Southeast Asian Studies: Pacific Perspectives. **Edited by Anthony Reid.** Tempe, Arizona, USA: Monograph Series Press, Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 2003. Soft cover: 375pp.

That Southeast Asia exists would appear to be a necessary condition for the study of Southeast Asia to be a respectable adult occupation. Contestations about the region seem however to gain currency through an alluring vagueness surrounding the term "exists" more than the ontological status of the region itself. It is the history of the term that decides the subject more than the objective existence of a place called Southeast Asia. Let us take the example of something presumably less problematic: China, for example. Does China exist in the sense that some part of it, or even the whole of it, can be studied and commented on, in one respect or another? Yes, quite certainly. Similarly, does Southeast Asia exist in the sense that part of it, or even the whole of it, can be studied and commented on, in one respect or another? If the answer again is yes, then from where do the questions whether or not Southeast Asia exists and whether or not Southeast Asian Studies is a legitimate academic discipline arise?

The issue is more about *how* a designated geographical area is studied than *if* it has sufficient ontological status to make it worthy of the attention of academics. As noted in the introduction of the reviewed volume, no scholar is actually an expert in all the countries involved, nor in all aspects of one chosen area. The validity of such a criterion for defining an academic discipline is doubtful at best, since no expert can consider himself to be so over the entirety of his formal discipline. No physicist can possibly be an expert in physics as such, surely. And for the same reason that we have astrophysicists and nuclear physicists, we have economists studying Vietnam, or anthropologists studying Bali or architects studying Kuala Lumpur. Expedience will decide how these are grouped together as "Southeast Asianists".

What demands one might have for the component parts of Southeast Asia to be classified as a unit are not uninformed by contextual needs. "Southeast Asia" does not have to exist the way the moon exists for there to be institutes of Southeast Asian Studies, and for research funding to be available. We need not confuse academic discipline with institutional expedience. The first concerns an ambition to study what is a coherent subject matter, whose ontological status is assumed or is to be ascertained, while the second is an administrative issue, a matter of keeping the house tidy.

As with all "new" areas of study, there is a certain "development" involved, where a discourse steadily evolves around the discipline's denotation, and "knowledge" is constructed from terminologies that promulgate its status and convince a sufficiently influential public of its viability. Behind every successful discipline there is a history, of both the science and of its interaction with the processes and relationships it has studied. Before it must stretch a continuing process of creation and discovery. As Richard A. O'Connor notes: "History is real, deep and inescapable" (p. 81), and it is this history that a discipline is served by, and studies at the same time. Why "Europe" exists more than "Asia" does is the institutional relevance the former has, and why the "Orient" is practically dead is not due so much to a sudden discovery of its demise than to the end of the colonial project that helped to construct it. As a geographical given, it is as chimerical as the formerly named continents. That is because there are no geographic givens where polities are concerned, and it is human history and discursive relevance that decide. The view that Southeast Asia's non-existence is revealed by the fact that "few Southeast Asianists actually cover the whole region in their research", or that the term is a Cold War construction, are countered by the equally secure fact that "enough people speak, teach, learn, and write as though 'Southeast Asia' did exist for us to give them the benefit of the doubt" (Donald K. Emmerson, p. 48). Furthermore, if the former points are to be a criterion for the existence of a subject worthy of study, then *all* disciplines, including physics, chemistry and biology, are in trouble. Which physicist covers "the whole region" of the physical world in his research?

Furthermore, the issue has to be dissociated from political agendas, at least in the analytical methods of the scholars if not in the choice of subject and the titling of the institutions that pay their salaries. If scholarship wishes to stay as free from political prodding as possible, then at least at a theoretical level, perspectives that consider new delineations and suggestions of disciplines should be entertained. In line with that, and where the subject of Southeast Asia is concerned, one should perhaps explore the habit of not including Australia and its history, strategic or otherwise, in the "field", or that of Sri Lanka even. Whether the fact that Australia is not considered part of Southeast Asia, despite being located between India and China, is a case of Eurocentric anthropological bias, or an *a priori* division resulting from the proactive status of the scientific observer as contrasted with his passive object of study, is open to discussion.

Where any type of area studies is concerned, whether initiated during the Cold War or not, the particular focus of study cannot possibly

assume similar significance for all the parts concerned. In that sense, the discussion on Southeast Asian Studies' right to exist is misplaced. All pigeonholes include empty spaces that need filling up. That is one of the points for a categorizing exercise. The reviewed 375-page volume commands a breadth that allows interesting comparisons to be made between different traditions of "Southeast Asian" studies, although including sections about how China and India approach the subject would have added new dimensions to the discussion.

As it is, on one extreme end is the case of Japan, where Southeast Asian Studies is merely given the status of the traditional disciplines, and institutionalized as such. This saves scholars attached to such institutes from feeling marginalized (Takashi Shiraishi, p. 143). At the other end, where the origins of their field of studies are evidently political, such as in the United States, Southeast Asia scholars experience more self-doubt than they otherwise would. However, not all relevance stems from strategic considerations. What may appear a new construct sometimes turns out in many ways to be a partial discovery of old patterns and relationships, and so the subject lives on after the strategists have lost interest, partly through the network of institutions already founded and the graduates and researchers already accredited, and partly through processes revived by them, which predate the immediate past.

The discussion about Southeast Asian Studies should perhaps not be about the rights and wrongs of "area studies", but about consciousness of the pragmatic nature of a social science, and how far its agendas are formed by the requirements of institutions of research and learning, and sociopolitical discourse at large.

This volume is divided, besides the introduction, into four parts. Anthony Reid's Introduction, together with Emmerson's and O'Connor's contributions in the first section, outline major conceptual problems and proclaim pertinent views on them. The section entitled "The Study of Southeast Asia as a Global Phenomenon" includes a presentation by Reid and Maria Serena Diokno on the revival of institutes for the study of Southeast Asia located in the region itself. Other essays include Charnvit Kasetsiri's introduction to the structure of Southeast Asian Studies in Thailand, Anthony Milner's discussion on the "origins, style, and future" of the subject in Australia, and Takashi Shiraishi's study of the institutional structure of Southeast Asian Studies in Japan. Charles Hirschman provides general observations about social scientific research in a globalizing world serviced by computing technology in the section "Area Studies and the Disciplines" where the study of art history, literature and comparative literature in Southeast Asia are

otherwise discussed. Contributions include that by Nora Annesley Taylor on the subject of art history in the region, Charles Keyes on how literature in translation offers insights into indigenous ethnography, and Henk M.J. Maier on comparative literature in Southeast Asian contexts.

The final section, "Diasporic Students and the Rebirth of Southeast Asian Studies in the United States", is devoted to the rising role of diasporic students in the revival of Southeast Asian Studies in the United States. While this may appear of great interest to Americans, interesting connections are revealed between diasporic studies, with its many challenging takes on mainstream ideas, and area studies at large, especially Southeast Asian Studies. While Michael Salman talks about Southeast Asian Studies at UCLA and discusses the future of the subject, Vicente L. Rafael explores the connection between Southeast Asian Studies and Asian American Studies. Other contributions include those of Peter Zinoman who writes on Vietnamese Americans and Vietnamese Studies in America, Teri Shaffer Yamada who considers Southeast Asian American youth and the cultural misrepresentation of their heritage, and Tony Diller who ends the volume with "Heritage Learning of Southeast Asian Languages".

Ooi Kee Beng
Department of Oriental Languages
Stockholm University, Sweden

Civilizing the Margins: Southeast Asian Government Policies for the Development of Minorities. **Edited by Christopher R. Duncan.** Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. Softcover: 278pp.

This edited volume comprising a total of nine chapters examines local government policies in Southeast Asia, especially towards indigenous peoples. With the exception of Brunei and Singapore, the work examines all the other countries and therefore constitutes a good representative sampling of the region. The common themes that weave the book together are how regional governments have traditionally responded to indigenous minorities and how that may change over time. The emphasis is on the sort of policies undertaken, whether there is an attempt at assimilating or excluding such minorities within a broader conception of the state. As amply demonstrated by the contributors, there are