

New Trends in the Anthropology of Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This article addresses the question, is there such an entity as a separate field of the anthropology of Southeast Asia? Has the crisis in anthropology in the 1970s and ‘the literary turn’ of the 1980s led to a renewed interest in area studies? A number of topics that originally belonged to the field of anthropology will be discussed: religion, the culture of social class and strategic groups, family and gender relations, developments in tourism, leisure and consumption, material culture, media and performance, and the growing importance of the rapid urbanization in Southeast Asia and its relationship with globalization and localization.

KEYWORDS: anthropology, Southeast-Asia, globalisation, social change, urban development, family, gender, tourism, religion, mobility, transnationalism

TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF SOUTHEAST ASIA?

THE QUESTION OF WHETHER or not we can discern and delimit a separate discipline of the anthropology of Southeast Asia is a tricky one. The discussion about area studies or specific country or regional knowledge has led most authors to conclude that Southeast Asian Studies constitutes first and foremost a knowledge construct that represents only a part of the social reality of the region (Sutherland 2005: 21).¹ Local knowledge is pivotal for any specific area knowledge and instrumental for the understanding and analysis of globalizing processes. Paradigms of local knowledge do not, on the whole, contribute much to the general development of theories, though, some have a more than geographically limited significance as, for example in the theories of the ‘Big Man’ (or Wolters’ ‘men of prowess’ [2008]) and Malinowski’s *kula* ring in the Asia-Pacific area.

Anthropology is a complex, wide-ranging, and ever-changing field. It includes a range of certain concepts, distinctive methodologies, as well as philosophical and practical issues in various sub-disciplines like cultural, social, political, and economic anthropology. Anthropology is like other disciplines in the social sciences of value to professional practitioners, but receives much attention

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¹See, for example, the interesting discussion by Korean scholars about the state of Southeast Asian Studies in Korea, organized by the Korean Association of Southeast Asian Studies (KASEAS) in 2007 (Oh *et al.* 2011).

from others outside academia. More recent trends cover topics like gender, post-modernism, post-colonialism, globalization and its local reactions and public issues; trends which reflect changes in perspective and language.

According to Jane Guyer (2004: 515), “Anthropology in Southeast Asian studies presents itself quite differently.” Guyer argues that the ‘practitioners’ of the discipline have committed themselves to “a series of imaginative interventions with specific contributions on cultural and religious complexity. Scholars [of Southeast Asia] commit less to historical reconstruction than in either Africa or South Asia’ (ibid: 515). She implicitly refers to debates among Africa-nists about the relevance of modes of production to explain the local development of the economy, and, among South Asian historians organized in a Subaltern Studies Group who critically study colonial and post-colonial situations to detect continuity between colonial and post-colonial categories, which include the values and value judgments implied in both.

Victor King summarizes this lack of an encompassing anthropology of Southeast Asia as follows:

“One result of this lack of interest was the absence, until recently, of any substantial anthropological text on the Southeast Asian region as a whole, and a positive rejoicing not in cultural commonality but in cultural difference and diversity. To my mind, anthropology, at its most successful and productive moments, has directed its comparative gaze on sub-regional categories and populations: the Kachin Hills, central Borneo, eastern Indonesia, the Mountain Province of northern Luzon, and the Malay Archipelago.” (King 2005: 6)

The absence of any substantial anthropological text on the Southeast Asian region as a whole does not mean that there was or is no such thing as the anthropology of the region. King (2002) recognizes a number of themes, trends, issues, and perspectives, but doubts that a dominant ‘style’ of analysis makes Southeast Asian anthropology different from other areas in the world (or rather that it serves to differentiate it sufficiently).

Mary Steedly (1999) tackled the same issue already more than ten years ago. She proposed to deal with themes like gender, marginality, violence, and the state as topics for discussing the consequences of state-formation for culture in Southeast Asia. For Steedly, culture is much affected by the state: it both promotes official nationalism and generates reactions from ‘the local’ against these “processes of collective imagining, whether guided or relatively spontaneous” (Steedly 1999: 442). A bewildering number of places, spaces, and themes have received the attention of anthropologists: “schools, museums, festivals, print-capitalism, political rituals, public depictions of ethnic diversity in textbooks, posters and dioramas, national art competitions, national heroes, language and literacy, religion, tourism and art, television and films; fashion systems, music and popular

entertainment and mass organizations' (Steedly 1999: 442). A clear hierarchy, or priority, in this enumeration of topics is absent, but the list lacks at first glance a concern with communication technology, for example the Internet and mobile phones.² That seems logical given the timing of her publication when Internet had only just reached its World Wide Web form. Anthropologists, who keep an eye on the local, Steedly argues, cannot afford to overlook the state, or even to look past it. For her, the matter is not what "a Southeast Asian regional anthropology might comprise, and, as well as a place to look for culture, though we now have to look for it at the level of the state, it is also a place 'seemingly marked by violence'" (Steedly 1999: 444). Steedly sees a trend, already noticed by John Bowen in 1995 that "the state has taken culture's place as the generalized and generalizing superorganic centre of our theories of meaning" (Steedly 1999: 444). However, the same state context also urges anthropologists, and Steedly urges her readers, to study the "landscape of the banal", the everyday life of the citizens of Southeast Asian countries which we also can describe as culture (Steedly 1999: 446).

Others (e.g. King and Wilder 2003) have opted for broader themes like ethnicity, identity and nationalism, ecology and environmental change, gender and the sexes, and urban ways of life.³ At the beginning of the 21st century, the anthropology of Southeast Asia was, according to these authors, not yet established into a distinctive profile, rather it exhibited a "healthy mix of the old and new" (King and Wilder 2003: 317). In regard to Bowen (1995, 2000), King is also sceptical of the notion that one can identify in Southeast Asian anthropology a 'dominant style' closely connected to 'cultural interpretation' and characterized as a "historical anthropology of politics" and "comparative studies of culture in context" (Bowen 2000: 11). Bowen refers exclusively to American studies with 'a Cornell perspective' which means that he tends to be in favour of a cross-disciplinary approach dealing with the study of culture, politics, and history in Southeast Asia, resulting in an insufficient account of other traditions outside the USA.. Takami Kuwayama even uses the metaphor of the 'World-System', though more in Frank's (1966) than in Wallerstein's (1974) terms, to discern a core, a periphery and a semi-periphery (Kuwayama 2004).

In their recent edited volume, *Centering the Margin* (2006), two young anthropologists, Alexander Horstmann and Reed Wadley, propose a more useful and comprehensive approach by defining an anthropology of Southeast borderlands with a closer study of the cultural complexities of borderland communities linked with trans-national networks and spaces. They and their co-

²See Pertierra (2006a) for the Philippines.

³As King commented, "In our recently published regional anthropology of Southeast Asia, my co-author and I did not seek to justify the project in terms of socio-cultural commonalities and a Southeast Asian cultural region nor in terms of a distinctive intellectual approach and a set of dominant research questions" (King and Wilder 2003) continuing in a later publication, "[r]ather we tended to echo Emmerson's notion of 'a conveniently residual category' [1984: 17]" (King 2005: 9).

authors deal with geographical centre and periphery concepts in the borderlands of Southeast Asia, with ethnic minorities and with cross-national and transnational movements of people and goods.⁴ They show that people are not only constrained by borders, but that the crossing of borders also opens up new options of agency. In the *'Centering on Margins'* volume, Sara Davis' study of a Buddhist revivalist movement in the border areas of Burma, Laos, Thailand, and China provides an interesting modification of cultural theory that poses transnationalism as a new phenomenon based upon modern communication technology (Davis 2006). For Davis, the social imagination of the effects of border crossing goes back to an era when such technology was not yet available and messages via palm leaves were the common vehicle for communication (Davis 2006: 87–111). For insular Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, Reed Wadley's own research with M. Ellenberg shows that ethnicity is still an important socio-economic strategy among the Iban in West Kalimantan in cross-border labour migration (Wadley and Ellenberg 2009).

A more general approach is proposed by King in his recent *Sociology of Southeast Asia* (2008), in which he defends an overlap between the two disciplines of anthropology and sociology, but also identifies the concern with 'culture', 'identities', 'discourse', and 'multiple narratives' as being part of a number of strands of post-modernism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism (King 2008: 248).

Sociologists, and by implication anthropologists, of the region, King argues, of whom he argues for the importance of the earlier work of the Dutch scholar W.F. Wertheim (e.g. 1968), should embrace a comparative approach especially in the field of culture and identity, based upon what has been done in the past on the historical and political economy of the region. Here the anthropology of the region blends easily into my own reading of what are labelled as upcoming trends in the anthropology of Southeast Asia, provided that such a regional anthropology or sociology exists.

⁴The work on 'Central Asia' seems to be a new academic area, though one has to be cautious with the concept of 'area'. Van Schendel distinguishes at least three dimensions of the concept in terms of space: physical, symbolic and institutional, each referring to a way of understanding it (Schendel 2005: 277). The geographical and institutional metaphor of Southeast Asia has been discussed since the 1960s, leaving the boundaries and the understanding of an academic area complicated and sometimes vague. Of the three, the most problematic way of understanding is, still according to Van Schendel, the symbolic space. He quotes Neferti Tadiar (1999), a radical feminist scholar in cultural studies, who understands the 'area' of Southeast Asia as a theoretical *'problematique'* or as a research question (Schendel 2005: 278). Van Schendel is mainly working in the border areas of Bangladesh and Burma, and susceptible to the topicality of an area where the phenomena of ethnic minorities, migrants, and refugees inhabiting border regions and crossing borders are part of their everyday life. The coining of the geographical term 'Zomia' to encompass a number of populations who live in the highlands of Southeast Asia, beyond government control, is also the topic of political scientist James C. Scott in his latest book about Southeast Asia (Scott 2009).

ANTHROPOLOGY AFTER THE CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION

Contemporary Southeast Asian studies in the field of anthropology (and sociology) seem to be moving from the 'classical' themes of interest in the culture of peasants and tribes, village and urban studies, to the links between different people, groups, and classes. The classical bipolar themes like 'essentialism' and 'nominalism' or 'political versus moral economy' seem to be replaced by a change towards 'deconstruction' of concepts like 'social structure', 'village society', 'ethnicity', 'class and state', and 'globalization and locality'.

Recent research in the region demonstrates a number of topics undertaken by social scientists (not anthropologists *per se*). Key terms are (among many others and based upon a personal selection) the transformation of the social structure, the way trans-national business networks operate, the process of democratization and the establishment of a civil society, the effects of globalization upon religion (in the way world religions have found a local radical form of fundamentalism and terrorism), and urbanization (i.e. the cultural construction of space). King and Wilder (2003) add to these concepts changes in ethnicity, identity and nationalism, ecology and environmental change, while the biggest change in attention has been recorded in the research on gender relations. Whether or not these concepts are typical for anthropologists, the issue is that they belong to key terms of the social sciences in general.

Rather than assigning a definitive character to these key concepts, I would argue that the differences between these concepts are not very large and that the labels sometimes change. Instead of following King and Wilder too closely, I have made my own division of topics which I see as relevant from a sociological or anthropological perspective.

Religion

Since Clifford Geertz (1966) defined religion as a cultural system, its study was a task which anthropologists set for themselves in terms of the Redfieldian little tradition (i.e. non-textual 'folk' traditions and belief structures such as ancestor cult, saints, and spirits). In many countries of Southeast Asia, an outburst of religious phenomena in Geertzian terms has been witnessed. Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system can help us to understand the category of practice, most usually called religious that is growing in Southeast Asia (Geertz 1966; 1973: 90). Though I will not discuss here Geertz's definition in detail, his emphasis on symbols and models, the importance of addressing questions of "a general order of existence", and religion's distance from secularization processes are considerations to discuss here as a new trend. Susan Harding (2000) and the editors of *Asian Visions of Authority* (1994) have already provided excellent post-Geertzian anthropological discussions of the power of religion in the face of predictions of imminent secularization in the American and Asian contexts respectively. Harding also coined the term 'the repugnant cultural Other' (Harding 1991),

as a warning that anthropologists sometimes make their own object by a selective choice of their topics, and that the ‘unwelcome’ cultural others, like conservative Christians, should be studied with the same care as other minorities (based upon class, race, gender, and sexual orientation).

Current studies of contemporary religion in Southeast Asia, then, seek to situate religious organizations, such as churches, cults, movements, or networks in relation to the economic, social and political power structures that shape our contemporary world. There is a plethora of studies that deal with these topics. What started with the excellent *Asian visions of authority: religion and the modern states of East and Southeast Asia* (1994) edited by Charles Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre, has now expanded to numerous studies by anthropologists who have asserted time and again that Jean Comaroff’s prophetic words “religion and ritual are crucial in the life of ‘modern’ nations and communities” (Comaroff in Keyes 1994: 301), is as relevant in Asia as elsewhere. Comaroff urges us “to distrust disenchantment, and to rethink the *telos* of development that still informs the models of much mainstream social science” (Keyes 1994: 301). My own research in Vietnam in the late 1990s dealt with the revival of religion as a result of the socialist transition that took place in that decade (Kleinen 1999). I concluded at the time that secularization in terms of post-socialist modernity had not taken place, but that new ceremonies and rituals provided a modernist answer to a rapid changing time.

Robert Hefner’s edited volumes (2001, 2005) on religion and politics in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, were well-received and are valued attempts to use terms like ‘pluralism’ and ‘citizenship’ to describe the politics of multiculturalism at a local level; for similar approaches, see Siegel (2002) on sorcery on Java; Jackson (2003 [1988]) on efforts to socialize Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and make it more accessible to lay people; and Stengs (2009) on a secular religion of devotion of the Thai King Chulalongkorn.

Social Class and Strategic Group Formation

In 1973 the German sociologist Hans-Dieter Evers coined the useful concept of a ‘strategic group’ to understand the ethnically differentiated post-colonial elites who had replaced the colonial upper classes in newly independent nation-states around the world. The term was designed to address and analyse the organization of an amalgam of indigenous aristocrats, Chinese and European business people, the upper ranks of the bureaucracy and military apparatus, and the processes of class formation. Even in non-colonized countries like Thailand this ‘strategic group’ was composed of mutually strategic individuals from different upper-class groups. Developments in Laos and Vietnam have shown similar trajectories. The study of ‘strategic groups’ has become an enduring research topic of social scientists who have also focused on the emergence of middle classes which embraces (sometimes air-conditioned) life styles with self-expressed Asian values. The emergence of a new middle class in Southeast Asia is also closely

linked to the presence of diasporic communities such as the Overseas Chinese from Southern China, South Indian Chettiars, or former migrants from within the region (see Cohen 1999). They play key organizational roles (including the facilitation of trading networks) in the diasporic experience of these former migrants. Trans-national brotherhood provides members with continuous feedback in order to support each other in moments of distress or to maintain a moral or political order (e.g. Anderson's analysis (1992) of long distance nationalism among diasporic communities; and Stokhof and Salemink's (2009) interesting study of Indonesian Muslims in Vietnam). Anthropologists have set out to understand how people in these networks interact in terms of the transactional contents of their mutual relationships. In other words, what are the goods and services, the messages, the degree of emotional involvement, and information, which move back and forth between people who are linked to each other and what instruments or media are used in these processes of interaction. Examples of this trend are the works of Martin Manalansan (2004) on Filipino gay men in the diasporas worldwide, and of Aihwa Ong (2003) on the cyberspace link between Chinese in the People's Republic of China and Indonesia at a time that citizens of Chinese descent living in Indonesia are threatened by the Javanese majority.

How emerging middle classes change their food consumption patterns with numerous culinary variations that unconsciously aim to establish a group identity is also a topic that has been dealt with (Matejowsky 2006; Wilk 2006).

Patricia Sloane-White's study of the Malaysian middle class is another example of a fresh, new view on this social group. Using Joel S. Kahn's well-known concept of the '*bumiputera* new elite' (Kahn 1998), Sloane-White uses an insider's knowledge on the self-perception of members of the Malay middle class in producing capitalism in one of the Southeast Asian 'miracle economies'. It is a fascinating account of scanning the space between consumption and dependency not only in terms of 'success' but also of 'failure' and of coming to terms with producing capitalism without the expression of the blatant success that has been attributed to members of this elite (Sloane-White 2008, 2007).

Family and (Trans-)Gender Relations

The rapid modernization of Southeast Asian societies has given rise to a number of studies on gender relations, ethnic identities, and the concomitant changes in life styles ranging from tourism to material and popular culture. King and Wilder (2003) are right in pointing out that many of these topics are now studied from a post-modern and post-colonial perspective encouraging anthropologists to share their research topics with other disciplines like cultural studies and world histories. Yao Souchou's superb overview of studies in his edited *House of Glass, culture, modernity, and the state in Southeast Asia* (2000) shows "the relationship between discursive practices, modernity, and state power in Southeast Asia" (Souchou 2000), and has given impetus to a number of local studies. Most of

the contributions in the book respond to what Steedly was looking for in “the landscape of the banal” (Steedly 1999: 446).

The study of women and gender has intensified in terms of the number and quality of papers due to feminist studies and social constructionist understandings of gender in anthropology. In her recent review of the convergence of recent anthropological interests in gender, labour, and globalization, Mary Beth Mills explores “the diverse meanings and practices that produce a gendered global labour force, incorporating the perspectives of men and women, masculinities and femininities” (Mills 2003: 42). Her interest is also the connection between gender and labour, and the way this relationship is reinforced by ethnicity and nationality. For Southeast Asia, she mentions a number of books and articles that deal with the role of women during labour strikes, the plight of female migrant workers (including entertainment and sex work), and the redefined role of masculinity in relation to shifting gender relations. Mills’ own work concentrates on Thailand and focuses upon Thai women in the global work force (Mills 1999).

Gender issues without the global nexus have been treated by two scholars from Malaysia and Vietnam. While Aihwa Ong (1987) studied female factory workers in Malaysia from their own dynamics in terms of gender in relation to capitalism and Islamic revival, Nghiem Lien Huong’s study of Vietnamese workers (2004) explored the limits of modernization as determined by the choices women make between (Vietnamese) patriarchal families and their own lives.

A link can be made to another aspect of gender studies: the relationship between gender and sexuality in which the gender borders are transgressed. Again, to repeat King’s warning, this is not necessarily a new trend in the anthropology of Southeast Asia. Ara Wilson’s book on Bangkok’s ‘intimate economies’ (2004) and Megan Sinnott (2004) on female homosexuality are welcome sequels to Peter Jackson’s and Gerard Sullivan’s earlier edited volume on sexualities in Thailand (1999). These can be easily matched by (trans-)gender studies from the Philippines (Alcedo 2007; Constable 2003; Johnson 2008; Manalansan 2004;), and Indonesia (Boellstorff 2005).

Tourism, Leisure, and Consumption, Material Culture, Media, and Performance.

A comprehensive overview of tourism in Southeast Asia is in the edited volume Hitchcock *et al.* (1993, 2010). With Janet Goehran’s volume of ‘*Asian Tourism: Growth and Change*’ (2008), and a special review by King (2008) in *Sojourn* (2008), this topic seems to have come on age.

With the study of tourism, comes automatically the concept of ‘heritage’ that is used in different contexts and with different meanings. Heritage is not just the protection of landscapes, artefacts or other material and immaterial values. It can also be a tool in the hands of politicians or part of a civil society process. Cultural heritage is a widely discussed topic among various disciplines, including anthropology. The determination of what ‘heritage’ is, poses a paradox: for some, it is

something that is genuine and provides a collective memory and a social-cultural identity for those who share and inherit the markers of cultural heritage (for an overview see Aiello 2010; Hodder 2010); for others it is unmasked as an (re)invention or construction of tradition to provide a firm basis to social-cultural identities (Howbsbawm and Ranger 1983), for which MacCannel coined the terms ‘authentic reproductions’ and ‘staged authenticities’ (MacCannel 1973, 1999).

Heritage as a Eurocentric notion was first exported to Asia under colonial rule. The long process of internationalizing heritage practices and theories which started in Europe after the First World War, became more generalized after UNESCO’s World heritage Convention in 1972. However, Eurocentric discourse and practices have evolved since the 1980s. In this evolution, Asian countries and their local cultural conception of heritage play an important role. Asian concepts of heritage come from pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial times. They also include traditions and customs which are intrinsically linked to the materiality of heritage. Asian heritage is nowadays a palimpsest where local and international conceptions coexist.

The comparison between Asian and European examples shows that similar dynamics take place at different moments according to the rhythms of economic development. In Asian cities, conservation policies are currently dealing with the need for modernization and the accelerated development processes which have taken place in Europe since the Industrial Revolution. As heritage conservation depends on the stage of economic and social development in each country, even within the Asian continent, dynamics follow different rhythms. The same heritage category (shop houses, for example) will not therefore receive the same attention in all Asian countries. An important part of the heritage might thus disappear over the coming decades in the wake of modernization.

In spite of a promising start (Goodman and Robison 1996), the study of the role of the fast growing World Wide Web and the use of mobile phones and other means of communication such as Skype, Twitter, and RSS through the Internet, are topics that have so far developed much slower than expected (Raul Pertierra pers. comm.) In the field of Visual Anthropology the use of new methodologies like video analysis are not yet added to the already existing methods of photo and video elicitation (VEI) or photo-elicitation interviewing (PEI), in spite of the growing number of photo and film/movie collections stored in local archives and the rapid use of simpler equipment for making movies (Kleinen 2007; Rose 2012).

Urbanization, Globalization, and Localization (*Glocalization*⁵)

The rapid urbanization of Southeast Asian cities since the 1980s has created new social forms and disparities of social differentiation on a large scale. King and

⁵The term, originally a marketing term, was coined by the British sociologist Roland Robertson (1995) and made famous by Zygmunt Bauman (1998). For the differences with Appadurai (2001), see Robertson (2004).

Wilder (2003) mention among others the studies by Tania Li (1989) on Singapore, James Siegel (2002) on Surakarta, and Nicholas Ford and Sirinan Kittsuksathit (1996) on Bangkok. These studies “demonstrate some of the themes urban anthropologists have taken up: the flow of cash, and commodification /commoditization in general, and how persons in cities adapt in local terms to it; the questions of gender and of generation” (King and Wilder 2003: 307; for Southeast Asia see Wan-Ling and Alatas 2002; for Vietnam see Drummond and Thomas 2003).

A fascinating expression is coined by the Canadian anthropologist Tania Murray Li for what she calls ‘the global conjuncture of belonging’, in her studies on conflicts over ‘indigeneity’ in Indonesia (Li 2000). Li focuses upon the global attention to ‘indigenous peoples’ and ‘disappearing cultures’, but also raises concern over the loss of ‘local biodiversity and ecological knowledge’. Her pivotal idea is that apparently unrelated global trends converge into turning the idea of ‘belonging’ into a central issue. The Africanist Peter Geschiere (2009), places the concept in a wider context to understand peoples preoccupation with belonging, a sense of being tied to the land or in an Asian context the authenticity of national culture and the immigrants’ relationship to it. Geschiere even uses the term to criticize international development elites for using it as a pretext (go local!) in order to bypass the state (Geschiere 2009: 67–71).

What before was called urbanization, is now often presented as the interplay between globalization and locality (sometimes called *Glocalization*) and in post-modern terms indicated as the ‘cultural conception of space’. It goes with ‘modernity at large’ to borrow a term from Arun Appadurai, but the critical question remains whether or not the result will be the slow disappearance of local identity within the framework of the nation-state.⁶ These issues have been brilliantly dealt with by the papers in Tanabe and Keyes (2002) edited volume, *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: modernity and identity in Thailand and Laos*, which deal with aspects of social memory and local identity within the setting of an emerging crisis of cultural crisis in Thailand and Laos.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first two paragraphs of this essay, we regarded Southeast Asian cultures as diverse systems of belief, values, symbols, and (re)presentations. In depth local research which started with Geertz’s approach of thick description showed great sensitivity to the nuances of local context and meaning. Since then different interpretations of culture and the nation-state have been developed (e.g. Per-tierra 2006b).

Upcoming or new trends in a discipline are difficult to forecast, but after the linguist or ‘literary turn’, the production of scientific texts became less taken for

⁶See Hirsch *et al.* (2007) for discussion on how anthropologists use the concept of ‘globalisation’.

granted (Clifford and Marcus 1986). The defenders of globalization and their adversaries have not by-passed the nation-state which is still an important framework for anthropological research. There is no dominant paradigm and the study of Southeast Asia in cultural terms is not as easy as some have proposed in the past. Much is now worded in *post-* 'styles' of analysis, as Bowen observed with an apparent feeling for what still had to come (1995: 1047): post-modern, post-colonial, post 9/11. Or, is it what Mary Steedly (2001: 7) once remarked that anthropology's treasured concepts of culture, and of the social sciences in general regarding community, nation, state, and region are disturbed by the world of 'constantly breaking news' (see also King 2006: 30)? Whatever the reason, anthropology – or for that matter anthropologies (in the plural) – of Southeast Asia still have found a niche to study important aspects that go beyond the delusion of the day.

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