Indexing a Field: The Case of Malaysian and Indonesian Studies

The abstracting and indexing databases *ISI* and *Scopus*, which used to be only research tools in order to find scholarly literature, are increasingly employed as powerful bibliometric benchmarks in research assessment exercises around the world. This carries the potential to severely affect smaller fields of scholarly inquiry in those areas of the humanities and social sciences where the main journals are not referenced by these two indexes. This lecture examines the case of Malaysian and Indonesian Studies in this context.

Departing from a discussion of the area studies indexes that used to be the main abstracting and indexing databases in the field, it is argued that in general no single index should be used as the only point of reference. By comparing the *ISI* Research Coverage Ratio (RCR) of Indonesia with that of other large Asian nations, in particularly China and India, it is shown that *ISI* generally tends to under-represent not only Indonesia, but also other large Asian countries with extensive systems of higher education where the major part of the academic discourse is carried out in national-level journals and in non-European languages. In contrast, smaller countries such as Singapore or Brunei Darussalam score a much higher RCR. In this context, also the ratio of authors with local versus international affiliation has to be taken into account. It is demonstrated that foreign players contribute 88.5% of the *ISI*-indexed publications on Indonesia and 67.4% on Malaysia. In both cases, *ISI* seems to over-represent Western voices. A new approach towards a cumulative index of indexes is discussed in the final section of the lecture, based on an analysis of 23 bibliographic indexes referencing 1,431 journals with contributions on “Indonesia” and “Malaysia” in the period of c. 2003-2006.