WHAT IS SEASIA?

A Talk by Prof. John N. Miksic for the Southeast Asian Studies Research Cluster, School of Humanities, NTU

I originally made up the acronym Seasia to avoid having to write the words Southeast Asian thousands of times when I was composing the book *Ancient Southeast Asia* together with Prof. Goh Geok Yian. One reviewer did not like it, but I have often thought that the subject might actually be more appealing if it had a shorter, punchier name. After all, Seasia implies a fusion of the words “sea” and “Asia”, which calls to mind a part of Asia which is as much water as it is land. I have lived in six different places in three countries in this region, and have conducted or supervised research in every country except Laos, Brunei, and Timor Leste. I am still not sure whether I am qualified to speak on behalf of the whole field of Seasian studies, since the scholarly approaches to the region are as varied as the topography and cultures found here. I was however a student of Oliver Wolters during the period when he was writing his book *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, and I like to think that our conversations on the subject played some small role in his text. In this talk I will discuss how my definitions of Southeast Asian studies have evolved since I first arrived here in 1968.

JOHN N. MIKSIC

John N. Miksic received his PhD from Cornell University based on archaeological research in Sumatra. He has worked in Malaysia as a Peace Corps Volunteer, in Sumatra as a Rural Development Advisor, and as a project specialist at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta. In 1987 he moved to the National University of Singapore. He is professor in the Southeast Asian Studies Department. He has also been affiliated with the Department of History, University Scholars Programme, and Asia Research Institute. He founded the Archaeology Unit at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. He received a Special Recognition Award and Pingat Bakti Setia long service award from the government of Singapore, and the title of Kanjeng Raden Hanya Temenggung from the Susuhunan of Surakarta (Indonesia). His book *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea* won the inaugural award for best book on Singapore history in 2018. He specializes in the archaeology of Southeast Asia between 500 and 1500 CE, including urbanization, trade, Buddhism, and ceramics.