

The last four years have seen the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS)-based research centre, the Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC), revitalized in terms of research output, grant acquisition, seminars, workshops, conference activities, international networking, community outreach, and knowledge transfer. SEARC has a strong network of ties with leading Southeast Asia centres in the US, Europe and Japan as well as within Southeast Asia itself. SEARC will continue to seek competitive external grants at which it has excelled in the past. It will collaborate with major international organizations (such as the International Organization for Migration with which SEARC works closely). SEARC also works closely with Hong Kong-based organizations (such as the 10 Southeast Asian consulates, advocacy groups, and cultural organizations such as the Asia Society). SEARC's strong international reputation is an important contribution to CityU's commitment to internationalization. This is of particular importance at this juncture when the centre is expanding and reaching out – regular international visitors and short-term visiting fellows are and will continue to be a key component of further raising the profile of the Centre.

In terms of future plans, SEARC will focus on three main areas: increased grant acquisition (with a special emphasis on policy oriented external funding) and high quality research output (in leading journals and university presses), hosting leading global scholars of Southeast Asia at research seminars and research-oriented workshops and international conferences as well as inviting them to be visitors at SEARC, collaboration with other leading Southeast Asia centres and related centres such as the Global China centre in CLASS as well with major international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In short, SEARC seems well positioned to enhance its reputation as a globally recognized centre for the study of Southeast Asia, making it a major asset to CLASS and CityU generally.

SEARC holds regular research seminars (10-12 per year), international conferences (such as a recent one on Asian Migration co-organized with the International Organization for Migration, with negotiations currently ongoing for another two other major conferences), and workshops (after recent ones on current political developments in Thailand and on religious minorities in Southeast Asia, further ones are planned on Myanmar, democracy in Southeast Asia, and on China and the 'Singapore model'). Grant acquisition will remain a crucial benchmark with the

SEARC director, together with SEARC Board Member and Business School professor, Dr Rueben Mondejar, recently applying for a major Hong Kong government Central Policy University Public Policy Research funding scheme on the current free trade negotiations between Hong Kong and the ten member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This represents a major shift in SEARC's priorities toward more policy oriented research. In terms of networking SEARC will join the Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia (SEASIA) at its inaugural event at Kyoto University this December. SEARC is currently negotiating a MoU with Berkeley as well as several more leading universities in the region itself. Finally, SEARC will continue its efforts to reach out to the community through cultural events, contacts with the ten ASEAN country consulates in Hong Kong (including co-organized events) and through media appearances by SEARC members (who are quoted in or wrote for major newspaper and have made numerous radio and television appearances in media outlets in Hong Kong and globally). SEARC is thus well positioned to enhance its reputation as a globally recognized centre for the study of Southeast Asia, making it a major asset to CLASS and CityU generally.

SEARC has established itself as a distinctive, one-of-a-kind research area, helping raise the profile of the college and the university. Under the directorship of Prof Mark R Thompson and associate director Dr Tom Patton (as well as previous associate directors Dr Chiara Formichi, now at Cornell University and Dr Kyaw Yin Hlaing, now a presidential advisor and leading government peace negotiator in Myanmar), SEARC - the only interdisciplinary centre for the study of Southeast Asia in Hong Kong - has cemented its reputation as one of the world's leading centres for the research on contemporary Southeast Asia.

SEARC will continue to widen its membership (looking in particularly to recruit more academic affiliates working on Southeast Asia at other Hong Kong Universities as well as associate members - prominent members of the Hong Kong community in business, culture, social welfare, journalism, etc) even further, after nearly doubling its core members over the past four years. SEARC will also assist its members, through seminars, workshops, and small grants to boost their research output (particularly in terms of SSCI/SCI ranked publications) and external grant acquisition.

SEARC will continue to invite leading experts on Southeast Asia as speakers, conference participants, and visitors, continuing to network with the top Southeast Asia centres globally (MoUs have recently been signed with Cornell, SOAS, Sydney, Murdoch, Northern Illinois, and Kyoto as well as top centres within Southeast Asia itself).

On June 12, 2015 SEARC signed MoUs with Cornell University (perhaps the best-known Southeast Asia centre in the world from which several SEARC members are holders of PhDs from its PhD programme and SEARC's former associate Director, Dr Chiara Formichi, has just taken a position at Cornell) as well as Northern Illinois University (NIU), another leading centre for the study of this region globally, an event which was featured on CityU's website:

<http://wikisites.cityu.edu.hk/sites/newscentre/en/Pages/201506151500.aspx>).

This MoU has already resulted in one successful workshop, on religious minorities in Southeast Asia, which was held on June 12-13, 2015 with leading scholars from around the world (<http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/>). Follow up workshops with Cornell and NIU on this topic as well as other forms of collaboration are planned. In addition, SEARC will join the Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia (SEASIA) in December 2015. This is an important initiative for the networking of Southeast Asian centres in Asia which will encourage greater research collaboration as well as strengthen the standing of Southeast Asian studies in the Asian region.

As mentioned above SEARC recently signed an MoU with Cornell University, Northern Illinois University, the School of Oriental and Africa Studies (SOAS), University of London, the University of Passau in Germany, and the University of Sydney but also with leading universities in Southeast Asia such as Gadjah Mada University (generally considered one of Indonesia's two best universities), Thammasat University (one of Thailand's two best known universities), and the University of Brunei Darrusalam. SEARC core members have close contacts with leading educational institutions in all ten Southeast Asia countries as well as ties with major centres for Southeast Asia in Australia, Europe, Singapore, and the United States. SEARC benchmarks its research output and international competitiveness with leading Southeast Asia centres such as those at the Australian National University and the National University of Singapore as well as Cornell, Kyoto, SOAS, and Sydney as mentioned above.

This is a fortuitous moment to conduct research on Southeast Asia as an interdisciplinary research field at City University because it comes at a time when the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) nears the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) as an integrated economic and free trade area at the end of 2015 which will create the second largest market in the world for which Hong Kong is increasingly serving as a gateway. Southeast Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world with its rapid economic growth as well as profound political and social changes. It is also a region of fascinating cultural diversity and religious pluralism, a long pre-colonial and diverse colonial history, as well as an area of study for extreme climatic events (particularly typhoons), environmental issues, migration, tourism, and a number of other topics on which City University researchers focus.

The Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) was inaugurated on 27 February 2001 as a faculty-based research centre within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (now the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, CLASS). In less than a decade and a half, SEARC has established a strong international reputation as an important setting for the study of political, economic, and social issues in contemporary Southeast Asia. While receiving funding in most years from City University of Hong Kong (CityU), SEARC members have actively sought competitive external grant funding, helping to foster a steady output of high-quality publications and working papers. SEARC has also launched an effort, with the assistance of the university, to seek external donors for the centre based on its contacts and networks in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Co-sponsoring events with other leading organizations (such as IOM) or other universities (such as a recent workshop on religious minorities with Cornell University and Northern Illinois has also proved a promising future financial model.

The Centre has also attracted many respected scholars as visitors who, in carrying out research projects and conducting seminars, have further energized the Centre. And in regularly sponsoring international conferences, workshops, public addresses, and roundtables, SEARC has contributed widely to public debate and intellectual life at CityU.

SEARC brings together 29 board members at the City University of Hong Kong and several research affiliates at other Hong Kong universities specializing in various disciplines and

working on all ten member countries of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN). SEARC core members are engaged in high impact research projects, often funded by outside grants, which focus on recent political changes in the region, economic and social developments, migration, and environmental issues, among others.

SEARC has particular strengths in politics, sociology, anthropology, international relations, and history but we also bring together those interested in the economies and the cultures of this region. It holds regular academic seminars open to a CityU audience and a wider public and also organizes larger workshops and conferences as well as hosting major international congresses. SEARC members are often interviewed by the press and contribute opinion pieces on important contemporary issues regarding Southeast Asia. SEARC also regularly hosts visiting fellows from the region and around the world. We also actively involved in establishing research networks with universities in Southeast Asia as well as with other centres focused on Southeast Asia outside the region.

SEARC hosted a major Southeast Asia cultural festival in spring 2013 in cooperation with the Southeast Asian consulates in Hong Kong and Southeast Asian groups in the Special Administrative Region. We see ourselves as a meeting place for scholars whose research is focused on Southeast Asia and for those wishing to learn more about it. We reach out to the larger community of Southeast Asians in Hong Kong and to people in Hong Kong with events and information about this region.

The [SEARC website](#) has been updated and revitalized and much of the information provided there about SEARC members and activities is also available on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Searc.CityU>. In October 2013, SEARC began video taking SEARC seminars and posting them on the SEARC website which also helped to document SEARC activities and make them available to the wider public and academic community. An example of such a research seminar video is <https://youtu.be/AkokzXuFJqk>. In order to keep the public informed of SEARC events and news, there is a section on the centre's website for upcoming events and the other for news related to SEARC in which we post media appearances of SEARC board members, calls for papers' notices, as well as news that is of interest to academia as well as

to those who are interested in knowing more about Southeast Asia.

http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/Events_News.aspx

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Southeast Asia is near to Hong Kong, but far from the minds of too many Hong Kongers. China is ASEAN's largest trading partner (and ASEAN one of China's biggest) while ASEAN is Hong Kong's second biggest partner in trade, with particularly close trading ties to Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and Myanmar. Hong Kong businesses have major investments in a number of Southeast Asia countries (it is the fifth largest destination for outward investment from Hong Kong). There is a long tradition of Hong Kong's engagement with the region and it is now emerging as a gateway to Southeast Asia's free trade area to be established at the end of next year (as of this writing, negotiations are ongoing for a Hong Kong-ASEAN free trade agreement), with foreign investment (much of it channeled through Hong Kong) now outpacing investment into China. Southeast Asia is a favourite tourist destination for Hong Kongers, and its culinary culture is widely appreciated here. Hong Kong's geographical proximity also means it shares extreme climatic events with the region, particularly typhoons. There is much migration between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Many prominent Southeast Asian families and businesses have close ties to Hong Kong, often as Hong Kong residents. Hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asians work in Hong Kong, primarily as domestic helpers but there are also tens of thousands of professionals from the region in the Special

Administrative Region. Knowledge of contemporary Southeast Asia is thus essential and of significant importance to economic, societal and community matters in Hong Kong.

The Southeast Asia Research Centre has close ties with the business community, for example through its associate member Bernhard Charnwat Chan, chair of the Hong Kong-Thailand Business Association. Led by SEARC core member Dr Reuben Mondejar, Department of Management, SEARC has been working closely with the Hong Kong business community to provide greater information about the Hong Kong ASEAN free trade negotiations (most recently at a September 15, 2014 forum held in the Hong Kong Club about the Hong Kong-ASEAN Free Trade Zone at which Dr Mondejar was a panel speaker and SEARC's activities in promoting the importance of Southeast Asia were highlighted). SEARC is also in discussions with the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) about hosting a joint forum on the ongoing ASEAN-FTA negotiations. As a new research area for postgraduate education, SEARC could expand its orientation towards economics, linking up even more closely with the Hong Kong business community about investment opportunities and other business-related matters in the regions.

Through SEARC, CityU already has close ties to the Southeast Asian migrant community (over 300,000 strong) in Hong Kong through its focus on migration issues (SEARC will be hosting a second major international conference on migration this December at CityU after co-organizing a migration conference last year "Asian Migration and the Global Asian Diasporas" co-hosted with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which brought together leading scholars to discuss Asian migration along many different dimensions).