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## **The Spaces of Southeast Asian Scholarship**

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# Professorial Address

RESIL B. MOJARES

## The Spaces of Southeast Asian Scholarship

This professorial address argues that the genealogy of Southeast Asian studies must be traced to the work carried out by Southeast Asians themselves in the context of the practice and formation of local or national scholarship. The argument is illustrated by the historical formation of what can be called “Southeast Asian studies” in the Philippines. The paper was a keynote address that was read at the conference on “Engaging the Classics in Malay and Southeast Asian Studies,” Singapore, 17–18 June 2010, sponsored by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the National University of Singapore’s Department of Malay Studies.

**KEYWORDS: MALAY RACE · LOCAL KNOWLEDGE · NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP · ASIANISM**

I was initially thrown off by the title of this conference, “Engaging the Classics in Malay and Southeast Asian Studies.” I thought of classical Malay texts like *Sejarah Melayu* and the old Malay chronicles, until I realized the reference was to the likes of Clifford Geertz, Benedict Anderson, James Scott, and Reynaldo Ileto. My misreading is perhaps part of the problem the conference aims to address and so I shall say no more about my own personal confusion.

I would like to skirt the matter of the “classics” and the “canon” and instead speak of what a canon presupposes or assumes—that discipline or field out of which a canon emerges and which a canon in turn helps constitute and enforce.

Discussions have taken place for at least four decades now about the character and limits of the field called “Southeast Asian Studies.”<sup>1</sup> Running through these discussions is an anxiety over how the field has been dominated by scholarship outside the region, and with this anxiety the desire to find and establish the field’s center of gravity within the region itself.

Anthony Reid (2003) has made an important intervention in showing that the genealogy of Southeast Asian studies is deeper and more complex than claims of its origin in the United States during the Pacific War and the immediate postwar period. Reid pluralizes the field by tracing its origins to conceptions of the region in Chinese, Japanese, Arab, and Southeast Asian texts prior to the sixteenth century, to its emergence as a more-or-less coherent area of study in the era of European expansion in the writings of Portuguese, Spanish, British, Dutch, and other European authors, and the founding in the region of colleges, learned societies, and journals with a “regional” character.

Reid, however, focuses on work inspired or driven by foreign missionary, commercial, and political interests based in the region. We need to look into the work carried out by Southeast Asians themselves.

In the 1970s there was much interest in promoting “decolonized” and “Asianized” scholarship in the social sciences. There was the call for “autonomous histories” that would look at societies in the region from *within* instead of from *without*, and for an “indigenized” social science that would offer alternative conceptual frameworks that reflect native worldviews and experiences. By the 1980s there were those who said that the indigenization of the field was well underway, not only by force of the fact that Southeast Asians themselves composed the largest number of scholars working on the

region but because of the ways Southeast Asians used the advantages of their location—language, life-experience, and personal involvement in the life of their societies—to produce works more responsive to specific national contexts of discourse in topic, approach, method, and style (see Smail 1961, 72–102; Bennagen 1980, 1–26; Anderson 1984, 41–50).

The argument of “indigenization” remains unconvincing or ill defined. The imbalance persists. It is cited that the work of Southeast Asians is still tied to specific countries and that there are very few true “Southeast Asianists” in the region; that much of this scholarship remains invisible outside the national contexts in which they are produced; that the most “influential” works in the field (even those that purport to adopt indigenized and autonomous frameworks) are still written by non-Southeast Asians or Southeast Asians trained and based outside the region; that English remains the dominant language of scholarship; and that the contributions of Southeast Asians to “theory” in the disciplines have not been notable.<sup>2</sup>

These are comments that privilege advances made under “universally-acknowledged” disciplines (whether political science, history, or anthropology) as well as visibility and recognition in the “international” (as against the “national”) space of scholarship. Even the idea of “indigenization” assumes an outside body of knowledge *from*, *with*, or *against* which Southeast Asians have to work.

I am not saying that these assumptions are misplaced but that they should be laid bare and that it may be more productive for a revisioning of the field to start out not from the “international” standards against which we should measure our work but from the practice and formation of local or national scholarship itself.

I would like to explore the value of such a perspective—moving “inside-out” instead of “outside-in”—by tracing the historical formation of what we may call “Southeast Asian studies” in the Philippines. (I use the Philippine example not because I am assuming it is the most typical or instructive but because it is what I am familiar with.)

### **Nineteenth-Century Filipino Intellectuals’ Engagement with *Malasia***

Nineteenth-century Filipino intellectuals had a “modern” sense of the region. “Universal” geography was taught in secondary institutes in the Philippines as early as the seventeenth century, and in Southeast Asia’s first

university, Manila's University of Santo Tomas, founded in 1611. Focused on Spain and Europe in its hierarchic presentation of the regions and countries of the world, this teaching disseminated the knowledge that the Philippines was part of *Malasia* (one of the four subdivisions of Oceania, together with Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia) and that Filipinos were part of the "Malay" race.<sup>3</sup> However, *Malasia* was a somewhat fluid, contingent geographical category that overlapped with the idea that the country was also part of something called *Asia* and coexisted with the more dominant fact that the Philippines also "belonged" to Spain in a tributary relation as a colony.

By the late nineteenth century, however, "being Malay" had become more than just a lesson in geography class. The first Filipinos to apply themselves to the study of the Southeast Asian region came in the 1880s, the most prominent of them being José Rizal (1861–1896), Pedro Paterno (1858–1911), Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera (1857–1925), and Isabelo de los Reyes (1864–1938). Perhaps the most Europeanized group of Southeast Asians at the time, all four studied at the University of Santo Tomas and spent significant time outside the region in travels that sharpened their sense of location in the world. Rizal earned a licentiate in medicine in Spain and pursued ophthalmic studies in Paris and Heidelberg. Paterno obtained a doctorate in law from the Universidad Central de Madrid while Pardo had a medical degree from the Sorbonne in Paris. De los Reyes finished law at Santo Tomas and sojourned in 1897 to 1901 as a prisoner and exile in Spain where he consorted with socialists and anarchists.<sup>4</sup>

What drove their interest in Southeast Asia? It can be said that the "regional turn" was partly enabled by the spirit of comparativism in European cultural sciences in the nineteenth century, with their preoccupation with the description and classification of "races" and "civilizations," the key organizing concepts in the discourse on identity in science and politics at the time.

More importantly, however, Rizal's generation looked toward the region out of a need to locate and define a Filipino "nation." Compared to other parts of Southeast Asia, precolonial Philippines did not have the kind of strong, centralized polities that generated indigenous written and pictorial traditions that could foster a consciousness of membership in a deep, indigenous realm or lineage. Moreover, three centuries of Spanish

colonization separated Rizal and his contemporaries from their precolonial past. Hence, they had to look outward to make the civilizational claims that would underwrite the existence of an autonomous nation.

Discovering *Malasia*, they argued that Filipinos descended from an "ancient" and "high" Malay civilization in their languages, social institutions, psychology, religious beliefs, and diverse cultural practices. At the same time, they claimed a definably integral nationality within this wider culture-area by arguing for a distinct unity to local languages, writing systems, political organization, and religion. They were not only "Malay" but also a distinct kind of "Malay."

Rizal's generation discovered *Malasia* by way of Europe. They read the Spanish chronicles of discovery and conquest (in which, by the seventeenth century, the idea of Malay origins and identity was already an established theme). They did research not only in the Spanish libraries of Manila but also in foreign institutions like the British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale. Pardo studied Malay and Sanskrit under the French Jesuit missionary Pierre Favre at Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes in Paris, earning a diploma in Malay in 1885. In 1889 Rizal himself attended lectures of the linguist Aristide Marre at the Ecole in Paris.

Versed in several Western languages, they studied European scholarship in many fields—the ethnological surveys of Theodor Waitz and John Lubbock, the philological studies of Max Muller and Wilhelm von Humboldt, and the racial theories of such scientists as Johann Blumenbach and James Cowles Prichard. They read accounts of the Malay archipelago by Alfred Russel Wallace, John Crawfurd, and William Marsden. They even attempted to delve into Malay indigenous texts. Rizal was familiar with *Sejarah Melayu*. Pardo worked on Malay chronicles at the British Museum and attempted in 1889 a Spanish translation of the Johore chronicle *Makota radja-radja*.<sup>5</sup> Rizal's and Pardo's knowledge of the region so impressed the Austrian scholar Ferdinand Blumentritt (1890, 268–71), he said that Rizal and Pardo were "the only learned scholars of *Malasia* produced by Spain."<sup>6</sup>

While Rizal and the others heavily relied on European sources (the time's "canon" of Malay studies), they used these sources critically. Isabelo de los Reyes critiqued John Crawfurd's views on the relations of Malayo-Polynesian languages and Alfred Russel Wallace's classification

of Oceanic races. Among other instances, José Rizal chided Wilhelm von Humboldt for the latter's reliance on flawed Spanish sources in his references to Philippine languages. He attacked the Spaniard Vicente Barrante's treatise on Tagalog theater for its ignorance of local theatrical practice and its lack of comparative knowledge about Chinese and Japanese theater.

Rizal and his colleagues confronted foreign scholarship in two ways. On the one hand, they used Western sources with a strong sense of entitlement, staking out a position of parity with European scholars in the use of Western rational-critical methods of analysis. Inserting themselves into European scientific discourse, they engaged it in its own terms. Exposed to a Europe much broader than just Spain, they knew that Europe was far from monolithic and they exploited the contradictions in Europe's view of the world. They used Europe against Europe by deploying their "superior" French or German learning against that of "less-advanced" Spain. They, not the "benighted" colonial authorities at home, were the true bearers of the European Enlightenment.

They moved with easy confidence in the "international" space of scholarship. They were not just an object of Orientalism but participants in its making. They wrote in Spanish (and also in French, in the case of Pardo), published in Europe, corresponded with European scholars, and were members or correspondents of Europe's learned societies, like Berlin's Anthropological Society, the Hague's Royal Institute of the Netherlands East Indies, and the Indo-Chinese Society of Paris. In 1887 Rizal attended meetings of the geographical and ethnological societies in Berlin, and in one of these meetings presented a paper on the art of Tagalog versification, in German.

In a bold move to demonstrate parity in a world community of scholars, Rizal attempted in 1889 to organize *Association Internationale des Philippinistes* and hold an academic conference on the Philippines in Paris to coincide with the Paris International Exposition of 1889. He drew up a roster of French, German, British, and Spanish scholars as the association's officers, identifying them by nationality or race. Of himself, the association's secretary, he wrote: *Malayo-Tagalo (Malais-Tagale)*. The planned conference did not push through; it would have been amazing had Rizal pulled it off. Imagine: a "native" organizes an international conference of scholars on his

country in the shadow of a world exposition where French-colonized Asians and Africans were exhibited as exotics in simulated ethnological villages for the thirty million visitors who came.

On the other hand, as the "natives" about whom the Europeans wrote, Rizal and his cohorts deployed "local knowledge," the claim that they had a more intimate, empirically grounded understanding of the country and region. They parlayed a "cultural insiderism" in asserting their unique access to local languages, places, practices, people, and events. De los Reyes frequently invoked in his writings his direct, personal knowledge of local languages, customs, and beliefs. In his polemical critique of Barrantes, Rizal (1964c, 105) even plays with the notion of a local knowledge "hidden" from outsiders by invoking a private experience of Tagalog theatrical performances the Spaniard cannot possibly understand:

**The first songs, the first farces, the first drama, that I saw in my childhood and which lasted three nights, leaving an indelible remembrance in my mind, in spite of their crudity and absurdity, were in Tagalog. They are, Most Excellent Sir, like an intimate festival of a family, of a poor family. The name of Your Excellency which is of superior race would profane it and take away all its charm.**

The argument of incommensurability was more polemical than theoretical. Rizal was simply making a statement about the "situatedness" of knowledge. Elsewhere, he writes:

**I imagine men who engage in the study of the truth like students of drawing who copy a statue . . . some nearer, others farther, who from a certain height, who at its feet, see it in different manners; and the more they try to do their best in being faithful in their drawings, the more they differ from one another. . . . Who is to judge the drawings of the others taking his own for norm?**<sup>7</sup>

He goes on to write: "For us, mathematical truths which are like plane figures present themselves only in one form. But religious, moral, and political truths are figures of extent and depth, they are complex truths, and human intelligence has to study them in parts." In sum, nineteenth-

century Filipino intellectuals positioned themselves as equal participants in the West's conversation about the world, at the same time that they claimed special knowledge in matters pertaining to their country by virtue of their location, experience, and access.

### Creating Space for National Scholarship

Eric Hobsbawm (1996, 4) has said that, for those in the world outside European capitalism, the challenge was “the choice between a doomed resistance in terms of their ancient traditions and ways, and a traumatic process of seizing the weapons of the west and turning them against the conquerors: of understanding and manipulating ‘progress’ themselves.” Rizal and his colleagues seized the weapons of the west and used them for their own purposes.

While they were excited about participating in the production of world knowledge (contributing, in Paterno's words, “one more stone to the edifice of Universal History”), they were not disciplinary specialists (Rizal and Pardo were physicians; Paterno and De los Reyes lawyers). More important, their intellectual ambition and ultimate destination were not “international” but “national.”<sup>8</sup> What they were up to was the creation of space for a national scholarship.

Creating such space involved a series of moves. First was the formation of a visible community of Filipino intellectuals. Rizal and his cohorts acknowledged the invaluable contributions of foreign scholars and in this wise aided and encouraged the work of “Philippinologists” such as A. B. Meyer, Hendrik Kern, and Ferdinand Blumentritt. Yet, they knew that in the end Filipinos themselves would have to spearhead the effort, claiming the authority to speak for themselves. Thus, Rizal repeatedly urged Filipinos in Spain to “buy books by Filipinos; mention now and then the names of Filipinos like [Pedro] Pelaez, [Vicente] Garcia, [Jose] Burgos, Graciano [Lopez Jaena], etc.; quote their phrases.” Addressing the Filipinos in Barcelona in 1889, he encouraged them “to buy, read, but critically, the books about the Philippines that you may see there published.”

It is necessary that you study the questions that concern our country.  
Knowledge of a thing prepares for its mastery: Knowledge is power.  
We are the only ones who can acquire a perfect knowledge of our

country, because we know both languages [Spanish and a Philippine language] and besides we are informed of the secrets of the people among whom we had been raised. (Rizal 1963b, 254)

Second, space for a national scholarship was to be built up by accumulating intellectual resources through the appropriation or diversion of foreign scholarship. Thus the efforts to learn as much of the world scholarship would provide Filipino intellectuals with the data, methods, and theory for understanding Philippine culture and history. This included the Filipinos' attempts to access European knowledge of the wider Malay and Asian region to clarify, confirm, or fill gaps in their characterization of Philippine society and culture. Thus, too, the campaign among the nationalists to widen and modernize the colony's educational system, including the teaching of the Spanish language, to empower larger numbers of their countrymen.

Classic forms of appropriation were translations and annotations of foreign texts, forms practiced by Rizal's generation. The best-known example is Rizal's critical annotation in 1889 of the Spaniard Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1609). Rizal's *Sucesos* was an audacious act: a “native” critically annotating a canonical European account of his country's history. Rizal corrects errors, exposes ethnocentric bias, explains and elaborates, draws critical connections between past and present, invokes more authoritative references, and, not least, demonstrates his superior erudition.<sup>9</sup>

Appropriation took the form of various reading strategies, of reading “between the lines,” “against the grain,” source mining, or even misreading for usable data, ideas, and arguments to be deployed in the discourse over power. A somewhat bizarre example is the Filipino Creole Manuel Regidor's *Islas Filipinas* (1869), a reformist tract on Philippine society and government.<sup>10</sup> Regidor takes up the French anthropologist Paul Broca's theory on the relationship between intelligence and brain size, based on craniometric studies of skulls buried in Parisian cemeteries across eight centuries. Broca had concluded that the brain is larger for superior races (especially white Europeans), men, and the higher social classes. Correlating brain size with degree of civilization, he however argued that inferiority is not a permanent condition and that the smaller brain size of primitives and women is due to underusage. Regidor accepts this theory (abominable today

but intellectually respectable in the mid-nineteenth century), but he uses the relation between brain size and civilization as an anticolonial argument. Asserting that the Malay's skull measurements are "similar to the European Latins and near that of the Germans," he says that even if one admits that Filipino intelligence is inferior this is due to a "stagnation of intellectual faculties" that is the direct result of the backward and oppressive colonial-monastic rule in the Philippines.

Third, a national scholarship was to be built up through the recovery, consolidation, and dissemination of "local knowledge." This was exemplified by the move made by Isabelo de los Reyes in 1885 when he launched the Philippine folklore movement. Inspired by his contact with folklorists in Spain, he declared the aim of this movement thus: "*Folk-Lore de Filipinas* has for its aim to collect, compile, and publish all of the knowledge of our people in the diverse branches of Science (Medicine, Hygiene, Botany, Politics, Morals, Agriculture, Industry, Arts, Mathematics, Sociology, Philosophy, History, Anthropology, Archaeology, Languages, etc.) (De los Reyes 1889, 1:12–18).<sup>11</sup>

The folklore project was nothing less than a call for creating an "archive" of popular knowledge (*saber popular*) in the Philippines, a move that had radical implications: retrieving and concentrating resources of local knowledge, breaking dependence on Western sources, building a database from which a national identity can be formed and from which the Filipino can look out and speak to the world. De los Reyes pursued his initiative by publishing *Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889), an open-ended encyclopedia of Filipino popular knowledge. His was not a mere antiquarian project. De los Reyes was not too concerned with a pure indigeneity as with the country's living culture, one already dynamized or "contaminated" by foreign influences and still in the process of creation and recreation.

In addition, De los Reyes (a journalist who also published in Tagalog and his native Iloko) signified an important step in the development of a national scholarship: the turn toward a local audience. In the initial, reformist stage of the nationalist campaign, it was logical for Filipino intellectuals to address the colonial power in the form of petitions, complaints, and critiques. As the campaign widened, they also wrote for a wider, "enlightened" Europe and the educated class at home in a mode of "double address." Thus they wrote in Spanish, used European forms and styles of discourse, and (in part because of state and church censorship

at home) published abroad. As the campaign for reforms failed and the mood turned more separatist, the premium shifted toward building local or national constituencies, and the intelligentsia itself widened to include "folk" and homegrown intellectuals who addressed the people in their own language in more diverse and popular genres.

Although De los Reyes was not able to sustain his "movement" (only two volumes of *Folk-Lore Filipino* were published), and the full significance of his initiatives was not quite appreciated in his time (and even today), he sketched imperatives important in building a national scholarship.

## Interest in Asia

What of the Filipino "turn" to the region?

Prior to the revolution, *malayismo* (the claim to a "high," "ancient," and integral Malay nationality) was politically conservative. It was not deployed as charter for separation or independence but as a cultural argument for greater recognition, equal rights, and a more autonomous status for the Philippines *within* Greater Spain. In political terms, Greater Spain was the field in which Filipino intellectuals operated even as they invoked their "Malayness." Thus, Filipino reformists based in Spain networked with liberal Spaniards, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans as they worked for a greater share of power as an "overseas province" of Spain.

Filipino nationalists were nevertheless aware that they were engaged in a struggle that had implications for other peoples in the Malay region. As the temper of their movement turned more separatist, *malayismo* acquired more radical overtones. As early as 1889, when Rizal and his friends gathered in Paris for the Universal Exposition, they formed a secret society called RDLM (or Rd.L.M.), a group reportedly committed to "the redemption of the Malays" (*Redención de los Malayos*). At the time, his colleagues recall, Rizal was excited about Multatuli's anticolonial novel, *Max Havelaar* (1860), and talked with passion of the misfortunes of the Javanese. Another suggestive episode was Rizal's visit in 1892 to Sandakan, Borneo, to seek a land grant from British officials for a Filipino colony. Rizal was interested in a refuge for his family and victims of Spanish repression and (some scholars surmise) a possible staging area for a Filipino independence movement (in the manner of Florida's Key West for the Cuban patriot Jose Marti).

All this became more pronounced with the outbreak of the revolution. Two republican periodicals that appeared in the revolution were called



*La Malasia* (1898) and *Columnas Volantes de la Federación Malaya* (1899–1900). Apolinario Mabini, the leading theoretician of the revolution, imagined the Filipino revolution as a model for the anticolonial struggle among other Malay peoples against the Dutch, British, and Portuguese. He wrote: “The Revolution has a final aim, to maintain alive and resplendent the torch of liberty and civilization, in order to give light to the gloomy night in which the Malay race finds itself degraded, so that it may be led to the road of social emancipation” (quoted in Majul 1996, 89; cf. Mojares 2009a).

A “pan-Malayan movement,” however, was no more than a romantic idea at this time. Nineteenth-century Filipino intellectuals had little contact with fellow-Malays in the region. Nationalist groups comparable to the Filipino propaganda movement did not exist in Malasia until years or decades later. Moreover, by the time the Philippine revolution began in 1896, political realities had reconfigured Filipino regional consciousness with the shift from a culturally-defined malayismo to a more politically-driven *orientalismo*, in which Filipino revolutionaries looked toward Japan for political alliances. Unofficial contacts with the Japanese in 1896 accelerated in the years that followed as the international base of the Filipino propaganda movement moved from Barcelona to Hong Kong.

The Filipinos looked toward Japan, which had emerged as a world power and center of Asian revolutionary activity, for possible assistance to the anti-Spanish revolution, which had, by 1899, become a war against the United States in the wake of the Spanish-American War. At least two unsuccessful attempts were made to smuggle arms and ammunition from Japan to the Philippines with the help of pan-Asianists in and outside the Japanese government.

The ideal of “Asian solidarity” attracted Filipino nationalists. Most prominent among them was Mariano Ponce (1868–1918), who networked with Spaniards, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans when the Filipino propaganda movement was still based in Barcelona, then with the Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans when the movement moved to Hong Kong and Ponce became the Aguinaldo government’s envoy to Japan. In Spain Ponce was mainly responsible for turning *La Solidaridad*, the organ of the propaganda movement, into a veritable journal of comparative colonialism with his articles on British Malaya, French Indochina, German Africa, and Spanish America. When the propaganda movement moved back to Asia, he studied

Japanese culture and met other Asians (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Thai) in meetings of the Association of Oriental Youth and other pan-Asianist groups in Tokyo. In 1906 Ponce also went on a learning tour of Indochina (during which he probably visited Cambodia and Siam as well). After he returned to the Philippines in 1907, ending a twenty-year exile, Ponce devoted himself to intellectual work, publishing, among others, a monograph on Indochina in 1907 and, in 1912, a book-length biography of Sun Yat-sen (who was a good friend when they were both based in Yokohama, engaged in the same political work for their respective countries) (see Mojares 2010).

Interest in “Asianism” continued for a time. In 1915 leading Filipino intellectuals formed *Sociedad Orientalista de Filipinas*, under the leadership of Mariano Ponce and Jose Alejandrino (a Belgian-educated engineer who also worked as an Aguinaldo agent in Hong Kong and Japan). With around a hundred members, the society aimed to promote an informed knowledge of the region (Southeast/East Asia) through research, publications, conferences, linkages with similar societies elsewhere in Asia, and the creation of a library of Asian materials. The society published the monthly *Boletín de la Sociedad Orientalista de Filipinas* (1918–1919). These could well be the first “Asian studies” society and journal independently organized by Southeast Asians in the region.

These initiatives, however, proved ephemeral. US colonial rule radically altered political geography for Filipinos, and the internal demands of nation building consumed the attention of Filipino scholars. The early efforts to establish an autonomous site for regional studies did not prosper. Independence was not achieved until 1946, and the nation-state did not accumulate enough political or economic capital to be a regional center. Filipino interest in the region waxed or waned according to the circumstances of the nation and changes in the global situation. But the enthusiasm for Malay studies of Rizal and his generation was not quite recaptured.

## The Nation and Filipino Scholarship

What lessons can be drawn from the Philippine example?

The example reminds us that “Southeast Asian studies” has a long, local genealogy that has not been adequately acknowledged, and that from the beginning it has been constituted in a dynamic (if structurally unequal) process of struggle, competition, and mutual appropriation among



international, national, and local practices and forms of knowledge. The critical interrogation of the Western canon (the subject of today's conference) has been ongoing for more than a century now.

Filipino interest in Southeast Asia was driven and defined by "nationalizing" motives, as local intellectuals sought to embed the nation within a wider civilizational field, as well as mark out its distinctness in relation to other nations and civilizations. The "region" was configured according to what, for Filipino intellectuals, was the effective world for the project of forming and consolidating the nation, as shown in the shift in focus from the Malay archipelago to Japan during the revolution. To speak of nationalizing motives in the genesis of regional studies is to relocate the vantage point away from the acts of external powers demarcating areas of influence and control, to the initiatives of people in the region defining themselves in relation to the wider world.

The nation has remained a key determinant in Philippine—and Southeast Asian—scholarship, even today when it is fashionable to speak of its demise. Cultural commonalities, geographical proximity, and shared or similar political and economic interests are such that a comparative knowledge of countries in the region is essential for enriching national scholarship. Border zones, transborder movements, transnational networks, and other globalizing forces require—and will stimulate—a more regionally-minded scholarship. In either case, however, Southeast Asian scholarship will continue to be anchored in nations. To say this is not to lament the fact. If, as in the Philippine example, we turned to the region in the struggle to "nationalize," it is in turn from the nation's development that the imperative to "regionalize" will come.

What are the prospects for the development of a less nation-bound and more "internationalizing" scholarship? Such a development will be driven, in the final instance, not by disciplinary or theoretical trends but by how the spaces of scholarship are constituted. In *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), the French literary critic Pascale Casanova (2004) argues that the most endowed literary spaces are those that tend to be more autonomous and denationalized. By "endowed spaces," she means those places where intellectual capital has been concentrated, in the form of well-articulated intellectual traditions, a "big" language, and a developed professional milieu of schools and academies, publishing, reading public, number and reputation of writers and scholars, and systems of recognition and rewards.

Such spaces are created through the accumulation and concentration of economic and political power, a process by which other spaces are also left deprived, making for a structurally unequal "world republic of letters" that, in Casanova's mapping, is more empire than republic.

We see this dynamic in the emergence of international and area studies. Hence the intellectual dominance of imperial centers that had the material and symbolic resources, and the interest to produce, organize, and deploy knowledge about the region and the world. Thus the appearance of the first centers of regional studies in Southeast Asia—in Malacca, Batavia, Bangkok, Singapore, Saigon, and Manila, places that, in the main, functioned as strategic stations or outposts of Europe's political, commercial, and religious interests in the region. They were, in the words of Anthony Reid (2003, 4), "the most natural places from which to conceive the coherence of Southeast Asia and the need for its study as a region."<sup>12</sup>

The practice of scholarship, however, cannot be reduced to a simple opposition of endowed and deprived or dominant and dominated spaces, as shown in the example of countries and regions (like Latin America or South Asia) that enjoy a reputation in international letters incommensurate with their position in world economy and politics. Latin American literature, for instance, has earned worldwide influence not only because of its creative appropriation of influences from outside Latin America (or its "consecration" in literary capitals like Paris, which Casanova highlights) but because it has built up a distinct discursive formation inspired by the region's indigenous traditions, histories, a "big" language (Spanish), and a long-running tradition of intellectual exchange among writers that, cutting across the continent, has created a literature that is "Latin American" and not just Colombian, Peruvian, Chilean, or Mexican.

There is, of course, a world of difference between Latin America and Southeast Asia. For geographic, historical, cultural, and linguistic reasons, it is much more difficult to imagine Southeast Asia as a unitary and coherent space. Yet, the example of Latin America points both to the imperatives and promise of a discursive formation enabled by the accumulation of intellectual capital in the space of the region rather than the nation (even if this region, like the nation itself, will necessarily be a contingent and unstable terrain).

The same logic that has created regional blocs for political, economic, and security cooperation suggests, too, the benefits of a regionalizing

scholarship. While this sounds unpleasantly programmatic, what I want to say is that comparative and transnational work is not only unavoidable in the investigation of certain problems, it is essential if we are to broaden the empirical and epistemic base of our studies and thus ascend to higher levels of generalization and theorization. It is, in more practical terms, also important for acquiring a visibility in the world that national scholarship does not quite have.

## Conclusion

Critical engagements with the Western canon of knowledge have always been part of the intellectual history of the region, and national spaces of scholarship (even if intensely contested) have been built up. The formation of a definably distinct “Southeast Asian studies *by* Southeast Asians” will require more. We can begin by looking back at the intellectual histories of the region, conceiving a “region” that is not defined and imposed from the outside but built from within, driven by the same processes that have created the nation-space of scholarship: the formation of a regional community of scholars, the critical appropriation of foreign resources, and the buildup of local knowledge.

José Rizal and his friends looked toward the region to create the nation. We must, in our own time, turn to the region to transcend the nation’s limits.

## Notes

- 1 See Fischer 1973, based on a panel discussion at the Association of Asian Studies meeting in Washington, DC, 19 Mar. 1971; Morse 1984, based on a Wilson Center conference in 1984 on the state of Southeast Asian Studies in the US; Hirschman et al. 1992, based on a conference sponsored by the Joint Committee on Southeast Asia of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies and the Southeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies, at the Wingspread facility in Wisconsin in 1989; Abdullah and Maunati 1994, based on a conference on the “Promotion of Southeast Asian Studies in Southeast Asia,” Jakarta, Nov. 1993, sponsored by LIPI and Toyota Foundation; Ahmad and Tan 2003, based on a conference on “Southeast Asian Historiography Since 1945,” Penang, 30 July–1 Aug. 1999, sponsored by SEASREP and Japan Foundation; *Weighing the Balance* 1999, proceedings of meetings held in New York City, 15 Nov. and 10 Dec. 1999, by the Social Science Research Council; Kratoska et al. 2005, based on a conference on “Locating Southeast Asia: Genealogies, Concepts, Comparisons

and Prospects,” Amsterdam, 29–31 Mar. 2001; *Southeast Asian Studies in Asia* 2003, proceedings of a conference organized by the UP Asian Center and Japan Foundation, Quezon City, 8–10 Jan. 2002.

- 2 In the recent attempt of *Sojourn* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) to identify “the most influential books of Southeast Asian Studies,” the short list of fourteen books cites only one Southeast Asian author (Reynaldo Ileto) and two books originally published in Southeast Asia. A longer list of thirty-one books includes only eight Southeast Asians and three books originally published in Southeast Asia. All the books authored by Southeast Asians (with the exception of one or two) were produced out of advanced studies done in universities outside the region. It may be further noted that all the works listed came out only after 1941. See *Sojourn* 2009, vii–xi.
  - 3 *Malasia* was a loosely configured category that referred primarily to the “Malay” region (the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia); in other sources, it encompassed Siam, Burma, and Indochina as well. On the concept of Malay, see Vickers 1997.
  - 4 For more on these personalities and their work: Mojares 2007; 2002, 52–86; 2008, 303–25.
  - 5 Pardo’s unfinished project may have been a Spanish translation from a French edition of the chronicle: Bokhari de Djohor, *Makota radja-radja ou la Couronne des rois, traduit du malais et annoté par A. Marre* (Paris, 1878).
  - 6 Rizal’s knowledge of the scholarship on Southeast Asia is shown in two posthumously published articles: “The People of the Indian Archipelago” (Rizal 1964b) and “Notes on Melanesia, Malaysia, and Polynesia” (Rizal 1964a). These articles were first published in *The Independent* (4 May 1918), 20, 21; (27 April 1918), 19–21.
  - 7 Rizal continues: “Those who copy directly from the original are thinkers who differ from one another for starting from different principles, founders of schools or doctrines. A large number, for being very far, for not seeing well, for not being so skillful, for laziness . . . are contented with making a copy from another copy of the one nearest to them, or, if they are willing, from what seemed to them best. . . . These copyists correspond to the partisans, the active sectarians of an idea. Others even more lazy, not daring to draw a single line in order not to commit a blunder, buy themselves a ready-made copy, perhaps a photograph, a lithograph, and they are contented and cheerful. To this group belong the passive sectarians, those who believe everything in order not to think.” See Rizal 1963, 2:208–9.
  - 8 Distinctions can be marked in the specific ways Filipino intellectuals positioned themselves in the space of international scholarship but I have left a discussion of these differences out of the present paper. The quote is from Paterno 1890, 1.
  - 9 Examples of annotations and commentaries are Pardo’s edition of the Spaniard Juan de Plasencia’s 1589 manuscript, *Las Costumbres de los Tagalog* (1892), and the Spaniard Simon Anda’s 1768 memorial to the King, *Una memoria de Anda y Salazar* (1899); Paterno’s commentary on the Maura Law of 1893, *El regimen municipal en las Islas Filipinas* (1893); and De los Reyes’s twice-monthly journal, *El Municipio Filipino* (1894–1896), a popular review of Spanish legislation and jurisprudence.
- Translations were also a favored form. Rizal translated Hans Christian Andersen and Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell*, and at one time planned to translate Theodor Waitz’s *Anthropologie der Naturvolker* (1859–1872) as guide to anthropological studies. He also suggested to his

colleagues to have Antonio Pigafetta's Italian account of the Philippine discovery translated to Tagalog or Spanish "so that it may be known how we were in 1520." Pardo embarked on an unfinished translation of *Makota radja-radja*, and De los Reyes translated European literary works, including Verdi's *Aida*.

- 10 *Islas Filipinas: Reseña de su organización social y administrativa* appeared in Spain in 1869 under the name Raimundo Geler, said to be the pseudonym of Manuel Regidor, a Creole lawyer active in the reform movement. See Mojares 2007, 439–41.
- 11 For a discussion of the folklore project, see Mojares 2009b.
- 12 Reid cites the first regional societies (Siam's Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris in 1665; Batavia Society of Arts and Sciences in 1778; Saigon's Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient in 1898), journals (Malacca's *Indo-Chinese Gleaner* in 1817; Singapore's *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* in 1847), and educational institutions (Malacca's Anglo-Chinese College in 1814).

Based in the Philippines, Spanish publishing on the region was driven by Catholic missionary interest, particularly in countries like China, Indochina, and Japan. An example is *El Correo Sino-Annamita*, annual compilations of missionary reports published in Manila (mostly dealing with China and Indochina) that ran from 1866 to (at least) 1893.

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