Transformations: A Region in the Making

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Transformations: 
A Region in the Making

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Foreword

The publication by Far Eastern University of Transformations: A Region in the Making, a collection of essays crafted by an international group of scholars in the making at the National University of Singapore is a welcome initiative.

The issues addressed by these students of Southeast Asia range from history and historiography to development economics and international relations, from age-old problems of ethnic animosities to current global concerns about global economic competition and terrorist threats. The cosmopolitan cast of writers match the diversity of the topics, with contributors coming from the ASEAN countries, Hong Kong, China, Portugal and the United States.

It is not too often that graduate students from different disciplines are able to push a collaborative book project into completion. This is a tribute to the quality of students NUS has been able to attract to its campus and the kind of learning environment it has established for them. There was a time, not too long ago, when one had to go to Europe, the United States of Australia to pursue Southeast Asian studies. NUS has emerged as one of the Southeast Asian institutions where it is possible to learn about Southeast Asia.

To find a publisher willing to invest in the academic output of young scholars is an even more infrequent occurrence. Far Eastern University does not have a Southeast Asian Studies program. But it had a Southeast Asian character before the concept of Southeast Asia had emerged. In the 1930s, when the Philippines was still a colony of the United States, FEU had in its campus a Chinese Students Association and a Siamese Students Association. Perhaps the release of Transformations will also pave the way for a broader engagement of the University in the region.
NUS and FEU deserve congratulations for recognizing and rewarding the initiatives taken by the writers to launch this book project. We hope that this achievement will encourage these scholars to continue the effort to understand the problems confronting the region and, by sharing with a larger public, make a contribution towards this realization.

Edilberto C. de Jesús

Preface

The definition of Southeast Asia as a region really began on the eve of World War II when strategic military commands were delineated to stem the Japanese advance. Before the war, however, the study of various sub-regions already flourished, reflecting imperial interests and holdings in Southeast Asia. This activity was monopolized by colonial bureaucrat-scholars--British, French, Americans, and Dutch--who trained locals in the languages and intellectual frameworks of their mother-countries. Siam, for its part, employed similar practices in order to consolidate royal control over a vast and contested territory.

The post-war period of nationalist agitation, independence, and decolonization brought forth challenges to colonial scholarship. However, the focus of local writing understandably was on individual nation-states rather than the wider region. Southeast Asian Studies as a field of study really took off in Europe and the United States, often occupying the spaces left by the older colonial institutes. The driving force of much of this scholarship was the Cold War and the funding institutions for the ideological fronts of this war.

Only in the post-Vietnam war era did the centre of gravity of Southeast Asian Studies begin to shift to Southeast Asia itself. The Toyota-funded Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) pioneered the development of domestic Southeast Asian Studies by linking institutions mainly in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Singapore, being in the region's geographical centre, was a natural site for this field of study to develop on its own, given its dynamic economy. In the early 1990s the National University of Singapore established the Southeast Asian Studies Programme (SEASP) in order to formally incorporate this field of study into the university curriculum. The SEASP is located within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and offers academic degrees at the BA, Honours, MA and PhD levels.
The present volume of essays is an offshoot of the SEASP's coursework program for MA and PhD students. What makes it unusual is the fact that it stems from the initiative of graduate students themselves who wish to share their work with a wider audience. The diversity of the topics, theoretical frameworks and methodologies in this volume reflects the broad, interdisciplinary scope of the SEASP itself. The contributors, it must also be noted, although coming from many different parts of the world are mostly from Southeast Asia itself. This reflects the need for Southeast Asian Studies today to be a venue wherein scholars from the many parts of the region can come together and speak to each other. The SEASP MA program was designed partly for this purpose, and this volume testifies to it.

Unlike in the past when, ultimately, the West formed the horizon for this field of study, today we are moving in the direction of Southeast Asian Studies for the consumption of Southeast Asians themselves. It is thus of great significance that the Far Eastern University in Manila is publishing this volume of essays by students at the NUS. Only when scholars in institutions of higher learning within the region are able to team up and produce books like this, can we truly say that the centre of gravity of Southeast Asian Studies has finally moved to this part of the world. The editors and contributors to this volume should thus be congratulated for helping to bring this goal closer to fulfillment.

Reynaldo C. Ileto

RESEARCH NOTES:

REVISITING THE ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS
CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC PREMISES OF THE ARTICLE ENTITLED:

THE END OF THE ASIAN MYTH:
WHY WERE THE EXPERTS FOOLED?

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Introduction and methodology

his study is primarily a critique of the article entitled: “The End of the Asian Myth: Why were the Experts Fooled?” written by Werner Baer, William Miles and Allen Morgan for the journal World Development Volume 27, Number 10 edition which was issued in 1999. The critique will use standard econometric analyses to test the validity of the economic premises of the article and also test hypotheses that are derived from the premises of the article.

The study sought to revisit and test some of the fundamental economic premises presented by the article mentioned above. This would be accomplished by undertaking cross-national econometric analyses of East Asian as well as Latin American countries. Specifically, the study addresses three core questions:

1.1.1 Using the premises of the article being critiqued, is it possible to create a model that approximates the neo-classical representation of national economies?

1.1.2 Holding everything constant, and once again using the premises of the article being critiqued, is there a significant difference between the economies of East Asia and Latin