throughout the colonial period. Thai modern history is a story of success, of a country led by enlightened monarchs from the mid-19th century - Kings Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, Vajiravudh and Prajadhipok, together with a long list of various princes (they are the 'fathers' of modernity and scientific technology in Thailand). Later on during the difficult time of World War II, Thailand's new military and civilian leaders again managed to save the country by 'bending with the wind', first joining the Japanese and later siding with the Americans. During the Cold War era, the country's military leaders believed they were saving the country from the communism and chaos unfolding in neighboring countries. Between the 1960s and 1980s, Thailand forged strong economic links with big powers like the US and Japan, thereby securing its legacy of success once again, and transforming itself into a potential Newly Industrialised Country (NIC) - a dynamic element in the 'Asian Miracle'.

Therefore, it might be argued that the rest of Southeast Asia is only useful to Thai academics as case studies of failure during the colonial period (of how Burmese kings and Vietnamese emperors are different from ours, how impractical and inadaptable they had been, etc). Again, in the period of post-World War II, Southeast Asian revolutionaries, be they nationalist or communist, were of little inspiration to the Thai elite. In fact they were rather apprehensive of what had happened in Burma, Indochina and in the archipelago of Southeast Asia (the communists in Malaya and Indonesia so on and so forth). Thus, there was not much use for such cases. The Thai elite, including

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<sup>16</sup> According to Anderson, "Among the most important of these [works by Nidhi] were *Sunthonphu mahakawi kradumph* (Sunthonphu, Bourgeois Poet Laureate) and *Watthanatham kradumph kap wannakham ton rattanakosin* (Bourgeois Culture and the Literature of the early Rattanakosin Period)". Using a variety of tools, but above all a comparative study of poetic styles, Nidhi argued that the rise of the present Chakri (Rattanakosin) dynasty at the end of the 18th century marked a decisive historical break from the high aristocratic civilization of the Ayutthayan era. (the early Chakri thus stands for bourgeoisie).

academics, preferred to look elsewhere for knowledge and enlightenment. If, as Eric Hobsbawm (1997) puts it, “The history of backward countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the history of trying to catch up with the more advanced world by imitating it...”,<sup>17</sup> then Southeast Asia is no use as a role model (except within contemporary economics where Singapore and sometimes Malaysia are seen as possible role models).<sup>18</sup> I think these dynamics of Thai-centrism and elitism explain why Southeast Asian studies in Thailand is in its present condition.<sup>19</sup>

Before leaving the case of institution building, let us look at what has been attempted for Southeast Asian studies at Thammasat. Interestingly, at the same time as Chulalongkorn was planning a SE Asian program in 1974, the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat also came up with the idea of establishing a minor interdisciplinary program on Southeast Asian studies. At that time there was already a course on Southeast Asia which, with some adjustment, could be developed into a minor program.<sup>20</sup> A committee was set up to plan a new curriculum, plus organize seminars and prepare textbooks.<sup>21</sup> As in the case of Chulalongkorn, the minor program met the same fate - it lacked student interest, university support and leadership. As a result, it never came into fruition as an active program and was eventually dropped from the university bulletin without any notice.

In 1997, some 23 years later, the minor study program of Southeast Asia has been revived under the present Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, and is again listed in the University Bulletin with 19 courses (including two in Thai government and foreign relations). As a minor program, students are required to take at least eight courses or 24 credits. At about the same time, in August 1997, the Rector of Thammasat appointed a university-level committee, once again to examine the viability of introducing SE Asian studies as an

<sup>17</sup> Hobsbawm, 1997, pp. 1-9.

<sup>18</sup> I don't know whether the present currency crisis in Southeast Asia will have a strong impact on the perceptions of Southeast Asians towards themselves. Can ASEAN really become a middle ground for cooperation and helping each other? After the baht float on 2 July 1997, Thailand asked for help from the IMF and the World Bank. There was a report that Indonesia would be willing to add \$500 million to the fund. This should be interpreted as the spirit of ASEAN, but some of my colleagues at Thammasat thought it was rather shameful to have to be rescued by Indonesia; they do not have the same feeling, though, if the aid money is from Japan or other big players.

<sup>19</sup> In 1984 a new research center was established at Thammasat University. The Institute of East Asian Studies was given legal status on par with a Faculty. Within the Institute there are three branches of studies: the Japanese, the Chinese and the Korean Studies Centers, but there is none focused on Southeast Asia as a region. As in the case of the Chulalongkorn Institute of Asian Studies, China and Japan loom large and overshadow Southeast Asia. To be fair, it should be mentioned that the present Director of the Institute has suggested, in a letter to myself in September this year, that he is willing to create such a Center as the fourth branch.

<sup>20</sup> In 1974 there were 12 courses on Southeast Asia at Thammasat at the undergraduate level (seven in Political Science, three in History, one each in Anthropology and Linguistics, excluding Thai studies and Asian language courses. In 1994 Thammasat still had 12 courses ie six in Political Science, five in History, one in Anthropology; the Thai Department also listed two Khmer language courses but they were rarely offered. See Charvit (1994) p.110-11. It should be noted that by looking at any annual Thammasat University Bulletin, there are a great number of interesting courses listed. In fact, these courses may have been printed on paper but never been offered. Again, Sombat and Thak commented, in 1981, “The proliferation of courses is the result of poor planning as courses are invariably geared towards individual lecturers, several of whom have left for greener pastures” p. 177.

<sup>21</sup> Two books were produced as a result of this program: Utsane Kannasut and Phatchari Sirorot, *Phunthan kanmuang sethakit sangkhom nai klumprathet achia tawanokchiangtai* (Foundations of Politics, Economics and Societies of Countries in Southeast Asia), 1973, Bangkok: Thai Watthanaphanit (note that the book came out before the set up of the above committee). In 1975, the first author of the two, edited another book: *Kanplianplaeng thang sangkhom sethakit lae kanmuang nai achia akhane* (Econo-Political and Social Changes in Southeast Asia), Bangkok: Phrae Phitthaya.

independent discipline, with degree granting from The bachelor level (as in the case of Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam). Such a degree program might be attached to the Faculty of Liberal Arts, where the Linguistics Department could provide Southeast Asian languages as an integral part of the program. It remains to be seen whether these two programs will take off or whether they will crash like their predecessors in the 1970s.

Besides Chulalongkorn and Thammasat, Sinlapakorn and Mahidol universities, have been quietly doing their part with Southeast Asian studies since the 1970s.<sup>22</sup> I have yet to find out whether the little attention these universities receive from academics outside Thailand is because of their geographic location outside Bangkok or because of their orientation, ie history, linguistics, and culture, which are viewed as more 'soft sciences' than politics or international relations (Chulalongkorn and Thammasat). Sombat and Thak did not discuss these two universities in their 1977 Sabah presentation but Patya told us to wait and see with some optimism. I confess that during the preparation of this paper, I have not done much to increase the body of information available on the studies and research of these two universities. This, too, is part of our problem; it is a problem of fragmentation, of having no networking or coordination.

As mentioned above, Sinlapakorn University commenced its MA program in Southeast Asian history as early as 1974. Its mission is: To produce academics who can teach Southeast Asian studies; and, to promote research, textbooks and knowledge for domestic use in Thailand. By 1995 there were 78 master's degree graduates, but Sinlapakorn seems to have also experienced its fair share of problems and dilemmas in getting its Southeast Asian history program up and running. Most of its students joined the program with insufficient background or training for Southeast Asian history, ie no knowledge of regional languages, except Thai. And because of the time limit, roughly two years for a master's degree program (one year for course work, and one for research and thesis writing), students have no chance to develop their language skills. Therefore, for their theses, most have had to rely on English secondary sources (English is already foreign and cross-cultural, and in fact a very difficult language). For practical reasons, most of them end up choosing not to cross cultural boundaries, thereby resorting to the same solution as their counterparts who go overseas for Southeast Asian studies, ie back to their own one-country and Thai studies.<sup>23</sup> This raises questions about the future of Southeast Asian studies degree planning - whether it is desirable to focus on an MA level which is right in the middle of a BA, and a PhD level where one has more time to develop area skills and experiences.

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<sup>22</sup> In early 1960s before the Thai government's first economic plan (1961-65), there were only five 'universities' in Thailand, all located in Bangkok. Since 1962, under the umbrella of social and economic development (partly suggested by the World Bank and the US), provincial universities were established in other regions: Chiangmai University in the North, Khon Khaen in the Northeast, Prince of Songkhla in the South, etc. At the same time Bangkok-based universities with limited space, like Thammasat, Sinlapakorn, and Mahidol, all received land grants for expansion. Thus, these universities were split into two (or even three or four) campuses, making it rather difficult for faculty staff to commute and teach between them.

<sup>23</sup> Recently it has been acceptable, especially since the time of the 'bubble economy' of the 1980s, that in most MA programs in Thailand, one can choose either writing a regular master's thesis or hopping to a 'mini' thesis, a kind of long essay but with less research. Between 1974 and 1991, the master's program of Southeast Asian history

At the same time, in 1974, a research program on Southeast Asian Language and Cultural Studies was established at Mahidol University. In 1981, seven years later, it was 'legally' raised to the status of The Language and Cultural Research Institute for Rural Development, putting it on par with a Faculty. Besides research works, the Institute has been conducting four master degree programs (in Southeast Asian linguistics, cultural studies, language and culture for communication and development, and rural development studies); and in 1992 it began offering a PhD in linguistics (no one has yet graduated). The Institute produces four publications: 1) *Warasan phasa lae watthanatham* (Journal of Languages and Cultures), published twice a year since 1981, it is primarily devoted to the languages and cultures of hill-tribes in Northern Thailand, with occasional papers dealing with other parts of Southeast Asia; 2) a newsletter; 3) *Wiatnam sukxa* (Vietnamese Studies), a tri-monthly first published in August, 1997; and, 4) *Journal of Mon-Khmer Studies*, in corporation with the University of Hawaii.

Despite SE Asian Studies first commencing at Mahidol back in the mid-1970s, it has had to contend with the same difficulties and problems facing other area programs throughout Thailand, and only became active in the latter part of the 1980s. Like Sinlapakorn's experience in granting a master degree, graduate students at Mahidol did not possess sufficient background in Southeast Asian studies or language proficiency to fully benefit from the two year course and thesis. As a result, the Institute was not successful in producing area specialists. Due to its heavy linguistic orientation (which is highly specialized and technical), Mahidol's activities have largely gone unnoticed. It is a dilemma and an irony that there has been no coordinated effort to integrate the specialised language training of Mahidol with SE Asian study programs at other universities (although Mahidol has occasionally offered some SE Asian languages like Khmer, Burmese, Malay and Vietnamese). Each university operates independently, and although they are not in competition with each other, they are also not capitalising on the potential of a coordinated nation-wide tertiary approach to SE Asian studies.

In short, although Southeast Asian studies in Thailand may have existed in one form or another over the last three decades, they have never received serious attention - either formally (legally) at Sinlapakorn and Mahidol, or informally at Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities. They have remained on the status of *luk mia noi* or 'children of minor wife' and 'side-shows'. It seems as if Southeast Asian studies cannot easily take root in Thai academic soil.

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produced 14 theses and mini-theses on Southeast Asia (the rest, around 40, were on Thailand). One can get some idea of the direction of research by these students by looking at the countries of focus, titles and dates: Brunei, one mini-thesis (1986) on British colonization; Burma, one thesis (1979) on Siam-Burma Relations 1824-1851; Cambodia, one thesis (1979) on Battambang Governors; Indonesia, two mini-theses, one (1989) on the abangans in Java 1900-41, and another (1987) on Islam in Indonesia; Laos, two theses, one (1986) on Lao Communities in early Bangkok, another (1988) on Muang Phichai and the Haw Uprising 1875-1880; Malaysia, three mini-theses, one (1986) on Education Policy 1957-71, another (1987) on Chinese Capital Accumulation 1819-1900, the third (1987) on Pan-Islam 1900-57; the Philippines, one mini-thesis (1986) on the Chinese in the Philippines; Vietnam three mini-theses, one (1986) on Confucianism, another (1991) on Communist Movements 1925-45, the third (1991) on Traditional Peasant Society 1771-1840.

In the 1990s, however, it seems we may be on the verge of a '(r)evolution' with a kind of academic 'proliferation' of Southeast Asian studies on various campuses throughout Thailand. Chulalongkorn is commencing a master's degree program in Southeast Asian studies in the Faculty of Arts. At Thammasat there are three potential projects - a minor program in the Faculty of Political Science, a BA in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, and a research plan at the Institute of East Asian Studies. Chiangmai University has recently started its first year master's degree program in general area studies, while the new Naresuan University in Phitsanulok has just established its Burmese Studies.<sup>24</sup> The Prince of Songkhla University now offers Malay Studies, and at the newly established Ubol and Burapha (formerly Srinakharinwirot, Bangsaen) universities, plans are underway to initiate Indochina Studies. Some of these projects have already been included in the *Eighth Social and Economic Plan of the Thai Government, 1996-2000*. Prior to the baht and Southeast Asian currency crisis, the University Bureau and the Department of Technical and Economic Corporation, Office of the Prime Minister, had been supporting language training, and exchanges and seminars between Thai students and scholars from neighboring countries.<sup>25</sup> It remains to be seen if we are going to have 'genuine' Southeast Asian studies in Thailand, at last.

### **Research Work: Its Dilemma**

It has become practice in Thailand that whenever there are new phenomena springing from the West - new ideas, technology or innovations - which have an impact or presence in Thai society, then the Thai elite, especially those at the Royal Academy, take great pains to coin new words for use in the Thai language. They usually turn to borrowing from Pali and Sanskrit, making it

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<sup>24</sup> The case of Burmese Studies in Thailand is a rather unusual one. It is ironic that a program of Burmese studies is officially established at Naresuan University. Nevertheless, because of Burma's proximity to, and long historical and often unpleasant involvement with Siam/Thailand; its towering heroic figure of Aung San Suu Kyi, and the 1990s 'proliferation' of Southeast Asian studies in Thailand, there have been various recent attempts to set up Burmese studies, both in academic circles and as a new type of NGO activity (with links to individual personalities).

In 1987, before the '8888' uprising of the Burmese, the Association of History of Thailand organized a seminar on "Burmese studies". Dr Ruchaya Abhakora and Nakharin Mektrairat presented an overview which dealt mostly with studies on Burma conducted by Westerners, but the seminar set a kind of path to be worked out academically in Thailand for the first time. When things seemed to get hot in Burma and along the Thai border there have been at least four major seminars organized between 1991-96 (1991 in Chiangrai, hosted by Chiangmai University and the Ford Foundation; 1994 in Bangkok by The Thailand Research Fund and the Asia Foundation; 1995 at Chulalongkorn University, funded by the Thailand Research Fund and the Asia Foundation; and, 1996 at Chiangmai University, hosted by the Thailand Research Fund).

At the same time outside the academia, a new NGO focus is taking place along with support of individual personalities. The Asia Forum, established in 1991, has been operating more action-oriented studies of Southeast Asia: monitoring the problems and hardship of refugees on the Thai-Burmese and Thai-Cambodian borders, coordinating with those "unrepresented nations and peoples", and organizing discussions (like the one in July 1997, which was held on the 1st year anniversary of the release from house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and focused on challenging the role of ASEAN). Books on democracy, human-rights, and Aung San Suu Kyi have been published and distributed. One of the most active supporters of this kind of NGO activity is MR Narisa Chakrabongs, a millionairess and a great grand-daughter of King Chulalongkorn, and whose grandmother is Russian and mother English. Narisa has become active in re-printing her father's books (Prince Chulachakrabongs), plus writing and publishing her version of her family history like the popular best-seller on her grandmother, *Katya and the Prince of Siam* (1995). I believe these so-called non-academic activities of Southeast Asian studies, especially of NGOs, should be taken into consideration if we really want to know what's going on in this dynamic region.

<sup>25</sup> There was a brief period of 'Thai Aid' to neighboring countries, especially the three states of Indochina: training programs, scholarships and academic exchanges. Among these aid programs there was a comparative study of deltas in Thailand and Vietnam, 1996-96, (one million baht per year) funded through Detec. With the currency crisis starting on 2 July, 1997, the project came to a sudden halt.

sometimes even more confusing. It is considered un-Thai, un-patriotic, and un-cultured to mix foreign words while one is speaking Thai, though most of the Thai elite themselves do it all the time. Nevertheless, the Thai elite took some time before they could Thai-ize such words as: Civilized or civilization - should it be dubbed as *siwilai* (*sri+vilaya*) or as the newly coined *arayatham* (*araya or arayan+dhamma*)?; Revolution - should it be *patiwat* (*pati+vati*) or *aphiwat* (*abi+vatana*)?; Globalization - is it *lokawuat* (*loka+nuvati*) or *lokaphiwat* (*loka+bivati*)? Unlike their Southeast Asian neighbor, Indonesia, with its usage of *revolusi*, *globalasi* and *dwi-fungsi*, the Thais have yet to find a convenient linguistic method of translating Western terminology into an acceptable Thai format.

The process of coining can be quick or lengthy depending on the nature of the new word. Some take as long as a few decades to search for a proper and acceptable Thai substitute. It is curious to see that the term 'Southeast Asia', which probably entered Thai academia some 40 years ago in the late 1950s, has yet to be given a suitable linguistic place in the Thai world. Currently there are at least three expressions being used: *echia tawan ok Chiang tai* (Asia + eye of the day {the Sun} + exit + lean + under, all words except Asia are simple Thai); *echia akhane* (Asia + Southeast, *akhane* is Pali-Sanskrit); and, *usa khane* (morning + Southeast, *usa* is Pali-Sanskrit). The first term *echia tawan ok Chiang tai* is officially used by the Royal Academy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which takes care of ASEAN matters), and accepted generally among the academia; the second is popular among journalists and some older academics; and the third, because of its pretty sound and look, is used more by unconventional writers, especially by those writing for the influential *Sinlapa-Watthanatham* (Art-Culture Monthly). Which one of these will eventually take pride of place in the Thai lexicon remains to be seen.

For the purposes of our discussion on research, Southeast Asian studies in Thailand pertains to the studies of the region as a whole or of a particular country within the region, excluding Thailand. The exclusion of Thailand is due to Thai studies existing as a separate entity within this country. However, in cases of comparative study, for example, between Thailand and Burma, and/or Malaysia - Thailand is then regarded as Southeast Asian. In short, it has to cross cultures and national boundaries. Also, for the purposes of our discussion it is necessary to look at both academic and so-called non-academic works, since I believe that in the Thai and Southeast Asian context in general, it might be difficult or unrealistic to try to draw a clear line between the two.

In 1991, as part of a joint research project of the Thammasat and Kyoto universities, a preliminary survey was carried out on theses and mini-theses (over 150), books (400) and articles (1,700) printed in the Thai language.<sup>26</sup> These are works by academics (and MA students) as well as by 'non-academics', i.e. popular writers and journalists. Let us look at them in order to get some idea of the kind of research, studies and trends being adopted in the study of Southeast Asia in Thailand (for the sake of convenience I will leave out articles for the time being).

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<sup>26</sup> See my *Bibliography of Southeast Asian Studies in Thailand*, first printed as a working paper in 1993, and discussed at a Thammasat-Kyoto Core University Conference on "In Search of A Collaborative Framework for Southeast Asian Studies" at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto in October 1991. In 1992 it was printed in book-form with an introduction and observation in English; in 1995, the Thailand Research Fund produced a reprint with an introduction in Thai: *Bannanukrom echia akhane suksa nai prathet Thai*.

Master Theses and Mini-theses: 1960-1991 (four Thai Universities) <sup>27</sup>

1960s	1970s	1980s	1990-91
11	77	80	9
			<i>total</i> 177

As mentioned earlier, the pursuit of SE Asian studies in Thailand is linked to American hegemony in Asia - the chart shown above, starting in the 1960s, seems to confirm this. It is rather symbolic that the first Thai MA thesis was completed in 1963, at the height of the Cold War era, and that the topic is *Botbat khong saharat amerika thang echia akhane phailang songkhram lok khang thi 2* (Role of the United States of America in Southeast Asia after World War II). The student was Mr Prida Aphirat who later became a high ranking Thai diplomat.

During the 1960s, when subjects on Southeast Asia were first introduced by Anglo-American educated Thais, there were one or two theses per year, the most was three in 1968 (there were none in 1965 and 1969). It is rather impressive that by the 1970s and 1980s this rate had increased seven and eight times respectively, peaking in 1976, one year after the victories of the communists in Indochina, with 15 and in 1986 with 21 theses and mini-theses. In short, the changing political scene in Southeast Asia, with its emerging sense of regionalism, may have had some impact on the number of theses. If one looks at the topics students chose to research and write on (mostly in political science and international relations), ASEAN is the most popular (23 out of the total 177); next were Laos and Vietnam (21 each), followed by Malaysia (20), Cambodia (16) and Burma (11); the islands with no common boundary with Thailand received less attention - Indonesia (5), the Philippines (4), Singapore (3) and Brunei (1). <sup>28</sup>

In addition, the subject of these theses and mini-theses can be broken down into disciplines. Political Science, including International Relations, produced the biggest number of 73, followed by History at 47, and then Economics at 40 (Economics is a special case as indicated in notes 25-26). The rest are scattered, one or two on this and that discipline, and rather insignificant for our discussion here.

<sup>27</sup> These four are: Chulalongkorn University and its Faculty of Political Science (including international relations) and the History Department; Thammasat and its Faculty of Political Science (also international relations), and Faculty of Economics and its master degree program in English (making it the only one which has foreign students including those from Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines and Indonesia); Sinlapakorn and its master's degree programs in Southeast Asian history and Archaeology; and, Srinakharinwirot, formerly College of Education, and its History Department. I have not yet looked at the theses of the Mahidol University. And I have not yet attempted to find out whether the graduate works of those in the Natural Sciences overlap with SE Asian studies. We tend to confine our area studies within political science and history, and partially in economics. Unlike other graduate programs, where the majority of the students are Thai, economics is rather unusual since instruction and theses are in the English language and its students also include those from overseas. Their theses are on their own 'one-country'; therefore they are rather a special case. For the sake of convenience I will exclude them here but I will point to them if necessary to give a clear picture of the studies in Thailand.

<sup>28</sup> In these figures I exclude those economics theses in the English language done by foreign students, since most of them researched and wrote on their own countries, especially those from the Philippines and Indonesia. For example, of 16 economic theses, five are by Thais in the Thai language. There are 11 in written in English; of these, nine are by Indonesian students on topics such as: *A Study of Rice Supply...in Indonesia* (1985), *Indonesia in ASEAN Trade...* (1990), *Tax on Income in Indonesia...* (1978), *Indonesia's Term of Trade...* (1975), etc. Again I have to emphasize that studying one's own country should not be interpreted as something negative.

It is striking, but in a way rather natural, that these theses are mostly on Political Science and History. But one may ask why? Aside from the fact that Southeast Asia as a field of study entered Thailand as a by-product of Anglo-American-educated Thais, this trend probably has more to do with issues of 'national security' and Thai centrism. Why are ASEAN topics so popular, especially among political science and international relations students? The answer is that this interest is linked to an ever-changing scene of regional politics in which ASEAN was, then, viewed as a mechanism of integration and cooperation for these former anti-communist countries. Why are topics on Indochinese countries (plus Burma) very popular among history students (studying the ancient period) and among political science and international relations students (studying the modern period)? The answer is that this trend is linked to an interest in justifying the Thai past when "we used to control this or that part of Laos, Cambodia and Malaya"; "how the leaders of Burma or Vietnam failed, while we succeeded", etc. In the case of history theses, the interpretation centers around 'official nationalistic history', while political science and international relations students focus on the Thai government's strategic and policy planning. Generally speaking these theses show (with some exceptions) that, as Sombat and Thak put it: 'parochialism prevails'. It is a dilemma of research and theses writing, in which the area of studies is not seen in its own light.

What about those hundreds of books? A quick snapshot follows. Those on Cambodia constitute the biggest number, followed by Laos and Vietnam respectively. The three countries in Indochina are largely seen in connection with Thai nationalism, security and stability. For example, in 1962 when Thailand 'lost out' and was requested by the World Court at The Hague to hand back the impressive 12th century Khmer temple of Phra Wihan to Cambodia (Phrea Vihear, the temple sits on a cliff bordering Thailand and Cambodia), a great number of nationalistic writings poured out trying to prove that the temple should belong to Thailand. Likewise, with the victories of the communists in 1975 and the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia in 1979, works on these three countries were at the fore.

Next to the three states of Indochina comes Burma in which the Thais main interest is centered around three subjects: 1) British colonization (or as the Thai see it, 'the loss of Burmese independence'); 2) Burmese socialist economy and its military; and, 3) minorities, ie Mon-Shan-Tai. The first subject is popular among traditional-conservative writers, while the second is studied here and there by academics, and the third is something of an 'underground' or alternative tendency. Moving further outwards to the island world, the list goes like this: Malaysia together with Singapore attract the most attention, followed by the Philippines, then Indonesia, and lastly, Brunei.

When reviewing the Thai literature which emerged from various disciplines, it should be pointed out that the majority of this work is the product of 'local knowledge' and written by non-academic figures, ie personal travel accounts, popular writings, official and journalist reports. They offer an interesting alternative view of 'Southeast Asian studies' in Thailand (and Siam) as they

have been around for a longer period of time and are more persistent compared to the academics.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps their work also throws more light on formal studies in Thailand. It should be noted too that academics and their counterparts - popular writers (and journalists) - can cross into each other's territory without much difficulty. One finds that since the 1960s, a good number of popular writers (and journalists) have come into academia and vice versa, especially in the 1980s during the 'bubble economy' period when academics started to migrate into the busy mass-media arena (daily, monthly, radio and TV programs).<sup>30</sup>

In the 1960s and early 1970s, an interesting case of 'local knowledge' was reflected in the work of MR Kukrit Pramoj (then of *Siam Rath Daily*) whose extremely popular and prolific writings and talks were like windows for Thais to the outside world. Representative examples from his voluminous collection of writings which should be highlighted as part of area studies are: *Sathanakan rob ban rao...* (situation around our home), 1969; *Khmer-Sihanouk, Java-Sukarno*, 1970; and, *Malayu ram krid* (Malay danced the kris), 1972. Though Kukrit's writing was rather Thai-centric, journalistic and a Thai version of the Cold War mentality, it was also packed with information and the style was simple and accessible; he was well accepted among academia. In fact during this period he was officially accorded the title of full-professor by Thammasat University and the campus became his playground against the Thanom-Prapas regime. A less obvious example is Wilat Maniwat, whose popular and less Thai-centric writing style is well regarded. In 1971, Wilat published his *Chiwit lae kantosu khong Sukarno* (Life and Struggle of Sukarno) which still stands as the only text on Sukarno in the Thai language.

As with formal academic writing during this period, the general tone of this literature of 'local knowledge' was rather parochial, nationalistic and Thai-centric, but these works are useful as a reflection of Thai thinking towards their Southeast Asian neighbors at the time. I must, however, emphasize that there are many exemptions and that 'free press', 'non-conformist' and non-mainstream thinking in Thailand can and did often produce diverse and sympathetic attitudes towards our SE Asian neighbors, especially during the 'book boom' period between 1973 and 1976. In fact, predominant among the hundreds of books officially banned and the thousands more that were burned in the immediate wake of the military coup on October 6, 1976, were works of liberal and left-wing writers, positioned mainly outside academia, who were sympathetic to the nationalists and communists in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

In the case of the three Indochina states, they have been historically viewed as subjects of concern for security and stability, particularly during the Cold War

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<sup>29</sup> Among the academics who have been persistent and consistent in their area studies are: Dr Witthaya of Chulalongkorn (mentioned above); Asst Prof Sida Sonsri of Thammasat's Political Science Faculty, Dr Sunait Chutintranond of Chulalongkorn's History Department; and, Dr Thira Nujpiam of Sinlapakorn's Arts Faculty. Dr Witthaya has followed his work through on Indonesia, while Sida contributes a great deal on the Philippines, especially the Marcos period. Dr Sunait has become known for his new interpretation of Thai-Burmese wars based on Burmese chronicles - this is a fresh and new step since the time of Prince Damrong. Dr Thira has focused his studies on Vietnam.

<sup>30</sup> In his 1996 presentation on Thai 'public intellectuals', Kasian Tejapira discussed these academics who 'migrate' back and forth between the campus and the world of mass media. He cited Nidhi, Suvinai Poranawalai and Theerayuth Bunmi. Kasian, himself, actually has been doing this work of a public intellectual as well. I am quite certain that we would find this type of 'transmigration' occurring in other Southeast Asian countries, for example Taufik Abdullah, Ongkhokham, etc in Indonesia.

era. Until the 1980s, when Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia, this Thai apprehension remained deeply rooted. From Bangkok's point of view, Vietnam could become a threat to Thai interests and expansion in Cambodia and Laos at any time. This perception resulted in Thai-Vietnamese competition and fierce fighting in the 1830s and 1840s before the French 'took' Vietnam away. There seemed to be a 'revival' of this attitude in the 1970s when the Americans were defeated and the Vietnamese entered Cambodia. The general Thai feeling toward Vietnam is probably *klua-klua*, *kla-kla* (fearful and brave at the same time).

What about the Thai attitude towards Cambodia? There is a phrase found in most Ayudhya chronicles which might illustrate this attitude. It is (the) *khom prae phak*, literally 'Cambodian changed face', of which even today historians have not yet discovered the 'real' meaning, but it is nationalistically interpreted as 'Cambodians are unfaithful, or untrustworthy'. In early Bangkok times, the Cambodians (read kings and aristocrats) were perceived as being capable of switching sides with the Thais and Vietnamese at any time. It had been like this in the past and this perception has not changed in the present-day.

Towards Laos one finds, again, a Thai phrase, *ai nong lao*. 'Ai' is a prefix for someone who represents the other in an affectionate, close relationship - it can be teasing or rude depending on the situation. And *nong lao* means younger brother Lao, implying a kind of Thai big brother attitude which can be helpful, but at the same time bullying and patronizing, depending on the situation and context, and it also implies that the 'younger brother' Lao should be obedient, respectful and grateful.

What about Burma? As mentioned earlier, the view of the Thai elite that the British colonization of Burma was a 'loss of independence' is very useful, especially for Thai-centrics seeking to explain the role of a Thai royalty and aristocracy who were 'modernized and adaptable' to the point that they could 'preserve national independence'. Among these popular comparative themes is the topic of Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, and Kings Mindon and Thibaw. Kukrit himself wrote an account of this period, *Phama sia muang* (Burmese lost their country). It has been extremely popular and became a reference for TV re-productions several times. In effect, this kind of comparison reinforced Thai-centrism rather than opening up a new horizon of understanding. Fortunately, the same cannot be said for comparative studies which explore the similarities in the opening up of the Irrawaddy, Chao Phraya and Mekong deltas. These studies show that our three neighbours, especially their peasant populations, experienced similar problems to Thailand.

Thai academic and journalistic treatment of contemporary Burmese history, including the subjects of Burmese socialism and military politics (pre-and post-1988), has been uneven and occasional. Surprisingly, studies of this period have never materialized in the form of comparative studies, despite the two countries sharing experiences of military rule. There have been no attempts to compare say Ne Win with Phibun, Sarit or Thanom, nor SLORC (now SPDC) with its counterpart in the short-lived *ro-so-cho* (The National Peace and Order Preservation Council of General Suchinda Kraprayura, responsible for the 1992 Bloody May Massacre in Bangkok). The 1988 Burmese struggle for

democracy sparked enthusiasm among liberal Thai academics and journalists but it soon died down. Interestingly, contemporary Burma has turned out to be a source of nostalgia among the Thai middle-class who tour 'undeveloped' Burma as an 'exotic' land and delight in reflecting that "we were like this and that, or we had this and that before". Travels and tours by Thais within Southeast Asia will be discussed later, along with Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

There has been, however, something going on rather unnoticed by the academic community. It is a kind of 'underground' area studies, or another type of 'local knowledge', especially that focused on the minorities of Burma. One finds sympathetic works on the Tai-Shan, Karen and particularly Mon, regularly published and sold in general book stores. These are probably works of 'minority nationalism' since for the last few decades a good number of these peoples have crossed the border into Thailand. Some, especially those educated ones, might have gone further to the West but they still maintain their nationalist links with those who are left behind. And for a long period of time, at least up until 1988, the Thai government and its military has played a kind of double diplomacy for security reasons, ie having good but distant relations with the regimes in Rangoon while keeping good relations with the Karen, Shan and Mon on the border. Within this context, these nationalist publications have emerged and been circulated rather freely.

Most striking among them is a prolific writer on the Mon, Phisan Paladising, who is a fifth-generation Mon descendant from Photharam, Ratburi. He has been very vocal about the fate of the Mons who have been living along the Thai-Burma border and fighting the Burmese. His books on the Mons, their history, culture and plight, are sold widely in Bangkok and are well received by a good number of Thais (of Mon-descent). In 1996-97, Phisan was successful in presenting his Mon case to the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization which is attached to the United Nations). He brought a Mon flag to display at a conference of unrepresented nations and peoples in Estonia.

For reasons of proximity, the Southeast Asian island world is of less concern in Thailand. Occasionally we have produced works on unusual events and personalities like Sukarno or the Marcos regime. Here, again, the non-academic, 'local knowledge' requires our attention. The Thai elite have been rather fortunate that their country was not colonized. Therefore they have been able to travel freely since the mid-19th century, during the height of British imperialism. King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) was the first Thai monarch, and perhaps the only Asian dignitary at that time, who travelled extensively to many centers of European power and their colonies in Asia. Early in his reign, 1871-72, the King visited the British colonies of Singapore, Burma and India; his first trip also included Java which was under Dutch colonial rule at the time. The British-style administration of Singapore (including Malaya) and the Dutch government in Java became models for reform by the Siamese king. It was much later, and following all the necessary adjustments for a new Siam (the 1892 administrative reform and the 1893 Paknam incident in which Siam 'lost' Laos to the French), that Chulalongkorn conducted his 1897 official first grand tour in Europe, where he met kings and queens, including a much publicized meeting with Tzar Nicholas in St Petersburg.

Since the time of King Chulalongkorn it has become popular tradition among the elite to print books to hand out as gifts for special occasions (cremations, birthdays, opening new buildings, etc). Printing official reports of overseas trips and accounts of personal royal travels is part of this new tradition. They are very popular among the small circle of the elite and a growing number of educated middle class. These books have opened windows for a new emerging Thai in a new world, as well as providing reading pleasure. The King's official reports of and his personal letters written during his overseas trips have been printed over and over and are widely read within Thai society. During his long reign, King Chulalongkorn went to Singapore and Malaya nearly 10 times; he visited Java three times in 1871, 1896 and 1900. All of his trips were well documented with either official reports or his own writing accompanied by fantastic photography. On his second trip to Europe, in 1907 the King wrote 43 long letters between March 27 and November 6, to one of his daughters. They have been preserved and later printed in a comprehensive book form. In 1997, as part of centennial celebrations, a TV series was produced following the footsteps of the King to Europe. One can imagine that in the age of tourism this type of series would be very popular.

Successive Thai Kings and nobility continue to travel, issue reports and publish their writings. Prince Damrong is another good example. He wrote extensively of his trips overseas to such locations as Burma and Cambodia (Angkor). MR Kukrit Pramoj was another case; his book on Cambodia (*Thok Khamen*) was Thai-centric but hilarious.<sup>31</sup> But the most outstanding are the prolific writings of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn who has been officially and unofficially travelling and visiting countries around the world, probably more than any Thai. The Princess has published some 30 travelogues of her own.

This upper class habit later spread out among writers of middle class background, and it is not uncommon for Thais to publish an article or book on returning from an overseas trip. This type of writing is now known as *sarakhadi thongtheo* (documentary travelogue). A long tradition of such writing can be traced through these names and pen-names - Sriburapha, Bunchui Srisawad, Pladpleng, Sang Pathanothai, Suwanni Sukhontha, Sulak Sivarak, Sujit Wongsdes, Thiraphab Lohitkul, and so on. For more than a century, there has been an enormous number of travelogues written by Thais. This type of 'local knowledge' has not received attention from the academics nor fully exploited as part of Southeast Asian studies in Thailand.

Although 'local knowledge' of Southeast Asia in Thailand / Siam can be traced back at least a century, academics took much longer to embrace SE Asia as an area of interest. The first Thai language academic text dealing with Southeast Asia is a translation by MR Chirawat Chakrabhan, of a small and rather unknown book, *History of Southeast Asia* by BR Pearn, published as *prawatsat achia akhane*. Its first printing was in 1968 by the Association of Social Science of Thailand Press, at the height of American hegemony. Interestingly enough, it was a publication of the Social Science Association which was then actively promoting 'Thai-ness' and at the same becoming critical of American involvement in Indochina and Thailand.

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<sup>31</sup> Jit Phumisak also joined while he was working part-time as tourist guide to Angkor. He came up with a little book, *Nirat Nakhon Wat* (Travel to Angkor).

The Association, however, was well connected with some American foundations and fund granting organizations, like the Asia and the Rockefeller foundations. The Association was, then, one of the few meeting grounds of Thai academic-intellectuals and their American counterparts - those first and second generations of Thailand area specialists such as Lauriston Sharp, Lucien Hanks, Herbert Phillips, David Wilson and Charles Keyes. Sulak Sivaraksa, the outspoken editor of the Association's journal, *Sangkhomsat Parithat*, was probably one of the first to come out criticizing the US and its Thai ally, the Thanom-Prapas regime. Domestically, the Association was a new gathering ground for new emerging Thai academics, and many of them became increasingly aware and critical of the tremendous socio-political transformation of Thai society during the Cold War era. When Sulak left in 1970, his critical editorialship was pursued even more vigorously by Suchart Sawasdisri, one of the first students to graduate with a BA degree in History from Thammasat University (1965). While Sulak attracted support and protection from respected figures like Prince Wan, Phraya Anuman and Dr Puey Ungpakorn, Suchart was able to connect with the younger generation of new academic-intellectuals of the 1960s.<sup>32</sup>

The image of the Social Science Association was rather 'radical'. The combined forces of the two 'S's', Sulak and Suchart, and a group of academics also linked with the Association, pioneered the publication of social science (and humanities) textbooks in which Southeast Asia was included. This is known by its long name as the 'Foundation for the Promotion of Social Science and Humanity Textbooks Project'. It was started as a project within the Social Science Association in 1966, by a group of prominent academics, including Dr Puey Ungpakorn, Saneh Chamarik, Neon Snidvongs, Kasem Sirisamphan and Sangwian Inthrawichai. The Rockefeller donated one million baht for setting up an endowment. After 1976 the project became a Foundation and a separate entity.<sup>33</sup> In the early 1980s, another one million baht donation was added by the newly established Toyota Foundation. The Textbook Foundation has been promoting academic area studies (mainly Thai, Southeast Asian and Japanese subjects) in Thailand; its main activity has been the translation of Anglo-American and Japanese textbooks. Among the first in its pioneer projects were translations of such 'classics' as DGE Hall's *A History of South-East Asia* (published in Thai in 1979), and John Bastin and Harry J Benda's *A History of Modern Southeast Asia: Colonialism, Nationalism and Decolonization* (1978).<sup>34</sup>

Any discussion on research and studies of Southeast Asia in Thailand is not complete without mentioning two recent developments. The first from Japan and the latter from the newly established Thailand Research Fund. These two seem to be representative of new forces pushing into the Thai academia since the end of the Cold War era and the diminishing role of the US - "Since the

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<sup>32</sup> For a good overview of 1960s and 1970s Thai intellectual atmosphere (editorial roles of Sulak and Suchart) see Benedict Anderson's introduction in, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era*, (1985), edited and translated by Benedict Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, Bangkok: Duang Kamol.

<sup>33</sup> Dr Puey Ungpakorn was its first Chairman. After the bloody coup of October 6, 1976, he had to leave the country and Prof Saneh Chamarik has been the Chairman ever since.

<sup>34</sup> The translation and publication of the *magnum opus* of the Chief Historian of Southeast Asia has become a sort of legend. The project was conceived as early as the founding of the Textbook Project in the late 1960s and some 10 leading overseas-educated Thai historians were asked to join the translation project, but it took more than 10

mid-1980s, Southeast Asia's largest investor, largest exporter, largest foreign aid donor, largest buyer of raw materials such as oil, natural gas, and timber, and largest source of tourism has been Japan."<sup>35</sup> Like their American counterpart, Japan has been giving out aid for education scholarships, research grants and academic exchange programs. The Japan Foundation was created and is becoming increasingly active, with headquarters in Bangkok, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. The nature of its activities have been directed more toward grantees to assist them to learn and understand more about Japan. The *mumbusho*, *gaimusho* or Japan Foundation was, in the early stages, content with this bilateral relationship, ie Japan-Thailand, Japan-Indonesia, or Japan-Malaysia. But with the Cold War ending and the rapidly changing dynamics in East and Southeast Asia, a new regional grouping and alignment emerged. A new pattern of relationships became an issue.

In 1974, the Toyota Foundation was established and within a few years it has moved deep into the academic world of Southeast Asia (primarily within the original five ASEAN member states), becoming an active funding agency, though the amount of grants was much smaller than those from the Japanese government. The rather unconventional approach of its leadership and staff (who travelled widely and regularly in Asia) put the new Foundation in closer touch with local scholars and potential grantees. Its translation program 'Know Our Neighbors' is probably still one of the most productive and highly-acclaimed. The nature of the Toyota Foundation's activities was also bilateral, but slowly it began adopting a new type of one-to-one approach. Instead of remaining Japan-Thailand, Japan-Indonesia, etc, the foundation began to promote relationships between the ASEAN neighbors, ie grants were given for Thais to translate the literature of neighboring countries into the Thai language. Although this project is not as successful as the ones translating from Southeast Asian languages into Japanese (limited funding), the translation project as a whole became a catalyst for multi-lateral relationship.

In 1986 the Toyota Foundation started providing 'follow up' support by convening workshops and seminars which brought grantees together to present their works. The first one was the *International Workshop on Translation* held in November 1986, organized in cooperation with the Textbook Foundation (see above), and the venue was on the River Kwai in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. The Foundation was able to bring scholars from Indonesia, the Philippines,

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years for it to appear in print, just on time to inform DGE Hall that his work was finally in the Thai language. Professor Hall passed away soon after that. Despite being criticized as old fashioned and colonial, the translation of Hall was well received among Thai academics since there were not many studies available on SE Asia at that time. The first 2,000 copies were sold out in two years and a second printing quickly followed. For Bastin and Benda's book, it took less than three years to be published in Thai in 1979, with a second printing in 1986. It is interesting to note that about the same time that introductory history textbooks on Southeast Asia were being published in Thai (in the late 1970s and early 1980s), Thai university and college lecturers started to come out with their own work (for example, studies by Pensri Kanchanomai and Somkit Srising).

The Textbook Foundation continues its interest in Southeast Asia to the present, supporting both writings by Thais and translations from foreign languages (mainly English and Japanese, occasionally French). One of its latest publications is a translation of David Chandler's *A History of Cambodia*.

<sup>35</sup> Shirraishi, 1997, "Japan and Southeast Asia". In Katzenstein, P.J. & Shirraishi, T. (Eds). pp. 169-94

Malaysia, Nepal, Vietnam and of course Japan and Thailand.<sup>36</sup> The workshop was opened with a keynote speech by a well-respected and senior scholar from Nepal, Prof Malla and ended with closing remarks by Prof Saneh Chamarik, Chairman of the Textbook Foundation and the Director of the Thai Khadi Studies Institute, Thammasat University. Interestingly, Prof Saneh concluded by making the point that there should be networking among Asian scholars and that area studies should be set up with the genuine desire to learn about one's neighbors, and that it should not be like past area studies with negative results.<sup>37</sup>

In November 1990, the Toyota Foundation held another 'follow up', in Bangkok, under the title of *International Symposium to Present the Result of Projects Funded under the Toyota Foundation's International Grant Program* - scholars were now being encouraged to cross borders within their region. And in November 1993, in Jakarta, *The Second International Symposium to Present the Results of Projects Funded under the Toyota Foundation's International Grant Program* was conducted with the theme, "Perspectives on Southeast Asian Studies by Southeast Asian Researchers". The 1986 River Kwai, the 1990 Bangkok, and the 1993 Jakarta symposiums finally led to Southeast Asian scholars and grantees coming together at the *International Conference on the Promotion of Southeast Asian Studies in Southeast Asia*, held from November 3-5, 1993, and jointly organized by the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI) and the Toyota Foundation.

In the meantime another push was coming from Japan, largely from the Center of Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University and its Kyoto-Thammasat Core University Program, funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS); although a great number of Japanese scholars have also been involved. The Center started primarily with a research focus, but as in the case of the Toyota Foundation, the promotion of Southeast Asian studies within the region became a by-product. Interestingly, again, the Kyoto-Thammasat Core Program was originally conceived as bilateral and it was more for the purpose of promoting Japanese studies in Thailand.

In the early 1980s when Thammasat University was expanding its campus to the Rangsit area, north of Bangkok airport, the Japanese government (through JAICA) gave a large sum of aid (115 million baht) to build offices for the Japanese Studies Center. Another grant was negotiated for a Japanese studies program, a student information and exchange program, and for holding annual seminars. As a result, a 12-year Core University Program (1986-1998) was established. Initially, its research activity was bilateral: Thailand-Japan and vice versa, but by 1991 the focus had been shifted and the conference of that year was entitled *In Search of a Collaborative Framework for Southeast Asian Studies*<sup>38</sup>;

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<sup>36</sup> Two Vietnamese scholars, Nguyen Tan Dac and Ho Hai Thuy, were invited for the first time to Thailand. The Thai government was still uneasy with the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia so Thai intelligence officers were sent to visit the Chairman of the Textbook Foundation, Prof Saneh Chamarik, to make sure that this was strictly academic! See *International Workshop On Translation*, (1987) edited by Charnvit Kaset Siri, Bangkok: Arun Amarin.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Regional themes for research and seminars have been pursued since this conference. In 1992, in Bangkok, the theme was *Democratic Experiences in Southeast Asian Countries*; 1993, in Kyoto, *Thailand and Her Neighbors [1] Malaysia*; 1994, in Bangkok, *Thailand and Her Neighbors [2] Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia*; 1995, in

participants were no longer just Thai and Japanese but other Southeast Asians as well. Therefore, the Kyoto-Thammasat Core Program and the Toyota Foundation seem to be complementing each other in their efforts to promote SE Asian studies. Networking has started with a positive outcome in 1996 when a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by five Southeast Asian universities.<sup>39</sup> Under the MOU the five would exchange scholars and students who will cross the 'boundary' to lecture and learn languages of the region. This program is again funded by the Toyota as well by the Japan Foundation. It remains to be seen if this kind of academic regionalism, with more push from the outside, will be sustained from the inside.

Last but not least, a big push is also being felt from the 'inside'. Since its foundation by the Anand Government in 1992, the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) has been rather 'aggressive' or pro-active in its funding policy (under the directorship of Prof Vicharn Panich, and especially when Dr Bunrak Bunyakhetmala, 1994-96, was in charge of 'transnational' research). The emergence of TRF occurred at the same time Bangkok's mass media and mass media-oriented academics excitedly seized onto the idea and slogan of 'globalization' and the coming of the new age of 'information'. Therefore it is logical that Thais should 'learn' and, more importantly, 'know' about the world in general and about its neighbors in particular. Southeast Asia (at least the parts where Thai ersatz capitalism has or had been operating) seems to fit well into this new scene.

Although the TRF is rather natural and applied sciences oriented, its activities represent the first time in Thailand that domestic support for area research has occurred on such a scale. And it seems that TRF arrived at an opportune time in

Ayudhya, *Ayudhya and Asia*; and, 1996-1997, in Kyoto and Bangkok, *Southeast Asian Studies in Thailand*.

I am very thankful to Prof Hayao Fukui who provided me with much background on the Japanese and Kyoto side of activity. Fukui has long been dedicated to Southeast Asian studies in Southeast Asia. In fact, my *Bibliography on Southeast Asia*, 1991, was inspired by his suggestion. We also cooperated on the short-lived two issues of the *Southeast Asian Network Bulletin*, which has now been taken over by the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP).

It should be noted too that besides the Kyoto-Thammasat regular conferences, similar activities have been pursued elsewhere, especially in the early 1990s until the currency crisis of 1997. Southeast Asia has become a popular topic among the academia and outside. In November 1995, the Chulalongkorn Institute of Asian Studies held a seminar on *50 Years of Thai Relations with Its Neighbors*. In June 1996, the Department of Fine Arts together with Detch, held a conference on *Southeast Asian Cultures: Similarities and Way of Life*.

<sup>39</sup> The MOU was signed in early 1996 by the Rectors/Chancellors of the University of Indonesia, Gadjah Mada University, the University of Malaya, the University of the Philippines, and Thammasat University. In November 1997, three more were added: Chulalongkorn University, Ateneo de Manila University, and the National University of Malaysia.

For the record, it should be added that this MOU was the product of the coming together of a myriad of personalities and events. After initial development in the late 1980s and early 1990s by Southeast Asians and the Japanese, a small meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur in early 1994, where Shaharil Talib (Malaysia), Taufik Abdullah (Indonesia), and Maria Diokno (the Philippines) met with Himemoto Shiraishi from the Toyota Foundation; they agreed to continue networking and tabled plans for a progress meeting in 1995 in Ayudhya, with Thai participants (Charnvit Kasetsiri and Thanet Aphornsuwan) also attending. In August 1995, there was another "follow up" meeting in historic Bandung, where the Japan Foundation agreed to the idea of multi-lateralism and came in with financial support. SEASREP (Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program), a standing committee, was formed with four Southeast Asian original members (Taufik, Charnvit, Shaharil, and Maris), plus representatives from the Toyota and Japan Foundations, and two outside advisers, Ruth McVey and Yoneo Ishii.

the late 1980s and early 1990s, when area study planning had begun 'proliferating' among the Thai academia. Between 1994 and 1997, the TRF held two big conferences, searching for frameworks and directions for area studies, plus another nine medium and small seminars and workshops.<sup>40</sup> In its most recent seminar in August 1997, on *Developing Framework and Direction for Area Studies Research*, the TRF set out a rather ambitious goal - embracing strategy, mechanism, priorities and agenda. Marking a remarkable transformation in the Thai attitude towards Southeast Asian studies, SE Asia was given top priority on the subject list. Again it remains to be seen if 'academic knowledge' of Southeast Asian studies in Thailand will take off or whether it is just like *fai mai fang* (fire burning straw, ie it comes and goes quickly).

From the above discussion we can hardly say that Southeast Asian studies do not exist in Thailand. The concept has long been bandied around albeit parochially - Thai-centric, parasitic, institutionalized, a by-product of world politics being pushed from the outside. However, as has been shown, whatever its origins were in the 1960s, by the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s, SE Asian Studies have been increasingly embraced locally in Thailand, as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia. If the time is ripe for self-awareness, as proposed by OW Wolters, a genuine Southeast Asian studies in Thailand, or on a larger scale in Southeast Asia, needs to be defined. There has perhaps been no other time in contemporary Thai history when we could see so sharply the common, cross-cultural threads we share with our Southeast Asian neighbors. The 'Indonesian' haze, the 'Thai' currency crisis, AIDS, social disparity, destruction of rural and traditional ways of life - these alone form more than enough subject matter for studies of the region.<sup>41</sup> We would do well to become mirrors of one another, seeing problems and discovering solutions.

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<sup>40</sup> Among these nine, four were on Burmese studies: 1) June 1994 in Bangkok, a joint seminar on *Thailand's Road toward Burma: Myanmar Beyond Ayuthia*, conducted in English with the Asia Foundation; 2) November 1994 in Bangkok, conducted in Thai on *Forms and Direction of Burmese Studies*; 3) December 1994 in Chiangrai, in Thai on *Way to Development Burmese Studies in Thailand*; and, 4) June 1996 in Chiangrai, in Thai on *Burmese Studies*. There were two workshops on Lao Studies (1994 and 1996), both held in Mahasarakham in the Northeast of Thailand. Interestingly, one of TRF's publications is a Thai-Burmese and Burmese-Thai Dictionary. A big project of selecting and printing some 20 Thai MA theses on Southeast Asia is currently well on the way.

<sup>41</sup> In her presentation on *Globalization, Marginalization, and the Study of Southeast Asia*, 1996, Ruth McVey discussed the problems of the study and came up with a number of useful suggestions. Although she directed her discussion towards the Western audience, I feel that some of her recommendations could be applied in the region and in Thailand as well, especially when she talked about the "need to emphasize cooperation rather than competition... We need to think more in terms of networks than of institutions, and these networks should be in principles global and not just regional or national. ...there should also be a serious effort to develop networks extending beyond the regional specialists, in order to import experience and techniques from other areas and disciplines and to make Southeast Asianists's combination of local and disciplinary knowledge available to the wider scholarly world".

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