

Southeast Asian Studies in the age of STEM education and hyper-utilitarianism

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Abstrak

Area studies, including Asian and Southeast Asian studies, in the post-Cold War era have been facing an epochal challenge that is rooted in two conditions: on the one hand, the end of the Cold War and the fading geopolitical rationale, and on the other, the emergence of the technology-driven transformation of the global economy and society. The consequences thus far are paradoxical: 1) While the technology-led transformation needs a workforce with critical and innovative abilities, higher education becomes more hyper-utilitarian; 2) While the transformation instigates increasing diversity of identities in global cultures, many countries thrive for STEM education at the expense of learning languages and cultures, including area studies which are essential for diversity. Southeast Asian studies programs need to change in response to these new conditions. These changing conditions and paradoxes, nevertheless, take different forms and degrees in the American, European and Asian academies, thanks to their different histories of higher education. The prospects for Southeast Asian Studies in these various academies are likely to be different too.