

Decentring and Diversifying Southeast Asian Studies: Perspectives from the Region(ISEAS) edited by Goh Beng Lan

This collection of essays edited by Associate Professor Goh Beng Lan, Head of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies sets the stage for regional scholars to develop perspectives and concepts as they respond to the critique of area studies and the new political-economic and cultural reconfigurations around them.

This book contains fascinating autobiographical accounts, by some of Southeast Asia's most eminent scholars, concerning their struggle to find their own voices in interpreting the region to which they belong. It is thus of interest to anyone interested in thinking about knowledge production and its politics in a postcolonial world. In the views of these scholarly Southeast Asians, we are made to see, in very personal terms, the link between the global crisis in the social sciences and the need to find remedies for it that are neither Eurocentric nor parochially anti-Western. The book therefore marks the shift of the centre of Southeast Asian Studies from the West to Southeast Asia.

The insights provided by the authors are not simply explanations of colonial and postcolonial experiences of major Southeast Asian scholars. Rather, the book provides a unique set of intellectual genealogies that show that distinctions between humanities and social sciences are less important than the development of distinctive local and regional traditions and practices of scholarship. Its reflexivity sets the stage for scholars from the region to develop perspectives and concepts to address the challenges of the new configuration of the Asia being ushered in by ASEAN. The end result is a combined view of the state of the art of Southeast Asian Studies, a view that is greater than the sum of its national parts.

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