

Moving Beyond Thai-Centrism: Theorizing “Asia as Method” in Decolonial Education

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Abstract Grounded in Chen's idea, Asia as method, the author conceptualizes his theorizing with Winichakul's signified meaning of Asia as a home for understanding how the author encounters educational phenomenon and having the authority to reconstitute Thai-centrism discourse in education. The notion of “home” signifies Thailand is part of Asia, which is used to move beyond the debate over “us vs. them”, which is non-productive and leads to other shortcomings. Asia as method as a frame of reference can be used to conceptualize how knowledge, culture, power, and discourse intersect in education. Given that the field of education is a cultural praxis in which diverse discourses, positionalities, and pedagogies deserve its place, education needs to be reconceptualized by moving beyond the legacy of western modernity- coloniality episteme and any forms of epistemic internal colonization, a legacy that continues to occur at the deep-rooted socio-cultural and psychological level and plays essential roles in constructing our subjectivity about educational ideals for cognitive and social justice. Thus, to move forward with decolonial and critical education projects, it is essential to explore multi-epistemology and methodology for nuanced understandings of education in the socio-cultural, political, historical, and environmental contexts. The relationship between Asia as method and decolonial and critical education projects need to be a point of departure for democratic deliberations against epistemicide and demonstration of how education as a form of cultural praxis works to internalize particular knowledge production for constructing a specific notion of citizenship in Thailand, Southeast Asia and beyond.

Keywords Asia as method; Asia as method in education; Thai-centrism; Decolonizing education; Critical education

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Statement of the research problem

Education reform has long been a critical issue in which Thailand has endeavored to create citizens with both Thai and global citizenship characteristics. It was evident in the educational policy on the ASEAN Curriculum Framework and the educational provision of ASEAN studies in 2012, and most recently, when the Sustainable Development Goals were set as the national agenda for the reformation related to human capital and socio-cultural, political, economic and environment dimensions in Thailand. However, efforts to create awareness of global citizenship through the Thai education system still adhere to the framework of nation-centric formations of hegemonic discourse, embedded with colonialism and juxtaposed with globalization and Thai-centric citizenship (Joseph & Matthews, 2014; Kampeepararb et al., 2023). However, this article is not intended to critique the discourse of Thai-ness and their discursive practices in the education system and the creation of Thai-centric citizenship, as such research studies have been sufficiently conducted (Jatuporn, 2022; Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2016; Toyota, 2005).

In this light, Southeast Asian Studies were inquired under the academic imagination of a post-Oriental self-understanding of the present contexts, which have brought to "*Asia as method*" proposed by Chen Kuan-Hsing as a frame of reference that emerged later among post/de-colonial scholars (Chen, 2010). The author conceptualizes his theorizing with Thongchai Winichakul's signified meaning of Asia as a home, for understanding how the author encounters educational phenomenon and having the authority to reconstitute Thai-centric discourse in education. The notion of "home" signifies Thailand is part of Asia, which is used to move beyond the debate over "us vs. them", which is non-productive and leads to other shortcomings (Keyes, 2002; Winichakul, 2014).

By conceptualizing the notion of Asia as home, Asia as method leads to constructing the body of knowledge of Asia through inter-referencing in history, philosophy, society, culture, economy, politics, and Southeast Asian subjectivity in the context of Asia (Lin, 2012). That plays a significant role in building a body of knowledge that comes from the methodology of area studies, emphasizing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies, and in the study of area studies, which take into accounts questions of epistemology and methodology for modernity/coloniality and power/knowledge constructions and relations (Baker, 2012). This has led to a new way of inquiring knowledge in temporal, spatial, and contemporary situated contexts including geo-colonial historical materialism, translation, base entity, critical syncretism, West as method, de-cold war, deimperialization, and inter-referencing (Kester et al., 2023). The method also focuses on comparative studies to create a shared space for knowledge construction that aims for solidarity and social cohesion.

Asia as method is a conceptual framework that has been widely used in disciplinary social sciences and humanities such as sociology, anthropology, area studies, literary studies, and cultural studies. In education, Asia as method has been recently employed as a framework for theorizing educational discourses and practices as well as educational phenomena in various dimensions in the context of Asia and East Asia (Kester et al., 2023). This approach aims to study, understand, analyze, critique, and propose alternatives to modernity/coloniality/decoloniality and aims toward critical and transformative education reforms (Lin, 2012; Zhang, Chan, & Kenway, 2015). At the same time, issues related to educational discourses, practices, and phenomena in light of multiculturalism, super-diversity, and pluri-versality have forged into imagination, language, and discourse in transformative dimensions both in Thailand and Southeast Asia.

Therefore, Southeast Asian Studies must be reconceptualized, as the knowledge construction of Southeast Asia in the past did not serve the Southeast Asians due to the fact that the global hegemonic political powers provided research funds for Southeast Asian Studies. Moreover, the formation of the ASEAN Community also results in the need for us to know our neighbors, to know ourselves in the context of Southeast Asia. However, neighbor education has been recently perceived;

nevertheless, it has not been seriously studied as to what it is like to study Southeast Asia by Southeast Asians themselves, or how different it would be from Southeast Asian Studies from afar?

Based on the author's experiences in inquiring about the nexus of curriculum theory, teacher education, and cultural studies over the years and the positionality in conducting research oriented to critical discourse in education, the author focuses on the macro-perspectives related to socio-cultural, political, philosophical and historical frameworks and social foundations of education studies and curriculum (Ropo & Autio, 2009). Given that the field of education is a cultural praxis in which diverse discourses, positionalities, and pedagogies deserve its place, education needs to be reconceptualized and goes beyond the legacy of western modernity-coloniality episteme and any forms of epistemic internal colonization, a legacy that continues to occur at the deep-rooted socio-cultural and psychological level and plays essential roles in constructing our subjectivity about educational ideals for cognitive and social justice (Kincheloe, 2008; Paraskeva, 2020; Park, 2017).

More specifically, the questions about the nature of knowledge production through curriculum, textbook, and pedagogy on Southeast Asia by Southeast Asians are as follows: Are there any characteristics that might be called a post-Oriental Southeast Asia in the view of Southeast Asians? In the future, if Southeast Asians decide to study Southeast Asia, what topics should be initiated in education as well as in educational theories and practices? Thus, theorizing "Asia as method" in decolonial and critical education is essential to creating imagination, language, and discourse that will lead to new alternatives for educational reform in Thailand, Southeast Asia, and beyond.

Research question

The author aims to create an alternative argument by asserting that creating Thai citizenship with a global citizenship mindset begins with the knowledge production, curriculum, and pedagogy of Southeast Asian Studies. Thus, how "Asia as method" could be conceptualized and theorized into education studies for constructing decolonial and critical education in Thailand, Southeast Asia, and beyond?

Research objective

This article aims to analyze and present the transformative idea that moves beyond Thai-centrism by theorizing "Asia as method" in decolonial and critical education.

Research methodology

The author employed a qualitative approach by using related documents and case studies as units of critical analysis. The details were demonstrated as follows. First, the author analyzed and synthesized related documents about "Asia as method" and "Asia as method in Education," both in English and Thai, to obtain the foundations of the state of knowledge of this approach. Second, the author analyzed case studies such as official social studies curricula and textbooks, ASEAN curriculum sourcebook and instructional manuals for educators and teachers, and the perspectives of scholars and educators provided in academic documents and public media in order to provide information for critical social explanation and discussion (Anyon, 2009). In this light, "Asia as method" was constructed as an approach and conceptual framework to study, understand, analyze, critique, and propose alternatives to modernity/coloniality/decoloniality that aim for critical and transformative education reforms (Baker, 2012; Lin, 2012; Park, 2017). The data obtained were analyzed using document analysis based on the conceptual framework juxtaposed with conceptual, logical, and philosophical analysis to provide research findings and transformative idea that moves beyond Thai-centrism in decolonial and critical education (Jatuporn, 2022).

Research findings and discussion

In this part, the author divided the presentation into four aspects detailed as follows: First, the production of knowledge through curriculum, textbook, and pedagogy of Southeast Asia that explains the essential reasons why we need to construct neighbor education in place of Southeast Asian Studies. Second, the initiatives to transcend the representations of discourse, knowledge, identity, and oriental subjectivity in education have been reconceptualized through epistemological and methodological constructions of curriculum and knowledge production. Third, the efforts toward Southeast Asian subjectivity have been constructed through a particular form of Southeast Asian Studies and provide another alternative discourse, knowledge, and new identity in education. Last, neighbor methodology will be employed to understand, analyze, critique, and transform knowledge production from within the nation to transborder knowledge through curriculum, textbooks, and pedagogy.

1) Knowledge production through curriculum, textbook, and pedagogy of Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian Studies is a disciplinary and methodological approach developed in the United States and spread to other countries, especially Europe and Australia. However, such area studies are on the verge of a dead end in the Western and global north academia. Interest in studying Southeast Asia has recently declined because the region lost its strategic importance in geo-global politics of knowledge in the post-Cold War period (Alatas, 2006). However, new academic discourses still challenge the hegemonic power of the Western-centric production of knowledge. Therefore, instead of adopting area studies in American or European traditions, there are many reasons why we need to reconceptualize and reconstruct Southeast Asian Studies in our way. The author refers to it as neighbor studies or neighbor education. The essential reasons why we need to construct neighbor education instead of Southeast Asian Studies are as follows:

To begin with, at the contemporary moment, the study of non-Western knowledge has increasingly turned its attention to the work of scholars from the non-Western world. That is, knowledge constructed by Anglo-American/European/Western scholars to comprehend the non-Western world is no longer adequate (Santos, 2016; Paraskeva, 2017). In the history of education, a new line of educational inquiry known as postcolonial/decolonial/subaltern studies in education proposed by scholars from South/Southeast Asia has replaced educational discourses and praxis that have been constructed in Euro-American academia (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006; Subedi & Daza, 2008). In the anthropology of education, non-western educational anthropologists, or those with immigrant, transnational, transcultural, and diasporic backgrounds, have become more influential in the field of contemporary anthropology of education that has transcended the field itself from discourse and theory to cultural practices (Baker, 2012; Hemphill & Blakely, 2015).

Even in the philosophy of education, contemporary educational philosophers with diverse backgrounds outside of Europe and America are growing significantly. Because of this, Southeast Asian Studies in the next decade deserve a thorough critical reconstruction. However, that is not to say that the post-Oriental knowledge will negate all legacies of the West. Instead, the knowledge has been constructed based on socio-cultural, economic, political, historical, and environmental conditions, research issues, and diverse subjectivities (Lim & Apple, 2018). Southeast Asia should not be created by eliminating Western knowledge. It should avoid the approach proposed by the West; creating the East as if there is a mere different Eastern world, where the West formulates an essentialized identity through the framework of Orientalism (Rizvi, 2013).

Second, in contemporary social sciences, humanities, and education, especially in the anthropology of education, there has been increasing interest in the global-local nexus of globalization from below and educational practices in specific and situated local contexts. One issue discussed in the last decade is the world anthropologies in education, which seek to inquire, compare, and propose

the educational reform model, initiatives, and cultural practices in schooling from an anthropological point of view (Arrove, 2009).

In this light, world anthropologies do not require a shared history of education with the Anglo-American and Eurocentric anthropologies. The mainstream epistemological and methodological approach has dominated the anthropology of education for decades. This approach revisits the discourse, culture, knowledge, and power relations of the English language as hegemonic epistemicide, while seeking educational theories and practices that provide different alternatives from education issues found in the Western academic world (Moreira, 2017).

Last, due to the decline in Southeast Asian Studies, the Western academic world has been trying to reconceptualize Southeast Asian Studies for more than a decade. However, there is still a slight number of scholarly works that focus on Southeast Asian Studies constructed by Southeast Asians themselves. In this light, the author considers the subjectivity of Southeast Asians in many dimensions that are likely to shape the characteristics of Southeast Asian Studies, herein called neighbor studies or neighbor education, the emerging field of educational inquiry that may replace area studies (Rizvi, 2013).

The fact that Southeast Asians have never seriously studied each other is because we are only interested in ourselves. If we want to study other countries, we tend to be interested in the more significant powerful countries influencing us socially, culturally, economically, and politically (Singh, 1995). However, from now on, we need to know and understand each other better, and seek value from understanding neighbors. Understanding people who seem familiar, yet different from us is essential.

2) Transcending the representations of discourse, knowledge, identity, and oriental subjectivity in education

The binary division between “we” and “the others” is the cornerstone of Southeast Asian Studies and its influence on knowledge production. As Edward Said pointed out, the study of an Oriental Non-Western society has modeled “the others” (the Oriental) from the inferior distinction to “us” (the Occident) (Singh, 1995). The capability to know about the East reaffirms the domination and superior power over the East, to make the East more developed and civilized (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006). However, contemporary Orientalism in post-colonial Southeast Asian Studies may have been somewhat different because the East is no longer socio-economically and politically inferior to the West. However, the ultimate difference, the construction of the others and other-ness, remains the complexity of Southeast Asian Studies.

Southeast Asian Studies conducted from afar and beyond regional boundaries are often based on context-specific and situated historical, political, and cultural construction. The research questions and the directions to inquire about the answers of the study are therefore being conditioned by a particular historical, political, and socio-cultural frame of reference for knowledge production. However, Southeast Asian Studies by the Southeast Asians themselves are not polarized from each other because they also have their particular common roots in terms of language, ideology, philosophical, historical, political, and socio-cultural frame of reference (Joseph & Matthews, 2014).

In this light, the questions that need to be explored further are as follows: what are those historical, political, and cultural frames of reference? How can we develop Southeast Asian Studies from those frameworks? Moreover, how can we create context-specific and culturally situated in the subjectivity of Southeast Asian Studies? By doing so, there are continuous efforts for curriculum development and knowledge production by the Southeast Asians for Southeast Asians themselves demonstrated in the ASEAN curriculum framework and its supplementary documents such as the ASEAN curriculum sourcebook and instructional manuals for educators and teachers. The visionary goal of this curriculum is to “...foster shared ownership and mutual pride in the multiplicity of ASEAN, and help today’s students, who will be tomorrow’s leaders, workers, and citizens, define

and value their unique place within ASEAN, and recognize how it shapes their own experiences, and life in their community, country, region, and the world..." (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012).

Achieving this goal requires Southeast Asian educators to reconceptualize their epistemological and methodological constructions of curriculum and knowledge production. Meanwhile, transcending the representations of discourse, knowledge, identity, and subjectivity reproduced in Anglo-American/European/Western rationality is no longer disturbing. Neither the construction of the East from the West nor the production of the East with such a worldview that the East can be better is fragile and plausible because both constructions do not take into account the multiculturalism, super-diversity, and pluri-versality in the non-Western world (Cary & Mutua, 2010; Cairns, 2021).

3) Toward Southeast Asian subjectivity: a new identity in neighbor education

In disciplinary social sciences and humanities and other relevant academic fields such as education, the unit of analysis inevitably requires binary comparisons and divisions between us and them or the others. Although it is not a deliberate comparison, there must be implicit comparative in-depth inquiry. In this light, intercultural and transcultural comparative studies are a form of translation and recontextualization, which involves using metaphors, symbols, and signified meanings. It is the effort to replace one thing with another incompletely. In comparative education, "us" describes "the others." In this sense, "us" always depends on understanding "the others" because we can never fully understand others without understanding ourselves.

Understanding others is therefore inseparable from our own understanding (Popkewitz et al., 2014); moreover, that can be applied in a reversible manner. Thus, the binary divisions between we/they, we/the others, and other binary constructions are not as much as what the Southeast Asian scholars from the West portrayed. Furthermore, the differences would be much less if the readers of those works were those from Southeast Asia.

Recent debates in anthropology and sociology in education proposed that the notion of culture(s) generally viewed as passive, static, and long-lasting should be replaced with a globally/locally situated, dynamic, and constantly contested. Thus, culture is time and context-specific, short-listing, and can only be studied in specific areas, not in a general context-free fashion. Additionally, the positionality of people, places, and cultures in each society makes it difficult to obtain in-depth and authentic data (Arnove, 2009; Andreotti, 2011).

In addition, the effort to transcend and move beyond from the essentialized simplistic divisions between we/the others or the insider/outsider is a significant method contributed by non-Western anthropologists of education, who may simultaneously criticize the West and their identity construction. These scholars propose alternative frames of reference for rethinking the construction of non-Western education and reformulate a critical perspective that considers oneself as both an insider and outsider. In this sense, neighbor education is conceptualized by realizing their subjectivities. In the same way, Asian scholars suggested that Southeast Asian subjectivity is crucial for the social sciences, humanities and education (Alatas, 2006; Nguyen & Chia, 2023; Winichakul, 2014). Then, Southeast Asian subjectivity also creates a particular form of Southeast Asian Studies and provides another alternative discourse, knowledge, and new identity in education.

4) Neighbor methodology: From within the nation to transborder knowledge

To move forward with decolonial and critical education projects, education scholars must explore multi-epistemology and methodology for a nuanced understanding of education in their own situated socio-cultural, political, historical, and environmental contexts (Nguyen & Chia, 2023; Paraskeva, 2017). Therefore, in this section, the author will discuss the "*neighbor methodology*"

employed to understand, analyze, critique, and transform knowledge production through curriculum, textbooks, and pedagogy.

Opposing neighbors: the methodological nationalism

The reason why Southeast Asian scholars do not seem to give much importance to Southeast Asian Studies is that the number of Southeast Asian scholars' works published in English is minimal. However, having scant English published papers does not necessarily mean that there is no study of Southeast Asia by Southeast Asians. In addition to the issues of the power of the English language and the hegemonic relationships between academic capitalism in publications and the Western/Euro/American-centric production of knowledge, the author observes that the academic challenges of many Southeast Asian scholars are quite different from those of the Western academic world. Alternatively, to put it in the essence of Escobar (2007), the South American anthropologist who researched the diversity of anthropology, it can be stated that regional and local Southeast Asian Studies are contrastively different from the Western/Euro/American-centric Southeast Asian Studies.

One of the key characteristics of Southeast Asian Studies by Southeast Asians is nationalist subjectivity embedded in a methodology called "methodological nationalism". Although methodological nationalism is not identical to nationalism, there are certain related parts. Methodological nationalism focuses on studying a particular country, and prioritizes studying the researcher's home country. The author argues that Southeast Asians mainly decide to study in their own country. This is not a result of language barriers since many Southeast Asian experts are proficient in Western European, Chinese, Pali, and Sanskrit languages. In addition, the reasons for inadequate funding and financial budgets for these countries to support people to study abroad are not significant inputs because many foreign experts assist Southeast Asians in conducting research even though they are not based in Southeast Asia countries.

In this light, the emphasis on studying one's own country results from the strong nation-state's political, historical, and socio-economic conditions. Methodological nationalism thus contains the essence of nationalism orienting into the study of a particular country. For Southeast Asian scholars, academic work is part of nationalist politics and state policies. This was strongly evident in curriculum, textbooks, and pedagogy in Southeast Asian countries during/after post-colonial period (Hemphill & Blakely, 2015; Lim & Apple, 2018; Nozaki et al., 2005).

In Thailand, many Thai social sciences, humanities, and education scholars often place their unit of study and analysis of Thailand, regardless of their academic fields, in pursuit. A small number of scholars are interested in studying other Southeast Asian nations seriously. It can be stated that historiography that creates national unity, continuation of the monarch's hegemony, and the unity of the Thai ethnicity is the mainstream ideology established since the nation's building project in the reign of King Rama IV and continues since then (Winichakul, 2014). It is also interesting to see that the study of history, sociology, and anthropology, whether by mainstream or non-mainstream/alternative scholars, all interact with each other in the boundary of Thai-centrism.

The official knowledge of Southeast Asian Studies in those mentioned above had been self-constructed in a way not different from the modernity/coloniality knowledge power relations, whose identity was created within the boundaries of nation-state borders (Bhambra, 2007). Such knowledge production rejects or undermines diversity, which may link various pluralities and diversities across nation-state borders (Andreotti, 2011). This kind of knowledge thus produces a specific understanding of neighbors who, if not our relatives, can become our formidable enemies. Southeast Asian Studies are oriented to studying one's own country, expecting nation-centrism and superiority, and creating neighbor education with a sense of opposing nations all the time.

As Thailand enters the globalization and internationalization phase, this knowledge will only serve as the foundation for "methodological regional colonialism", that is, to inquire about the knowledge of neighbors to gain benefits, or be wary of neighbors. Neighbor education in this fashion

is subjected to research grants provided by more developed countries in the region. In Thailand, one of the protocols demonstrated in the government-funded scholarships asked the researchers to explain what we get from studying our neighboring countries? In turn, this can lead to other shortcomings. This is because neighbor education under this framework undermines positive understanding between regions since the goals were set to take one's own country as a center and more superior. Thus, neighbors are understood by revolving around Thailand as historically reproduced through the nation's Siamese/Thai imperial discourse.

In addition, the focus of neighbor methodology needs to consider the interests of neighbors and the region. If the study regards mutual benefits, it will allow understanding from more than one's perspective. That will allow one country to see one's identity more broadly. Neighbor education that promotes hegemonic building over the region, competition, domination, and exploitation of resources and labor from neighbors, rather than building cooperation and solidarity in the region, needs to be declined (Alatas, 2006; Winichakul, 2014).

However, there are emergent non-mainstream/ alternative works, despite the fact they are still dealing within the scope of nation-centrism, or currently considered alternative nationalist academic works. This new historiography and ethnography are aimed at crossing nation-state borders. They would be constructed at the interstices between becoming and not becoming a nation, to localization through the study of local history, that helps connect the different regions of the country with neighboring territories across borders - from Northeast Thailand to Laos, from Northern Thai provinces and Lanna to Myanmar, Kengtung and Xishuangbanna, from Malay to globalized Malay and Southeast Asian region in the Indian and South China ocean (Winichakul, 2014).

The works that challenge nation-state borders bring about new understandings that the border is a construction of social reality that we do not need to cherish and protect unquestioningly. Some works challenge the understanding of the origins and developments of Thai culture, suggesting that Thai-ness emerges from somewhere other than the Altai Mountains or from anywhere more distant than the locality in which we live today. These self-critique Southeast Asian Studies are conceptualized as a method of "internal decoloniality/ de-colonial within", and can be considered the critical foundation for a new form of Southeast Asian Studies and Asia as method in Education (Winichakul, 2000; Winichakul, 2014).

Despite being rarely mentioned in international and global academia, methodological nationalism is considered an important approach to Southeast Asian Studies by Southeast Asians. As knowledge cannot be completely dominated and tends to be challenged all the time, the study in this tradition is evident in the mainstream construction by the state, which ultimately produces neighbors' knowledge as a threat to building better understanding between regions, and by the emerging non-mainstream and alternative scholars who challenge the official production of knowledge. These scholars also propose a new frame of reference for transcending nation-state borders for Southeast Asian Studies by Southeast Asians.

Neighbors within: Methodology for the others within

While the first approach to Southeast Asian Studies emphasizes the self-study and critique of self-identity construction, the second approach to Southeast Asian Studies focuses on the study of people in their nation-state. Those people are "the Others Within" (Winichakul, 2000). In the same fashion, anthropologists are regarded as the others within when situations and contexts orient to the targets of their study. The studies in this approach may be divided into two subgroups.

First, it involves participatory action research aimed at academic activism and social educational movement, focusing on the subordinated, the subalterns, the oppressed, and the others. The study in this area is considered the foundation of anthropology and ethnography in education in Thailand since the research works' aim is for practical applications rather than theoretical conceptualizations. As such, these scholarly fields focus more on economic, social, cultural, political,

and resource issues in educational practices, and on solving problems of the disadvantaged and disfranchised children and youth, parents, teachers, and community stakeholders rather than on developing conceptual knowledge. The units of analysis are usually the target groups of educational development, rather than being a source of knowledge of a specific field of study. This trend of study integrates cross/trans/inter-disciplinary knowledge from social sciences, humanities, sciences, and technology to examine a wide range of problems related to education, rather than theorizing conceptual knowledge (Nasee, 2020).

Second, it does not focus on providing educational development, opportunities, accessibilities, and building educational infrastructures, but on constructing theoretical, epistemological, and methodological advancements. Southeast Asians who study Southeast Asian Studies cannot claim the primacy of experience, or the status of being indigenous insiders or native informants as their own culturally legitimate scholarship because studying people within the same nation-state boundary does not mean the people being studied and the study of participants will always belong to the same group (Cary & Mutua, 2010).

The subjectivities of Southeast Asians make Southeast Asian Studies different, especially in anthropology and ethnography in education. Most anthropologists are urban, well-educated, and middle class who cannot speak the local dialects fluently. This implicitly separates the anthropologists from the group of people being studied. However, the anthropologists are involved in the same society as the people with whom they conduct the studies, and are members of the same national community. Thus, the others within can also be used as a framework for studying foreign neighbors because the subjectivities of neighbors within and foreign neighbors are not much different. They share everyday subjectivities as outsiders, and are indigenous insiders who share a particular culture, language, history, and society.

Transnational neighbors: Different and yet similar

In Thailand, Southeast Asia, and Asia, the solidarity efforts for knowledge production through educational policy, curriculum, textbook, and pedagogy as well as methodological imaginaries that seek to theorize “Asia as method” (Cairns, 2021; Jatuporn, 2022; Lin, 2012) and researching on/with “Asia” into educational studies, educational theory and practices have increasingly become more advanced (Brehm & Kitamura, 2022; Kester et al., 2023; Lim & Apple, 2018; Rizvi, 2013; Takayama, 2016).

Among these significant contributions from the social sciences and humanities that have critical implications for educational studies are the transnational studies, particularly the one conducted by Tangseefa (2007), which studied border territories not situated in Thailand and Myanmar. His work is; therefore, different from many regional studies researchers, who focus mainly on the expertise of a particular country. Another aspect of the border territories that Thai scholars are interested in is the boundary lines. Significant works were initiated by Thongchai Winichakul, who studied the origins of the Thai nation-state through the construction of Siam Mapped (Winichakul, 2014).

However, many transnational studies approaches need to be reconceptualized. First, the people being studied are transnational, transborder, and transcultural, but the researchers are not. Many transnational studies create new frontiers, or reinforce the existing boundaries, whether it is the borders of nation-states, ethnic borders, or religious borders. Transnational research rarely intends to present the movement of people crossing borders; the research studies often focus on studying people on either side of the country’s borders. As the aim of such research remains on the policy level that focuses on the nation’s interests, transnational citizens still need to be placed as the central unit of the study.

Second, many transnational studies have yet to realized that people did not cross the border, but the border crosses people’s lives. Border territory is a new political construction, that originated a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, people’s relations in Southeast Asia have long been intertwined regardless of nation-state borders. The accompanying issue that should be studied along with

transborder is bordering, which some nation-states and international organizations like ASEAN may be creating new frontiers. These different types of boundaries only sometimes require the presence of the physical border. A clear example is the issuance of identity cards in different colors to prevent human migration.

Transborder must take into account many additional conditions. The first is language. We can no longer assume that the power of official language can rule over other territories. Not only the nation's official language being studied that is important, but ethnic and local dialects are equally necessary. The second factor is political, historical, and socio-economic dispositions that define the scope and goals of the research study. These challenges may not be as severe as those found in conducting research under national boundaries, which is why there are still few studies of other countries.

At the same time, it is a surprising remark that reveals the socio-cultural differences of the neighbors, which overlap with their similarities or shared common characteristics. Importantly, because the differences between the neighbor's identity and the researcher's identity are not much different, the subjectivity of Southeast Asians should, therefore, be greater than the perspective of scholars from afar who view Southeast Asia through the lens of Orientalism.

Table 1 Neighbor methodology and its key characteristics

Neighbor methodology	Key characteristics
Opposing neighbors: the methodological nationalism	1) Although methodological nationalism is not identical to nationalism, there are certain related parts. 2) Methodological nationalism not only focuses on studying a particular country, but also prioritizes studying the researcher's own home country. 3) Methodological nationalism is considered an important approach to Southeast Asian Studies by Southeast Asians.
Neighbors within: the methodology for the others within	1) The unit of analysis focuses on the study of people in their own nation state. 2) Those people are "the others within". 3) Neighbors within can be classified into two groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participatory Action Research (PAR) aimed at academic activism and social movement for reform, focusing on the subalterns, the oppressed and the others. - the construction of theoretical, epistemological and methodological advancements in academic and scholarly fields rather than focusing on educational development.
Transnational neighbors: the different and yet similar identity	1) Important works inspired by transnational studies and border territories of the Thai nation state. 2) The socio-cultural differences of the neighbors overlap with their similarity or shared common characteristics. The differences between the neighbor's identity and the identity of researcher are not much different. 3) The subjectivity of the Southeast Asians should be greater than the perspective of scholars from afar who view Southeast Asia through the lens of Orientalism.

The neighbor methodology and its key characteristics aforementioned are expected to be taking place in the various forms of critical pedagogy and cultural praxis. In this vein, developing critical consciousness or “*conscientization*” is instrumental to action in decolonial and critical education. Reconceptualizing and theorizing Asia as method alone does not perform miracles in educational reform, so it should be a collaborative and solidarity effort and a result of collegial and deliberative dialogue.

Sustain strategies, such as special interest groups, continuous academic research and activism by educators and reflective practice might be mechanisms that support in scaffolding critical consciousness with a longer-lasting impact. However, moving from critical consciousness to action by means of critical pedagogy in a nuanced, dynamic and situated context is very essential (Paredes-Canilao, 2017). I believe that critical pedagogy is “*a pedagogy of the us*” by presenting Freire’s legacy in its symbolic, pedagogical, political and ethical power, which calls us to think of our country and region of uncertainty and restlessness, in order to resist so much hopelessness together and build a “we” from more receptive and welcoming performative actions.

Conclusion

The essence of theorizing “Asia as method” in decolonial and critical education and knowledge production through curriculum, textbook, and pedagogy can represent the subjectivity of Southeast Asian scholars in terms of similarities and differences. In so doing, Southeast Asian Studies address regional issues and answer practical problems, rather than theoretical conceptualization. Although the epistemological and methodological frameworks have been imported from the West, those frames of reference have been recontextualized/re-appropriated for constructing epistemicide in the region. Southeast Asian Studies thus reconstruct a relationship between the researcher and the people being studied, instead of the others in the society being studied. The researcher then studies themselves while studying others.

What makes Southeast Asian Studies by Southeast Asians themselves different from Southeast Asian Studies from afar is the Southeast Asian subjectivity. That makes the research questions, conceptual theories, and epistemological and methodological inquiries used in the research study distinct from Southeast Asian Studies from afar. The critical foundation for a new form of Southeast Asian Studies and by theorizing Asia as method in decolonial and critical education is a point of departure for democratic deliberations against epistemicide and demonstration of how education as a form of cultural praxis works to internalize particular knowledge production for constructing a specific notion of citizenship in Thailand, Southeast Asia and beyond.

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