

1st Presentation

**Asian Studies in Asia at the National University of Singapore:
An Appraisal by a Southeast Asian Studies Practitioner**

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This paper explores institutional, disciplinary and theoretical politics in regional quests for Asian alterities and their impacts on the field of Southeast Asian Studies using the experience at the National University of Singapore. It explores how efforts to do Asian Studies in Asia in the aftermath of the Orientalist critique have produced a critical brand of Inter-Asia discourses in advancing claims of distinctive Asian ontologies and rationalities. Yet, the Inter-Asia insistence on intractable Asian differences comes with the attendant risk of closing off all translatability and entrenching the insolvability of relativism and universalism in the adjudication of social-cultural incommensurability. How then might regional quests for alterity generate more equal and inclusive adjudications of human diversity and possibility? This paper argues that empirical realities of, and theoretical developments on, cultural and political fragmentation within Southeast Asia contain a promise to facilitate intercultural imaginations of the interdependency between social-cultural incompatibilities within or without (Southeast) Asia.