

Studying Southeast Asia in and for Southeast Asia: Interview with Anthony Reid

Leonard Blussé and Carolien Stolte met Anthony Reid and his wife Helen for an Italian dinner in Leiden. Cultural confusion ensues: a life and career in Southeast Asian studies. For the convenience of our readers footnotes have been added concerning some of the people and publications mentioned during this interview.

Could you tell us something about your youth and educational background in New Zealand?

Growing up in New Zealand definitely contributed to my interest in the rest of the world. It bred a kind of internationalism; since the centre of the world was so clearly not New Zealand, it had to be somewhere else. I never studied history at school. Fortunately it wasn't available for the academic stream in my school, but since memory was never my strong point, I would have done badly and would have given up on the whole thing. So I didn't discover history until I was in university. However, my parents were good friends with John Beaglehole, the biographer of Captain James Cook, and probably New Zealand's then best-known historian on a world stage.¹ Since they were diplomats and often overseas, they arranged for me to live with the Beagleholes during my last undergraduate year (1959). Dr. Beaglehole was a brilliant researcher and writer, though not a great lecturer. His passion for history and the infectious humanism that went with it must have had its influence on me.

If we remember right, you did not spend all your youth in New Zealand.

Yes, being dragged about to various places as a 'diplomatic kid' must have had an effect. My parents went to the US at the end of the war. New Zealand didn't really know it was an independent country until the end of World War II, and hardly had any diplomatic representation until then. It did not have a foreign ministry, or a foreign service. There was an office in London to which they appointed ex-politicians, but nothing else. After all, we were 'British' so we didn't need to have separate representation—

Britain would look after us. The Second World War was a watershed in that sense; New Zealand (and Australia) saw that in a crunch Britain would look after its own interests first. If anybody was capable of protecting New Zealand and Australia in the Pacific, it was going to be America. The fall of Singapore was a crucial moment. A shift in orientation away from Great Britain began, and my father was sent to Washington to open up an office there in 1943. However, the war was still going on and the journey by sea was quite dangerous. I was still only 4 years old—I am the youngest of four children—and my parents didn't think it safe for us to cross. So the kids stayed behind until the last stage of the war. I was put up with an aunt in Auckland for a year. At the end of 1944 it was considered safe enough to ship us across the Pacific. So we got on an American troop ship taking US soldiers back. The crossing was still a little dangerous then, but for a little boy it was mostly exciting. I remember the target practices on board. They would send all of us below decks, saying all the civilians had to disappear. My siblings and I knew that those were the fun times when balloons would be released and shot at, so we would try to hide in the lifeboats to see everything.

So I began school in the US, and experienced that temporary trauma that displaced kids do. I was the boy with the funny accent for at least the beginning of my four and a half years there. After our return to New Zealand in 1949, I was again the boy with the funny accent, talking like an American kid. But children adapt quickly for survival.

My father took up a second posting soon after I began high school in 1952, seconded from New Zealand's Department of External Affairs to serve the UN as its representative in Jakarta. One of his main tasks was to look after international experts from agencies such as the FAO and the WHO. It was a frustrating time for him; Jakarta was expanding rapidly towards the hills to the south, and the newly built houses in Kebayoran intended for international staff would invariably be taken over by the Indonesian army when they neared completion. My father was never very comfortable in the role of diplomat, but did believe the Jakarta assignment was his most worthwhile. He had been trained as a lawyer, but keenly felt his own working class background and being born 'on the wrong side of the tracks.' He may have been a little over-anxious as an Ambassador subsequently, afraid that people would find out that he was just a working lad. I did visit them for a few months, but my parents considered me to be a failure in the tropics—I reacted badly to the climate, I missed my mates and my football, and was sent home. My next foreign visit was to see my parents in Japan when I had just started university in 1957. That

was my first adult experience of Asia, and it made a big impact on me. The post-war economic take-off was just beginning. Although I had seen poverty in Indonesia, I worried about it more in Japan. I went with my brother, and once we got into an overcrowded subway at opposite ends of the carriage. There was no problem finding each other since we both stood a head taller than everybody else. But when I next visited Japan in 1973 I no longer stood out at all. It was amazing to see by how much the Japanese post-war generation who came to maturity in the 1960s had outgrown their parents.

So you were not a typical New Zealand boy.

Who is typical? I do think my background made me relatively predisposed to appreciate the other; to recognise that there was cultural difference in the world and to find that endlessly fascinating.

What did you study in University?

I went to Victoria University in Wellington. As an undergraduate, I took history and economics, and in my first year also political science and French. I did not initially think history was an *important* subject, though it turned out to be so much more fun than economics. Economics was what seemed serious. I was an eager young boy who wanted to improve the world, and I thought economics should explain the world's inequalities and how to fix them, and that perhaps political science would also help a bit. But I kept on with economics through my first degree, thinking that was what would be relevant to the world's problems.

Helen interrupts: 'Your whole family was like that; it was your Methodist background.'

Yes, you are probably right. Methodism and the Student Christian Movement (which absorbed some of my time as an undergrad) conveyed this conviction that one should try to leave the world a better place. There turned out (by much later hindsight) to be one great advantage to studying history at that time and place. One studied to explain the world, not to explain oneself. No one was interested in New Zealand's history, which did not even begin to be taught at university until a few years after my time. I was not the only one who suspected that it was not the centre of the world. In the interim since then, history in New Zealand and Australia, like everywhere, has become more concerned with indigenous heritage and identity issues, and we have grown less confident about even our right to teach and write about the other. The history I learned in Wellington

was of course primarily European and British history, but that provided the frame for adding Asian history to a broadly global understanding. I felt I was learning something about the world, and wanted to explain that world. If history had meant predominantly the history of my own country (as tended to be the case in England and France, for example), I would have chosen something else.

So how did you end up in Southeast Asian studies?

What may have influenced things was that around 1949–50, a group of Commonwealth countries, spearheaded by Australia and New Zealand, initiated a scholarship agreement for students from the Asian Commonwealth initially, but eventually extended to most of Southeast Asia. Immigrants from those countries were not yet being accepted, but after the war it became obvious that they were neighbours and that they were poor. So we started offering scholarships under what was called the Colombo plan after the initial agreement in Colombo. Suddenly all these diverse and interesting students were coming to homogeneous New Zealand. I played a small role as a student organiser of programmes for one or two intakes in the late 1950s. This programme was one indication, along with the Volunteer Graduates scheme for Indonesia in particular, of what seemed clear to my generation down under: that the challenge was in Southeast Asia. There was no China—it was inaccessible—and the Pacific Islands that later became important to New Zealand were still a colonial responsibility. Southeast Asia was the challenge—whether thinking of poverty and development, of politics, or of cultural otherness. It was there and it was exciting. It has become less obvious now, but for my 1950s generation there was a real movement, a reformist challenge to ‘do something.’

Helen: The first thing his parents ever asked me, was: ‘So what can you do for the world?’ I was brought up a Catholic; his Methodist family took me by surprise.

Yes, Helen comes along somewhere around this time, towards the end of my undergrad years. She played basketball, as did I. We met at the New Zealand inter-university summer camp at Curious Cove in the Marlborough Sounds. It was a summer camp for wannabe intellectuals, full of the pretentious dreams of youth. Garfield Todd was one of the keynote speakers, and something of a hero as the New Zealand-born first prime minister of Rhodesia, trying to find a multi-racial solution before the white separatists took over. Helen was a student of languages

at Auckland, and a Catholic with a strong Auckland Catholic student network, while I was an SCM-type activist, for whom the biggest issue of the pre-Vietnam times was to stop racially exclusive rugby tours to and from South Africa. We became interested in each other for the usual reasons, but also perhaps a touch of the exoticism of otherness. My parents were somewhat less impressed.

I was Christian-activist enough at the time to write my MA thesis about Church and State in New Zealand during the Great Depression—the only time I ever did New Zealand history. Subsequently, I was interested in getting away, whether to do a Ph.D. on something Indonesian or to join the Foreign Ministry. The Rhodes scholarship rounds came along whilst I was working in a construction gang, mostly digging ditches, it seemed, over the summer holidays. I foolishly thought I had to tell the foreman of my gang that I had to go for an interview with the Governor General for a scholarship. I should have just called in sick, since nobody believed me anyway. I didn't get the scholarship, though. I always wondered if the problem was basketball—the rules at that time still required that, as well as academic prowess, you had to excel in 'the manly sports' to show the leadership potential needed for a Rhodes. In New Zealand that was clearly rugby, and I played basketball. The Governor General asked me: 'Is that a manly sport?' But I was still interested in doing a Ph.D., and not long after I got a phone call from someone connected with that process, asking if I would be interested in a much less lucrative and prestigious scholarship handled by the same committee—a consolation prize of sorts for not getting the Rhodes. So I took this Oxford scholarship to King's College, Cambridge.

To return to the question, I did know that I wanted to do something on Indonesia. I had even taken an undergraduate class in Southeast Asian history and read my Furnivall, Emerson and Kahin at that early stage. That course was a first for New Zealand, in 1958. It was taught by Emily Sadka,² who was from a Sephardic Jewish family in Singapore and had done her Ph.D. at ANU on colonial Malaya. New Zealand was starting to get interested in Southeast Asian history and was looking for people who could teach it. At Wellington they had also just begun teaching Indonesian, which subsequently had a long career in New Zealand before being abandoned a couple of years ago. Leslie Palmier³ was appointed to Wellington in my time also to start the Asian Studies programme. He didn't stay very long, but I asked him once where I should go if I wanted to do something on Indonesia. Of course he said Cornell. But I got the scholarship to Cambridge, and did not even apply for anything in

America—I was much more interested in going to Cambridge and being in Europe. So in 1961 I sailed through the Panama route to start work in Cambridge.

When I got there, they tried to persuade me to do something else. I already had an MA. But the historians at Kings said that what they did best was the Tripos, the three-year undergraduate degree. Cambridge still didn't pay great attention to graduate studies at that time, and many of the other scholarship students from abroad had indeed been persuaded to do a second bachelor's degree. I am glad I had the courage to say no, and of course the trend moved quickly in that direction subsequently. But they had no one in Cambridge for Southeast Asian studies—the only person I might do a Ph.D. with was Victor Purcell,⁴ who worked on the Chinese in Southeast Asia. I wasn't at all interested in the Chinese at that stage (see below), nor he much in Indonesia, but he became my mentor and so I went ahead with him. Helen and I married at the beginning of my third year at Cambridge (1963). She had come to Europe after teaching for a year to get some money, and after we got together again she had taught English in Aachen, as near as she could get to where I was toiling in the Dutch colonial archives at Schaarsbergen, near Arnhem.

What about the thesis itself?

Aceh, I am afraid to say, was an arbitrary choice in a way. I worried about all those Dutch researchers who would read the colonial sources so much faster than me, and although I did start learning Dutch right away, I did not want a 100 per cent Dutch topic. Purcell was a fascinating character, but he was ageing, finishing up his memoirs, and not very interested in me. So I used to go to SOAS to talk to the historians there, among whom was Jeremy Cowan,⁵ later Director of SOAS. He suggested I do East Sumatra, the *cultuurgebied* around Medan, as a key economic story on which little had been done. I went to the archives, and discovered that for every document on East Sumatra in either Dutch or British archives, there were twenty on Aceh. East Sumatra seemed such a quiet side-show by contrast that it would be hard to justify. So I went ahead with Aceh, trying to explain the origins of the war from both Dutch and British records leading up to the war, and discovering some fascinating Anglo-Dutch imbroglios along the way, largely ignored in the Dutch publications of the time because they embarrassingly compromised Dutch sovereignty. One of these was the strong Turkish role in the diplomacy of the war; another was the *Nisero* affair of 1883, which has remained in the shadows although a film could be made of it. A British steamer, *Nisero*, was wrecked on the

west coast of Aceh in the middle of the Aceh war, 1883, stranding its crew of 25 mostly British seamen. The local raja of Teunom had the wit himself—or more likely was advised by a French pepper-trader friend, Edouard Roura—to see this as a great chance. Why not hold them hostage and propose not to let them go until Britain guaranteed a proper solution to this war? It proved to be a stroke of brilliance because the British (especially in Singapore and Penang) were already very critical of Dutch policies, and the emotive pull of British hostages in a Sumatran jungle for a year made it imperative for London to appear to be doing something. The Hague was almost desperate to prevent the British from intervening. The Dutch government presented the eventual compromise with the British and the Raja, including the freeing of trade, to the Dutch public as if it was just what they would have done anyway. But losing that weapon of trade control was one of the factors that prevented the Dutch making a start on conquering Aceh for another ten years. Intriguing.

Anyway, I completed my thesis in January 1965 and published it with the University of Malaya and with Oxford.⁶ Overall, it was a fairly conventional diplomatic thesis, with some interesting data but no ambitious new paradigm or anything of the sort. It got a couple of reviews and took its place on dusty shelves in a few libraries. So it was astonishing to me that a few years later, in the 1970s, I received a letter from Hasan Tiro's independence movement (then still a small thing), saying how much they liked the book which inspired their guerrillas in the jungle in Aceh! I was incredulous and frankly appalled. I told nobody at the time. It seemed inconceivable that this pedestrian dissertation written entirely in Europe, with scarcely any knowledge of modern Aceh (I was able to visit Aceh only once between thesis and book), could have had such an effect.

It appeared later that Hasan Tiro had read my book in the New York Public Library in the early 1970s, and was excited by the picture of nineteenth-century Aceh being taken seriously as an independent country having diplomatic relations with Britain, France, Turkey and the United States. No doubt I had tried to make it, if not Aceh-centric, at least a story with three equal protagonists—Aceh, the Netherlands and Britain. My generation was fed up with colonialism and therefore inherently sympathetic with nationalism. I certainly sympathised with the Aceh underdog having little chance in a colonial world. The British sources provided a useful additional window, just because they were not Dutch, and could show the Aceh case. So I see now how that story may have inadvertently appealed to Aceh nationalists. After the peace began I felt

able to meet Hasan Tiro and Malik Mahmud in Sweden, and I became again more active on the Aceh front—especially after the 2004 tsunami.

What about your first university appointment?

That was Malaysia. I had put some feelers out, but the job offer from the University of Malaya arrived halfway through an overland trip through the Middle East: Yugoslavia into Greece, Turkey, Syria, Iran. A telegram somehow reached us at a campground in the south of Turkey, which we must have given as a forwarding address for the Poste Restante in Istanbul. I had a job option in New Zealand if nothing in the region had come through. But having written a thesis without any fieldwork in the country I really wanted to be near Indonesia. And I couldn't go to Indonesia itself in 1965 because of *konfrontasi*.⁷ The telegram basically urged us to get to Malaysia as soon as we could. I think I said we would need a couple more months, since we were only a third of the way and hadn't yet seen Jerusalem, Damascus, Baghdad and Isfahan. This was before the June 1976 War and so old Jerusalem was still part of Jordan. We had a booking made to get our Volkswagen van onto a ship in Madras, and I think we stuck to that.

Malaysia was an exciting place to start a career. The History Department was itself very interesting for a Southeast Asianist, with Wang Gungwu as head,⁸ Jan Pluvier⁹ already there as an Indonesianist, as well as David Bassett,¹⁰ Bill Roff,¹¹ Tony Short,¹² and David Wyatt¹³ and Gerald Maryonov as Fulbright visitors. But Malaysia itself was the real fascination. The late 1960s were turbulent times there as elsewhere. My first months witnessed Singapore's departure from Malaysia (August 1965) and the abortive coup in Jakarta (September), with all that followed from that. The most personally dramatic moment was the Kuala Lumpur rioting of 13 May 1969, which transformed the Malaysian scene. From hindsight it was the end of its age of innocence. About 200 people were killed, mainly Chinese, and many gruesomely slashed with parangs. Chinese Malaysians, although the victims of this violence, were also the big political losers from it, as the Malay-dominated government drew the conclusion that Malay resentment had to be addressed through one of the world's most large-scale affirmative-action programmes. Almost overnight Malay nationalism became legitimate, and the old relaxed cosmopolitanism suspect. Transforming the medium of Malaysia's universities from English to Malay, first a distant goal, became a political urgency, and (although the transformation came at a heavy price for the universities) I was glad to be there for the beginning of the process.

I was asked to teach Early Modern Southeast Asia, about which I then knew very little. Obviously the seed of the 'Age of Commerce' idea was planted there. But I got into it and started reading, and it was there that I started to find it really interesting. But as long as I was living in the region (as I found again in Singapore after 2002) the tug of understanding its contemporary shape was hard to resist. Of course I was itching to visit Sumatra for the first time, but couldn't until Indonesia recognised Malaysia. When I did start to visit in late 1966 I was struck by the enormous contrast between Malaysia and Sumatra, despite their rather similar frontier background in colonial and pre-colonial times. The vital factor appeared to be the Indonesian revolution, which swept away so many local *anciens regimes*. In Malaysia I started work on the 'social revolution' of Aceh and East Sumatra, which overthrew the old order of sultans, rajas and ulèëbalangs in a few violent months of 1945–46. This proved my most fieldwork-based book, drawing much from interviews with revolutionaries, administrators and surviving aristocrats.¹⁴

In total I spent five academic years in Malaysia. In 1970, I took up an essentially research appointment at the Australian National University. I was glad that I had already accepted the appointment just before the Kuala Lumpur riots, so I did not face the problem of some of my colleagues in seemingly overstaying their welcome in the transformation that followed the riots. 1969 turned out to be a defining moment in Malaysian history, and Malay-first racial politics dominated the next forty years. I think I left at the right time, and my experience in Malaysia was entirely positive.

And now come the big themes!

The first big idea was revolution. That Malaysia-Indonesia contrast, which stayed with me all my life and is again a feature of *Imperial Alchemy* (2009), underlined for me the enormous importance of revolution. The revolutionary break with past legal and customary constraints in favour of the sacralisation of a revolutionary moment has had results even more decisive in Asia than in Europe. Indonesia's unification as a centralised nation-state (not to mention China's) would have been impossible without it. While I was writing my book on the social revolution in Sumatra, I was asked to write a short general book about the Indonesian revolution which I there called a 'national revolution'.¹⁵ I think it is a necessary way to understand Indonesia—it became a nation through revolution, providing a certain coherence and eventually shared culture (through a very centralised education system), at the cost of much more violence, lawlessness and impoverishment than Malaysia.

Through the 1970s, therefore, I was basically busy with this idea, which spawned a number of publications on the 1940s. ANU was fortunate in having a critical mass which made possible some joint projects, such as those on historiography,¹⁶ on the Japanese occupation,¹⁷ and later a number of others. But by the mid-1970s I was starting to feel that I did have something to say about the early modern period that I had taught in Malaysia. I started rather cautiously proposing a few ideas about what at one stage I called ‘the Origins of Poverty in Southeast Asia,’¹⁸ and was able to do some serious research on it during a sabbatical in Europe in 1978. The problem of slavery arose in that early stage of trying to understand the pre-colonial social systems. How should one render a concept that appeared so frequently in the sources, but remains controversial and unhelpfully pejorative in contemporary culture? I convinced myself, though not all of my collaborators in the project, that slavery was a critical institution in Southeast Asian history, precisely as a point of interaction between cultures, and between the state and non-state domains.

The Bondage book¹⁹ was therefore a useful step towards the big project. Other themes that excited me along the way to the big book were the unusually autonomous position of women in Southeast Asia; the causes of Southeast Asia’s low population before 1800; and (after a year in Sulawesi in 1980–81) the exceptionally open society of seventeenth-century Makasar.²⁰ These all became minor projects, and to some extent diversions, along the way to the two volumes of *The Age of Commerce*. I was very relieved to be able to persuade Yale to take one volume at a time, because the scale of the thing was getting out of hand and starting to crush me. But I was certainly fortunate to be at ANU, which made possible an unusually ambitious writing project of that sort. It was the perfect research institution for such a project.

Helen: At that stage, Southeast Asia was still relatively very poor, and the explanation of that poverty was the challenge that got him started on the Age of Commerce project.

Thank you for reminding me that Methodist social conscience hadn’t quite deserted the Catholic adult. In terms of the dichotomy I once proposed in the motivation of Southeast Asian studies, between reformism and alterity,²¹ I certainly started with reformism—though somewhere along the way alterity (the fascination with cultural difference) got the upper hand. I did certainly begin with that ‘origins of poverty’ idea, but in the twenty years I took to realise it, that became overtaken by a number of other ideas. And the transition to ‘capitalism’ in the grand Marxist

sense was, I concluded, just too slippery a concept. Nevertheless I did pursue what seemed a particular feature of the Southeast Asian scene, the difficulties experienced in conserving capital. Like the gender question, this appeared to be something that distinguished Southeast Asia from both of its neighbours in India and China. There was a marked pattern in the region for investing in people rather than in institutions.

Whom were you inspired by in the Age of Commerce project? And did you ever imagine that this work would have such an impact?

I was particularly inspired by Fernand Braudel. Having discovered *La Méditerranée*²² some distance into the project I was greatly relieved to find that someone much wiser than I had managed to write inspiring early modern history around a maritime unit. I could not have had the courage to be so ambitious without that important precedent. Others in the *Annales* school, notably Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie, also showed how things could be done. I liked the big-picture work of Geoffrey Parker on the seventeenth century, and Charles Tilly, and the anthropologist Jack Goody. I certainly did not fully expect all the reactions I got—they were strong and they were many. Enthusiasm came from a number of unexpected quarters, notably Japan, and among graduate students in the US and Southeast Asia. Criticism necessarily came from colleagues, perhaps particularly targeting what some felt was seeing the region through a maritime/Indonesian lens, and for using sources rather boldly at a time when the cultural turn was discouraging some from using them at all. But there is not much about the work that I would repent or do differently. What irritated Southeast Asianists the most was perhaps the attempt to quantify some things. Economic history was very little developed for Southeast Asia since the pre-war Marxists, and putting numbers on things shocked some with a sense of misplaced concreteness. I do believe somebody had to begin to do this, to drive home that Southeast Asia was not some exotic Shangri-la which could not be compared with anywhere else. I love and admire the specialist work of epigraphers and literary scholars, but I want that to be more, not less, accessible to the non-specialist by making the comparisons where we can. One needs numbers to compare things; one needs to do one's best to put *viss* and *pikul* and so forth into metrics, after all the acknowledgement that nothing is precise and that things change with time and place. We needed to go forward, and it seemed wrong to me to ignore numbers only on account of there being less data. We may never know for sure whether Ayutthaya was as big as Paris in 1600, and we will never know as much about Ayutthaya

as about Paris. But there are still things to work with. Of course people started using my numbers, particularly for population, and people like Gunder Frank read more into them than they could bear. They should certainly be used with great caution, as I made clear, and treated as only one step towards contextualising the comparative place of Southeast Asia in the broader Early Modern world.

And how does your work on the Chinese enter into this story?

I had always felt that the Chinese in Southeast Asia were best left to those who had the language and context, but I was thrust increasingly into this field in the 1990s. There was a crisis in the study of the Southeast Asian Chinese at ANU when Wang Gungwu left for Hong Kong, and then in 1989 Jennifer Cushman²³ died suddenly in her early forties. We set up a series of lectures in her honour,²⁴ and later started a Centre for the Study of the Southern Chinese Diaspora, a way of including Australia and the Pacific as well as Southeast Asia without too many initials. We were all shocked at her sudden death, and Craig Reynolds and I were both propelled into taking responsibility for this Centre without much academic preparation for it.

This in turn gave rise to another ‘big idea’—to compare the experience of the Southeast Asian Chinese with the European Jews. Once again, fools rush in where angels fear to tread. I am reminded of the opening sentence of Clifford Geertz’s review of *Age of Commerce* Vol. I: ‘Of impossible books asking to be written, a “total history” of Southeast Asia in the manner of Fernand Braudel...would seem very near to the top of the list.’²⁵ I acknowledge that I have done some rash things that others had the wisdom to avoid, perhaps driven by that Methodist conscience or whatever. I had been troubled by this comparison ever since the Kuala Lumpur riots (pogrom?). Southeast Asianists and especially Southeast Asians steered well clear of it, and this itself began to seem a problem to me. I proposed it to the (New York-based) SSRC Committee on Southeast Asia, of which I was then a member, on the proviso (I thought unlikely to be met) that we could find an experienced Europeanist to handle the major sensitivities on that side. Daniel Chirot²⁶ was found able and willing—a specialist on Eastern Europe, and a sociologist given to ‘big ideas.’ We got together an impressive group about equally composed of Europeanists and Southeast Asianists, who met in San Diego, immediately before the Northridge earthquake of 17 January 1994 (presumably not connected). It was an eye-opener, even more for the Europeanists than for us. In Eastern Europe the huge role of Jewish financiers had long

been judged to be largely fictional, but in Southeast Asia the Chinese domination of the economic high points was a fact. Managing resentment looked like an even bigger issue for Southeast Asia than for Europe. They tended to read the Southeast Asian evidence as similar to that of Europe in the 1920s, and in some ways more alarming. We reassured them; it was all manageable and under control, at least as long as the economies flourished. Dan and I definitely wanted to publish on the issues, but our two colleagues from Malaysia thought that would be much too sensitive, given the demonisation of Jews in much contemporary Islamic discourse. At this point the Europeanists exploded. Now it *really* looked like Europe in the 1920s, when the establishment preferred to ignore anti-semitism as just an unruly fringe. Having insisted things were OK, how could we now say it was too sensitive to publish? It was an interesting episode, from which both sides learned a lot. While it remains true that the two communities have almost nothing in common per se, there are certain historical situations when entrepreneurial minorities become particularly endangered. Perhaps in both cases the gap between ruler and ruled was filled by an entrepreneurial minority. In the end, we took care to keep the book on a very analytic level.²⁷ We thought there might be some fireworks if the book got into the Southeast Asian press, so we didn't seek that and it never did.

What about your later career?

The book I have just finished is called *Imperial Alchemy*.²⁸ It is another example of the way being in the region tends to pull me back to more contemporary concerns. I am very happy to be back with more time to write, since getting out of administration in 2007. But to go back a few years, I left ANU for UCLA in 1999. My formal career ended most surprisingly with two offers I could simply not refuse, since each was offering major resources to build an important new institution. I don't think I am a natural administrator, especially when really tough decisions have to be made and defended, but I am proud of these two institutions. A viable Southeast Asian Centre in Los Angeles was an important and long overdue achievement, since LA is so important a diasporic centre for all the Southeast Asian-American communities. The Centre is still going strong, with Title VI funding from Washington in partnership with Berkeley. And after UCLA came the offer from NUS.

Helen: That was fantastic because it was never our intention to stay in America. He always wanted to work on Southeast Asia in Southeast Asia with Southeast Asians.

It is true that at ANU in the 1990s I was increasingly conscious that Southeast Asian Studies had to be centred in the region itself to be healthy. From an Australian base I was trying to develop the concept of Asian Studies in Asia, with Australia as very much part of it.²⁹ And because there were too many historians of my generation at ANU, and too few opportunities for young scholars, I very much wanted to move to Southeast Asia if I could find the right way to do it. I had various impractical schemes, but never dreamed that somebody would come along with generous resources and invite me to build a research institute in the region. So, despite many warm feelings about UCLA, I didn't have to hesitate long about the Singapore offer. And I am very honoured and grateful that I was able to have those last seven years (2002–09) in the region.

Notes

- 1 J.C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955); J.C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Voyage of the Resolution and Adventure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961); J. C. Beaglehole, *The Exploration of the Pacific* (London: A. and C. Black, 1934).
- 2 Emily Sadka, a distant relation of Singapore's first (also Jewish) Chief Minister David Marshall, was a brilliant student and Queen's Scholar, who completed her Ph.D. at ANU in 1966, later published as *The Protected Malay States, 1874–1895* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968). After only a year or two teaching in Wellington she returned to the ANU in 1960 as Research Fellow and then tenured Fellow (in effect my predecessor), but died tragically early in 1968.
- 3 Sociologist Leslie H. Palmier was appointed to head New Zealand's first Asian Studies Department at VUW in 1959, but resigned in 1963. His books include *Indonesia and the Dutch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); and *Communists in Indonesia: Power Pursued in Vain* (Penerbit: Anchor Press, 1973).
- 4 Victor Purcell's earlier life to 1950 is covered in his *The Memoirs of a Malayan Official* (London: Cassell, 1965). He is best known for *The Chinese in Malaya*

- (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948); and *The Chinese in South-East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- 5 C.D. Cowan had taught at the University of Malaya in Singapore before moving to SOAS as Professor of Southeast Asian History, and eventually as Director (1976–89). His books include *Nineteenth Century Malaya: The Origins of British Political Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); and *The Economic Development of Southeast Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964).
 - 6 *The Contest for North Sumatra: Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain, 1858–1898* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP/UMP, 1969; Indonesian translation 2004).
 - 7 President Sukarno took the view that Malaysia was a neo-colonial British plot, and launched his military ‘Confrontation’ of it when it was nevertheless formed in September 1963 by the federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah.
 - 8 Wang Gungwu was the first Malaysian Professor of History at the University of Malaya (1960–68), before moving to the ANU as Professor of Far Eastern History (1968–85), to the University of Hong Kong as Vice-Chancellor (1985–93) and to NUS in various capacities after retirement.
 - 9 Jan Pluvier moved subsequently to the University of Amsterdam. His books included *Confrontations: A Study in Indonesian Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); *Southeast Asia from Colonialism to Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
 - 10 David Bassett moved in 1968 to the University of Hull, in his native Yorkshire. He later authored *British Trade and Policy in Indonesia and Malaysia in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Hull: Inter Documentation Company, 1971); *Britain and Southeast Asia* (Hull: Inter Documentation Company, 1980); *The British in Southeast Asia during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hull: Inter Documentation Company, 1990).
 - 11 William R. Roff moved in 1969 to Columbia University. His pioneering ANU Ph.D. was published as *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).
 - 12 After military service and degrees from LSE and Oxford, Anthony Short arrived in Malaya in 1960 as ‘more or less official historian of the communist insurrection in Malaya,’ but combined this with teaching European history at the University. He moved to the University of Aberdeen in 1966 (Interview with Tony Short 2003, University of Aberdeen Oral History Archive). His books include *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948–1960* (London: Muller, 1975); and *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (London: Longman, 1989).

- 13 David Wyatt (1937–2006) spent a semester on a Fulbright at the University of Malaya in 1967, prior to moving to teach at his alma mater, Cornell University, in 1969, where he remained until his death. His work includes *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); *Thailand: A Short History* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), and a project influenced by his time in Malaysia, *Hikayat Patani: The Story of Patani*, 2 vols (with H. Teeuw, KITLV 1970).
- 14 Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra*, OUP, Kuala Lumpur: 1979 (Indonesian translation as *Perjuangan Rakyat*, Sinar Harapan, 1986).
- 15 Anthony Reid, *The Indonesian National Revolution, 1945–1950* (Hawthorn, Vic. Longmans Australia, 1974; Indonesian translation Sinar Harapan, 1996).
- 16 Anthony Reid and David Marr (eds.), *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Heinemann for ASAA, 1979; Indonesian translation 1983).
- 17 A.W. McCoy (ed.), *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1979).
- 18 Anthony Reid, 'Trade and the Problem of Royal Power in Aceh, c.1550–1700', in Reid and Castles (eds.), *Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia: the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Bali-Lombok, South Celebes* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1975), 45–55. A special lecture on 'The Origins of Poverty in Southeast Asia' at the Third New Zealand Conference of Asian Studies, Auckland, 1979, was later published as 'The Origins of Poverty in Indonesia', in J.J. Fox, J.A.C. Mackie and Peter McCawley (eds.), *Indonesia—Australian Perspectives* (Canberra: RSPacS, 1981), 441–54.
- 19 Anthony Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (St Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1983).
- 20 Two of the 1980s articles on Makasar were republished in Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999).
- 21 "Alterity" and "Reformism": the Australian frontier in Indonesian studies', *Archipel* 21 (1981) 7–18.
- 22 Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949).
- 23 Jennifer W. Cushman (194?–89) came to ANU from Cornell in 1976 to work with Wang Gungwu on the Southeast Asian Chinese. She authored *Fields from the Sea: Chinese Junk Trade with Siam during the late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell University Studies on Southeast Asia, 1993); and edited with Wang Gungwu, *Changing Identities of the Southeast*

- Asian Chinese since World War II* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988).
- 24 Eventually published as Anthony Reid (ed.), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese in Honour of Jennifer Cushman* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996).
 - 25 Clifford Geertz, 'A South Sea Renaissance', *New York Review of Books* 53:2 (1989). Although I feared disaster after this beginning, the review was in the end generous.
 - 26 Daniel Chirot, *Social Change in a Peripheral Society: The Creation of a Balkan Colony* (New York: Academic Press New York, 1976); *Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); *Social Change in the Modern Era* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986); *Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
 - 27 D. Chirot and A. Reid (eds.), *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).
 - 28 *Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
 - 29 Anthony Reid, 'Preface: Asian Studies in Asia', in *The Directory of Asian Studies in Asia: A Summary of Reports Presented at the 'Asian Studies in Asia' Workshop, held in Hua Hin, April, 1998* (Canberra: ASAA, 2000); 'Studying "Asia" in Asia', *Asian Studies Review* 23:2 (1999), 141–51; 'Completing the Circle: Southeast Asian Studies in Southeast Asia', in Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asian Studies: Pacific Perspectives* (Tempe, AZ: Program in Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 2003), 93–107.

