

# Old and new knowledge regimes and the public milieu

Notwithstanding reservations about generalising across regions, in this discussion I consider the notion of 'new Asia scholars' in connection with Southeast Asia. I look at two possible assumptions: either that new types of scholars have emerged that change the circumstances for knowledge production, or that new scholarship among Southeast Asian scholars may change or challenge the forms of knowledge produced about the region. I discuss both angles in relation to old and emerging regimes of knowledge production and their engagement with society.

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## Received legacies for research and publication

Before we may speak of 'new types of scholars' or 'new scholarship', I wish to begin with a survey of two regimes that have been inherited. First, without discounting the heartfelt passion, devotion and intrinsic motivation of individual scholars for the pursuit of knowledge, one may note that the underlying motivations for the patronage of European scholarship on Asia in the preceding centuries lay in the utility of such knowledge for European imperialism and epistemological control. The 'old regime' in scholarship on Southeast Asia was generated by institutions founded to serve and augment the administration and management of various colonial territories. They remain vital today.

Scholarship was also generated through the exploration and record of peoples and languages for evangelism by various European and American religious groups. These centres of knowledge production and archiving, and their journals and publishers, continue to referee and shape scholarship on Southeast Asia. The *Siam Society* and its journal founded in 1904 under royal patronage in Bangkok is the notable exception, even though it was ultimately modelled after the antiquarian societies of European colonial powers and is in fact linked to Siam's own imperial ambitions in the Southeast Asian mainland and its anxiety to demonstrate its parity with European imperial powers.

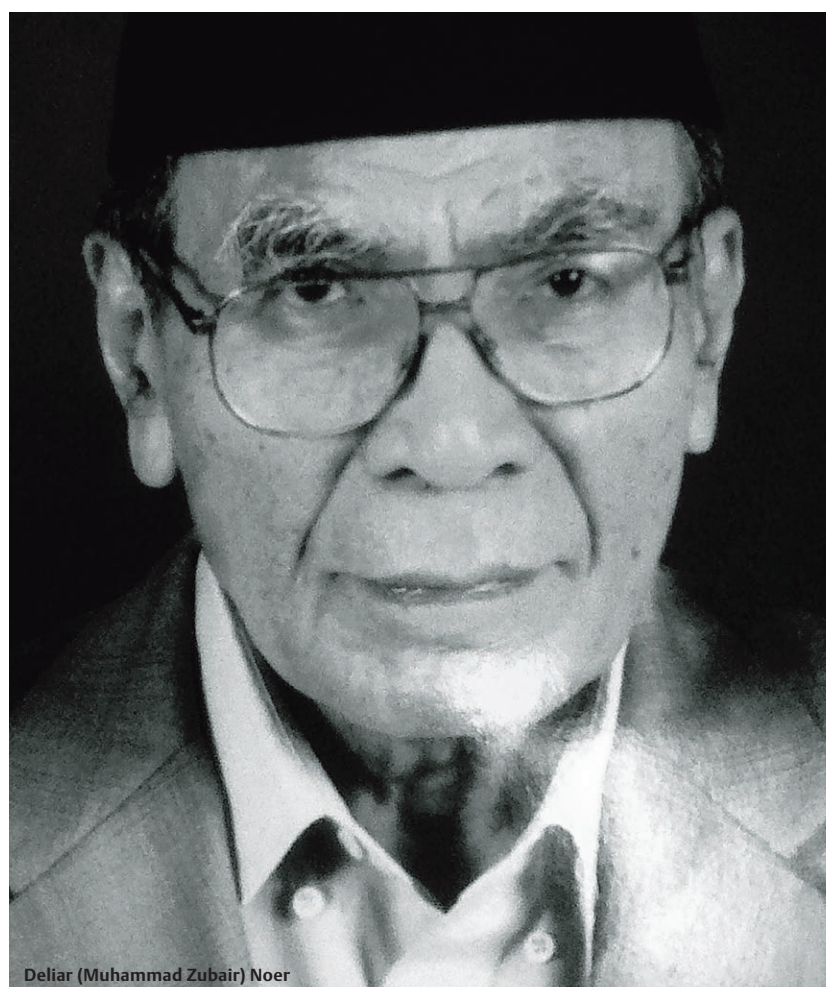
From the 1940s to the 1980s, a second regime emerged, with North American and Australian universities joining European ones in developing centres or programs on Southeast Asia connected to strategic foreign policy imperatives. Benedict Anderson observed acerbically the contrast between the 'entrepreneurial' North American university researcher and the 'unhurried' European colonial civil servant-scholar, both of whom were creatures of their respective 'ecology'.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, Anderson does not discuss any other 'ecology' beyond these.

Both European colonial and Cold War North American scholarship regimes involve Western scholars producing research with utility for Western knowledge consumers, at times within their national contexts. Yet, both legacies for research and publication shape contemporary scholarship in powerful and fundamental ways. Recent trends in promotion and tenure assessment for Asian universities based on American modes of knowledge validation through academic journal publication have renewed the power of both regimes of knowledge production.

It is these traditions, in English (and to a limited extent, other European languages) and refereed by Euro-American institutions, which form the received modes of scholarly enquiry, academic validation, career advancement, and financial viability for many Asian scholars. Alternative discursive domains and traditions of scholarship remain very limited even today – and language medium and milieu play fundamental roles in their dissemination. We need only recall that while J.C. van Leur's dissertation of 1934, with its well-known observations, destabilised not merely the epistemological assumptions but the very ontological bases of knowledge about Southeast Asia, its fundamental revision gained wider recognition only after an English translation of his thesis had been published in 1955.<sup>2</sup> His critique was then supplemented by those from Anglophone scholars such as John Smail calling for 'autonomous histories' in 1966.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, influential critiques by Asian scholars such as Arjun Appadurai and Lila Abu-Lughod of tropes and lenses inherited from colonial scholarship in anthropology were written in English. English-language Asian scholarship has largely remained the preserve of groups that have not only mastered and appropriated the language – notably those from former British colonies such as India and the Straits Settlements at Penang, Malacca and Singapore – but also have particularly sought to question inherited



Koentjaraningrat



Deliar (Muhammad Zubair) Noer

ways of seeing and discussing Asia or the 'Orient' and, further, explored new ontological terrains that expose the limitations of categories or terms in existing scholarship.

The lack of any sustained scholarship in English among former colonies of France and the Netherlands in Southeast Asia should be considered against the rupture from inherited colonial educational legacies. These former colonial languages – French and Dutch – have a much-reduced utility as mediums of scholarly communication in the relevant former Southeast Asian colonies today. It is revealing too that the *Bijdragen* has opted to use English since 1948.<sup>4</sup> One may contrast Indonesia with the Philippines in this respect. Their former colonial languages, Dutch and American English respectively (notwithstanding the Philippines' earlier Hispanicisation), enjoy vastly different fates in international academia today. While *Asian Studies*, issued by Manila's Asian Centre at the University of the Philippines Diliman, has enjoyed continuous publication in English since 1963, the University of Indonesia's *Wacana*, begun in 1999 as a bilingual journal for the humanities in Bahasa Indonesia and English, chose in 2010 to use English exclusively. Gajah Mada University Press stands out in this regard – beginning in the 1950s, and particularly from the 1970s, it has published a number of English-language books despite belonging to a non-English-speaking milieu.

## Pioneering 'new scholars' – PhD holders in the early post-independence milieu

Asian intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century were internationally-mobile individuals well-aware of their shared colonial predicament and attuned to the socio-political developments elsewhere<sup>5</sup> – and they were mainly autodidacts. Subsequently, a different type of scholar in Asian society emerged, who underwent further formal education in Western universities leading to higher degrees. A parallel transition took place among European scholars; Oliver Wolters conducted his doctoral research at SOAS in 1961, under the supervision of D.G.E. Hall, who had an MA in English History. Hall's entry into Southeast Asian scholarship began when the British government despatched him to assume the Chair of History for a newly-created University of Rangoon (Yangon) in 1921; his departure upon Burma's independence led him to eventually become the first chair of the History of South East Asia at SOAS in 1949.

The pioneer generation of Southeast Asian doctoral degree-holders who taught locally did not yet belong to the 'publish or perish' milieu of today. Though they continued to publish academic works, there was no real impetus either for sustained academic publication in English for an international audience, or to engage Euro-American or Australian scholarship that was then being produced about Southeast Asia for Western foreign policy. Instead, much of their intellectual energy was directed towards serving their respective countries, especially through institution-building or diplomacy, and more importantly in public service and advocacy.

The stories of five pioneer Indonesian doctoral-degree intellectuals demonstrate this pattern. Sumitro Djojohadikusumo (PhD Netherlands School of Economics 1943) returned to Indonesia to fulfil several ministerial roles in the newly-independent country before becoming the second dean of the Faculty of Economics at University of Indonesia (UI) in 1951. His students, known as the so-called 'Berkeley mafia', received doctorates or masters in economics in the US by the late early 1960s, under a cooperative agreement with UC Berkeley facilitated by the Ford Foundation, and served Indonesia through public office or civil service. Strikingly, in this early post-independence period, academic programs in the US attracted, sponsored or courted the key Indonesian scholars. Koentjaraningrat, independent Indonesia's pioneer anthropologist, was a Fulbright scholar who studied at Yale before returning to Indonesia for his PhD at UI in 1958; in 1974 Utrecht University bestowed upon him an honoris causa doctorate. He founded the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) in 1964, while his students headed Departments in various universities across Indonesia.

Deliar (Muhammad Zubair) Noer (PhD Cornell 1963) taught in Jakarta for seven years before being sacked in 1974 just before delivering a lecture on 'Participation in Development', which the Suharto regime deemed seditious, and thereafter taught at ANU and Griffiths University before co-founding a think-tank, LIPPM. Sartono Kartodirdjo (MA Yale 1964; PhD Amsterdam University 1966) returned to head Gajah Mada University's History Department from 1968, was general editor of the 6-volume set of Indonesian history textbooks published in 1975, and was conferred the first Harry J. Benda Prize in 1977. Finally, in Soedjatmoko we see a very different kind of intellectual – a statesman who was accorded several honoris causa doctorate degrees by US tertiary-level educational institutions. As a journalist he was critical of the Suharto regime; he served in various Indonesian think tanks and, when it was no longer safe to remain in New Order Indonesia, was guest lecturer at Cornell, and at the end of his career served as Rector at the United Nations University from 1980 to 1987.