

# WORKING PAPERS

**“Silencing as Method”: Leaving Malay Studies Out**

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## **Introduction\***

The idea of 'silencing as method' is taken from the 'Asia as method' project. I suggest that while the persistence of Orientalism and Eurocentrism in the social sciences functions to silence or at best marginalise non-Western concepts, ideas, perspectives and voices, in short, the non-Western as knowing subjects, at the same time Malay world responses to Orientalism and Eurocentrism themselves had also been subject to the process of silencing and marginalisation. This is what I believe has happened to the field of Malay studies, particularly to Malay studies as it has developed at the National University of Singapore. This paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I briefly discuss the problem of Orientalism and Eurocentrism in the social sciences and provide an overview of the response of Malay studies to the problem, which I argue does not merely exist but has been pioneering. I then turn to commentaries on the problem of the social sciences in Asia which, although make references to Singapore (where the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore is located) or to the Malay world, do not make mention of the contributions of Malay studies. I conclude with a discussion on the politics and economy of silencing in knowledge production.

Here, I would like to emphasise two points. First of all, this is not a personal attack against certain scholars. Those whom I have identified as silencers are merely illustrations of a larger problem in global knowledge production, that is, the marginalisation of certain discourses in the context of intellectual imperialism and academic dependency. Secondly, it is necessary to state that no intentionality to silence whatsoever is attributed to those authors whom I refer to as participants in silencing discourses. My main concern is with the effects and functioning of silencing, which is to maintain the marginalisation of certain discourses.

## **The Response to Orientalism in Malay Studies**

The field of Malay studies is arguably the last bastion of Orientalism. Advances made in other areas such as Middle East studies or South Asian studies will generally not be found in Malay studies. This is not to say that there have been no serious responses to the problem from scholars writing out of the Malay world. Nevertheless, the field is still largely dominated by Orientalist traits and concerns. This section briefly outlines the nature of Orientalism in Malay studies as well as the responses to it emanating from

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Malay world scholars, particularly those located at the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore.

Orientalism is a European-biased style of thinking about the so-called Orient that emerged as Europe became conscious of itself as a distinct civilisational entity. Orientalism, particularly today, is synonymous with Eurocentrism or, more accurately, Euroamericentrism. The discussion on Orientalism in Malay studies that follows is guided by a few assumptions:

1. Not any Western perspective is deemed to be Orientalist. Some Western discourses on the Orient may present an objective explanation that provides a Western perspective in that the “angle of vision” is the West. Thus, the Dutch view of Malacca as seen from the administrative offices of their trading houses is not necessarily Orientalist. Objective accounts of historical events are always multiple and diverse, all contributing to building a picture of the past. Other Western discourse may present a subjective understanding or experience of the Orient that is also not necessarily Orientalist in nature. An example would be the meaning and significance of a Sufi *ratib* session in Indonesia to a pious Christian colonial scholar as it causes him to examine his own religiosity.
2. Orientalism as an orientation can be internalised by the so-called Orientals or natives.
3. Dominant Western perspectives in the social sciences and humanities, including their Orientalist perspectives, do not originate from the entire West but from certain knowledge centres or powers, namely, the United States, Britain and France.
4. Non-knowledge powers in the West, as well as non-Western knowledge communities, are alike in that they are both consumers of Western theories, methods, research agenda emanating from the knowledge powers. In other words, there is the relationship of academic dependency.
5. Academic dependency may be on both Orientalist as well as non-Orientalist knowledge in the Western knowledge powers.

Here, I focus on Orientalist ideas in the area of Malay studies that Malay studies in the ‘Orient’ have been dependent on since the very inception of the field. The traits of Orientalism in Malay studies can be said to be the following:

1. It is characterised by a subject-object dichotomy. By this I mean that the Malays are generally seen to be the objects of study or informants, and not sources of ideas and concepts that may become the basis of theorising in Malay studies. This applies to thinkers in the classical Malay tradition as well as modern thinkers. For example, neither

Bukhari Jawhari nor Abdullah Munshi was viewed as sources for a theory of feudal society by the colonial scholars and later Orientalists who studied their writings. Modern thinkers who had pioneered certain perspectives or areas of research within Malay studies such as Syed Hussein Alatas (sociology of colonial capitalism; sociology of corruption), Syed Muhammad al-Naquib Al-Attas (theory of Islamization of the Malay Archipelago) and Shaharuddin Maaruf (Malay theories of development; the study of Malay values), all of whom had made original contributions, had rarely been taken seriously by scholars in the field, whether in the West or the Malay world. Another aspect of the subject-object dichotomy is that Malay culture, history and tradition is not seen as a source of ideas and concepts. Rather, it is the Western scholar who is the knowing subject.

2. The next trait of Orientalism in Malay studies is the construction of things Malay through a European lens. This proceeds logically from the subject-object dichotomy. An example is the terracentrism that afflicts much of the historical political economy of the Malay world. In European experience, the dominant categories are town and country. The town-country dichotomy is land-centric, reflecting the nature of European geography and its human ecology. This perspective was then imposed on the Malay world, resulting in an erroneous conceptualisation of the political economy. Most conceptualisations of the political economy tend to be terracentric, while the reality of the Malay world is such that it is the trichotomy, *hulu*, *hilir* and *laut* that is relevant. The sea was not just a means of transportation or connection between land masses but a mode of production unto itself that articulate in an integral manner with the land-based modes of production. Nevertheless, efforts to conceptualise the political economic systems of the pre-colonial Malay world, while taking rivers and seas into account, tend not to accord central conceptual importance to them. For example, I do not think that the idea of a nomadic aquatic mode of production has been thought of.
3. Yet another trait of Orientalism is the idea that Europe is the sole origin of modern civilisation in all of its expressions. Let us take the issue of the origins of capitalism. It is widely assumed that the process of primitive accumulation in the colonies was begun by Europeans, despite evidence to the contrary.
4. Because of the dominance of the Orientalist paradigm, pertinent questions of a universal nature, asked in the Western tradition about the West, were not asked in the context of the Malay world, because the Orient was held to be so different, so unique. For example, Furnivall's notion of the plural society, a society defined by ethno-religious and linguistic groups rather than classes, that lived side by side but separately, and only met in the marketplace, took its toll on Malay studies by distracting attention away from class and modes of

production analysis. The reality was that in the mid- to late-nineteenth century the labour force in tin-mining in the Malay states of Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan consisted of Malays and Chinese. The same could be said of the capital-owning class.

5. There is the European moral bias. In the colonial period, there was the convenient failure to notice the discrepancy between the lofty ideals of the civilisation of the coloniser and its brutal practices. In France, for example, there was the paradox between the discourse on freedom and humanism and the practice of slavery in the colonies during the French revolution. This is also true of the colonial scholarship on Raffles in the context of Singapore, a discourse that has been internalised by the post-colonial state (with the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore being an exception!).
6. An interesting feature of Orientalism is silencing. There is a tendency in Orientalist scholarship to be silent about certain themes or topics, although they are empirically relevant. There is the tendency to select themes and topics that are in line with the Orientalist image of the Malays. For example, Orientalist scholarship tends to study the more feudalistic oriented classical Malay literary texts or to emphasise their feudal elements, ignoring the egalitarian trends in the same literature. The few Malays scholars who have raised the problem of feudal values in Malay literature have hardly ever been cited by scholars in the field of Malay studies. The same can be said of the theme of exploitation.

Malay world scholars have critiqued Western scholarship in the area of Malay studies. A counter-Orientalist anti-colonial colonial scholarship, in fact, emerged in the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore since its founding in 1967.

A department to promote Malay Studies was established at the University of Malaya, Singapore in the 1952/53 session on the recommendation of the Commission for University Education in Malaya. Za'ba (Zainal Abidin Ahmad) was the first head of department, followed later by Dr R. Roolvink. Following the independence of Malaya and the establishment of a separate University in Kuala Lumpur, the Department was transferred to Kuala Lumpur. Meanwhile, on January 1, 1962, the Singapore Division of the University of Malaya was re-established as the University of Singapore (renamed the National University of Singapore in 1980). On March 1, 1967, the Department of Malay Studies was re-established in Singapore with Prof Dr Syed Hussein Alatas as head of department.<sup>1</sup>

Since its founding, the department has produced a tradition in anti-colonial and counter-Orientalist social science. According to Alatas:

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<sup>1</sup> For a biography of Alatas, see Masturah Alatas, *The Life in the Writing Syed Hussein Alatas: Author of The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Kuala Lumpur: Marshall Cavendish, 2010. See also Masturah Alatas, "Malaysian Fidel", *Counterpunch* 29 November, 2016. <https://www.counterpunch.org/2016/11/29/malaysian-fidel/> [accessed August 2, 2018].

A tradition can be expected to emerge. By tradition it is not meant the mere presence of disparate studies of local or regional subjects by indigenous scholars. Apart from the traits we have earlier cited, there is one significant overriding trait of a tradition, that is, the continuous discussion of a set of major problems and ideas in the course of long duration, decades or centuries, reflecting the cumulative development of knowledge concerning particular subjects. An example is the discussion on the French Revolution or periodisation in European history.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the Department of Malay Studies has a tradition of creating alternative discourses to Orientalism. These including the writings of Syed Hussein Alatas. Examples include the historical, sociological research on colonial ideology with a focus on the political philosophy of Raffles<sup>3</sup> and the myth of Malay, Javanese and Filipino laziness,<sup>4</sup> his critique of intellectual imperialism,<sup>5</sup> and his call for an autonomous social science tradition in Asia.<sup>6</sup>

The formative period of Alatas' thought was European colonialism, particularly in British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. The nature of colonial society is understood in terms of the concept of colonial capitalism, an idea which was discussed by Alatas in his demystifying and deconstructing work, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*.<sup>7</sup> Some European ideas about the natives functioned as constituent parts of colonial ideology to advance the interests of colonial capitalism. Above all, Alatas was concerned with the nature and perniciousness of colonial depictions and images of the native and how these images affected the colonised to the point of being internalised and believed in by them.

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<sup>2</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, "The Autonomous, the Universal and the Future of Sociology", *Current Sociology* 54, (2006): 7–23, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, *Thomas Stamford Raffles 1781-1826: schemer or reformer*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A study of the image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its function in the ideology of colonial capitalism*, London: Frank Cass, 1977. See also Masturah Alatas, "Four decades of a Malay myth", *The New Mandala* January 23, 2017.

<http://www.newmandala.org/four-decades-malay-myth/> [accessed August 2, 2018].

<sup>5</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, Academic Imperialism. Lecture delivered to the History Society, University of Singapore on 26 September, 1969; Syed Hussein Alatas, "Intellectual imperialism: definition, traits and problems", *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 28, 1(2000): 23-45.

<sup>6</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, "Towards an Asian social science tradition", *New Quest* 17, 1979: 265-269; Syed Hussein Alatas, "Social aspects of endogenous intellectual creativity: the problem of obstacles – guidelines for research". In A Abdel-Malek & A. N. Pandeya, ed. *Intellectual creativity in endogenous culture*, Tokyo: United Nations University, 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A study of the image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its function in the ideology of colonial capitalism*, London: Frank Cass, 1977.

The ideology of colonial capitalism functioned to justify the workings and interests of colonial capitalism. A central feature of this ideology was the denigration of the natives and their history. They were portrayed as unintelligent, lazy, evil and unfit to rule.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, it was the victims of colonial rule who were blamed rather than the colonial masters, the exploiters. Colonial administrators and scholars, that is, the ideologues of colonial rule, rarely pointed to injustices and atrocities committed by the Europeans against the natives or other non-Europeans. All this was done in the name of dispassionate, objective scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

The adoption of the ideology of the coloniser by the colonised is a reflection of the ubiquity of the captive mind, an “uncritical and imitative mind dominated by an external source, whose thinking is deflected from an independent perspective”.<sup>10</sup> The external source is Western knowledge and academia which tends to dominate all the levels of scientific activity such as problem-selection, conceptualisation, analysis, generalisation, description, explanation and interpretation.<sup>11</sup> The traits of the captive mind include the inability to be creative and raise original problems, the inability to devise original analytical methods, and alienation from the main issues of indigenous society. The captive mind is trained almost entirely in the Western sciences, reads the works of Western authors, and is taught predominantly by Western teachers, whether in the West itself or through their works available in local centres of education. Mental captivity is also found in the suggestion of solutions and policies. Furthermore, it reveals itself at the levels of theoretical as well as empirical work. Alatas had also suggested that the mode of thinking of colonised peoples paralleled political and economic imperialism. Hence, the expression “academic imperialism”, the context within which the captive mind appears.<sup>12</sup>

Alatas had suggested that the International Sociological Association organise a session at the World Congress of Sociology on the issue of an autonomous sociological tradition in order to “alert sociologists throughout the world to pool their attention on this extremely vital need for the development of sociology” and, therefore, to counter the influence of the captive mind.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the South is not lacking in creative and original thinkers. Many examples of alternative discourses can be cited from various countries in Asian and Africa.

Some of Alatas’ students wrote along the lines of an autonomous social science tradition. Examples are Shaharuddin Maaruf’s works on the re-examination of the concept of the hero in Malay tradition, his critical study

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<sup>8</sup> Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, pp. 8, 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, ‘The Captive Mind and Creative Development’, *International Social Science Journal* 36, 4 (1974): 691-699, p. 692.

<sup>11</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, ‘The Captive Mind in Development Studies’, *International Social Science Journal* 34, 1 (1972): 9-25, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Alatas ‘Academic Imperialism’; Alatas, “Intellectual Imperialism”.

<sup>13</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, “The Autonomous, the Universal and the Future of Sociology”, *Current Sociology* 54, (2006): 7-23, p. 17.

on Malay ideas of development in which he examines the ideological nature of what mainstream scholarship considers to be progressive ideas, and his fresh perspective and theorising of tradition and modernisation in the Malay world,<sup>14</sup> and Sharifah Maznah Syed Omar's critical work that examines the role of myth in maintaining the interests of the feudal elite.<sup>15</sup> A Malay Studies scholar from the third generation, Azhar Ibrahim Alwee, has made many contributions to the critique of Orientalism in the study of the Malay world.<sup>16</sup> Azhar has carefully delineated the main features of Orientalism as they are found in the study of Malay literature, history and society. Another scholar from Malay Studies in Singapore, Tham Seong Chee, wrote on the problem of intellectual colonisation.<sup>17</sup>

The Malay Studies approach, which can be said to be a decolonial one, is largely influenced by Alatas, and informs the writings of the first and second generation of scholars following him. Take, for example, Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, a student of Alatas and currently the Head of the Department of Malay Studies. She works in the area of the administration of Muslim law and also has a larger interest in the religious orientation of the Malays. In her approach there is a concern with the colonial image, be it of law, religion, Malay culture and so on.<sup>18</sup> Beyond this, there is the recognition of the continuities between the colonial and post-colonial era in which it is noted that certain colonial orientations about the Malays had been internalised by the Malays themselves and survived into the period after independence. Also distinctive of the Malay Studies approach is the position that it was not only colonialism that played a role in the construction of

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<sup>14</sup> Shaharuddin Maaruf, *The concept of the hero in Malay society*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1984; Shaharuddin Maaruf, *Malay ideas on development: from feudal lord to capitalist*, Singapore: Times Book International, 1989; Shaharuddin Maaruf, "Some theoretical problems concerning tradition and modernization among the Malays of Southeast Asia", in Yong Mun Cheong, ed., *Asian tradition and modernization: perspectives from Singapore*, Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Sharifah Maznah Syed Omar, *Myths and the Malay ruling class*, Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Azhar Ibrahim, "Orientalisme dalam pengajian Melayu". Persidangan Antarabangsa Bahasa, Sastra dan Kebudayaan Melayu ke-2, bertemakan "Ke arah bitara keserjanaan Melayu", Singapura, 1-3 September 2002; Azhar Ibrahim, "Sociological Readings of Classical Malay Literature: Possible Contribution to the Sociology of Religion of Malays of South-East Asia," in Zaiton Ajamain & Norazian Ahmad, eds., *Kesusasteraan Tradisional Asia Tenggara*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 2005, pp. 416-436; Azhar Ibrahim, "Contemporary Malay Studies: Diverging Visions, Competing Priorities and its Implications: A Critique", *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 35, 4-5(2007): 657-680; Azhar Ibrahim, "Orientalism, Ethno-Religious Exclusivism and Academicism in Malay Studies: The Challenges for the Emergence of an Autonomous Sociological Discourse." Paper presented at the World Congress of Sociology, RC 35: Concept Formation in Asian Sociology, 16 July 2010, Gothenberg, Sweden; Azhar Ibrahim, *Menyanggah Belunggu Kerancuan Fikiran Masakini* Kuala Lumpur: SIRD, 2016; Azhar Ibrahim, *Historical Imagination and Cultural Responses to Colonialism and Nationalism: A Critical Malay(sian) Perspective*. Kuala Lumpur: SIRD, 2017 (English version of Azhar Ibrahim, *Menyanggah Belunggu*).

<sup>17</sup> Tham Seong Chee, "Intellectual Colonization", *Suara Universiti* 2,2(1971): 39-40.

<sup>18</sup> See her book, *Colonial Image of Malay Adat Laws: A Critical Appraisal of Studies on Adat Law in the Malay Peninsula during the Colonial Era and Some Continuities*, Leiden: Brill, 2006.

regressive orientations about the Malays, but also the Malay ruling class which not only internalised those orientations but benefitted from colonial capitalism and was party to the exploitation of the Malays.<sup>19</sup> It is further recognised that the dominant thinking about the Malays and their problems tends to be culturalist, overemphasising the role and influence of Islam in an essentialist and ahistorical manner.<sup>20</sup> Noor Aisha defines the culturalist approach in the following manner:

The approach is characterised by a style of thought in which perspectives and methodology from the social sciences utilised in understanding culture and society are largely neglected. Although culturalists are not anti-culture and do not ignore it in defining a community, the problem lies in their tendency to shore up an essentialist culture, one perceived as a static, homogeneous set of common identifiers that defines a community, such as language, race or religion, wrapped into a sense of common identity. This identity is deemed more or less stable, permanent and fixed at any given point in time in terms of its meanings and forms.<sup>21</sup>

There is a tendency in the culturalist approach to view communities as static and isolated, immune from the variety of material and ideal influences that are often the subject of social scientific investigations.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, Noor Aisha notes that the culturalist approach is held to be a survival of the Orientalist thought style inherited from the colonial period.<sup>23</sup> It is a continuation of the reductionist, essentialist thinking that characterised colonial, Orientalist thought in the past that has survived into the post-colonial period and internalised by the post-colonial state and society actors.<sup>24</sup>

The task of critique and reconstruction is to then examine the dominant orientations or styles of thought in a particular domain of life sociologically and to then assess the impact of this orientation on the actual lives of

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<sup>19</sup> Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, pp. 159-63.

<sup>20</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, "Changing Roles, Unchanging Perceptions and Institutions: Traditionalism and its Impact on Women and Globalization in Muslim Societies in Asia", *The Muslim World* 97(2007): 479-507, p. 479.

<sup>21</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, "Issues on Islam and the Muslims in Singapore Post-9/11: An Analysis of the Dominant Perspective", in Hui Yew-Foong, ed., *Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013, p. 337. See also, Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, "The Dominant Perspective on Terrorism and Its Implication for Social Cohesion: The Case of Singapore", *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 27, 2(2009): 109-128, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, "Issues on Islam and the Muslims in Singapore Post-9/11: An Analysis of the Dominant Perspective", p. 337-8.

<sup>23</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, "Issues on Islam and the Muslims in Singapore Post-9/11: An Analysis of the Dominant Perspective", p. 339.

<sup>24</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, personal communication, Singapore, 18 July 2018.

people.<sup>25</sup> The approach is by way of the sociology of knowledge and draws upon the work of Karl Mannheim<sup>26</sup>, in addition to Alatas.

The Malay Studies approach I am referring to does not today characterise the whole department. Not all of the staff in the department had adopted this approach. It can be said to be a tradition within the department. During the period that Alatas was at the department (1967-1988), the approach was more dominant because many of the students he trained had later joined the department as lecturers.<sup>27</sup> Malay Studies, as a systematic field of inquiry in the social sciences, was developed with a distinctive and original approach by Alatas. Noor Aisha's assessment sums this up very well:

Unlike the dominant anti-social science approach that had characterised representations of the Malays during the colonial period and thereafter, Malay Studies began to witness the emergence of a critical and systematic body of knowledge that creatively selected and assimilated perspectives, concepts and methodologies from both Western social science and indigenous and Asian intellectual traditions, to raise and diagnose problems of relevance to the Malays. Theses and monographs produced by students and academic staff during this period raised original problems that reflected not the interests of those in power but concerns and challenges of the Malays and Asian societies more generally as they adapt to political, economic, socio-cultural changes and the process of development. Even research and the teaching of language and literature departed from the emphasis on formalism but was conceived and approached as a mirror of social history. Studies were approached and understood using the contributions of relevant social science perspectives and concepts such as sociology of knowledge, social structure, ideology and its function, social change, modernisation, elites, and so on. At the same time, new concepts were created from indigenous sources and traditions to explicate phenomenon.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to note that there are some works critical of Eurocentrism and the blind imitation of knowledge from the Western knowledge centres that came out of other departments at the National University of Singapore. I only mention a few here. They are Myrna Blake's caution against the imitation of family therapy,<sup>29</sup> Wang Gungwu's call for Asian perspectives in

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<sup>25</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, "Traditionalism and its Impact on the Administration of Justice: The Case of the Syariah Court of Singapore," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5, 3(2004): 415-432.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1936; Karl Mannheim, *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1986.

<sup>27</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, Personal correspondence, 28 July 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, Personal correspondence, 28 July 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Myrna L. Blake, "The Portability of Family Therapy to Different Cultural and Socio-Economic Contexts", *Asia-Pacific Journal of Social Work* 1, 2(1991): 32-60.

the social sciences,<sup>30</sup> and the several works of my colleague and co-author in the Department of Sociology, Vineeta Sinha, on the problems of and alternatives to both the Eurocentric and androcentric bias in the social sciences.<sup>31</sup> Of particular interest is Sinha's paper, "Re-building institutional structures in the social sciences through critique", which critically assesses the project, *Open the Social Sciences*, which is itself aimed at rethinking and restructuring the social sciences.<sup>32</sup> Also noteworthy is the work of another sociology colleague, Eric Thompson, on academic dependency.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Silencing of Malay Studies**

Despite the contributions of scholars working out of the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore to anti-Orientalist and counter-colonial discourses over the course of several decades, their works have generally been ignored at the National University of Singapore itself. This silencing has consequences. Before proceeding to discuss the instances of silencing with reference to specific authors, I would like to suggest that there are two forms of silencing that are relevant. One is silencing as omission and the other silencing as dismissal. Both forms of silencing serve to marginalise an already marginal discourse.

#### *Silencing as omission*

Citation and referencing practices may contribute to the marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion of certain discourses, in our case, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-Orientalist ones. One way this is done is through silencing, that is, the very act of not citing or referencing certain works or authors. It is silencing by way of omission, ignoring, neglect,

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<sup>30</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Shifting paradigms and Asian perspectives: implications for research and teaching", in Syed Farid Alatas, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Pagesetters, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Vineeta Sinha, "Reconceptualising the Social Sciences in non-Western Settings: Challenges and Dilemmas", *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 25, 1(1997): 167-181; Vineeta Sinha, "Moving Beyond Critique: Practising the Social Sciences in the Context of Globality, Post-modernity and Post-coloniality." *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 28, 1 (2000): 67-104; Vineeta Sinha, "Reading Harriet Martineau in the Context of Social Thought and Social Theory", *Akademika* 28(2001); Vineeta Sinha, "Re-building institutional structures in the social sciences through critique," in Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, Proceedings of the ISA Regional Conference for Southeast Asia, Singapore, 30 May - 1 June 1998, Singapore: Pagesetters, 2001, pp. 78-87; Vineeta Sinha, "De-centering social sciences in practice through individual acts and choices", *Current Sociology* 51, 1(2003): 7-26. See also Syed Farid Alatas & Vineeta Sinha, "Teaching Classical Theory in Singapore: The Context of Eurocentrism", *Teaching Sociology* 29, 3(2001): 316-331; See also our joint work, Syed Farid Alatas & Vineeta Sinha, *Sociological Theory Beyond the Canon*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Eric C. Thompson, "Internet Mediated Networking and Academic Dependency in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the United States", *Current Sociology* 54, 1(2006): 41-61.

inattention and disregard. Such silencing practices serve to devalue or diminish the status and prestige of already marginalised discourses and contribute to the unevenness of global knowledge production. While it is true that the social sciences are still largely dominated by whites and males, these are not the only practitioners engaged in citation and referencing practices that silence. Some proponents of anti-colonial discourses or those located outside of the knowledge powers, perhaps surprisingly, also practice silencing discourses.

Citations are not merely quantitative proxies for measuring the impact of authors' papers and monographs. Qualitatively speaking, citations may indicate a "conscientious engagement" with the discipline or a body of work rather than merely being a quantitative measure of impact.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the unwillingness or failure to cite or acknowledge the work of others, no matter how pertinent or relevant those works are, suggests the lack of conscientious engagement with relevant bodies of work. Citational practices may function to either reify or challenge and resist existing hierarchies of knowledge.<sup>35</sup> When critics of Orientalist and colonial discourses fail to cite and acknowledge the contributions of their fellow critics, their work inadvertently but effectively contributes to the perpetuation of Euroamerican, androcentric hierarchies, and regimes of knowledge production and their coloniality.

In what follows, I discuss a few examples of writings from the National University of Singapore that engage in silencing by way of omission. The omitted works, the works that fail to be cited, coming out of the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore, are those that are extremely pertinent and relevant to the domain of discourse of the silencers who, nonetheless seem not to be aware of or to be uninterested or indifferent to such works.

Stella Quah, currently an adjunct professor at the Duke-NUS Medical School's Health Services & Systems Research Programme, taught for many years at the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. Specialising in medical sociology and family sociology, Quah is an accomplished researcher in her field and also contributes to other areas such as social class, professions, social policy and general sociology.<sup>36</sup>

Among Quah's writings is a series of articles that discuss issues relating to the sociology of knowledge in which theoretical and methodological questions concerning the state of Asian sociology are raised. In a special issue of *Current Sociology*, *Asian Sociologists at Work*, edited by her in 1993, she discusses "the main trends and directions in the current discussion of different types of sociologies variously labelled 'national', 'indigenous' and

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<sup>34</sup> Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne, "Citation Matters: Mobilizing the Politics of Citation Toward a Practice of 'Conscientious Engagement'", *Gender, Place and Culture* 2017, p. 3. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1339022>

<sup>35</sup> Mott and Daniel Cockayne, "Citation Matters", p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> See her website, [http://www.stellarquah.com/about\\_stella\\_quah.html](http://www.stellarquah.com/about_stella_quah.html).

‘global’ or ‘international’.<sup>37</sup> She notes a dilemma that sociologists in Asia and the Third World, in general, have, namely, that of two alternative calls. One is to maintain internationally recognised standards of scholarship in theory building and methodology, and the other is to write in a way that is relevant to the lives of their own people. Nowhere in this paper or anywhere else, however, does Quah refer to the writings of [Syed Hussein] Alatas, who was a colleague in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore (1967-1988), and who had written precisely on those concerns since the 1950s.

Quah brings attention to the indigenous sociology movement that emerged as a result of concerns with the Americanisation of sociology. Although her work is about the Asian sociology, it is telling that there is practically no reference to Asian sociologists who had contributed much to the debate about indigenous, endogenous and national sociology. A long list of Indian, Filipino and Indonesian scholars, who had made serious contributions to these issues, was omitted by Quah.<sup>38</sup> Although she makes mention of an African debate, there was no reference to the voluminous literature across Asia.<sup>39</sup> There was also no mention of [Syed Hussein] Alatas’ work on the captive mind or on endogenous intellectual creativity or his writings on the need for an autonomous tradition in Asian social science, not to mention his critique of intellectual imperialism.<sup>40</sup> Quah had intended to discuss the different types of sociologies that had emerged in some Asian countries but had neglected the contributions to these differences that were made at the National University of Singapore itself.

Quah concludes, “it appears that the closest interpretation of the concerns of native sociologists in the Third World, is embodied in the concept of indigenous sociology”.<sup>41</sup> She may not have come to such a conclusion had she actually read and cited the works of several Asian sociologists who were critical of the hegemony of Euroamerican sociology but who nevertheless did not subscribe to the notion of indigenisation. A case in point is Alatas who spoke rather of the need for an autonomous social science tradition among Asian scholars.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Stella Quah, “The Native Sociologist and the Challenge of Science: National, Indigenous and Global Sociologies”, in S. R. Quah, ed., *Asian Sociologists at Work*, London: Sage, *Current Sociology* 41, 1(1993): 95-106, p. 95.

<sup>38</sup> Quah cites one Japanese and one Indian scholar. See Quah, “The Native Sociologist and the Challenge of Science”, p. 105. For a discussion on Asian contributions see [Syed Farid] Alatas, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science*, especially chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>39</sup> Stella R. Quah, “Sociologists in the International Arena: Diverse Settings, Same Concerns”, S. R. Quah, ed., *Asian Sociologists at Work*, London: Sage, *Current Sociology* 41, 1(1993): 1-23. See p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Alatas, “The Captive Mind in Development Studies”; Alatas, “The Captive Mind and Creative Development”; Alatas, “Social aspects of endogenous intellectual creativity: the problem of obstacles – guidelines for research”; Alatas, “Towards an Asian social science tradition”; Alatas, *Academic Imperialism*; Alatas, “Intellectual imperialism: definition, traits and problems”.

<sup>41</sup> Quah, “The Native Sociologist and the Challenge of Science”, p. 102.

<sup>42</sup> Alatas, “The Autonomous, the Universal and the Future of Sociology”,

Quah makes the contentious and erroneous point that, in general, indigenous and global sociology are incompatible. Apart from not having demonstrated what Asian indigenous sociologies, if they actually existed, look like, the position is prematurely arrived at. The vast majority of proponents of non-Eurocentric sociology in Asia, including those who call for the indigenisation of sociology, would agree that sociology ought to (1) contribute to theory; (2) advance comparative research; (3) devise relevant concepts to the national setting; (4) devise methodologies relevant to national conditions and (5) create a sociology relevant to national development, the five challenges listed by Quah. Again, had Quah referred to the sizeable literature in Asia on the topic she may have concluded that so-called indigenous sociology and global sociology are compatible.

It is also remarkable that Quah, in discussing the appraisals or stock-taking of developments and trends in sociology,<sup>43</sup> only looks at Western<sup>44</sup> rather than Asian ones.<sup>45</sup> In several places, Quah had also referred to Rubington and Weinberg's 'dual mandate' of sociology,<sup>46</sup> that is, to develop sociology as a discipline as well as to solve social problems.<sup>47</sup> This, in fact, refers to the role of intellectuals, a group that has a certain level of consciousness and insight, and which is able to deal with the vital problems of society. Again, there is no reference to the writings of Asian scholars on the role of sociology or of intellectuals.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the issues and concerns referred to or raised by Quah in her papers cited here were also discussed in *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, edited by Syed Farid Alatas. Both Syed Hussein Alatas and Shaharuddin Maaruf, the then acting head of the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore, were present at this conference. This volume represents the proceedings of the International Sociological Association Regional Conference for Southeast Asia that was convened by [Syed Farid] Alatas and held at the National University of Singapore in May/June 1998 at which Quah was a participant. The papers presented at this conference and published in the proceedings covered

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<sup>43</sup> Quah, "Sociologists in the International Arena: Diverse Settings, Same Concerns", pp. 4-9.

<sup>44</sup> She discusses Ritzer. George Ritzer, *Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1975.

<sup>45</sup> Examples are Alatas writings on the captive mind or academic imperialism.

<sup>46</sup> Quah, "The Native Sociologist and the Challenge of Science", p. 103; Stella R. Quah, "Four Sociologies, Multiple Roles", *The British Journal of Sociology* 56, 3(2005): 395-400, p. 397; Stella R. Quah, "Sociology: Opportunities and Professional Challenges", *Asian Journal of Social Science* 39(2011): 30-38, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> Earl Rubington & Martin S. Weinberg, *The Study of Social Problems. Six Perspectives*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 298-9.

<sup>48</sup> See for example, Syed Hussein Alatas, *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*, London: Frank Cass, 1977; André Béteille, *Ideologies and Intellectuals*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980; André Béteille, "Secularism and Intellectuals", *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, 10 (Mar. 5, 1994), pp. 559-566; Rajeev S. Patke, "Is there any Intellectual in this Room?: An Asian Problem", in Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, pp. 119-28.

topics such as academic imperialism, Asian perspectives in knowledge production, the sociology of sociology, and Eurocentrism and Orientalism.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, it is pertinent to note that Quah discusses “the interesting pattern of ignoring colleagues’ work” which she sees as a “failure to curb personal bias”.<sup>50</sup> She proposes several theoretical interpretations to understand this phenomenon. Her short but useful discussion on this is worth reading, if for no other reason but the irony that it invokes.<sup>51</sup>

Another scholar who can be said to have omitted the contributions to anti-colonial and anti-Eurocentric discourses from the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore is Goh Beng Lan. Goh is an associate professor in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.<sup>52</sup> She has written several important papers that are relevant to the issue of knowledge production in Southeast Asian studies.

At the same time, however, one may note that Goh’s discussions on the state of knowledge in the field of Southeast Asian studies ignore and omits the role of scholars from Malay Studies at NUS. The reason for this cannot be that they are from Malay Studies as opposed to Southeast Asian Studies, for the field of Malay studies is usually seen to be part of the larger field of Southeast Asian studies. Many writers in the area of Malay studies actually speak of Southeast Asia and publish in Southeast Asian and Asian studies journals, for example.

In her discussion on recentring knowledge production back to the regions as an alternative to Eurocentric perspectives, she fails to mention a great deal of scholarship from Malay Studies that has attempted to engage in this decentring since the 1960s.<sup>53</sup> She mentions the issue of “alternative social scientific discourses” but does not refer to [Syed Farid] Alatas’ *Alternative*

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<sup>49</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, “Academic Imperialism”, in Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, pp. 32-46; Wang Gungwu, “Shifting Paradigms and Asian Perspectives: Implications for Research and Teaching”, in Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, pp. 47-54; Shaharuddin Maaruf, “The Social Sciences in Southeast Asia: Sociology of Anti-Sociology and Alienated Social Sciences”, in Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, pp. 88-103; Ignas Kleden, “The Orient and the Occident: From Binary Opposition to Hermeneutic Circle”, in Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, pp. 104-118; Syed Farid Alatas, “Alternative Discourses in Southeast Asia”, in Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, pp.13-31. Quah also has a paper in this volume. Stella Quah, “Of Consensus, Tensions, and Sociology beyond the Western Sphere”, Alatas, S.F, ed., *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia*, pp. 68-77.

<sup>50</sup> Stella R. Quah, “Beyond the Known Terrain: Sociology in Singapore”, *The American Sociologist* 26, 4(1995): 88-106, p. 98.

<sup>51</sup> Quah, “Beyond the Known Terrain”, p. 98.

<sup>52</sup> See her profile at <http://profile.nus.edu.sg/fass/seagohbl/>.

<sup>53</sup> Goh Beng Lan, “Southeast Asian Perspectives on Disciplines and Afterlives of Area Studies in a Global Age”, in Zawawi Ibrahim, ed., *Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World*, Kajang: Malaysian Social Science Association & Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2012, pp. 79-102, p. 80.

*Discourses in Asian Social Science*,<sup>54</sup> which was published in 2006. In her discussion on John Smail and the issue of autonomous history<sup>55</sup>, there is no reference either to [Syed Hussein] Alatas' several papers on theoretical aspects of Southeast Asian and Malay history<sup>56</sup> nor to numerous other relevant works published by Malaysians and others. She discusses the question of how "local scholars negotiate the difference in what counts as 'scholarship' in Southeast Asian and Euro-American settings while remaining true to their calling to prioritise local perspectives" without reference to such negotiations in Malay Studies.<sup>57</sup>

The most obvious and glaring of Goh's omissions are to be found in an essay published in a booklet issued on the occasion of the official opening of the Asian Studies Building in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore in 2017.<sup>58</sup> Here, Goh refers to the epistemological problems facing Asian studies at NUS:

Akin to Euro-American models of Area Studies, the lack of coherent frameworks similarly haunts the NUS model of Area Studies. In part, this problem is augmented by the primacy of English in human science practices at NUS which makes its model of Area Studies more susceptible to the globally dominant post-Second World War, North American academic practices. In addition, increasing pressures of benchmarking in NUS academic practices against western universities have meant that its area study practices are more encumbered by disciplinary and theoretical polemics emanating from North American human sciences than when compared to its neighbouring countries.

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<sup>54</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Sciences*, Delhi: Sage, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Goh Beng Lan, "Southeast Asian Perspectives on Disciplines and Afterlives of Area Studies in a Global Age", p. 82. See also Goh Beng Lan, "Southeast Asian Perspectives on Area Studies in a Global Age", *Jati: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, Special issue, (2010): 45-61, p. 47; Goh Beng-Lan, "Disciplines and Area Studies in the Global Age: Southeast Asian Reflections", in Goh Beng-Lan, ed., *Decentring & Diversifying Southeast Asian Studies: Perspectives from the Region*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011, pp. 1-59, pp. 5-6. John R. W. Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, 2(1961): 72-102.

<sup>56</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, "Theoretical Aspects of Southeast Asian History: John Bastin and the Study of Southeast Asian History," *Asian Studies* 2, 2(1964): 247-260. This paper was a response to John Bastin's inaugural lecture, *The Study of Modern Southeast Asian History: An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur on 14 December 1959*, Kuala Lumpur: The University of Malaya, 1959. A shorter version of this was published as "The Western Element in Modern Southeast Asian History", *Papers on Southeast Asian Subjects*, no. 2, Department of History, The University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, 1960. Another relevant paper of [Syed Hussein] Alatas is "Reconstruction of Malaysian History," *Revue du Sud-est Asiatique* 3(1962): 219-245.

<sup>57</sup> Goh Beng Lan, "Southeast Asian Perspectives on Area Studies in a Global Age", *Jati: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, Special issue, (2010): 45-61, p. 46; Goh, "Disciplines and Area Studies in the Global Age", pp. 2-3.

<sup>58</sup> Goh Beng Lan, "The Future of Asian Studies: A Personal View", in *Asian Studies*. Printed on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the AS8 Building, October 2-3, 2017, Singapore: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 2017, pp. 26-39. This building houses the five Asian Studies departments, Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, Malay Studies, South Asian Studies and Southeast Asian Studies.

Against this background, it is not surprising that the five departments will continue to face conundrums over whether a truly interdisciplinary approach along with coherent sets of epistemological strategies can be really feasible.<sup>59</sup>

Much of what Goh states here does not apply to Malay Studies at NUS. Despite the dominant use of English, the increasing dominance of the North American academic model, and greater stress on benchmarking against Western university practices, the Department of Malay Studies has, over the decades, fashioned an approach that is counter-Orientalist and anti-colonial. This has been discussed in more detail above. While noting that “there is promise for the Asian Studies Division to play a concerted role in advancing critical-decolonised directions relevant to the study of communities located in East, South and Southeast Asian societies”, Goh makes absolutely no reference to the contribution of Malay Studies to such a discourse.<sup>60</sup> In the case of Malay Studies such a discourse had already emerged since the 1960s and so it is erroneous to merely refer to it as a promise.

Goh discusses as a critical and influential approach, the Inter-Asia orientation, an approach promoted by the Consortium of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies in various Asian institutions, particularly in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, India, Indonesia and Singapore. Chua Beng Huat at NUS is the Singapore-based core consortium member who has played a key role in establishing Cultural Studies at NUS. Goh refers to the Inter-Asia project as the most established and coherent of projects, stating that others are emergent or nebulous.<sup>61</sup> Again, there is no reference to Malay Studies which can hardly be said to constitute an emergent and nebulous project. Goh makes the claim that Asian Studies at NUS has for the greater part been influenced by the Inter-Asia project.<sup>62</sup> Without doubting the influence of the Inter-Asia project, it is puzzling that not a word is mentioned of the Malay Studies approach, which is not only older than the Inter-Asia project but also home-grown at NUS. Goh’s omission is all the more glaring in view of the fact that elsewhere she refers in a footnote to some works of [Syed Hussein] Alatas in the context of discussing local contributions to concept formation.<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Goh, while herself practising omission, notes that voices that came to be known under the labels of the indigenisation and decolonisation of knowledge movements were marginalised by scholars of Southeast Asian studies in the West.<sup>64</sup> She makes no mention of the contributions of the scholars of the Department of Malay Studies over the decades in her survey of revisionist trends.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Goh, “The Future of Asian Studies”, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> Goh, “The Future of Asian Studies”, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> Goh, “The Future of Asian Studies”, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Goh, “The Future of Asian Studies”, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Goh, “Disciplines and Area Studies in the Global Age”, pp. 5, 46-7, n. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Goh, “Disciplines and Area Studies in the Global Age”, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Goh, “Disciplines and Area Studies in the Global Age”, pp. 7-10.

Goh does, however, place a great deal of importance on the Inter-Asia approach that revolves around a founding member of the Consortium of Inter-Cultural Studies in Asia, Chen Kuan-Hsing and his notion of “Asia as Method”.

The Inter-Asia or “Asia as method” approach was developed from a 1960s lecture by the Japanese scholar, Takeuchi Yoshimi, entitled “Asia as Method”.<sup>66</sup> Takeuchi makes a plea for comparative studies among Asian societies instead of limiting ourselves to viewing Asia vis-à-vis the West. An example would be the comparison between China and Japan as representatives of different types of modernisation.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, it is not easy to understand from Takeuchi’s text what Asia as method means. He suggests that the Orient must change the West such that the West will recognise the Orient’s “outstanding cultural values”. He refers to this as a rollback of culture or values. Such a rollback would create universality.<sup>68</sup> Takeuchi then goes on to say:

When this rollback takes place, we must have our own cultural values. And yet perhaps these values do not already exist, in substantive form. Rather, I suspect that they are possible as a method, that is to say, as the process of the subject’s self-formation. This I have called “Asia as Method,” and yet it is impossible to definitely state what this might mean.<sup>69</sup>

I must admit that I do not understand what this means and that I am no closer to learning about what “Asia as method” entails for research and writing in a non-Orientalist and decolonial mode of thought.<sup>70</sup> Chen Kuan-Hsing, however, rereads Takeuchi’s “Asia as Method” in order to elaborate an “Inter-Asia methodology”.<sup>71</sup> As Chen notes, Takeuchi’s plea for the comparative method is relevant to the theoretical underdevelopment in Asia. Theory may advance if comparative studies among Asian societies are carried out, with the added requirement of emphatic understanding, or what Takeuchi refers to as entering into the hearts of the many people living in these countries.<sup>72</sup> Such comparative studies would effect a more productive inter-Asia referencing rather than orient our thinking toward Euro-America.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Asia as Method”, in Richard F. Calichman, ed., *What is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 149-165.

<sup>67</sup> Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Asia as Method”, p. 157.

<sup>68</sup> Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Asia as Method”, p. 165.

<sup>69</sup> Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Asia as Method”, p. 165.

<sup>70</sup> Equally difficult to follow is the discussion on “China as method” in Mizoguchi Yuzo, “China as method”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17, 4(2016): 513-518.

<sup>71</sup> Chen Kuan-Hsing, “Takeuchi Yoshimi’s 1960 ‘Asia as Method’ Lecture”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 13, 2 (2012): 317-324.

<sup>72</sup> Chen, “Takeuchi Yoshimi’s 1960 ‘Asia as Method’ Lecture”, p. 320; Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Asia as Method”, p. 151.

<sup>73</sup> Chen, “Takeuchi Yoshimi’s 1960 ‘Asia as Method’ Lecture”, pp. 320, 322.

The idea of “Asia as method” is more thoroughly articulated in Chen’s book, *Asia as Method*.<sup>74</sup> “Asia as method” is proposed as a means of bringing about a transformation of existing knowledge structures by making societies in Asia as “each other’s points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt.”<sup>75</sup> What this means is comparative studies or inter-reference studies within Asia, rather than applying Euro-American theory to local experiences.<sup>76</sup> Comparative studies by way of inter-Asia referencing are necessary to yield ways of understanding Asian societies that have hitherto remained unavailable because the point of reference has been Europe and America.<sup>77</sup>

Goh’s enthusiasm for the novelties and advances of the inter-Asia approach<sup>78</sup> is in contrast to her omission of references to the Malay Studies approach. The novelty of the inter-Asia or “Asia as method” approach is not clear to me, although this is not the place to enter into a critical discussion on it. What is puzzling to me is how scholars located at NUS could have missed referencing the several prominent interventions in the discourses and conversations on Eurocentric social sciences and its alternatives that have emerged from within Malay Studies. Also omitting mention of the contributions of Malay Studies is Chua Beng Huat who regards Chen Kuan-Hsing’s “Asia as method” approach as a “more fruitful way forward” because the approach advocates treating the Euro-American as just one among many points of reference, as opposed to futile attempts at contestation by critics of intellectual imperialism and advocates of provincialising Europe and of local points of view.<sup>79</sup> The impression is given that the variety of different responses to Eurocentric, Orientalist knowledge structures and production are futile exercises because of the impossibility of excising Western paradigms and concepts from the education system in Asia. Here, Chua implies that the various projects of discourses that see themselves as alternatives to Eurocentric ones take this extreme approach to knowledge production. The untruth of this can be readily appreciated from a serious consideration of the Malay Studies approach to colonial knowledge and its survivals in the post-colonial period.

I think it only fair to mention that there is also a tendency in Malaysian social sciences to omit and ignore Malay Studies in Singapore. The omitted include the works of [Syed Hussein] Alatas and others from Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore.

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<sup>74</sup> Chen Kuan-Hsing, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Chen, *Asia as Method*, p. 212.

<sup>76</sup> Chen, *Asia as Method*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>77</sup> Chen, *Asia as Method*, p. 243.

<sup>78</sup> Goh, “The Future of Asian Studies”, pp. 33-34.

<sup>79</sup> Chua Beng Huat, “Inter-Asia Referencing and Shifting Frames of Comparison”, in Carol Johnson, Vera Mackie & Tessa Morris-Suzuki, eds., *The Social Sciences in the Asian Century*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2016, p. 68.

### *Silencing as dismissal*

Another form of silencing involves not omission but rather the dismissal or repudiation of certain types of discourses. Rather than an economy of ideas governed by practices of omission, there is a politics of dismissal that functions to marginalise certain discourses. I offer two instances of dismissal, both from past presidents of the International Sociological Association. It is important to note that dismissal is different from critique. Critique can be seen as a serious and creative engagement with an opposing discourse, whereas dismissal refers to an unconscientious and unserious engagement with such discourses.

Margaret Archer, in her Presidential Address to the International Sociological Association (ISA), criticised the move within sociology toward what she saw as fragmentation and localisation. In her address, entitled “Sociology for One World: Unity and Diversity,” Archer referred to “the irony of an increasingly global society which is met by an increasingly localised sociology”.<sup>80</sup> Our initial reaction to Archer’s title may be that the idea of a single discipline for a single world is acceptable as long as the notion of being single does not entail a monolithic and homogeneous sociology in ideological, theoretical, conceptual and methodological terms. Upon closer reading, however, there appear to be problems with Archer’s formulation.

What Archer seems to mean by one discipline is the commonality of human reason, that humans reason in the same way about society and social relations although concepts and methods may differ.<sup>81</sup> But Archer argues against a view of diversity informed by a more radical emic approach according to which incommensurability and untranslatability meant that diverse social phenomena could only be understood on their own terms.<sup>82</sup> In taking this position, she seems to be intolerant of radically different epistemologies. Archer also seems to accept the indigenisation programme in sociology on the condition that it does not reject ‘Western reason’ and that non-Western theory building and concept formation do not have non-rational foundations.<sup>83</sup> Archer’s view of the task of international sociology to theorise the “integration of diversity” and to create a new “theoretical variety” is well-taken, but it should be taken as just one alongside other more radical approaches. But, she seems to exclude the more radical approaches from the single sociology that she advocates. I must admit that I am unclear as to what Archer’s approach would imply for the acceptance or rejection of specific non-Western traditions of thought. For example, would Ibn Khaldun’s works be considered as falling outside of the domain of rational approaches?

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<sup>80</sup> Margaret Archer, “Sociology for One World: Unity and Diversity”, *International Sociology* 6, 2(1991): 131-147, p. 132.

<sup>81</sup> Archer, “Sociology for One World”, pp. 143-4.

<sup>82</sup> Archer, “Sociology for One World”, p. 133.

<sup>83</sup> Archer, “Sociology for One World”, p. 142.

A decidedly anti-indigenisation and probably anti-decolonial position is taken by another ex-president of the International Sociological Association, Piotr Sztompka. In 2011, Sztompka, president of the ISA from 2006-2010, critiqued [Syed Farid] Alatas' work in an issue of the journal, *Contemporary Sociology*.<sup>84</sup> This issue carried a section entitled "Debate in International Sociology" which published a polemic between Sztompka and the leading sociologist, Michael Burawoy. In his article entitled "Another Sociological Utopia", Sztompka had referred to a paper of [Syed Farid] Alatas, "The Definition and Types of Alternative Discourses".<sup>85</sup>

Sztompka sarcastically calls [Syed Farid] Alatas a champion of global sociology,<sup>86</sup> citing his point that "non-Western knowledge traditions and cultural practices should all be considered potential sources of social science theories and concepts, which would decrease academic dependence on the world social science powers".<sup>87</sup> But Sztompka does not agree with this position, suggesting instead that there is no need to consider non-Western sources of ideas and concepts since Western theories are indeed applicable to all societies.<sup>88</sup> Sztompka had misunderstood [Syed Farid] Alatas' position. Alatas' view is not that social science theories of Western origin were necessarily inapplicable to Asian or African studies, but rather that we should also look towards non-Western sources for theories and concepts. This point was taken up by Sztompka's successor, Professor Michael Burawoy, who argued that "there can be no singular body of theory but only multiple traditions, or research programs, within Northern countries, as well as between North and South".<sup>89</sup>

Commenting on [Syed Farid] Alatas' work and contradicting Sztompka, Burawoy had noted that "he [Alatas] proposes different ways of amalgamating Western sociology with alternative intellectual traditions emanating from non-Western societies. In his contribution here he dwells on the history of a distinctive Chinese sociology and its relevance to the modern world. Elsewhere (2006b) he has creatively introduced Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of history into Western debates about Asiatic society."<sup>90</sup>

For Sztompka, there can only be one sociology, one that studied many social worlds.<sup>91</sup> He condescendingly suggests that "the most welcome contribution

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<sup>84</sup> Piotr Sztompka, "Another Sociological Utopia", *Contemporary Sociology* 40, 4(2011): 388-396.

<sup>85</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, "The Definition and Types of Alternative Discourses", in Michael Burawoy, Mau-kuei Chang and Michelle Fei-yu Hsieh, eds., 2010, *Facing an Unequal World: Challenges for a Global Sociology. Vol. 2: Asia*, Taiwan: Academia Sinica and the Council of National Associations of the International Sociological Association, 2010, pp. 139-157.

<sup>86</sup> Sztompka, "Another Sociological Utopia", p. 391.

<sup>87</sup> Alatas, "The Definition and Types of Alternative Discourses", p. 139.

<sup>88</sup> Sztompka, "Another Sociological Utopia", p. 392.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Burawoy, "The Last Positivist", *Contemporary Sociology* 40, 4: 396-404, p. 402.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Burawoy, "Facing an Unequal World: Challenges for a Global Sociology", <http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Global%20Sociology/Facing%20an%20Unequal%20World.pdf> Alatas' 2006 publication that Burawoy refers to is "A Khaldunian Exemplar for a Historical Sociology for the South", *Current Sociology* 54, 3 (2006): 397-412.

<sup>91</sup> Sztompka, "Another Sociological Utopia", p. 389.

by sociologists from outside Europe or America is to provide evidence, heuristic hunches, ingenious, locally inspired models and hypotheses about regularities to add to the pool of sociological knowledge which is universal".<sup>92</sup> Attempts by non-Western scholars to contribute to concept formation were dismissed by Sztompka as mere translations:

Alas, Alatas attempts to provide some concrete examples. And what do we get? The observation that in "Asian communication studies, the Chinese, Japanese and Korean scholars have been looking at indigenous concepts" (p. 147) such as "bao," which in Chinese means reciprocity, or "bian" which means change, or "guanxi," which means network of interrelations, or "ke qi," which means politeness. But these concepts are simply the equivalents in the Chinese language of well known, "mainstream" sociological ideas: reciprocity, change, interrelations, politeness. Is the "indigenous sociology" any sociology written in another language than English?<sup>93</sup>

Only Eurocentric thinking would reduce terms in non-Western languages to the equivalents of mainstream sociological concepts developed in the West. It had not occurred to Sztompka that the Chinese, Japanese or Korean terms referred to in the quotation above are not merely equivalents of mainstream sociological concepts but are actually repositories of different conceptualisations of similar phenomena. For example, "bao" is not merely reciprocity but refers to a unique conceptualisation of reciprocity. Furthermore, why can it not be said that "reciprocity" is the English equivalent of "bao"?

Consider another statement of Sztompka:

[T]he futile attempt to create "alternative" or "indigenous" sociologies is pernicious for the discipline. Science, including social science, does not know borders. It develops as a common pool of knowledge to which all national, continental, regional or even local sociologies are more than welcome to contribute. They may have unique research opportunities, unique research agendas, particular problem-emphases or orientations, but they do not require any alternative methodologies, or indigenous theories. Instead of arguing for the need for indigenous sociologies, my advice is: just do it. There is a lot of important sociological work done in the non-Western world. But it is usually based on standard methodologies and contributes to the universal pool of theories. Nothing alternative or indigenous there, but simply good sociology.<sup>94</sup>

What Sztompka failed to understand here is that good sociology requires attention to concept formation and theory building, and that the two are

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<sup>92</sup> Sztompka, "Another Sociological Utopia", p. 393.

<sup>93</sup> Sztompka, "Another Sociological Utopia", p. 392.

<sup>94</sup> Piotr Sztompka, "Ten theses on the status of Sociology in an unequal world," *Global Dialogue: Newsletter for the International Sociological Association* 2, 2, 2011.

neither innocent of material and ideal interests nor undetermined by cultural contexts. The general failure of the social sciences to understand this point has resulted in the continuation of the Orientalist orientation in the social sciences, in the form of the marginalisation of the non-Western.

There is also a dismissive attitude in the views of Quah. In her discussion on the challenges of sociology, she lists contribution to the theoretical growth of sociology and the advancement of comparative research as two challenges. She says that these challenges contradict another, the challenge of developing concepts that are exclusively relevant to the national setting.<sup>95</sup> The impression is given that those non-Western sociologists who seek to indigenise sociology wish to develop concepts and theories that are applicably exclusively to their respective national settings. This is generally not the case, though.

### **Acknowledging the Exceptions**

To be sure there are some scholars who have recognised the contributions of Malay Studies to the anti-Orientalist discourse in the Malay world and in Southeast Asian in general. Some of them are from the National University of Singapore and others are in the general area of Southeast Asian Studies and work elsewhere.<sup>96</sup> I would like to mention some of them.

Eric Thompson's writing on academic dependency draws on [Syed Farid] Alatas' work on the same.<sup>97</sup> While Alatas provided empirical evidence for a global division of labour in academic knowledge production from publishing in leading social science journals, Thompson goes further to survey 574 academic staff at research institutes and universities to test the hypothesis of "whether or not scholarly communication is routed mainly through what Alatas has called the "social science superpowers".<sup>98</sup> The result is a more "fine-grained, institutional-level analysis" than that provided by Alatas.<sup>99</sup>

Roger Kershaw, in a review article of 1988, discusses the contributions of Chandra Muzafar and Shaharuddin Maaruf to Malay political sociology and history. Chandra, like Shaharuddin, did his PhD under [Syed Hussein] Alatas. He has always been based in Malaysia as a scholar and activist. Kershaw notes Chandra's writing on the continuity between the traditional Malay polity and modern Malaysia in terms of the phenomenon of blind

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<sup>95</sup> Quah, "The Native Sociologist and the Challenge of Science," p. 103.

<sup>96</sup> Some of the works of Vineeta Sinha, that have been mentioned above, recognize the contributions of Syed Hussein Alatas to the debates on the state of the social sciences. See, for example, Sinha, "Reconceptualising the Social Sciences in non-Western Settings"; Sinha, "De-centering social sciences in practice through individual acts and choices".

<sup>97</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, "Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour in the Social Sciences", *Current Sociology* 51, 6(2003): 599-613.

<sup>98</sup> Thompson, "Internet Mediated Networking and Academic Dependency", p. 44.

<sup>99</sup> Thompson, "Internet Mediated Networking and Academic Dependency", p. 42.

loyalty to the ruler and the relationship of that to the feudal mentality.<sup>100</sup> Kershaw also notes the contribution of Shaharuddin Maaruf's work on the understanding of the concept of the hero in Malay society, and the continuity into modern and post-colonial times.<sup>101</sup> Kershaw is critical of both Chandra and Shaharuddin on theoretical as well as methodological grounds. For example, he suggests that Chandra accepts at face value the accounts of blind loyalty found in classical texts and that he overstates the resilience of feudalism in order to be able to claim the continuity of feudal value into the modern period.<sup>102</sup> He also criticises Shaharuddin for not being able to argue a strong case for the view that the Melaka aristocracy did not represent true Malay values but was an aberration.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, in Kershaw, we see a serious consideration of the contributions of Malay Studies to the discourse on the Malay world.

Zawawi Ibrahim<sup>104</sup> had noted that the 'indigenisation' of social science discourse had been proposed by scholars such as [Syed Hussein] Alatas and [Syed Farid] Alatas.<sup>105</sup> He has taken seriously the contribution of [Syed Hussein] Alatas:

From the Asian world, the sociology of knowledge-based arguments by S. Hussein Alatas in *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) that actually preceded Said's pathbreaking *Orientalism* and the perspectives reconstituted from various disciplines under the rubric of cultural studies – has played a vital role in advancing new understandings of how and why knowledge is produced and reproduced. In the above landmark work, S. Hussein Alatas is able to bring into the discourse both a critique of colonial knowledge ( i.e., the colonial representation of the Malays as 'lazy natives' ) as well as of 'indigenous' perspectives which extend 'the 'colonial gaze' into explaining the causes of Malay underdevelopment ( for instance, his critique of former Malaysian PM Mahathir's famous treatise *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) and the Malay ruling elite's orientalist response to Malay underdevelopment in *Mental Revolution* (1970). In addition, the author is also able to enlighten us on Malay Islamic and indigenous values that are counter-narrations of British colonial and orientalist representations of the Malays (see Zawawi Ibrahim, 2012, pp. 165-200).<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Roger Kershaw, "Difficult Synthesis: Recent Trends in Malay Political Sociology and History", *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 16, 1(1988): 134-158, pp. 146-8; Chandra Muzafar, *Protector?* Penang: Aliran, 1979.

<sup>101</sup> Kershaw, "Difficult Synthesis", pp. 148-150; Shaharuddin Maaruf, *Concept of a Hero in Malay Society*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1984.

<sup>102</sup> Kershaw, "Difficult Synthesis", p. 147.

<sup>103</sup> Kershaw, "Difficult Synthesis", p. 148.

<sup>104</sup> Zawawi Ibrahim, "From a 'World-system' to a Social Science Knowledge 'Scape' Perspective: Anthropological Fieldworking and Transnationalising Theory-making in the 'Periphery'", *Journal of Glocal Studies* 2(2015): 45-68, p. 49.

<sup>105</sup> Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*; Alatas, S. F., *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Sciences*.

<sup>106</sup> Zawawi Ibrahim, "From a 'World-system' to a Social Science Knowledge 'Scape' Perspective", p. 50. The 2012 publication cited at the end of the quote is Zawawi Ibrahim and Noorshah M.S., "Indigenising Knowledge and Social Science Discourses in the

Elsewhere, Zawawi Ibrahim had referred to [Syed Hussein] Alatas as a deconstructionist and anti-orientalist writer,<sup>107</sup> referring to his critique of the Malaysian state ideology as well as his deconstruction of the discourse on the lazy native.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, he has applied [Syed Hussein] Alatas' approach in his own work on "the return of the lazy native".<sup>109</sup>

Another exception is Victor King who had noted the scholarship of [Syed Hussein] Alatas on colonial ideology, the captive mind, intellectual imperialism, and modernisation theory, and referred to the discussions of [Syed Farid] Alatas on alternative discourses, academic dependency, and the Asian values debate.<sup>110</sup> King sees [Syed Hussein] Alatas as a historical sociologist and as continuing the tradition of the Dutch sociologist, Wim Wertheim.<sup>111</sup>

Zawawi Ibrahim has suggested that the real potential of the call for alternative discourses has yet to be realised at the level of the concrete.<sup>112</sup>

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Periphery: Decolonising Malayness and Malay Underdevelopment", in Zawawi Ibrahim, ed., *Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World*, Kajang: Malaysian Social Science Association & Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2012, pp. 165-200.

<sup>107</sup> Zawawi Ibrahim, "The Anthropology of the Malay Peasantry: Critical Reflections on Colonial and Indigenous Scholarship", *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, 1(2010): 5-36. Available from:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249602421\\_The\\_Anthropology\\_of\\_the\\_Malay\\_Peasantry\\_Critical\\_Reflections\\_on\\_Colonial\\_and\\_Indigenous\\_Scholarship](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249602421_The_Anthropology_of_the_Malay_Peasantry_Critical_Reflections_on_Colonial_and_Indigenous_Scholarship) [accessed Jul 16 2018].

<sup>108</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, *Siapa Yang Salah: Sekitar Revolusi Mental dan Peribadi Melayu*. Singapore: Pustaka Nasional; Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*.

<sup>109</sup> Zawawi Ibrahim, "Return of the Lazy Native: Explaining Malay/Immigrant Labour Transition in Trengganu Plantation Society", in Riaz Hassan, ed., *Local and Global: Social Transformation in Southeast Asia - Essays in Honour of Professor Syed Hussein Alatas*, Leiden: Brill, 2005.

<sup>110</sup> Victor T. King, "Knowledge from the Margins of Malaysia: Globalisation and Research on the Ground", in Zawawi Ibrahim, ed., *Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World*, Kajang: Malaysian Social Science Association & Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2012, pp. 117-163, p. 131; Victor T. King, *The Sociology of Southeast Asia: Transformations in a Developing Region*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008, p. 27, 178, 186, 194, 247; Victor T. King, "Southeast Asian Studies: Insiders and Outsiders, or is Culture and Identity a Way Forward", *Suvannabhumi: Multi-disciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 8, 1(2016): 17-53, pp. 21-2; On modernization theory, see Syed Hussein Alatas, *Modernization and Social Change: Studies in Modernization, Religion, Social Change and Development in South-East Asia*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972. On alternative discourses, see Syed Farid Alatas, "An Introduction to the Idea of Alternative Discourses", *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 28, 1(2000): 1-12; [Syed Farid] Alatas, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science*. On academic dependency, see Alatas, "Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour"; Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff & Syed Farid Alatas, eds., *Academic Dependency in the Social Sciences: Structural Reality and Intellectual Challenges*, Delhi: Manohar, 2010; On the Asian values debate, see Syed Farid Alatas, "Religion, Values and Capitalism in Asia", in C.J.W.-L Wee, ed., *Local Cultures and the 'New Asia': The State, Culture and Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002, pp. 107-126.

<sup>111</sup> King, *The Sociology of Southeast Asia*, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Zawawi Ibrahim and Noorshah M.S., "Indigenising Knowledge and Social Science Discourses in the Periphery", p. 170. Zawawi Ibrahim, "Indigenising the Discourse on

His point that the discourse on knowledge production should go beyond the abstract to the actual practice of theorising from the periphery if the periphery is not to be regarded as merely a repository of data is well taken.<sup>113</sup> This is a view that is shared by others and is a necessary critique of the state of attempts to decolonise knowledge. King had gone further in his criticism:

There is a more serious criticism of the arguments of Heryanto, Goh, and Syed Farid Alatas; they do not give us a clear and unequivocal view of what a locally-generated, alternative perspective might look like and how it differs significantly from a Western-generated view. Having said this, I wholeheartedly agree with the position that the future of the study of Southeast Asia “must be in the region itself” and not in Western research centres.<sup>114</sup>

In fact, [Syed Farid] Alatas had done some work to concretise the idea of alternative or anti-Eurocentric discourses. His own interest has been to put the call to alternative discourses into practice by elaborating a Khaldunian sociology. This he had attempted to do in two books, *Ibn Khaldun* and *Applying Ibn Khaldun*.<sup>115</sup> While the former looks at the life and thought of Ibn Khaldun, the latter applies his theoretical perspective to the study of concrete historical cases.

King has also suggested that [Syed Farid] Alatas have held back to some extent. This he says because Alatas did not advocate a total rejection of Western social science. For King, this would not amount to an alternative discourse but a “modified, qualified, conditional discourse.”<sup>116</sup> Alatas’ response would be that his conception of alternative discourses is alternative in that it proposes a universal rather than parochial social science. Furthermore, what he has in mind is not merely modifying and qualifying the Western social sciences but rather the theoretical merger of concepts, theories and even methods from diverse traditions. An example is [Syed Farid] Alatas work on Khaldunian sociology in which he integrates Marxist and Weberian concepts into a Khaldunian theoretical framework.<sup>117</sup>

Along similar lines of criticism, Curaming says:

Can methodology be truly indigenous and decolonised? Postcolonial scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) are among those who registered doubt, declaring for instance that provincialising Europe may

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Malayness and Malay Underdevelopment”, *International Journal of Trend in Research and Development* 5, 4(2018): 169-181, p. 170.

<sup>113</sup> Zawawi Ibrahim, “From a ‘World-system’ to a Social Science Knowledge ‘Scape’ Perspective”, p. 52.

<sup>114</sup> King, “Southeast Asian Studies”, p. 24.

<sup>115</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, *Ibn Khaldun*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013; Syed Farid Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology*, London: Routledge, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> King, “Southeast Asian Studies”, p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> [Syed Farid] Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldun*.

be an impossible task for historians as it entails abrogating historical scholarship as we know it. His misgivings sprang from the fact that historical methodology and its philosophical underpinnings are deeply rooted in European traditions. Given that other social science disciplines rely on logic and methods that, like History, were European in origin or orientation, similar doubt seems to apply to the social sciences more broadly. Apparently, the fundamental challenge here lies in the extent to which indigenous aspirations can prevail given the utterly foreign frame that underpins conventional scholarship. Perhaps what is needed is a radical departure from the kind of scholarship we have long been accustomed to. But scholars are wont to avoid such a radical break. Farid Alatas (1992; 1999; 2006), for instance, has forcefully argued for a kind of indigenisation that leads to or converged with a universal social science.<sup>118</sup>

First of all, [Syed Farid] Alatas does not speak of indigenising methodologies but rather theories and concepts. Secondly, why is there a need for a radical break? A radical break is advocated by nativistic positions. What [Syed Farid] Alatas calls alternative discourses can be radical theoretically and politically without breaking totally with the Western tradition.

It is also important to note that the practice of alternative discourses can take place at various levels. At the simplest level, it refers to the cautious but creative application of Western methods and theories to the local situation. An example would be Karl Wittfogel's work, *Oriental Despotism*, in which he creatively develops and applies Marx's theory of the Asiatic mode of production. According to Wittfogel's analysis, centralised control over the key resource of water gave rise to a particular class structure and a bureaucratic state characterised by an extreme form of despotism. Such "hydraulic" empires, due to their extreme centralisation, had no independent aristocracy, unlike European feudalism.<sup>119</sup> While we may not agree with the thesis, the point I am making here has to do with the creative application of a theory that originated in the West to the Chinese situation. In this case, however, we cannot yet speak of alternative discourses if the mainstream is not engaged, critiqued and subverted or an alternative set of conceptualisations and theories presented. At a higher level of alternateness and, therefore, universality, both locally-generated and Western methods and theories are applied to the local context. At yet another level of alternateness and universality, local, Western and other indigenous methods and theories (that is, indigenous to other non-Western societies) are applied to the local setting. The various levels of alternative discourses, including non-Western approaches, are discussed in what follows.

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<sup>118</sup> Rommel A. Curaming, "On the Viability of Indigenous Methodologies: Implications for Southeast Asian Studies", *Suwannabhumi: Multi-disciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 8, 1(2016): 55-75, p. 57.

<sup>119</sup> Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental despotism; a comparative study of total power*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

*Local method and theories applied to local reality*

One of the most influential of Chinese histories, the *Shih chi* (Historical Records) of Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145? – 86? B.C.), is founded on an historiography that is significantly different from Western histories.<sup>120</sup> Finding earlier histories to be inadequate to the task of writing a comprehensive history of the world, Ssu-ma Ch'ien developed a new method that divided the past into five sections: (i) Twelve Annals that record the reigns of dynasties and rulers; (ii) Ten Tables that match events to a single chronology; (iii) Eight Treatises that provide accounts of selected aspects of economy, society and culture; (iv) Thirty Hereditary Houses that provide accounts of the rise and fall of great families and their fiefs; and (v) Seventy Biographies that discuss the histories of individuals linked by historical circumstances, family connections, occupations, geography, etc.<sup>121</sup> The *Shih chi* does not satisfy four requirements of Western historiography. Firstly, there is no unity of narrative voice. There is a great deal of variation in each chapter and the absence of a single voice reconstructing history. Secondly, there is no consistency of coherence across the narratives, with some sections lacking a clear narrative structure, that is, a beginning-middle-end structure that makes sense of the multitude and chaos of facts. Thirdly, there is no unified narrative. For example, for any particular historical event, readers must go to several chapters to get the relevant accounts. Fourthly, there is a lack of consistency in the narrations. There are multiple narrations of the same story that often contradict one another, resulting in different versions of the same event.<sup>122</sup> Is it valid to present competing versions within a single historical account as Ssu-ma Ch'ien seems to do or must one strive to provide the true presentation of the past as understood in the Western tradition? I am not in a position to answer this question now. The point, however, is, as Hardy notes, that the *Shih chi* is not just a challenge, but a counterexample to Western historiography.<sup>123</sup>

Another example, this time of theory, would be Fe Hsiao-t'ung's concept of the "gradated network" which he developed to explain the prevalence of selfishness among peasants in pre-revolutionary China.<sup>124</sup> In fact, he was very important in arguing that Chinese social theory differs significantly from Western social theory in that it is not founded on the tradition-modernity dichotomy. The lack of such a dichotomy was the basis for the view that the principle of China's modern industrial development is the individual enterprises that are found in the millions of villages and that

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<sup>120</sup> This account is taken from Grant Hardy, "Can An Ancient Chinese Historian Contribute to Modern Theory? The Multiple Narratives of Ssu-Ma Ch'ien", *History and Theory* 33, (1994): 20-38.

<sup>121</sup> Hardy, "Can An Ancient Chinese Historian Contribute to Modern Theory?", pp. 21-2.

<sup>122</sup> Hardy, "Can An Ancient Chinese Historian Contribute to Modern Theory?", pp. 24-5.

<sup>123</sup> Hardy, "Can An Ancient Chinese Historian Contribute to Modern Theory?", p. 35.

<sup>124</sup> Rance P. L. Lee, "Formulation of Relevant Concepts and Propositions for Sociological Research in Chinese Society", in Chie Nakane & Chien Chao, ed., *Home Bound: Studies in East Asian Society*, Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1992, pp. 81-98, p. 84.

industrialisation should be decentralised in the rural areas rather than concentrated in urban centres.<sup>125</sup>

*Application of local and Western theory to local reality*

An example of this is the application of Ibn Khaldun's historical theory of state formation that incorporates concepts and theories from Western social science. Ibn Khaldun studied the formation and decline of North African states for which he developed an original theory. In [Syed Farid] Alatas' previous work on Ibn Khaldun, he indicates an avenue for the integration of the modes of production framework into Ibn Khaldun's theory of state formation, the field of application being Iranian, Ottoman, and Moroccan history as well as state formation in modern Syria and Saudi Arabia. For example, while the economic system of Safavid Iran had been couched in terms of Marxist concepts, their dynamics had been described in terms of Ibn Khaldun's theory of state formation. The Safavid political economy can be characterised in terms of the tributary mode of production as the dominant mode in a secondary state-based world-system. Ibn Khaldun's work provides a theoretical framework with which to understand the rise and dynamics of the Safavid world empire.<sup>126</sup>

*Application of Western and non-Western theory to other local realities*

However, applications of Ibn Khaldun's theory should not be confined to Arab, North African or West Asian societies. The dynamics of state formation and decline elaborated in this Khaldunian modes of production framework can also be restated in terms of historical time frames of what Turchin calls the Ibn Khaldun cycle and applied to the history of China and Central Asia.<sup>127</sup> This is a secular wave "that tends to affect societies with elites drawn from adjacent nomadic groups" and which operates on a time scale of about four generations or a century.<sup>128</sup> They discuss four Chinggisid dynasties that fit the Khaldunian theory of the cyclical rise and fall of states, that is, the Yuan dynasty in China, the Jagataids in Turkestan, the Il-Khans in Iran, and the Juchids in the Kipchak Steppe. All these dynasties went through the typical Khaldunian cycle of about one hundred years.

*Application of non-Western theory to local reality*

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<sup>125</sup> Gan Yang, "The Inception of Chinese Social Theory: Peasant Life in China Reconsidered", *Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences* 3 (1994): 23-35. <in Chinese>.

<sup>126</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, "A Khaldunian Perspective on the Dynamics of Asiatic Societies", *Comparative Civilizations Review* 29 (1993): 29-51; Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldun*.

<sup>127</sup> Peter Turchin, *Complex Population Dynamics: A Theoretical/Empirical Synthesis*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, chap. 7; Peter Turchin & Thomas D. Hall, Thomas D. "Spatial Synchrony Among and within World-Systems: Insights from Theoretical Ecology", *Journal of World-Systems Research* 9, 1(2003): 37-64. <http://jwsr.ucc.edu>

<sup>128</sup> Turchin & Hall, Thomas D. "Spatial Synchrony Among and within World-Systems", p. 53.

Another level of alternateness refers to the application of ideas generated in one non-Western society and applied to another non-Western society. An example is the effort of the Indian sociologist, Benoy Kumar Sarkar to reject the stereotypical dichotomy about Indian and Chinese religions in favour of the idea of an Asiatic unity of religions. This was the topic of research in his *Chinese Religion through Hindu Eyes*. According to the dichotomy,

the genius of the Hindu race is essentially metaphysical and non-secular” [while] the Chinese are a highly practical nation without any other-worldly leanings. The people of India are said to cultivate exclusively the thoughts and feelings based on the concepts of the Eternal, the Infinite and the Hereafter; whereas with the people of China “the value of morality has completely overshadowed any claims of belief; duty towards one’s neighbour has mostly taken precedence of duty towards God.<sup>129</sup>

Sarkar proposes the systematic study of Asiatic sociology that would involve the historical and comparative study of Sino-Japanese Buddhism and modern Hinduism in order to prove the hypothesis that Buddhism in China and Japan are but varieties of the same faith known as Tantric and Puranic Hinduism.<sup>130</sup>

### *Locally-generated universal theory*

The highest level of alternateness and universality refers to the application of locally generated theory that is integrated with other non-Western theories as well as Western theories to both local and other realities. An example of this is Khaldunian theory. From the East Asian point of view, however, Khaldunian theory is an example of a non-Western theory integrated with Western theory and having possible application to local reality. What about Chinese or East Asian or other Asian originated theories that have the potential to have universal applications? We have already referred to the history of Ssu-ma Ch’ien above.

Understood in this way, it cannot be said that such a conception of alternatives, including all its levels as discussed above, to Eurocentric social science is a case of holding back or of being insufficiently radical.

### **A Call for Conscientious Engagement**

What should be done is that all Malay Studies students and scholars, as well as others who are concerned about more inclusive citation and referencing practices, should conscientise their colleagues and peers about

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<sup>129</sup> Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Chinese Religion through Hindu Eyes*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1916/1998, p. 1.

<sup>130</sup> Sarkar, *Chinese Religion through Hindu Eyes*, p. 304.

the problems of exclusion and erasure. Students should raise the problem in classes and in their papers and assignments. One ingredient for the creation of a social science tradition in our societies is undoubtedly the values attached to conscientious engagement, values such as honesty, humility and a love of good ideas. This should be inculcated in our education system. As it is, scholars, researchers and theorists from the colonised world are seldom cited in the works of those centred in the knowledge powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France. As noted by Connell, “the social thought of colonised cultures is excluded while the experience of the colonised is ignored in the writing of social theory in the North. In other words, there is the work of exclusion and erasure.”<sup>131</sup>

The politics of dismissal serves to marginalise attempts to create a counter-Eurocentric discourse, to deparochialise the social sciences, and to also bring about some change in the power relations in the process of knowledge production.

If there is a politics of dismissal, there are also the economies of omission in which demand for certain discourses seems to dictate what forms of knowledge are made visible for consumption. In the case of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore, it pioneered the critique of colonial knowledge and Eurocentric social science and evolved its own tradition grounded in both the Western social sciences and Malay world traditions. This has gone unnoticed at NUS itself, with Malay Studies having been subjected to the economies of omission. If those who are writing in the colonised world persist in the practices of exclusion and erasure, what is to become of all our efforts to create alternatives to the colonial, Eurocentric, patriarchal biases that dominate world social science?

Deliberate and studied indifference to and exclusion of counter-Eurocentric works in the social sciences would certainly be justified if such works were mediocre, second-rate or nativistic. This can hardly be said to be the case of the decades of work that has come out of Malay Studies at NUS. I have no idea why people engage in the politics of dismissal or the economy of omission. I cannot attribute any particular motives to them. Is it a conscious spite or hostility or a coarse indifference? Or, could it be that this silencing is unconsciously acted out, arising out of the desire to be dominant in a particular discourse? What I am fairly certain about, however, is the function and effects of omission and dismissal. It works against the efforts to create a better social science.

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<sup>131</sup> Raewyn Connell, “Northern Theory: The Political Geography of General Social Theory”, *Theory and Society* 35(2006): 237-264.