



## Anthropology in Southeast Asia: National Traditions and Transnational Practices

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### Abstract

Over several generations, since the mid-20th century, anthropology has become an established academic discipline throughout much of Southeast Asia. Academic anthropology in Southeast Asia is emerging as a scholarly practice driven increasingly by local initiatives and dynamics, though still maintaining ties to global academic networks. The purpose of this article is to contribute to an assessment and understanding of the national traditions and transnational practices of anthropology in Southeast Asia through a comparative perspective. I focus on four national traditions — those of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. While providing a comprehensive account of these diverse traditions and practices is not possible in the space of a single article, I attend to four significant issues relevant to the current state of anthropology across the region. First, I compare the emergent national traditions of the four countries, focusing on the transnational conditions shaping their development, particularly in the late colonial and early post-colonial period (i.e., the mid-20th century). Second, I compare the structuring of anthropological selves and others across these traditions, which shapes the ways in which anthropologists see their work and the people they write about. Third, I discuss ways in which localised anthropological practice can and should contribute to theory building by way of grounded theory and critical translation projects. And finally, I conclude by examining emergent transnational linkages and practices, which suggest current directions that anthropology is taking in the region. While only a partial of narrative anthropology in Southeast Asia, this article is a provocation to think beyond both the older dynamics of the-West-versus-the-rest and the newer constraints of methodological nationalism in anthropologists' on-going efforts to build a vital and valuable discipline.

### Keywords

anthropology, world anthropologies, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore

The shifting centre of gravity within the anthropology of Southeast Asia from European and American centres toward the region is increasingly perceptible across Southeast Asia. The shift remains tenuous in many respects. Nevertheless in many of the region's young nation-states, three or four generations of Southeast Asian scholars have been trained in modern anthropology and

related social science disciplines.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I offer comparative reflections on anthropology as a field of scholarship and research practices in Southeast Asia. My basis for comparison combines a review of the emergent literature chronicling local anthropologies, informal interviews with colleagues from around the region and old-fashioned participant-observation in the field, including roughly 13 of the past 20 years spent in Southeast Asia.

An account of Southeast Asian anthropologies — either in terms of particular national traditions or more broadly across the region — remains piecemeal (including my own account here). The history of these anthropologies is slowly being written in ways that will afford younger scholars a stronger localised grounding in disciplinary practice and theory. This article and my own knowledge of Southeast Asian anthropology are deeply indebted to this emerging literature (e.g., Evans, 2005; Prager, 2005; Ramstedt, 2005; Shamsul, 2004; Tan Chee-Beng, 2004; Zawawi, 2010). In terms of ‘Southeast Asian’ anthropologies, I use the term loosely. My knowledge of anthropology in the Philippines, Cambodia and Myanmar is not extensive enough to include in the current discussion; similarly, with Yunnan, Zomia (Scott, 2010; Van Schendel, 2002), or other regions we might include. Neither do I address Lao, nor Vietnamese anthropology with their complex ties to Soviet-era ethnology (*cf.* Evans, 2005).

I focus on the national traditions of Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore, which are the ones with which I have had the most experience. Those experiences have varied over time, in relation to my own position within anthropology; i.e., as a graduate student at the University of Washington, Fulbright scholar in Malaysia undertaking doctoral research, postgraduate fellow at UCLA, and faculty member at the National University of Singapore. My experiences in anthropology are also inevitably shaped, as with all anthropologists, by my identity in different contexts, e.g., as heterosexual, male, from the American mid-West with Japanese affines (see Thompson, 2007: 14–18, 198–199), and variously as *white* in America, *orang puteh* or *mat salleh* in Malaysia, *farang* in Thailand, *buleh* in Indonesia, and *ang moh* in Singapore — none of which is quite the same thing. In the observations I present here, I aim for a balanced, objective assessment of trends, not mere subjective opinion. Yet, the reader should of course consider my subjective perspective and weigh it against the work of others, such as the very useful essays on Malaysian anthropology by Shamsul A. B. (2004), Tan Chee-Beng (2004) and Wan Zawawi (2010). Shamsul, Tan and Zawawi are all very differently positioned from each other and from me in relation to Malaysian anthropology. Readers are urged to see the

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<sup>1</sup> While my interest in this article relates primarily to anthropology, there is scope to consider other social sciences and humanities, as well as Southeast Asian studies from a regional or area studies perspective (see Goh, 2011).

value both in the subjective insights that our various positions lend themselves to — i.e., as Malay, Chinese and *Mat Salleh* anthropologists. All assessments, particularly of a research field in which the author is a participant, involve crafting of narratives and shaping agendas, my own comments on ‘transnational anthropology’ no more or less than any other.

The aim of this article is to draw comparisons among different emergent national traditions, which to date have mostly been dealt with in expositions of their singular histories. I begin by reviewing general trends in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. I then turn to comparisons of the structure of anthropology, theoretical developments and anthropological practice among and between anthropologists operating in these different national contexts.

### Comparing National Traditions

As a broad, comparative text on anthropology in Southeast Asia, King and Wilder’s (2003) *The Modern Anthropology of Southeast Asia* is an invaluable account of historical trends and inheritances of the discipline. At the same time, it is exemplary of the disjuncture and deficiency with regard to recognising emergent national and local trends in anthropology (see also Hill and Hitchcock, 1996). In their sub-headings within chapters, King and Wilder name 20 prominent anthropologists. Among these, only one (Syed Husin Ali) could be considered an ‘indigenous’ Southeast Asian anthropologist. Their historical review of Southeast Asian anthropology similarly focuses on the ‘colonial impact’, dated 1900–1950, and the American and European traditions, both dated 1950–1970.

When I studied anthropology in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s, various scholars, such as the historian George Stocking, had already organised well-received narratives of American and British anthropology (e.g., Kuper, 1983; Stocking, 1983). At the University of Washington, all graduate students in anthropology were required to take a course in the history of the discipline. That course focused overwhelmingly on the American and British traditions. Bohannan and Glazer’s *Highpoints in Anthropology* (1988) provided a canonical if abridged guide to the key texts of the discipline. At the same moment, following on the work of such authors as Asad (1973), Said (1979) and Fabian (1984), various scholars such as James Clifford, George Marcus and others in the Writing Culture movement (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986), critical theory, feminist theory, subaltern studies and the influential importation of French post-structuralism, were hard at work deconstructing the positive, heroic narratives of (among others) Boasian anti-racism, Malanowski’s ambiguously sympathetic fieldwork among the savages and

Evans-Pritchard's appeal to emic perspectives, while rewriting anthropology and the "dead white male" anthropologist as complicit handmaidens of European and American colonial oppression. These themes have been taken up with great enthusiasm by various non-Western scholars, particularly in places such as Malaysia where local histories have been rewritten against the foil of nefarious *orientalis Barat* (Western Orientalists; e.g., Mohammed Redzuan, 2005: 2–16).

By comparison, the master narratives of Southeast Asian anthropological traditions centred within the region are still in the making. These are largely conceptualised as emergent national traditions. The postcolonial political and social organisation of Southeast Asia around territorially defined nation-states is by now a *fait accompli*. While many, if not all of these states claim historical lineages stretching back a thousand years or more, they also appear at times as awkward legacies of the colonial past, demarcated by borders forged in the colonial era. National narratives have had to overcome this awkwardness. As such, local processes of nation building in the second half of the 20th century played an important role in the development of anthropological knowledge and practice. Different experiences of post-coloniality and of national self-recognition have shaped these national traditions. I will begin with a brief overview of the emergent anthropological traditions of Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia to highlight their overlapping, yet divergent trajectories. As anthropology in Singapore has received the least attention in the recent world anthropologies literature, my comments on that history are somewhat more detailed. I draw on this history of anthropology in Singapore and somewhat better documented histories of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand to present comparative analysis of these postcolonial anthropological traditions and future prospects for the discipline in the region.

### **Singapore: Anthropologists in the Absence of Anthropology**

As an institutionalised academic discipline, anthropology only marginally exists in Singapore, although there are many practicing anthropologists in Singapore's universities. I have held a position in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore for more than ten years and my knowledge of anthropology in Singapore comes mainly from my position there.<sup>2</sup> In Singapore, anthropology has been subsumed within sociology, Southeast Asian studies, and other fields. During the first decade of this century, there have at

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<sup>2</sup> None of my comments here are to be taken to represent the views of the National University of Singapore or the Department of Sociology.

any given time been around 15 to 20 scholars with doctorate degrees in anthropology working at the National University of Singapore, not including those on short-term appointments of a year or less at the Asia Research Institute and elsewhere in the university. Most are in the Department of Sociology and Southeast Asian Studies Program.<sup>3</sup> Others have found homes in such divergent departments as Japanese Studies and English Language and Literature. Despite employing enough anthropologists to constitute a fairly large department at most universities, the lack of institutional support or recognition of anthropology as such stems from several sources.

First, whereas anthropology has been a significant discipline within national social science traditions, as well as nation-building in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and most other Southeast Asian countries, in Singapore anthropology has — if anything — been seen as antithetical to the forward-looking vision of Singapore's ultra-modernity. One tongue-in-cheek explanation I have heard for anthropology's lack of institutional recognition is that the discipline is not locally important "because there are no primitive people in Singapore."

In Singapore, anthropology, such as it existed in the form of individual scholars rather than an established discipline, has not been tied to nation-building. If anything, anthropology was conceptually excluded from the process in favour of sociology. The latter is seen as the study of 'advanced' modern, urban, industrial societies, rather than 'primitive' ones, and therefore more appropriate to Singapore's self-image and desire to shed its 'Third World' status. Whereas sociology was (not inappropriately) regarded as a discipline which could address social issues of a modern, urban society — such as housing, urban planning and urban inter-ethnic relations — anthropological knowledge of primitive, rural and 'underdeveloped' societies was considered to have little of practical value to contribute to Singapore.

The legacy of anthropology's marginal position at NUS and replicated at Singapore's other major universities, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University, can be traced at least as far back as Murray Groves, a British social anthropologist, who was the first head of the Department of Sociology in Singapore from 1965 to 1967. Groves later moved to work at Hong Kong University, where he also chose to establish a combined sociology-anthropology department under the singular name of 'Sociology'. As a British social anthropologist, Groves did not see a need to differentiate between anthropology and sociology. A complete history of this moment of disciplinary configuration remains to be written, but there are many indications that this

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<sup>3</sup> Southeast Asian Studies has recently been upgraded from a program to a full-fledged department within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

was not a peculiar inclination of Groves, but represented a particular British post-colonial position that sought to suppress the very colonial conditions of anthropology, especially British anthropology, which would come under such harsh criticism in the following decades. In India, M. N. Srinivas, a British-trained social anthropologist, also rejected the label ‘anthropology’ in favour of sociology (Chatterji, 2005: 163). And even earlier in the 1950s in Indonesia, the influential sociologist T. S. G. Moelia, similarly attempted (unsuccessfully) to abolish anthropology as a corrupt colonial discipline (Prager, 2005: 192).

While Groves, coming from the British tradition of social anthropology, did not see a need to distinguish between anthropology and sociology that distinction was in fact reinforced by a gradual but substantial shift in orientation within the Singaporean academy from British to American social science traditions. Since the 1980s, the sociology department has overwhelmingly been staffed with American-trained sociologists and anthropologists; bringing with them the strong tradition of divergence and even some enmity between the disciplines. American academic supremacy in the second half of the 20th century also more than likely spread this divergent disciplinary self-identity elsewhere (e.g., not only Singapore, but also Australia and Britain where some NUS staff continued to receive their doctoral training). Ironically, American influence meant that the division between anthropology and sociology became ideologically more rigid while the transformation of the world, from rural to urban, colonial to post-colonial, and in other respects, made the West versus the rest division of labour between sociology and anthropology ever more clearly absurd.

Subsuming anthropology within sociology has by no means prevented numerous anthropologists from prominent involvement in the social sciences at NUS. To mention but a few: Geoffrey Benjamin, who earned his Ph.D. under Edmund Leach at Cambridge, was appointed by Groves and served for roughly three decades within the sociology department and was held in high regard internationally as an anthropologist of the Malay world.<sup>4</sup> Tong Chee Kiong, a product of the undergraduate programme in the NUS Sociology Department and Ph.D. student of Thomas Kirsch in anthropology at Cornell University, played an important role not only within Sociology, but also in establishing the Southeast Asian Studies Program at NUS in early 1990s and served as the Dean of Arts and Social Sciences in the late 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Ananda Rajah also deserves special mention. He was raised in a Hokkien-speaking household. His ‘race’ according to his Singaporean Identity Card was Ceylonese. As a Ph.D. student

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin moved from NUS to NTU at the end of the 1990s and is still active in the field.

<sup>5</sup> As of 2012, Tong holds a position as Special Academic Advisor at the University Brunei Darussalam.

of Gehan Wijeyewardene at the Australian National University, he produced important ethnographic work on marginalised Karen communities on the Thai-Burmese border. Both in his personal history and scholarly endeavours, Ananda was a complex figure of transnational globalisation. Anthropology's own disciplinary developments in that direction had not fully caught up with him by the time of his unfortunate early passing in January 2007. More than a dozen other anthropologists have come and gone over the several decades since the Department of Sociology was established — including half a dozen or so currently active in the department.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to anthropology's 'primitive' image, a variety of personal and institutional dynamics also played into the on-going absence of substantial institutional recognition of anthropology as a discipline.<sup>7</sup> For example, in discussions of whether or not it would be wise to give the discipline a more prominent, institutionalised role (e.g., an undergraduate minor or major in anthropology), it is often claimed that anthropology would not be attractive to practically-minded Singaporean students and thus not be able to sustain undergraduate student numbers (*cf.* Shamsul A. B., 2005, whose data on student interest and outcomes from Malaysia calls the validity of this argument into question). For these and other reasons, anthropology has had a long, but disorganised presence in Singapore. By contrast, the past fifty years have seen anthropology become a core discipline in universities elsewhere in Southeast Asia.<sup>8</sup>

### Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia: Emergent National Traditions

Malaysian anthropology has been particularly influenced by British and Australian anthropology. Early development of modern anthropology in Malaysia was shaped by British colonial interests and especially by the work of Raymond and Rosemary Firth and M. G. Swift, who studied with Raymond Firth at the London School of Economics and in turn trained several prominent Malaysian anthropologists at Monash University in Australia (see M. Halib and Huxley, 1996: 22–23; Zawawi, 2010). Syed Husin Ali studied with both Swift at the

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<sup>6</sup> For a fuller account of anthropology as it has developed in Singapore, see: Sinha (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Beginning in 2012, Ph.D. candidates in the Department of Sociology will be able to declare an anthropology concentration, which is the first and only institutional recognition of an anthropology degree in Singapore to date.

<sup>8</sup> In the following section, I focus on the colonial and post-colonial era transnational linkages in the development of national traditions. Much more could and should be written on the development of these traditions within each country, but a full account is beyond the scope of this article.

University of Malaya and Raymond Firth at the London School of Economics. Prominent Malaysian anthropologists of the 1960s through 1980s were overwhelmingly trained either in Australia or the United Kingdom.

The relationship between Malaysian and American anthropological traditions has been much more tenuous. From the Malaysian side, the relationship of Malaysia to the United States has been less intensive as compared to Malaysia's history as a former British colony, which precipitated the relationship and lineage linking Firth, Swift, Husin Ali, Shamsul A. B. and others (Tan, 2005; Zawawi, 2010). In addition, strong suspicion of the West espoused by Malaysia's leaders, particularly long-serving Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, and more recently the rift between the Islamic world — with which Malaysia has increasingly associated itself over the past several decades — and post-Cold War America, has not on the whole encouraged collaboration between anthropologists from the two countries. From the American side, given the structure of American area studies and Southeast Asian studies, interest in and research about Malaysia lags far behind the attention given to Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and more recently Vietnam (*cf.* Van Schendel, 2002: 650). To my knowledge, American anthropologists with permanent academic jobs in the United States, who received their Ph.D.'s since 1990 and whose primary research was in Malaysia, number less than half-a-dozen.<sup>9</sup>

One consequence for the development of Malaysian anthropology is that for better or worse its ties during the second half of the 20th century were to the British-Australian tradition rather than the more prominent American one, particularly in comparison to Indonesia and Thailand. While there may have been some advantages to being outside of American academic dominance, it may also have left Malaysian anthropologists with fewer ties to some of the transnational anthropological networks forged in the past 20 years (e.g., by alumni of various prominent programmes such as Cornell or the University of Washington and by participation in large American-based area studies and anthropology conferences). On the other hand, Malaysian anthropologists have strong ties not only to Australia, but also to Japan.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, Thai anthropology has been overwhelmingly — though by no means exclusively — influenced by American anthropology. The earliest generation of Western-trained Thai anthropologists, such as Pattaya Saihoo and Suthep Soonthornpesat, attended universities in the United Kingdom and Europe. After the Second World War and particularly influenced by the

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<sup>9</sup> These include Tim Daniels of Hofstra University, Patricia Sloane-White of the University of Delaware, Andrew Willford of Cornell University and Tom Williamson of Carlton College.

<sup>10</sup> The history of Japanese anthropologists' research and academic involvements in Malaysia remains, as far as I know, yet to be written; but see for example: Shamsul and Uesugi, eds. 1998.



Cornell-Thailand Project, Thai scholars began going predominantly to the United States for training.<sup>11</sup> The self-image of Thailand in post-colonial Southeast Asia has also shaped the development of its national anthropology. Thailand was the only modern nation in Southeast Asia to avoid direct European colonial administration. As such, modern Thai history stresses the nation's legacy of independence, the corollary of which is a much less fraught or antagonistic relationship to Western 'orientalism' and colonialism. To the contrary, throughout most of the 20th century, and particularly after the Second World War, Thai governments have fostered and promoted positive attitudes and relations with Europe and America. With regard to the development of anthropology, this has engendered a much more positively conceived development of an indigenous tradition with regard to the role of foreign scholars.

Thai scholars have sought to develop an autonomous, local anthropology. And issues of local vs. foreign (especially Thai vs. Western or American) perceptions and approaches are not absent. For example, one of the most important classical works in Thai anthropology remains Akin Rabibhadana's *Social Organization of Early Bangkok* (1969), written as a critique of John Embree's earlier analysis of Thailand's 'loosely-structured' society published in the *American Anthropologist* (1950). Yet overall, due perhaps in largest part to the broader environment of relatively positive relations with the West and absence of strong post-colonial angst, Thai anthropology has maintained a relatively strong and non-antagonistic relationship with American, European and other foreign — especially 'Western' but also Japanese and South Asian — scholarly traditions. In particular, a set of relationships which have gained less attention but are well worth closer considerations are the ties between Thai and South Asian scholars, such as Stanley Tambiah and Gehan Wijeyewardene, related in large part to centuries-old historical linkages based on Theravada Buddhism (see also Sahai and Misra, 2006).

The lineage of Indonesian anthropology is perhaps the most complex of the four cases discussed here, with very substantial Dutch, Australian and American connections and in the wake of Koentjaraningrat's diverse influence. Koentjaraningrat is generally seen as the pivotal founder of post-independence anthropology in Indonesia (Ramstedt, 2005: 208; Winarto and Pirous, 2008). Koentjaraningrat received graduate training at Yale in the 1950s, while his colleague and collaborator in sociology Harsia W. Bachtiar studied at Cornell during the same period (Prager, 2005: 195; Ramstedt, 2005: 208). As Prager notes in his essay on post-War Indonesian anthropology, sending students to the United

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond Scupin's (1996) account of Suthep's influence in the development of Thai anthropology, points out how Suthep, for instance, had his initial training in the UK, but subsequently became increasingly influenced by American anthropology.

States for graduate education in anthropology and other disciplines was intended to uncouple the Indonesian academy from its Dutch colonial ties and heritage (Prager, 2005: 195). During that period, post-colonial, anti-Dutch sentiments did not seem generalised as ‘anti-Western’ sentiments in Indonesia. On the other hand, during Suharto’s New Order regime (1965–1997), Indonesia’s restrictive attitude toward foreign researchers as well as generally negative attitudes toward the regime within left-leaning American, Australian and European academic circles all contributed to an atmosphere in which the ties between anthropology and related disciplines in and outside of Indonesia were not as mutually supportive as the case of Thailand previously mentioned.

As Ramstedt (2005: 208) points out, Koentjaraningrat’s involvement in Murdock’s development of the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) at Yale influenced his programme for Indonesian anthropology. However, contrary to Ramstedt’s portrayal, this included but was not limited to an intensive interest in the diverse cultures of Indonesia. As Winarto and Pirous (2008) testify, Koentjaraningrat encouraged a number of students to undertake studies outside of Indonesia, such as Anrini Sofion’s research in Thailand and Amri Marzali’s research in Malaysia.

### **Structuring Anthropological Selves and Others**

Anthropologists have come to thoroughly recognise and embed within our theory and methods an understanding that our subjectivity and identity as researchers is deeply implicated in the research process (e.g., see Kitiarsa, 2007, for reflections of a Thai anthropologist). That is to say, who one is has important implications for the ways in which one conducts research, the information one uncovers, and the ways in which we interpret and write about what we learn. Identification of foreign and indigenous scholars, organised around a belief in nationally structured selves (e.g., Indonesian, Malaysian or Thai anthropologists *vs.* American, British or Dutch anthropologists) has served as a deeply influential organising principle for various initiatives, for instance, in eligibility guidelines for research funding. Modern anthropology emerged in tandem with the modern nation-state system. Through modern education systems — particularly universities — nation-states have been the primary patrons and benefactors of anthropology since at least the early 20th century. Critiques of the relationship between anthropology, anthropologists and state systems, particularly colonial states, which have been their primary employer are now standard fare within anthropology’s history of itself. No other discipline, as far as I am aware, has as well developed a critique and understanding of its position within a larger political, economic, cultural and social structure.

These critiques were first developed with regard to the relationship between anthropology and colonialism, at a point when the latter was fast disappearing and thoroughly discredited as a system of political and economic relations (e.g., Asad, 1973). But the spirit of such disciplinary self-critique continues in analysis of American area studies and anthropology and more recently in critiques of various emergent non-Western national traditions (e.g., Kim, 2004; Moon, 2005; Shamsul, 2004; Tan, 2004).

As I have argued elsewhere (Thompson, 2008: 123–125), we need to guard against reduction and simplification of insider/outsider, foreign/indigenous, self/other understandings of the position of anthropologists as researchers organised around ethno-national identities (see also Sinha, 2005; Tan, 2004: 307–308). One revealing example of the complexity and variability of self/other and indigenous/foreign concepts in anthropological practice is the varying ways in which emergent anthropological traditions in Southeast Asia have structured the subjects of their studies; the ‘others’ with whom anthropologists interact and about whom they write. In each national tradition, anthropological others are structured by centre-periphery relationships and hierarchies of interest. Anthropological traditions of both Malaysia and Thailand exhibit distinctive centre-periphery structures with regard to the focus of research interests in the two countries. In Indonesia, the hierarchical organisation of anthropology is not quite as pronounced. In Singapore, anthropology is not organised or institutionalised enough to even exhibit such hierarchical structure.

In Malaysia, anthropology has developed in relationship to a Malay and *bumiputera*-centred nation (*cf.* Tan, 2004).<sup>12</sup> The multi-ethnic and deeply divided imaginary of the Malaysian nation has been replicated in the development of Malaysian anthropology — both by local and foreign researchers. Research on Malay communities, particularly rural Malays, has received the most attention. Second to Malay-focused research have been studies of *orang asli* (literally original peoples; aborigines) and other non-Malay but *bumiputera* groups. While peripheral to most national concerns, the ‘primitive’ social and economic organisation of *orang asli* groups on the peninsula and various *bumiputera* (indigenous, but non-Malay) groups in Sarawak and Sabah on Borneo have captured the imagination of both foreign and local anthropologists. Anthropological interest in Chinese and Indian communities has been less pronounced. To some extent, Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia have gained more attention from foreign than local anthropologists (e.g.,

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<sup>12</sup> Bumiputera refers to Malays and others considered indigenous to the peninsula and territories in Borneo; particularly in contrast to Chinese and Indian ‘immigrants’.

Carstens, 2005; DeBernardi, 2004, 2006; Willford, 2007). Attention to other groups in Malaysia (e.g., Portugese or Thai descendent communities) — while not absent — is much less than that of either Malay and other *bumiputera* communities or Chinese and Indian communities (Tan, 2004). Malaysian anthropology replicates, in many ways, the deep, socially and politically perpetuated divisions of Malaysia's ethno-racially plural society.

In contrast to the perpetuation of ethnic difference as fundamental to political identity in Malaysia, Thailand has pursued an at times aggressive policy of assimilation toward the peoples within its modern borders, which is reflected in various ways in the development of anthropology. In Malaysia, a fairly substantial gulf tends to exist between those who study Malays, Chinese, Indians or Other, as well as between researchers focusing on the peninsula as opposed to Sarawak and Sabah. While anthropologists in Thailand specialise on various regions and peoples, the discipline is not a Balkanised as it is in Malaysia. At the same time, it is possible to perceive a hierarchy within Thailand's anthropology, centred on Central Thailand and Bangkok, and radiating outward in concentric circles, each representing a field of ethnography considered increasingly 'other' to the Central Thai ethno-national self. The regions of Northern (Lanna), North-east (Isaan) and Southern Thailand are conceptually closest yet generally approached as different from Central Thailand (i.e., conceptual 'othering') — but not very different with the largely Muslim 'deep South' being the most 'foreign'. At a further remove are various 'Hill Tribes', particularly in the north, followed by a more recent but increasingly substantial attention to ethnically Thai (or Tai) populations outside of Thailand; e.g., in Laos, Yunnan (China), the Shan States in Myanmar, Tai-speaking populations in Vietnam, recently studied by Yukti Mukdawijitra of Thammasat University and also studies of Thai diasporic communities, such as Pattana Kitiarsa's research in Singapore (Kitiarsa 2008, 2009). While Thai anthropologists are beginning to venture beyond national boundaries in their research and interests, very little research extends to topics beyond Thai communities outside the nation-state or very far beyond its modern borders. One oft-cited exception is the research of Thammasat University's Saipin Suphuthamongkol, who conducted dissertation fieldwork in Italy.

The situation in Indonesian anthropology is again perhaps the most complex. The great linguistic and ethnic diversity of Indonesia created a situation in which, for Indonesian anthropologists, "the other is us."<sup>13</sup> Compared to Thailand, Jakarta- or Java-centrism is not as pronounced in Indonesia as Bangkok-centrism is in Thailand. On the other hand, Indonesia's politics stress 'unity in

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<sup>13</sup> Yunita Winarto, personal communication.

diversity', rather than the rigid insistence on difference found in Malaysian political and social life. As mentioned, Koenjaraningrat's training at Yale and the HRAF encouraged him to guide Indonesian anthropologists to approach Indonesia as a place of great ethnic diversity — to be recorded and understood in the service of nation-building. The HRAF ideal, with anthropology as a comprehensive study of all humanity, also provided motivation for creating arguably the most outward-looking national tradition in Southeast Asia. But also of note is the shift over several decades from an approach focusing on cataloguing the cultures of different ethnic groups to investigation of practical issues and action-based, applied anthropology, for instance, in association with non-governmental organisations, international donors or other practically-oriented organisations. This has also been true in other traditions, perhaps most of all in Thailand. As Yunita Winarto related, now anthropologists most often "go to the region" (i.e., Asia beyond Indonesia) based on issues, rather than with the idea of recording different and diverse ethnic cultures; her own research in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia on agricultural practices being a prime example.

These cases highlight an important, historically embedded distinction between 'outward looking' colonial and neo-colonial national traditions, such as those of British, American and Japanese anthropology, and 'inward looking' post-colonial, national traditions, such as Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian anthropology. Given that in America and elsewhere, anthropologists studying 'at home' has become increasingly common, while anthropologists in Indonesia, Thailand and elsewhere appear to be increasingly interested in expanding the scope of their studies beyond national borders, there may be some convergence between more or less outward and inward-looking traditions. The emphasis on issues as opposed to 'cultures' noted by Winarto and other Southeast Asian anthropologists with whom I have conversed on the topic of this article also suggests a shifting conceptualisation of what the discipline of anthropology is about.

### **What is Anthropology? History, Theory and Methods**

Anthropology is well established enough that in much of Southeast Asia — certainly in Indonesia, Thailand and to a large extent Malaysia — it can take itself for granted. In Indonesia, it is an established discipline in more than a dozen universities. In Thailand, anthropology is by all accounts an expanding, thriving discipline with a major research centre, the Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, supported by royal patronage. In Malaysia, Shamsul A. B. (2005) gives a very positive account of anthropology within universities and positive prospects for undergraduates with anthropology degrees. And even in Singapore,

even in the absence of institutionalisation in the form of departments, degrees or programmes, major universities continue to hire anthropologists on a regular basis. In these contexts, anthropology will likely exist well into the future based on institutional inertia alone. But anthropology is not exactly the same thing everywhere — let alone the same thing to all anthropologists. Anthropology has already evolved beyond the ‘savage slot’ assigned to it within European and American academia in the 19th and 20th centuries; even if this is not fully recognised outside of the discipline (Lindstrom and Stromberg, 1999; Trouillot, 1991). As desirable and necessary as abandoning the savage slot is, it also leaves anthropology a bit adrift as to the organising identity of the discipline. In other words, even if our answers are diverse and complex, it is necessary to provide some answer to the question: What is anthropology?

Anthropology can be understood in a variety of ways, which are by no means mutually exclusive. History is one way. Various authors are making important contributions in elucidating the late 20th century history of anthropology, in which it has transcended its modern European and American origins to become a much more diverse field of endeavour, i.e., the emergence of ‘world anthropologies’, most but not all of which are currently tied to national traditions underwritten by various forms of nation-state patronage (see Thompson, 2008). In addition to historical lineage, anthropology can be defined by its subject matter, methods, applications and products. Also importantly, as a field of knowledge institutionalised primarily within modern universities, anthropology can be understood in relationship to other disciplines. While the ‘savage slot’ is nicely alliterative, it may be more useful to draw on an ecological analogy and consider how anthropology finds a niche within a broader field of disciplines.

Reworking the disciplinary relationship between anthropology and related disciplines — particularly sociology, but also area studies, cultural studies and others — is an important challenge for scholars of the current generation; although how to do this productively remains far from clear. As national traditions of and within various disciplines have flourished their relationship to each other has not necessarily followed the same path. It would make sense to work toward a theoretical and methodological merging of social and cultural anthropology with sociology, though institutional inertia as well as inherited disciplinary enmity, often having more to do with dogmas carried over from American and other training than from legitimate intellectual disputes frequently hinders such efforts.

With regard to the subject matter of anthropology (what is it that anthropologists study?), theory development — i.e., the organising concepts we use — is important. My own inclinations are to figure anthropology as a broad, holistic

discipline. When I teach anthropology at the National University of Singapore, I begin with a discussion of anthropology as a discipline consisting of the study (-ology) of human beings (anthrop-). The beauty of anthropology, in a sense, is that anything humans do falls under our purview. There is no need to question whether a particular study is properly about 'politics', 'economics', 'sociological' or even 'geographic' in scope or content. In addition, whereas the idea of capturing a 'whole' culture within the space of one ethnographic monograph has long faded, anthropology retains the principle of 'holism' insofar as we draw connections between different fields of human thought and action; in other words, religion, family life, work, politics, exchange systems, technology and the like are seen, at least potentially and in principle, as all interconnected (see Appadurai, 1996). It allows us to draw connections and propose explanations to which some more narrowly-defined fields (e.g., political science or economics) might be disciplinarily blinkered.

One of the most promising avenues for theory and concept development within Southeast Asian anthropologies may be greater reflection on the organising concepts implicit within the discipline(s) as they have emerged in different national traditions. Here, I will mention just a few of these key concepts and how we might draw on them to think about our anthropological endeavours. One of the rich features of language and thought in Southeast Asia is the region's many linguistic inheritances derived from its long history as a place of intersecting civilisations (e.g., Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, English, Malay, Thai and many others).

American cultural and British social anthropology were often roughly distinguished in terms of their overlapping but somewhat divergent key theories of culture and social relations. By the mid-20th century, 'culture' had come to be that which anthropologists studied in America, though by the late 20th century the use of culture conceptually had come into question and even rejected by some (in a debate which continues; in more and less productive ways; see Abu Lughod, 1991; Brumann, 1999). Similarly, key organising ideas are generative within various anthropological traditions in Southeast Asia. But the field of generative terms (ideas) can be organised quite differently.

In Thailand, the term *wattanatum* is most commonly translated as 'culture'. However, anthropologists in Thailand, for the most part, do not see themselves as studying *wattanatum*. This is because *wattanatum* carries the connotation of 'high culture' (such as canonical literature, court-centred classical music and traditional dance), as well as pedantic inflection in terms of its use in school curricula and elsewhere to teach correct manners and practice — i.e., instruction in '*wattanatum Thai*' as those practices which Thai people should employ (e.g., the 'wai' or hands folded together as a show of respect and greeting).

In this sense, '*wattanatum*' — as a modern Thai term coined in the past century and in modern Thai usage — refers only to good things, with a moral connotation as to how one should act, rather than the more neutral American anthropological term *culture* referring to how people act, with cultural relativism underpinning an orientation toward scholarly disengagement from questions of whether any particular 'cultural' practices are proper, improper, right or wrong.

Thai anthropologists and others have paid attention instead to *phum panya* (local wisdom) in contrast to *wattanatum*. Whereas *wattanatum*, tends toward authority-defined concepts and edicts on proper manners and conduct, *phum panya* emphasises knowledge emergent from local and peripheral sites (e.g., rural villages and hill peoples) in contrast to the centrally organised, modern Thai state, the key promoter of *wattanatum*. Although the focus of Thai anthropology has been more toward ethnographically grounded, empirically thick description of peoples and practices, the contrast between *wattanatum* and *phum panya* points to a productive theoretical tension within Thai scholarship. More recently, for instance, this has arisen with the development of *wattanatum suksa* or 'cultural studies' within the Thai academy. *Wattanatum suksa* bears some relationship to cultural studies found elsewhere, i.e., as the field of studies influenced by Raymond Williams and others. Many Thai anthropologists consider the development of *wattanatum suksa* in Thai universities to have been encouraged by the recognition of 'cultural studies' programmes blossoming in the rest of the world. But given the connotation of *wattanatum* as positive and refined 'cultural' practices, the field in Thailand has focused on high-classical cultural arts in sharp contrast to the motivation of cultural studies elsewhere to lend legitimacy to the study of various forms of popular culture and mass media. In Thailand the latter has been taken up much more by anthropologists than scholars of *wattanatum suksa*.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, *budaya* or *kebudayaan* has been adopted as an indigenous (but also Sanskrit-derived) translation of the word and concept of 'culture' developed and popularised by 20th century anthropologists. An interesting theoretical tension within Malay scholarship — particularly that produced over the past two decades — is in the relationship between *budaya* and *tamadun*. The latter, derived from Arabic, is translated into English as 'civilisation' and its popularity in recent Malay scholarship derives in no small part from a reaction to the popularisation of Samuel Huntington's idea of 'clashing' civilisations in the early 1990s. A consideration of the prolific writing in Malay on both *budaya* and *tamadun* would be a valuable endeavour in terms of anthropological theory development. Malay scholars have been working through the relationship of these concepts, particularly in considering the role



of Islam in Malay society but with regard to more universal implications for understanding human relations as well (e.g., Ab. Aziz *et al.*, 2006: 215–228; Abd. Wahid and Faezah, 2006: 16; Ahmad Jelani, 2008; Mohd. Zuhdi, 2006: 4; *cf.* Thongchai, 2000 on ‘civilisation’ discourse in Thailand).

In both of these cases, of the relationship between *wattanatum* and *phum panya* in Thai and *kebudayaan* and *tamadun* in Malay, anthropological theory could benefit (both locally and transnationally) from an interrogation of these very general concepts for understanding how human ideas and practices are guided and structured. In many other cases, theoretical interrogation of the conceptual terrain in different national and linguistic contexts will add to anthropological repertoires; for example, concepts such as Malay *bangsa* and Thai *chat* figure humanity somewhat differently than the English concepts of ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’ (*cf.* Ahmad Jelani, 2008: viii–xii). A key role of anthropology, both as an academic and public discipline, is to develop and provide a vocabulary for thinking about social and cultural processes. On-going efforts at engaged, critical translation and development of conceptual vocabulary across and between languages should be an enduring strength of the discipline.

### Networking Anthropology: Locally, Nationally, Transnationally

Assuming there is a more-or-less coherent field of scholars and scholarship that we can call ‘anthropology’, the final issue to raise in this essay regards the organisation or networking of anthropologists in Southeast Asia. The development of national traditions, or lack thereof in the case of Singapore, is one important facet of this. But a ‘national’ tradition is primarily a frame of reference — albeit a powerful, efficacious one — for conceptualising, motivating and structuring practices deemed to be anthropological. In this final section, I want consider national (i.e., nation-state enframed) anthropological practice in relation to two other frames — the local and transnational. By ‘local’ I am referring to variously situated patterns, networks, relationships and structures. Local is a slippery concept here and intentionally so. It can be thought of as referring to various configurations of anthropological practice that are ‘below’ or contained within the national. However, more generally I am referring to the (multi)sitedness of anthropology as instantiated in practice. Perhaps we can speak and think in terms of the locale(s) of anthropology in its ‘everyday’ manifestations. I turn to several examples to explain.

Local instantiation includes the organisation of departments within universities or other institutions. For any human activity to persist, institutionalisation is essential. I do not mean ‘institutionalisation’ only in its bureaucratic-

rational sense, though that is one mode of great importance in the modern world. I mean institution in its broader sense as an organised and reproduced field of human endeavour (e.g., ‘institutions’ of marriage, kinship or gender). People have done the sorts of things anthropologists do throughout history. For instance, in my anthropology courses in Singapore, we begin by reading passages from Ibn Battuta’s 14th century *Travels in Asia and Africa* and Ma Huan’s 15th century *Survey of the Ocean’s Shores*, both of whom wrote about areas around the Straits of Malacca in ways that are at least generally recognisable as what we now call ‘anthropology’. But they were not self-consciously working within any field of anthropology institutionalised and recognised as such. And their endeavours were conceptually organised as different sorts of things — a travelogue written for the Sultan of Morocco in Ibn Battuta’s case; an imperial survey for the Chinese court in Ma Huan’s.

Singapore, as I have indicated, has the least formally institutionalised tradition of anthropology of the four nation-state frames of reference which I have focused on here. Anthropology is taught to undergraduate and graduate students within the three major universities, but most often within and subsidiary to sociology or in other instances Southeast Asian studies and similar fields that grant doctoral, masters and bachelors degrees. Prior to the introduction of an anthropology Ph.D.-stream within the graduate programme in sociology at NUS in 2012, one could not graduate from a university in Singapore with official recognition as an expert in anthropology at any of the three aforementioned levels of proficiency. This has not necessarily been of great hindrance to the pursuit of anthropology in Singapore; considering that the largest university (NUS) probably employs more anthropologists than any other in the region. But it does create some cross-cultural confusion when dealing with academics and institutions outside of Singapore. For instance, I have found that I have to give a somewhat elaborate explanation of my own training and field when I hand people my business card from the Department of Sociology. Of slightly more consequence is when graduate students trained primarily in what much of the world now sees as ‘anthropology’ go looking for jobs with their ‘sociology’ degree or when external reviewers of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences are critical of the ‘lack’ of anthropology without apparently understanding how it is integrated into sociology and other disciplines. It also makes any sort of anthropological networks among anthropologists working in Singapore extremely informal.

Informal networks in anthropology or any discipline are not to be dismissed and are always important in parallel to formal institutionalisation of anthropology as such. More than one Thai anthropologist, for example, in reply to my questions about how anthropologists interact, said (paraphrasing) — there are

only a few dozen of us, and so we mostly all know each other and often meet informally. But Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia all have various formal structures through which anthropologists interact. At the university departmental level, many of Thailand's universities have combined departments of sociology and anthropology, where the two disciplines are both formally recognised. In some cases, most importantly at the influential Silipikorn University, anthropology is closely associated with archaeology. Indonesian universities, in a slightly different arrangement, generally house departments of anthropology that are separate from sociology and other disciplines and that teach a variety of anthropology heavily influenced by American 'cultural' anthropology or British social anthropology, in contrast to the American 'four fields' variety with emphasis on physical anthropology, archaeology and linguistics along with socio-cultural anthropology. Embedding anthropology within university departments produces a logic of reproduction of the discipline, with new faculty members hired and new students recruited as the older ones retire or graduate.

Thailand and Indonesia and to a lesser extent Malaysia have a variety of other formal institutions for shaping and engendering academic networks that produce anthropology. At present, Thailand has the most vibrant, active anthropological community among Southeast Asian nations. The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (or SAC) has played a significant role in giving anthropology a public profile and as a focal point for interaction over the past decade. According to its Director Paritta Chaloeempaw Koanantakool, the history of the Centre can be traced to initiatives at Silipikorn University in the early 1990s. From 1999, the SAC has operated from its own building in the Thornburi district of Bangkok. It operates as a centre both for academic endeavours and as a practical link between academic social sciences and public outreach. The Centre is host to visitors and conferences throughout the year, both anthropological and more generally for various social science and humanities endeavours. In March, it hosts an annual conference which several Thai anthropologists described to me informally as their 'annual meeting.' There is no Thai anthropological association as such — again, because, in the opinion of the Thai anthropologists I spoke to, the number of professional anthropologists operating in Thailand's academic institutions numbers only in the dozens and a bureaucratically-organised association seems unnecessary. Thailand does not have a dedicated anthropology journal, but Thai anthropology and anthropologists play an important role as contributors and editors in many influential Thai-language social science journals. In these, as well as books and various forms of working papers, a thriving production and consumption of anthropology is alive in Thailand today.

Indonesia and Malaysia have more formal institutions of anthropology than Singapore, but comparatively at present are perhaps less active than anthropology in Thailand. Indonesia, for example, does have (or at least has had) an *Antropologi Indonesia* association, but it has not been active in recent years. Similarly, the *Jurnal Antropologi Indoneisa* (*Journal of Indonesian Anthropology*), published over several decades out of the University of Indonesia and sponsor of a series of well-attended meetings over the past two decades has also been irregular in publication and activities over the past few years. In all of the three countries, excepting Singapore, anthropologists and other academics labour in relatively poorly-funded institutions and positions. Beyond certain constraints associated with their position most often as civil servants within a larger state bureaucracy, Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian anthropologists frequently need to seek out work to supplement fairly meagre salaries. For some, this means taking on diverse, additional teaching in secondary or private institutions. Many make a virtue out of necessity, by integrating their anthropological practice into a variety of state-sponsored, non-governmental, or even business-oriented applied projects.

Patronage of anthropology and anthropologists by funding agencies plays an important role in practice. Despite some downward pressure on salaries and restructuring of academia (i.e., the shift from employing tenured faculty to short-term, adjunct faculty), academics in Singapore like their counterparts in America, Australia and elsewhere still enjoy the relative luxury, privilege and power to set their own research agendas, given that their university income is at least sufficient to support a reasonable professional-class existence. Indonesian, Thai and perhaps to a slightly lesser degree Malaysian anthropologists are more constrained by the need to generate extra income on top of university salaries, even at the most prestigious institutions. While researchers everywhere are constrained, as well as enabled, by the needs, desires and understandings of patrons and funders, this is more acutely felt — in my conversations — among anthropologists in Thailand and Indonesia than those in Singapore. One of the gradual shifts providing greater autonomy to researchers in Thailand, for example, has been the strong sponsorship of research under the Thailand Research Fund. While having a national agenda, itself constraining in a variety of ways, that agenda is more locally set and oriented than those of some international agencies. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that foreign funders — most notably Japanese and Korean — have been generous and broad-minded (i.e., few ‘strings attached’) sponsors of anthropological and other academic endeavours across much of Southeast Asia.

Research projects and publications are another ‘locale’ of anthropological practice. Here especially, we can conceive of the ‘location’ of anthropology

configured in ways that are not only strictly single-sited (e.g., a university department) but multi-sited and transnationally networked. An exemplary case in point is the recent multi-year Mekong Ethnography of Cross-Border Cultures (MECC) collaborative research project. The MECC was organised through the Sirindhorn Anthropology Center in Thailand and funded by the Rockefeller foundation.<sup>14</sup> Organised conceptually and transnationally around the “Greater Mekong Subregion” (GMS), it involved multinational research teams from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, China (Yunnan) and Myanmar, as well as consultative inputs and peer review by scholars from Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States and elsewhere. The project proceeded through a series of collaborative workshops and fieldwork research. From the outset, teams from the GMS countries met to set the agenda for research projects. In contrast to projects where members of multi-national research teams act a ‘representatives’ of their country (see Winarto and Pirus, 2008), the MECC collaborators focused on themes from prostitution and human trafficking to marriage and citizenship to rice cultivation and ritual, which are not confined within national borders.

As with research projects, transnationally linked, collaborative publications have also become more numerous in recent years. It remains the case that a greater volume and quality of publications about Southeast Asia are produced outside of the region rather than within it. That said, important contributions are being made by scholars within the region, often published by presses within the region. In Malaysia, for example, Zawawi Ibrahim’s (2008) edited volume on *Representation, Identity and Multiculturalism in Sarawak*, jointly published by the Dayak Cultural Foundation and the Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia (Malaysian Social Science Association), included contributions by Malaysian, American, British and Japanese anthropologists based in those and other countries. The book was widely regarded as significant not only in its empirical contribution on contemporary Sarawak, but also for its theoretical engagement with ideas and experiences of multiculturalism (see Bunnell, 2010; Gabriel, 2010). Likewise, the interdisciplinary, but substantially anthropological volume on *The Family in Flux in Southeast Asia* (Hayami *et al.*, 2012), jointly published by Kyoto University Press and Silkworm Books, brings together a collection of Thai, Japanese, Indonesian, Malaysian, Filipino and Chinese scholars in a major transnational, comparative analysis of changing family and kinship systems.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is how to maintain, sustain and strengthen transnational connections among scholars in Southeast Asia. Most events, projects, publications or other initiatives tend to be one-off, episodic occurrences.

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<sup>14</sup> The MECC project included researchers from a variety of disciplines; but most participants and the project leaders were anthropologists.

They also tend to largely recapitulate a structure in which ‘international’ scholars lead the project and ‘local’ scholars conduct research within and are taken as representative of their particular national tradition. Even in the case of the MECC, which took extraordinary efforts to include researchers from around the region in all stages of conceptualisation and practice, the project was unavoidably Thai-centred. It would be unfair, however, to judge the MECC or any other project against a utopian egalitarian standard. In complex projects with many researchers, hierarchies and authority (who takes the lead, who makes crucial decisions, who controls the purse-strings) cannot be avoided; although, certainly, much can be done to promote greater inclusivity at all levels of research practice. What can be hoped for is that with the emergence of strong, diverse anthropological traditions throughout a region like Southeast Asia, we will witness an ever-widening range and configuration of anthropological practices. We can envision a transnational anthropology in which the hierarchical structures of projects will be more diverse and not dominated by a few, distant centres. The goal is for anthropology to be more flexibly networked producing a field in which one could point to multiple centres of authority and anthropological knowledge of Southeast Asia both within and beyond the region.

## Conclusion

Anthropology, like any academic discipline, is always an evolving field of theory and practice. Globally, anthropology has transformed from a discipline concerned with non-Western, non-industrial societies and non-Western cultures, the so-called ‘savage slot’ within Western academia (Trouillot, 1991), into a discipline concerned with globalisation, urbanisation, power and other subjects of contemporary critical theory (Hannerz, 2010). The discipline has also developed to include diverse, national traditions around the world (Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006). This article has sought to contribute to our on-going efforts to trace and to conceptualise these transformations. By taking a regional, comparative approach, my aim has been to advance our thinking about anthropological practice and disciplinary developments beyond on-going imbalances between largely ‘Western’ centres of academia and non-Western peripheries (*cf.* Alatas, 2006), as well as moving beyond histories of nationally-organised academic practice (*cf.* Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006; Thompson, 2008). Both of those concerns and realities continue to be of importance in shaping anthropology as an on-going field of practice. My aim here has been to highlight transnational linkages, as well as the ways in which emergent, diverse anthropologies can and likely will move the discipline forward in the coming decades.

This overview of emergent national traditions of anthropology has, of necessity, been cursory. Much more can and should be written about how anthropology has been shaped by anthropologists and by various theoretical and practical concerns in each of the four countries discussed in this article. For example, I have only alluded to the practical, applied, and issue-oriented anthropology carried out by Indonesian, Malaysian, Thai and to a lesser extent Singaporean anthropologists in the context of nation-building and development-oriented economies. Nor has it been possible to adequately discuss the details of institutionalisation of anthropology in universities, government bureaucracies and other sites. Much remains to be said as well about important interactions and relationships between anthropologists and non-governmental organisations and anthropologists' activities in fields ranging from medical to business anthropology (e.g., Thianthai, 2010). And while I have noted the work of several important anthropologists, those cited in this article represent only a fraction of the many Southeast Asian anthropologists who have contributed to disciplinary developments and transformations. These limitations notwithstanding, my focus has been on transnational linkages and theoretical development within Southeast Asian anthropologies.

Transnational linkages have been and continue to be vital in shaping anthropology across Southeast Asia. In the past, those linkages consisted mainly in training, research and intellectual relationships between neophyte disciplines and practitioners in Southeast Asia with established centres of anthropology in Europe, the United States and to a lesser extent Australia and Japan. Colonial and postcolonial geopolitics played an important if not altogether determining role in how those linkages played out in each country. While those relationships remain important, we are now seeing more diffuse and diverse transnational relationships being forged, particular among practitioners situated within Southeast Asia as well as more broadly across East and South Asia. I have also discussed the ways in which anthropology and anthropologists' relationships to the objects and subjects of the discipline are configured differently in different national traditions, with implications for alternative thinking about anthropological selves and others. And finally, I have suggested, albeit in a partial and preliminary fashion, the ways in which ethnographically grounded and linguistically diverse theory building could contribute alternative, Southeast Asian perspectives to a wider body of anthropological knowledge. These processes are all on-going. What we should look toward in the future is the ways in which transnational relationships and translation of ideas and practices among and within networks of Southeast Asian anthropologists in the region will contribute to the discipline's evolution at present and in coming years.

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