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Natasha Hamilton-Hart gained her BA (Hons) from the University of Otago and her PhD from Cornell University. Prior to joining the University of Auckland she held positions at the Australian National University and the National University of Singapore.

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Keynote Abstract

In Search of Southeast Asia, in New Zealand Natasha Hamilton-Hart

The study of Southeast Asia by researchers in New Zealand has been shaped by a changing landscape of international, national and disciplinary forces. Some of these forces create currents of change in the ways the region is approached that span national contexts. The increasing emphasis on theory and discipline over place is one such current; the potential emergence of another era of great power strategic rivalry is another. Other pressures have analogues elsewhere, but manifest in specific ways in New Zealand: in the organizational structures and rules for teaching and research, in national-level funding mechanisms, in the locus of language teaching within the university. Together these pressures have shaped not just 'how much' Southeast Asia research is conducted, but how it is conducted. While there remains much diversity, there is a current that would see the study of Southeast Asia – like area studies more generally – shift from 'the study of out there' to 'a platform for collaboration'. This offers possibilities for working productively with scholars in Southeast Asia, but effectively ends the area studies vision of understanding a specific part of the world.