# Constructing Southeast Asia and the Middle East:
## Two Corners of the "Victorian World"

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**[ *Abstract* ]**

How should we conceptualize regions? What is the context in which new approaches to regional study take place? What is the role of historical change in the reconceptualization of regions or areas? This article addresses this issue by using two case studies to shed light on the history of regional study by comparing some of the ways in which the Middle East and Southeast Asia have been conceptualized. Accordingly, the discussion traces the ways in which these areas were understood in the 19th century by highlighting the ideas of a number of influential Victorian thinkers. The Victorians are useful because not only did British thinkers play critical roles in the shaping of modern patterns of knowledge, but their empire was global in scope, encompassing parts of both Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

However, the Victorians regarded these places quite differently: Southeast Asia was frequently described as "Further India" and the Middle East was the home of the Ottoman Empire. Both of these places were at least partly understood in

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relation to the needs of British policy-makers, who tended to focus most of their efforts according to the needs of India—which was their most important colonial possession.

The article exhibits the connections between the "Eastern Question" and end of the Ottoman Empire (and the political developments which followed) led to the creation of the concept of "Middle East". With respect to Southeast Asia, attention will be devoted to the works of Alfred Russell Wallace, Hugh Clifford, and others to see how "further India" was understood in the 19th century. In addition, it is clear that the successful deployment of the term "Southeast Asia" reflected the political needs of policy makers in wake of decolonization and the Cold War.

Finally, by showing the constructive nature of regions, the article suggests one possible new path for students of Southeast Asia. If the characterization of the region is marked by arbitrary factors, it may actually point to a useful avenue of enquiry, a hermeneutic of expedience. Emphasis on the adaptive and integrative features of lived realities in Southeast Asia may well be a step beyond both the agendas of "colonial knowledge" and anti-colonial nationalism.

## Ⅰ. Introduction

The recent discussions about the future of the study of Southeast Asia reflect the larger challenge for devising research methods for the academic exploration of the region (Goh 2011; Herayanto 2002; Kratoska, et. al. 2005). Fully comprehending Southeast Asia, an artificially defined but complex and hybrid region, will probably always be a perennial problem. The shrinking of the world, the success of global communications, and the veritable ritualization of travel may have collectively implied that understanding regions or areas has become easier or self-evident. In fact, it is possible that despite these developments (and others), the task of conceptualizing the study of areas and

regions (or nations, for that matter) has become even more difficult. This paper will draw upon historical analysis to depict some moments in the pre-history of the definition of "Southeast Asia" in order to exhibit the forces which played a role in defining the boundaries of the region. This will be achieved by contrasting some of the things articulated with the area later known as "Southeast Asia" with that of the "Middle East", in order to show that these factors were at least as important in giving definition to that region. The connections between these regions may be greater than has been generally appreciated, but as one scholar observed, there is a "paucity of historiography" on these transregional issues (Tagliacozzo 2009: 1). While tracing some of these linkages is useful, the discussion here seeks to highlight some of the methodological issues both in the articulation of regions (which in the 20$^{th}$ century were increasingly confirmed by international borders and treaties) and the reasons why some geographical characterizations become decisive. Finally, this paper will conclude by suggesting some possibilities for future academic exploration for the conceptualization of Southeast Asia.

Given these priorities, it will be useful to draw upon political geography, particularly as it is reflected in the work of John Agnew's idea of the "Territorial Trap" because it underscores the ways in which the "territorial state" has come to define the conceptual basis of international relations. In this discussion, "the territorial trap" will be extended to the critique of regional thought. Agnew observed that where space has been defined in relation to territory, it has come at the cost of disregarding other geographic indicators. He explained:

> space is viewed as a series of blocks defined by state territorial boundaries. Other geographical scales (local, global, etc.) are disregarded. This usually taken-for-granted representation of space appears dominant in such fields as political sociology, macroeconomics, and international relations. (1994: 55).

In contrast, Agnew observed that space could also be understood in structural terms which implied that "geographical

entities of one sort or another, nodes, districts, regions, etc., have spatial effects that result from their interaction or relationship with one another" (1994: 55). He explained that both of these conceptions of space tended to be ahistorical. As Agnew put it, "these understandings have idealized fixed representations of territorial or structural space as appropriate irrespective of historical context" (1994: 55). Agnew's point was that international relations had to be reconceptualized away from the "territorial trap" and consider more nuanced ways of understanding the world. For us, the "territorial trap" serves as a reminder of the dangers of epistemic or scholarly homogenization within an ascribed territorial region. At the same time, this discussion will refer upon the broader ocular tradition of critical thought to suggest that ways in which these regions (and others) become visible is significant.

Furthermore, this paper will follow in a general way the work of Arjun Appadurai, whose *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990) explored a number of issues to the cultural engagement with regions. In particular, Appadurai's construction of "scapes" provides a basis for exploring how meaning is ascribed to places-often unknown (1990). The history of thought about regions has yet to be written, but it seems evident that many regional definitions have been exonymic, in that it has come from outsiders.

In addition, this discussion will be informed by some of the theoretical work associated with tourism. The exploration of the subject has produced many useful insights into cultural history, but the analysis of the phenomenon itself may have even richer implications. The works of Dean MacCannell (*The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1976) and John Urry (*The Tourist Gaze*, 1990) might be taken to mean that the act of beholding－central to any tourist encounter－may be more representative of the ways in which the "other" is understood than indicating a new direction for the study of tourist behavior. In fact, it might make more sense to situate these figures in the tradition of 'the picturesque,' and Grand Tour in order to argue that the visibility of external phenomenon continues to be of critical significance.

For our purposes here, it should become evident that it was not enough to locate regions, but they had to be made visible and ideally audible.

One assumption made here is that the territorial limits defined by nations tend towards conceptual homogenization. Moving forward, the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, especially *Truth and Method*, will provide a possible basis for both the recovery of the hermeneutics of "colonial knowledge" and building upon the genealogies of knowledge about Southeast Asia, an interpretative model which is sensitive to the nuances of regional identities.

The objective of this paper is neither to fully delineate these challenges nor to try to measure the extent to which the epistemological hurdles toward the academic comprehension of regions has increased; rather by providing a case study from the 19th century, the idea here is to shed light on what is in fact an old problem. Trying to find the means to understand a place and then to organize the systematic study of it has always been a challenge. The re-conceptualization of Southeast Asia, in fact, might be described as a repetitive or even ritual exercise (King 2010). In this instance, the discussion highlights the manner in which the Victorians, that is, those who were part of the worlds associated with 19th century Britain and the British Empire, conceptualized and understood the regions that are currently referred to as Southeast Asia and the Middle East. It might be remembered, as well, that the Victorians were the dominant global power of the 19th century. The clichés associated with *Pax Britannica* are well known and need not be repeated here, but it is important to recall that many of the decisions made by the builders of the British empire directly affected both the regions later known as the "Middle East" and "Southeast Asia". These examples should make the contingent basis on which the study of two very different, but significant parts of the world were conceptualized and understood. To anticipate, it should be clear that these efforts produced not necessarily "colonial knowledge" but imperial knowledge. These areas were comprehended not only by the needs of the empire－but through the lived realities

of empires.

This discussion will examine the ways in which a number of 19th century British authors, who had direct experience in the region currently referred to as "the Middle East" or even "the MENA" (Middle East and North Africa) conceptualized these areas. These writers tried to explain what they had seen and experienced to readers in Britain. Their task, as such, was to translate their experience and they did so by trying to make it visible. It might be remembered that these figures were bringing their own conceptual frameworks to bear upon a foreign and inherently "other" environment; that is, their needs reflected the imperatives of British power as it dominated global politics. It is probably safe to argue, as well, that it would be the needs and interests of British policy makers in the 19th century, who would play a key role in the articulation of some of the world's key geographic features. To cite one obvious example, the naming of many geographic features in different parts of the world was occasioned by the death of Prince Albert and more than a generation later, Queen Victoria.

At the same time, this paper will also treat the ways in which the area now known as Southeast Asia was defined by British authors. Since it is clear that the term "Southeast Asia" came into use in the early 20th century, attention will be devoted to manner in which the British conceptualized the spaces that it now occupies. Hence, British writing about Burma (then part of India), the East Indies, the Philippines, Siam, the Malay peninsula (including the Straits Settlements), Indochina, and Hong Kong will be considered. At stake for the British was the ability to define and discuss the region which was influenced by China, but not Chinese and still affected by India (their chief priority), but clearly not Indian. To look ahead, it might be added that in the 19th century, the British were hardly interested in trying to find the area's homogenous or essentializing features. Just as the British understood the Middle East through the realities of engaging the Ottoman empire, so too, the assessment of things in Southeast Asia reflected their own imperial agenda.

This paper has been developed to shed light on some of the issues inherent in the reconceptualization of Southeast Asia. Accordingly, it highlights both the "Middle East" and "Southeast Asia" to call attention to the ways in which regions have been understood and defined. This discussion will stress the importance of developing a genealogical perspective which focuses upon regions. The achievements of the scholars who studied Southeast Asia are themselves worthy of chronicle－if not historical and hermeneutical analysis. Recovering these efforts, which may be described as almost "against the grain", should enable scholars to raise new questions and delineate alternative lines of enquiry. Accordingly, this articles aims to be suggestive, rather than comprehensive or definitive because it aims to stimulate reflection and future modes of analysis－as a way to further the basic aims of this conference. In fact, this discussion has looked at "colonial knowledge" possibly in a new way: instead of examining its biases with respect to subject populations, it has explored the ways in which the needs of empire (as well as post-imperial situations) affect the assessment of other empires, and, more importantly here, the peoples and places that they govern. What should emerge is that the term "Middle East" made little sense in the 19th century because much of what is assumed to be in that area today was part of the weakened Ottoman Empire. The term "Southeast Asia" has a different, but related beginning. Ultimately, the main assumption on which much of this discussion has been predicated is that regional analysis is largely a post-imperial phenomenon. That is, the need to study regions is a direct result of a relatively new world political order which is based on the sovereign powers of the nation state system. To put it another way, the necessity of studying cultures, peoples, languages, geographies, economies, histories, and migrations might well be done within an empire or within and in relation to extant empires. In contrast, in a system made up of nation states, each with well defined borders and nation-building projects, the necessity to make these academic investigations is probably even greater, but the means to do so are diminished. Regional study, it follows, becomes attractive because it offers scholars the preconditions for conducting their

research without being halted by national borders.

Furthermore, this paper will adopt a constructive position for exhibiting the ways in which regions have been understood. Since the conceptualization of regions has often taken place from outside, it makes sense to take account of some of the insights to be gleaned from studying tourism (and the literature it produced) in order to capitalize on what is yielded by new work involving cross-cultural encounters. Accordingly, it will emphasize that it is precisely the artificial nature of the region's definition, which actually makes a good departure point for subsequent study. At the same time, many scholars write about Southeast Asia from "inside" it. To generalize a bit, the "internalist" perspective, as such, de-emphasizes the constructive nature of regional definition, which tends to take the territorial borders for granted.

## Ⅱ. Understanding the Ottoman East

The representations of the Ottoman Empire in modern geographic and cartographic discourses reflected the same process by which the Middle East would later be depicted (Yilmaz 2012). The term Middle East, which is currently deployed to define a broad, changing region, appears to be a relatively recent invention. At the heart of these representations lay "the Eastern Question" which carried a range of meanings, but most commonly involved the future fate of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, examining 19th century discourses reveal that there were a range of other terms which had similar－but not identical functions. The most common of these was "Near East", but it might be remembered that the term "Orient" might also be used in these discourses.

The term "Near East" has its own history which helps to illuminate the prehistory of the idea of the Middle East as a region. Yilmaz has collected a number of European formulations about the "Near East": it is useful to note that for some authors, including the historian, Leopold von Ranke, it began at Belgrade

(then a part of the Ottoman Empire). Eduard Alletz, who could be said to have engaged the "Eastern Question" from an early point, regarded the Balkans as a frontier which divided Austria and Turkey, Occident and the Orient and Christianity and Islam. British authors were hardly different: Alexander Kinglake also believed that the East started in Belgrade (Yilmaz 2012).

More interestingly, other British authors contrasted the "Far East", by which they meant China and Japan, with "the Near East". This term might well be compared with "Near Orient" because it was more closely tied with commercial and strategic interests. As the 19th century came to an end, it would be the "Near East" which would be deployed by British writers with greater frequency (Yilmaz 2012). It might be noted that the term "Nearer East" was employed—often to emphasize the region's connections with Christianity (Yilmaz 2012).

It is instructive to examine Charles Doughty's *Wanderings in Arabia* because in that volume many of the presuppositions which the Victorians held about the Middle East become apparent. Doughty characterized the region (without defining its limits) as the "Semitic East", (yet another term with its roots in the broader Judeo-Christian tradition) which was a land with a deep sense of the past. Doughty explained that it was "a land of sepulchres" (1908: 44), with Syria "a limestone country⋯full of tombs" which had come to have other uses. He explained that these tombs were now "stables for herdsmen, and open dens of wild creatures" (1908: 44). These features were definitive because these "are the lands of the resurrection. Palmyra, Petra, Hejra, in the ways of the desert countries, were all less oases of husbandmen than the great caravan stations" (1908: 44). Considering these structures in the desert led Doughty to draw a lesson: in "all is seen much sumptuousness of sepulchers; clay buildings served their short lives and squared stone columns were for the life of the State. The care of the sepulture, the ambitious mind of man's mortality, to hold eternity captive, was beyond measure in the religions of antiquity" (1908: 44).

Doughty believed that the Ottoman empire was characterized

as "ruinous" (1908: 44). He made the Ottoman presence visible by connecting some decayed bridges "as all is now ruinous in the Ottoman Empire" (Doughty 1908: 5). In addition, he portrayed the Ottomans as corrupt and deeply resented. Nomads, he continued, have an "ill opinion of Turkish Haj government, seeing the tyrannical and brutish behavior of these pretended rulers" (1908: 18). He characterized the "criminal Ottoman administration" (1908: 18) as a feature with which the local Arab populations had to contend. The more important point to emerge from Doughty's massive narrative was the difficulty of travel in Arabia. For Doughty dangers abound: the presence of outlaw gangs was just one of the challenges which had to be surmounted.

In order to understand Mesopotamia (Iraq), the best figure to cite is Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894), whose unique career, connected archaeological study with politics in a way which would be difficult imagine today. Layard, who served as British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire between 1877-1880, was much better known for his excavations at Nimrud and Nineveh. Two generations later, Gertrude Bell's encounters with Mesopotamia would again see the area through its ancient past and Ottoman present.

British travelers to Egypt were almost as well known and possibly no less influential. Thomas Cook's ability to bring tourists down the Nile is an iconic moment in the rise of modern tourism. Cook had the insight to develop a business out of the larger reality that many Britons were increasingly willing to take the risks (and experience the hassles) to travel to Egypt to see the well publicized archaeological discoveries which helped to produce "Egyptomania".

Harriet Martineau, one of the 19th century's great travelers, also ventured to Egypt, but she went beyond Palestine to what is present-day Jordan. Her assessments of the area offered in *Eastern Life, Present, and Past* (1848) not only a detailed look at the social practices of Egypt under Mohammed Ali Pasha, but a different interpretation of history and civilization. Egypt may have

technically belonged to the Ottoman Empire, but for Martineau it was the fate of the country under Mohammed Ali Pasha, which motivated her to launch a scathing critique of its society and modalities of human depopulation and regression. In Alexandria, Martineau explained:

> we made our way through heaps of rubbish and hillocks of dust to the new fortification, passing Arab huts more sordid and desolate-looking than I remember to have seen in other parts of the country. We met fewer blind and diseased persons than we expected; and I must say that I was agreeably surprised, both this morning and throughout my travels in Egypt, by the appearance of the people. About the dirt there can be no doubt;—the dirt of both dwellings and persons; and the diseases which proceed from want of cleanliness: but people appeared to us, there and throughout the country, sleek, well-fed and cheerful. I am not sure that I saw an ill-fed person in all Egypt. There is hardship enough of other kinds, —abundance of misery to sadden the heart of the traveler; but not that, as far as we saw, of want of food….this partly owing to the law of the Kuran, by which every man is bound to share what he has, to the last mouthful, with his brother in need….Of the progressive depopulation of Egypt for many years past, I am fully convinced… While I believe that Egypt might again, as formerly, support four times its present population, I see no reason to suppose, amidst all the misgovernment and oppression that the people suffer, that they do not still raise food enough to support life and health. I have seen more emaciated, and stunted, and depressed men, women and children in a single walk in England, than I observed from end to end of the land of Egypt—So much for the mere food question ( 1848: 9-10).

Martineau, who had seen slave markets in the United States, was an unflinching critic, but one who attempted to overcome metropolitan stereotypes and prejudices regarding Egypt. Nonetheless, her Egypt was a placed defined by poor social conditions, which were mercifully moderated by the more humanistic precepts of Islam.

One more British author, James Bryce (1838-1922), should be mentioned here. Bryce's career was extraordinary in its scope and breadth. Historian, lawyer, and diplomat, Bryce traveled in

the Ottoman Empire, and wrote with the idea of public policy foremost in mind. Bryce would be remembered for his writing during the First World War－most notably for his coverage of atrocities－one real and the other largely imagined or the result of British and French propaganda－in publishing *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916* (1916), which focused upon the events associated with the "Armenian Genocide" and the Bryce Report which exhibited atrocities allegedly committed by the German army in Belgium.  Bryce, possibly better than anyone, had to conceptualize the Ottoman Empire both in terms of its defining characteristics and future trajectories. To do so, inherently also involved comprehending the areas adjacent and relevant to Ottoman dominion.

Drawing upon these diverse, but representative figures, reveals the ways in which the region, now referred to as the Middle East, was made visible. The region, as such, might be defined or at least characterized by the frequent descriptions of backward conditions, Islamic practices, poverty, corruption, and bad governance. In addition, the portrayal of the area's distant historical past (as manifested by its Biblical roots and the excavations at Nineveh) made the region visible, but did so by emphasizing its past prosperity in contrast to its poor conditions in the 19th century. It might be added that by making the region visible in terms of its deficiencies, it almost certainly rendered other features invisible.

The British and Ottoman conceptions of the region varied－ often profoundly. The juxtaposition of Eastern and Western view of the land from the "Nile to the Oxus" is worthy of exploration, as are the earlier Islamic and pre-Islamic conceptions of the region. But what had the Ottomans thought about it?  Did they see the area as a region and how did the immediate world appear to them?  These questions cannot be answered without any significant study－but the travel narratives of Evliya Celebi, who traversed Ottoman dominions in the 17th century, may be helpful because they remind us about the contingency of regional or area definition. The recovery of Celebi's writings reveal that from the point of view of Istanbul, the world might well be

organized by the "Holy Land", the site of the two holy cities and the destination of the haj. Looking eastward, the power of Safavid Persia, a long term opponent, guaranteed that the frontier remained an important feature of Ottoman geography. Also in the East, lands populated by the Armenians revealed yet again the ethnic diversity of Ottoman dominion. Celebi looked (and traveled) west: the lands (now "Eastern Europe") associated with the Balkans — especially Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Transylvania, and Albania were well known to him. To the north, he could boast of travels to the Crimea and some knowledge of the steppe beyond. All told, this traveler did not know the "Near East" or the "Middle East", but a diverse set of lands united either by Ottoman dominion or by its definition as a "borderland".

Celebi's view of the world from the empire drew upon the older Muslim conceptions of geography. To generalize, these earlier spatial considerations focused upon a center, "the middle of the world" which might be understood to be within the "Levant", delineating the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (Celebi 2010). More relevant here, Muslim geographers did not seem interested in developing any kind of vocabulary for "East and West" (Celebi 2010). In contrast, the very definition of the region was predicated by a sharp differentiation between "East and West". Furthermore, it should be clear that the formulations regarding "the Eastern Question" prefigured the identification of the region with the failings of the Ottoman Empire.

## 2.1. The Idea of the Middle East

It is probably a truism that the term "Middle East" has the same intellectual parentage as "East Asia", "South Asia", "Central Asia", and of course, "Southeast Asia." While significant political realities lay behind these designations, what is more interesting is the rapid acceptance and use of these terms. The term "Middle East" hardly made sense in a world was geographically defined by the Ottoman Empire. To cite another example of regional nomenclature, it might be argued that the term "South Asia" would hardly have been attractive when maintaining the needs associated with

British India (which was often called "the Indian Empire"; the same may be true about "Central Asia" in the era of the USSR). However, the end of the Ottoman Empire and competition between the British and French (as well as other powers) for dominance in these areas served to produce a context in which a new and dominant term might be developed.

The use of the term "Middle East" reflected not only changes in nomenclature and politics, but in the needs of policy makers. It is generally agreed that the term began to be deployed with some consistency very early in the new 20th century. (Yilmaz 2012) In fact, even a cursory examination of its usage shows that its boundaries were far from settled. (Yilmaz 2012). What may be significant is that British authors increasingly moved from "Orient" to "East" which Yilmaz regards as the persistence of the "Eastern Question: in discourses about the region－long after the Ottoman Empire was dead and buried.

British reliance on the concept "Middle East" is clearly a product of the post-Ottoman historical setting. Nonetheless, it might well be argued that the consistent application of the term came about slowly. For example, in 1920 the Royal Geographical Society published a resolution in which the term "Near East" was to be used for the Balkans, while "Middle East" was to refer to the area between the Bosporus to the Indian frontiers (Adelson 2012). In the 1930's the British began to use the term with respect to military preparations. For instance, in 1938, the Royal Air Force reorganized the Middle East Air Command to include squadrons in Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, Aden, and Malta. The British army followed suit by reorganizing its command structure. The previously separate units in Egypt, Sudan, Palestine-Transjordan, Iraq, Aden, the Arabian Gulf, Cyprus, Iraq, and Iran were consolidated into one structure under General Archibald Wavell, who was stationed in Cairo. (Adelson 2012) All of this coincided with the growing importance of the region to British planners.

It should be satisfactory to add that the persistence of the term can also be explained by contemporary factors. In this case,

the Middle East is all too visible, but the prevalence of the region in the various modalities of international media may also come at the expense at rendering many of the complex realities of the region less visible－if not invisible.

## Ⅲ. Defining Southeast Asia and the Making of the Postimperial World

The articulation and definition of "Southeast Asia" followed both intellectual and political developments in the first half of the 20th century. The term "Southeast Asia" probably had a plural parentage, but as Victor King has pointed out, it was well in use before the World War II. Germanic scholarship may well have paved the way in making the term "Southeast Asia" popular. King credits Franz Heger, an Austrian ethnologist, for using the term in the title of a publication in 1902. He would be followed by Robert Baron van Heine-Geldern, an Austrian ethnologist and prehistorian who held a Chair at the University of Vienna. Last, Karl Josef Pelzer deployed the term in the 1930's and might be said to have introduced the term to the United States when he began to teach at Yale University (2010). At the same time, it would be the realities of that conflict which began to dictate not only the use of the term, but helped to create a situation in which the term (or another like it) would become necessary.

It is worth noting that in the 19th century, the term could hardly be said to exist. To again highlight the Victorians, the use of the term is practically non-existent in the 19th century. A few examples illustrate the ways in which leading British writers, many of whom were connected to policy making, conceptualized the region. For the purposes of our discussion we might delineate three strands, even though it hardly exhausts British and colonial perspectives on the region: (1) those who like Alfred Russel Wallace focused on the Malay archipelago; (2) those who worried about separating Burma (then a part of the Indian Empire) from India; (3) last, those interested in connecting India to China (through Burma); there's actually another strand, those

represented by Hugh Clifford who sought to define "Further India", recognizing the distinct Asian (and "Oriental") space which needed to be comprehended apart from its giant neighbors.

Alfred Russel Wallace had argued that the Malay Archipelago was its own distinct region. He began his magisterial work by defining the subject matter:

> we shall perceive between Asia and Australia a number of large and small islands, forming a connected group distinct from those great masses of land, and having little connection with either of them. Situated upon the equator, and bathed by the tepid water of the great tropical oceans, this region enjoys a climate more uniformly hot and moist than almost any other part of the globe, and teems with natural productions which are elsewhere unknown. The richest of fruits and the most precious of spices are here indigenous. It produces the giant flowers of the Rafflesia, the great green-winged Ornithoptera (princes among the butterfly tribes), the man like orang-utan, and the gorgeous birds of paradise. It is inhabited by a peculiar and interesting race of mankind—the Malay, found nowhere beyond the limits of this insular tract, which has hence been named Malay Archipelago (1869: 13).

Hugh Clifford's interest and experience was quite different: he engaged not only the Malay world, but the land to the west of it. In *Further India* (1904) Clifford probably came the closest to articulating the current accepted boundaries of Southeast Asia. For Clifford, the region was distinctive: "The great peninsula which forms the southeastern corner of the Asiatic continent, comprising, as we know it to-day, Burma, Siam, French Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula" (1904). Recounting the history of geographic encounters with "Chryse the Golden", he explained that the region had indeed been neglected:

> The failure of the lands of southeastern Asia to make a strong appeal to the imagination of the peoples of Europe is to be ascribed, however, not to their intrinsic unimportance, nor yet to any lack of wealth, of beauty, of charm, or of the interest that springs from a mysterious and mighty past. The reason is to be sought solely in the mere accident of their geographical position (1904).

Clifford referred to "southeastern Asia", but this did not include much of the Malay archipelago. His interest in what would later be known as "mainland Southeast Asia" would be shared by Sir George Scott, who was introduced to Malaya before Burma, and V.C. Scott O'Connor, who labored to provide detailed accounts of life in Burma. For these authors, Burma did not belong in India, but it was not obvious or inevitable that it should be connected with the Malay world either.

The effort to connect India to China for economic reasons bears examination. Archibald Ross Colquhoun (*Across Chrysê: Being the Narrative of a Journey of Exploration Through the South China Border Lands from Canton to Mandalay, 1883)* might well be taken as a representative figure among those who explored, labored and, ultimately, wrote about the commercial possibilities of opening routes which would make trade between western China and India feasible. This might be called a Burma story, but for our purposes, it was done with little interest in either "southeastern Asia" or the Malay archipelago. In fact, the success of such ventures would have done much to separate the Straits Settlements from Burma and possibly other parts of the region. All of this suggests that British authors engaged Southeast Asia for many reasons, but when they did so, it was with a decidedly alternative conception of the region than is orthodox today.

At the same time, these writers did make these areas visible－but not necessarily as "Southeast Asia". Burma was to be separated from India, the Straits Settlements anchored with the Malay archipelago, while the identity of northern Burma (and to a lesser extent Siam) was described in terms of being a route to connect China and India. More important, while the "territorial trap" referred to developments in the last decades of the 20th century, it reflected realities associated with the imperialism as well: colonial discourses might be said to have reified the linkages between space, political actors, and indigenous cultures.

German intellectuals may have been the first to deploy the term on a consistent basis, but it would be the realities of the

Second World War which helped to ensure that the term became widespread. The withdrawal of imperial power was gradually replaced by a collection of new nations, many of which were perceived to be vulnerable to the realities of Cold War politics. It would be the creation SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) which was created by the Manila Pact in 1954 which reflected these concerns. The Manila Pact was an attempt to strengthen these new nations, by creating an alliance in which they could both support one another and be tied to the United States and its allies. At the risk of repeating the obvious, SEATO followed the creation of other regional security alliances, which were aimed to preventing or forestalling communist advances amidst decolonization.

SEATO might well be a footnote to regional specialists, but the creation of ASEAN in 1967 followed and helped to confirm the territorial reality of the new region. The leaders (broadly understood) of these new nations might have been said to confront the challenge posed by what might be called the "imperial impediment". If the "territorial trap" meant that state borders became the basis for envisioning international relations, then the "imperial impediment" might be regarded as a kind of mirror image. The "imperial impediment" refers to the difficulty inherent in conceptualizing space (and territory) which has already been defined and controlled by empires－many of which are evidently powerful (it might be noted that it can also apply to the failure of imperial leaders to understand alternative conceptions of space within their own dominions). This obstacle can be significant not only with regard to legitimacy outside a state or new nation, but within it as well. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, it might be added that included within the "imperial impediment" were the numerous ways in which 19th century empires defined space: the local maps, surveys, place names, memorial sites, and routes of transit, which had all been developed in relation to colonial governance. Even more fundamental, the vocabularies, means of organizing geographic knowledge, and modalities of conceptualizing space remained in place－long after many empires had departed the region. In

addition, while touristic encounters (epitomized by the "tourist gaze") has come to underscore global inequalities, their existence was often predicated on the order and structures provided by imperial power. It may well be, then, that the extent of the imperial impediment has been actually underestimated－even by postcolonial scholars.

For our purposes here, it also implied that investing in regional identity meant much more than the opportunity to capitalize on Cold War politics, but became a means to inscribe a new set of spatial and geographical realities. That is, the construction of regions based on new nations, each with its territorial borders, might be regarded as one more step in the move away from a world system in which empires predominated. To put this differently, overcoming the "imperial impediment" may have helped to open up the "territorial trap".

More important, perhaps, it could be said that between the Manila Pact and the creation of ASEAN, came the "golden age" of Southeast Asian (King 2010). In this period scholarship on the region flourished. For the most part, this "golden age" (which might be easily disputed by those who write about the region from an "internalist" perspective) could best be witnessed within the friendly confines of Western universities. Nonetheless, scholars who originated from the region also made increasing contributions to the discourses which now became to be defined as "Southeast Asian Studies".

More broadly, the successful development of ASEAN also ensured that its members were all party to the collective efforts at regional maturation, even as they made nation building their priorities. The effect of ASEAN was to confirm not only the existence of the region, but the articulation of its borders. That is, membership in ASEAN reified the shape of the region, with now clearly defined borders, thereby creating regional and non-regional spaces. In short, the political developments which gave rise to SEATO and then ASEAN proved decisive in the formation of a distinctive space understood as Southeast Asia.

## Ⅵ. Reconceptualizing the Study of Southeast Asia

This article has used the instances of some of the shifts in perception about the Middle East and Southeast Asia to exhibit the mutability of the ways they have been conceived. Our focus here is Southeast Asia and developing a fresh perspective which will enable scholars to formulate new questions about the region.

To that end, this section will briefly explore some of the mythologies and conventions which have shaped regional study. Furthermore, in order to widen our discussion, the paper will briefly move towards a constructive position for the subsequent academic exploration of the region. It will be suggested that a hermeneutic might be developed which emphasizes genealogies of knowledge, drawing upon developing methodologies, and embracing multidisciplinarity in order to make the region both visible and audible. In doing so, the discussion should open some new avenues for inquiry in the interest of advancing the discussion of the region as a Holon.

### 4.1. The Myth of Autonomous History

John Smail's seminal article which explored the possibility of creating an autonomous history for Southeast Asia now reads as something of a historical document. Smail, of course, was objecting to the dominance of Eurocentric conceptualizations of the growing field of Southeast Asian history. Smail communicated his enthusiasm for D.G.E. Hall's aim of presenting Southeast Asia as an important subject in its own right (1961). However, it would be his comments about the writing of the region which would prove to be programmatic for two generations of the region's historians. Smail might as well have commanded:

> If we are to have successful and solidly-grounded new history of modern Southeast Asia we must begin by realizing that it is not enough simply to adopt an Asia-centric viewpoint. We must be clear in our minds what it is that we want to look at from this viewpoint. We must displace our attention from the colonial relationship to the domestic history of the area, shift it from historical sequences like the extension of colonial rule and nationalism-independence to

sequences like the birth of Indonesia as idea-as-fact, the growth of new classes by creative adaptation. Alongside this, we must learn to see continuities which span the late colonial period and carry on to the present day, like the persistence of the preindustrial elite-mass society. We must look for the autonomous history of Southeast Asia, hitherto largely hidden by our preoccupation with the impact of colonial rule (1961).

Smail wrote not only against the background of newly independent nations, but the emergence of a new field of study. The timing of his article was possibly better than its sensitive and forward-looking character.

At about the same time, in the early 1960's, the historical profession began to debate the social position of the historian. In particular, E.H. Carr's *What is History?* spawned a debate about not only the nature of historical evidence, but also the historian's relationship to it. G. R. Elton, Carr's chief critic, defended "traditional history" with both skill and tenacity, but in the wake of postmodern (and now postcolonial critiques of knowledge), the idea that historians can ever be autonomous now almost certainly looks naïve. Instead, the writing of history is interesting not only for its assessment of the past, but also the ways in which it reflects the biases of the historian. That is, both colonial history and anti-colonial history (to use Smail's language) can now be read "against the grain" to reveal the interests which guided the construction of particular approaches to the past as well as those historiographical trends which have become subsequently dominant.

## 4.2. Reading Colonial Sources "Against the Grain"

Students of Southeast Asia have become accustomed to reading sources "against the grain" in order to at once exploit the value of colonial sources and to overcome to their inherent biases — to the extent that it is possible. In fact, the practice has become so widespread, that one leading scholar has called for the utility of returning to the archival grain (Stoler 2009). Elsewhere, I have argued that it also makes sense to engage materials "outside the grain". This involves nothing less than developing a hermeneutic

aimed initially at rescuing these colonial authors from being written out of history because of their ostensible relationship to it. That is, exploring these figures "outside the grain" means providing their efforts, labor, and ideas with adequate intellectual autonomy, instead of forgetting them as merely a bit more than the ordinary peons associated with the colonial state. Reading these authors "outside the grain" hardly means forgetting that most were in some way connected with imperial projects. It does allow their work to be understood more broadly. Indeed, to probe the content of these texts is to recover a much richer intellectual world－complete with both advocates and dissidents of colonial practices－engaged in trying to describe, explain, understand, and ultimately assess places which were different and often rendered "other".

While the idea of reading "outside the grain" might not be palatable in some areas of academe, it raises yet another hermeneutical issue for those who wish to reconceptualize the study of Southeast Asia. The academic exploration of Southeast Asia flourished in the second half of the $20^{th}$ century. Its new independent nations were eager to develop narratives which moved away from previously dominant colonial representation of the region (and individual countries' past). It would be in these decades that the study of the region burgeoned both within and outside the region. The development of ASEAN legitimated not only the idea of regional study, but provided an easy, short hand answer for definitions of boundaries.

Consequently, it may become necessary to read early and mid- $20^{th}$ century scholars against the grain as well. Just as colonial scholarship reflected the realities of specific conditions, so too, the academic exploration of Southeast Asia in the second half of the $20^{th}$ century could be understood as equally affected by historical circumstances. Reading this body of secondary literature "against the grain" hardly means repudiating its major achievements (of which there are many) or drawing upon it to document regional or national trends. Rather, it requires the recognition that many of the academic conventions which have shaped discourses about the region were no less biased as many

of those deployed by colonizers. That is, the academic exploration of the region, whether supported by colonial interests, university establishments, or state sponsored research which have all collectively shaped the study of Southeast Asia, might both be used to demonstrate the importance of the issue raise first by Martin Heidegger and followed by Gadamer of the "hermeneutical circle" which shaped humanistic enquiry. Both the colonial authors and those who followed came to the region with their own prejudices, modes of interpretation, and research agenda. Building on these different moments in the interpretation of the region might well require the recognition of one's own place within the broader context of history of the region. Gadamer adds: "Effective-historical consciousness is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation" (1975). This point should be taken to heart by researchers who might come to the region without the carrying either colonial agenda or any program of struggle against it when they evaluate the identity and significance of Southeast Asia.

## 4.3. Imagining Communities: Creating Regions

Benedict Anderson's contention that nations are "imagined communities" because they are inevitably conceived of as a "deep horizontal comradeship" (1983) raises important issues for the study of regions as well. Nations were both "limited" (they did not embrace universal humanity) and "sovereign", meaning, that the "emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state" (Anderson 1983). These communities were imagined because even in tiny nations, most "will never know most of their fellow-members" (Anderson 1983). If nations could be created, made to appear homogenous, then, this might hold true for regions. Above all, the creation of regions, re-enforced by political developments, makes the "territorial trap" relevant to the study of Southeast Asia. We have seen that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the region could not really have said to exist in the minds of many key Victorians who were no less interested in the area than many who followed. However, the definition of regions with borders may well have produced the appearance of homogenizing

factors, which may not be fully warranted; or, alternatively, if warranted, it might well imply that the creation of a regional identity which was a transformative event.

## 4.4. Making Regions Visible

British authors did not lift their pens to make these regions, but they were trying to communicate what they had seen and experienced. Nowhere is this more evident than the way in which Alfred Russel Wallace begins *The Malay Archipelago*. It had not been enough to place the region on the map: Wallace wanted to supplement the geographic description with images. That is, it was important to enable their readers to literally see what they had; it might be added that the attention paid to descriptions mattered. To some extent, the need to produce visible images reflected both the difficulties of gathering the information and also the bias towards description which was a part of Victorian culture. Wallace's observations underscored the direct experience of a regional traveler:

> To the ordinary Englishman this is perhaps the least known part of the globe. Our possessions in it are few and scanty; scarcely any of our travelers go to explore it; and in many collections of maps it is almost ignored, being divided between Asia and the Pacific Islands….few persons realize that, as a whole, it is comparable with the primary divisions of the globe…The traveler, however, soon acquires different ideas. He sails for days, or even for weeks, along the shores of one these great islands, often so great that its inhabitants believe it to be a vast continent. He finds that voyages among these islands are commonly reckoned by weeks and months, and that their several inhabitants are often as little known to each other as are the native races of the northern to those of the southern continent of America. He soon comes to look upon this region as one apart from the rest of the world, with its own races of men and its own aspects of nature; with its own ideas, feelings, customs, and modes of speech, and with a climate, vegetation, and animated life altogether peculiar to itself (1869).

Wallace understood the challenges of articulating a region‐

it might not be enough to make it visible through images alone; narration, particularly on an epic scale, might well serve to make an area or region not only visible, but audible. That is, the advantages of travel narratives (and many others) stemmed from the fact that they connected people's experience with the images and cartographic modes of representation. Collectively, it might well make sense to say that these authors helped to shape a discourse in which the places, customs, and peoples of both Southeast Asia and the Middle East were made manifest and visible.

Scholarship about Southeast Asia after 1945 made the region manifest in other ways. To begin with, it became a priority to replace the discursive formulations now associated with colonial knowledge and "Orientalism". Moreover, regional scholarship embraced the task of creating new genealogies of knowledge which were much more complete and seemingly definitive achievements of scholarship. The region would now be studied in the university and the ease with which tens of thousands of visitors ensured that making the region "visible" would be done through other means－if it were to be done at all.

Additionally, connecting the rise of "orientalism" to the visible articulation of regions (for both the Middle East and Southeast Asia) is warranted, but it might be no less fruitful to investigate the impact of intentional orientalism. This concept refers to the practice followed by many in the tourist industry to sell places as exotic oriental experiences. If "orientalism" is the product of the occidental mind, intentional orientalism is the deliberate manipulation of the concept for commercial purposes. To be sure, this topic requires greater elaboration, but the collective work of ministries, tourism bureaus, advertising agencies, and transportation industries has done much to ensure the perpetuation, not only "orientalism", but also of stereotypes connected to particular regions. Intentional orientalism, then, has done much to manufacture regional and area identities.

More important, the argument here has documented the

artificial construction and maintenance of regions. Regional identity runs counter to the rhetoric of nation-making in which the nationalist trajectory seeks to frame the arrival of the new nation-state as an event which is consistent (if not the fulfillment) with any kind of natural order. That is, while nationalism has various forms, many have followed the example of Johann Gottfried Herder and Giuseppe Mazzini, who both believed that the nation is a natural expression of popular sovereignty or will. Accordingly, perhaps, many nation-building narratives feature revolution, the overthrow of corrupt or external governments, as necessary moments in the creation of a nation which inevitably reflect the will of the people. Heritage making, supported by the new state and often by commercial forces, finds martyrs, erects monuments, builds museums, manufactures traditions, and ensures that history, correspondingly, is rewritten －continuously if necessary to underscore these fundamental realities.

Regions, of course, are different. The forces that foster heritage making are not necessarily aligned to support the construction of regional myth-making. Consequently, it must often be academics who must often look beyond the national narratives to try to define and articulate the content of regional study. The importance of seeing how regions are made visible arises from the need to interpret the ways in which they have been constructed.

Yet, what we would like to argue here is that the artificial quality of Southeast Asia should be considered and explored. Many of the nations, communities, peoples, languages, religious traditions in the region themselves reflect artifice－not natural but creative and impressive. Southeast Asia's hybrid qualities need not be unpacked here, but it might not be too much to claim that it goes to the very heart of its intrinsic experiences. Accordingly, it might make sense to study the region apart from its colonial past and early nationalist moments and focus on precisely the ways in which artifice defines not only its external boundaries－but the lives of so many of its peoples.

Developing a hermeneutic of the artificial or the expedient might well open new lines of scholarly inquiry. A hermeneutic of artifice might privilege the "expedient", the "savvy", the "gimmick' and the device" because it would aim to capture the modalities of contrivance (including "intentional orientalisms"). Beginning with these discursive formations might allow scholars to recover some of the more creative and original aspects of regional experience. These subjects also put distance from the discursive patterns which emphasize "organic developments", "innocence" "sincerity", and even "simplicity". Emphasizing the subjects which aim to exhibit the integrity of cultural phenomenon has worked well in both colonial and anti-colonial nationalist narratives. A hermeneutic of artifice might serve to highlight the hybrid character which makes the region unique and compelling.

It might be observed that even if colonial knowledge has become benighted in ostensibly sophisticated academic circles, many of its tools remain in use. The disciplines that shape colonial modes of enquiry－philology, history, theology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology are all flourishing in the modern university. So, too, is the partnership between research and public policy and the hierarchies of knowledge which reflect the professionalization of academic study. To probe Southeast Asia with these tools is useful; it is even better to capitalize not only on new methodologies but emerging subject matters. Migrations, spatial constructions, tourist consumption, reconciliation and reconstruction, gender and other targets of Inquiry have the potential to move the study of the region beyond both the earlier colonial forms of knowledge and the reactions to it.


## Ⅴ. Conclusion: Reconsidering the 'Corners' of Regional Study

Much about the Middle East and Southeast Asia interested scholars in the last two centuries. These areas were not corners, but then it was not obvious that they were independent regions either. Regional definition came from political needs－first in relation to empire and second near the end of empire. This

article has suggested that comprehension of these realities would be useful for enterprises which aim to develop innovative approaches to the academic exploration of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, since the construction of these regional identities came from discreet historical circumstances, it seems likely that the methodologies which have been used to understand both were also products of these earlier global situations. Consequently, this paper which has used these case studies to stimulate discussion about the nature and challenges inherent in regional study, raises the prospect of studying Southeast Asia by moving away from the issues related to the "territorial trap" to developing a hermeneutic which can draw upon the genealogy of colonial, early nationalist (anti-colonial), and now post-colonial scholarship to find fresh and viable ways of thinking about this rich subject.

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