

The Southeast Asian Region and the Academe in Turbulent Times*

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I AM HUGELY HONORED by the invitation to give this keynote. I wish to congratulate everyone who has helped to create this event. I salute its historical significance. I confess, I am also terrified by the responsibility.

The organizers asked me to reflect on what we do. By “we” I mean academics working on Southeast Asia, wherever we were born, wherever we now live, whatever disciplines we choose. But I mean especially those who research, write, argue, attend conferences like these, and sometimes *shout* about our concerns because we care about the region, its people, and its future.

I plan to do this in three phases. First, I will revisit the time when I was starting my academic career. Looking around this hall, I see some old friends and familiar faces of my own generation. I want to remind them of how much has changed over our academic lifetimes. For younger friends, I want to hint how much change they can expect—far more than in my generation. Second, I will sketch a few major changes over the past thirty years—economic, political, and intellectual—that have transformed how we think and work. Finally, I will outline some issues that would frame my thinking if I were embarking on my academic career right now.



In my own education, from the 1950s to the 1970s, I went from a small Thai village, to the big city of Bangkok, and then to universities in the wide world, in Australia and the UK. Looking back, I realize this was