The region now known as Southeast Asia has been called the Malay World, Malay Archipelago, Nusantara, East Indies, the Far East, and Southeast Asia or the ASEAN region. All these terms are still in use in various contexts for different purposes, quite often interchangeably, for instance, in books on the history of Southeast Asia available for undergraduate teaching across the globe.

The region physically includes mainland and maritime components. The “Malay World” is being used by a number of academic institutions and publications in Malaysia, Indonesia and the United Kingdom. Others prefer to use Nusantara, instead, the old Javanese terminology for “archipelago”. It refers to the maritime area of Southeast Asia. When British naturalists, explorers and biological scientists analysed the flora and fauna of the maritime region, they preferred to use the term “Malay Archipelago”. The French, German, Austrian and British orientalists of the nineteenth century refer to this maritime geophysical space as part of the Far East.

The term “Southeast Asia” that refers to the present mainland and maritime parts of the region was first used by American priest and educator Howard Malcom in 1837. During the Second World War, a century later, the Allied forces established a South-East Asia Command (SEAC) in 1943 that covered the areas previously known as the Dutch East Indies; British Burma, Malaya and Borneo; French Indochina; and Thailand. In 1944, the Washington D.C.–based National Geographic Society published the first map of Southeast Asia as we know it today, based on SEAC’s military concept.

What is significant is that each of these names or labels for the region was constructed with different sets of knowledge content serving the specific purposes of whoever its originators were — imperialists, colonialists, researchers or academicians. The knowledge produced, based on empirical evidence derived from this region, often enriched the global discourse on a particular theory or concept.

For instance, the contribution of Alfred Russel Wallace (1858) was instrumental in establishing the “natural selection theory”, based on his eight-year research in the Malay Archipelago that was accepted and recognized by Charles Darwin himself. Similarly, the internationally well-known theory of “plural society” by J.S. Furnivall (1948), that was well received and applied widely in Africa and Latin America, was based on his research in Indonesia and Burma, which formed the empirical core of his theory. In 1983, Ben Anderson published his Imagined Communities based on field research conducted mainly in Indonesia, introducing his theory of nationalism and the origin of a nation.
ISEAS, founded in 1968, and its annual *Southeast Asian Affairs*, produced since 1974, have been among the pioneers in helping to dissolve the mental barriers between Southeast Asian scholars and thinkers shaped by long periods of colonial rule by different colonial masters, in the process contributing to better understandings and the gradual evolution of a regional identity.

They have also remained at the core of the construction of knowledge, the making of narratives, analyses and debate about Southeast Asian studies. More than that, much conceptualizing and theorizing within the global study of international relations and security studies, such as the debate between realism and constructivism or neo-realism versus constructivism, have often referred to Southeast Asia for empirical evidence and case studies. The corpus of knowledge provided by ISEAS and annually by *Southeast Asian Affairs* has helped to shape such theoretical discourses.

Both the regional section of *Southeast Asian Affairs* and the essays on individual countries of Southeast Asia have in the last four decades provided researchers, academics, policymakers, political analysts, risk studies specialists and others from all over the world a window to the region and the happenings within it. This will continue to be so into the future.

I congratulate ISEAS for bringing out *Turning Points and Transitions: Selections from Southeast Asian Affairs 1974–2018*. It is an impressive collection of essays from the annual *Southeast Asian Affairs* over a period of forty-five years.

Shamsul, A.B.
Distinguished Professor &
Founding Director
National Institute of Ethnic Studies
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Member
International Advisory Panel
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute