

2nd Presentation

Southeast Asian Studies in Indonesia in Three Stages: LIPI and Beyond

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In the late 1960s Soeharto regime commissioned the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) to initiate a research program focusing on Southeast Asian region. The government wanted the LIPI to advise the government over ways to end political confrontations against Malaysia and Singapore. The LIPI program led to the first institutionalization of area studies (*kajian wilayah*) in Indonesia. Later in the 1980s, individual projects focusing on a specific country appeared, such as Parsudi Suparlan's dissertation on Suriname and Arif Budiman's work on Chile. At the same time, people graduating from U.S. universities returned and expanded interest on Southeast Asian studies in Indonesia. They brought knowledge they had learned from reading Southeast Asian materials and from interactions with fellow students coming from the region. The early history of Southeast Asian studies by Indonesians indicated that it emerged from a comparative and strategic agenda that was independent from individual projects. I call this SEA Studies 2.0 (SEA Studies 1.0 was influenced more by Dutch orientalist's work on antiquities in Southeast Asia).

In the early 1990s, institutional framework on Southeast Asian studies began to take shape. With a support from the Toyota Foundation, Taufik Abdullah and Adrian B. Lopian of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) initiated the Program of Southeast Asian Studies at the LIPI. Since then, few other institutions bearing the name *Kajian Wilayah Asia Tenggara* (Southeast Asian Studies Program) have been established at Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta) and University of Indonesia (Jakarta). In addition, Airlangga University (Surabaya) and Parahyangan University (Bandung) have incorporated topics in comparative studies of Southeast Asian countries to their departmental curricula. An attempt to link individual thematic interests to shape institutional set up of Southeast Asian studies research centers and programs marks the SEA Studies 3.0 that started from the 1990s and has lasted until now.

The crisis of area studies in the U.S., Europe, and Australia, and the shifting priorities of the Indonesian government and the international funding agencies, from which the major supports for area studies work in the 1960s to the 1990s have come, have challenged the LIPI and the centers for area studies at universities to rethink the concept and method of doing area studies. The centers that have failed to respond to the changing environment have been forced to stay dormant. At the same time, individual projects need to adjust to the requirements of funding agencies. The government's current priority on fostering industrial revolution and regional competitiveness has called the LIPI to resituate area studies in the current realities of connectivity and disruptions. This will be SEA Studies 4.0, drawn upon the legacy of American and European area studies but directed to address current problems and issues in Asia.