

Panel proposal – Euroseas 2021

Teaching Southeast Asian Studies: reassessing the field from the classroom

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Participants:

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The legitimacy of area studies has been at the center of scholarly discussion for decades, with criticism pertaining to its origin, epistemological basis and tendency to regionalize the world (Svanton 2004, Kratoska & al. 2005). The postcolonial turn and numerous calls to rethink, to reinvent and to decenter Southeast Asian studies (Craig & McVey 1998, Heryanto 2002), rather than to abandon it altogether, have yielded strong theoretical scholarship which have opened fruitful new paths of enquiry (Goh Beng-Lan 2010, Houben 2010, Hau & Tenjapira 2011). While the current dynamics of Southeast Asian studies show that it has epistemologically changed – knowledge is not anymore produced exclusively in former imperial centers, research interests have moved toward the margins, and transregional studies continue to show the inefficiency of spatial containers – the reasons of its existence remain questioned.

The panel aims to continue the discussion on the present state of our studies focusing on its teaching, a point largely left aside in previous debates where the aim of knowledge transmission within or outside the region – for what are we teaching? – has been discussed very little. While teaching is directly linked to research on the region, and influenced by the epistemological changes aforementioned, its impact exceed the boundaries of the academic world. In each promotion, besides the few future academicians who will carry one research, a large part of students who will work with or within the region will be school teachers, researchers in think tanks, diplomats but also worker in international organizations or companies. The question of their training is essential as it will partly condition the ‘relation’ they will build with Southeast Asia. As teaching does not only depends on shifts in research paradigms, but is influenced by many other factors, the panel will cross experiences from different contexts, with different communities, and invite contributions which will deal, among others, with the way students from Southeast Asian origin, or descent, influence the development of those studies; how the declining status of humanities, and the structural changes within universities, have or could influence curriculum in Southeast Asian studies; and the consequence it would have on the studies in general.