The Formation of National "Subject" in Malaysia

The dissertation "The Formation of National 'Subject' in Malaysia" illustrates how the national "subject" of Malaysia is formed in relation to the academic field of "Area Studies". With regard to methodology, it considers the subject formation in Malaysia not as the one-way acceptance of the colonialist framework but as the process of continuous collision and agreement -- negotiation -- between the dominant and the dominated. In other words, it is to question the self-evidence of "Malaysia" as the object of analyses and to examine the process of the historical construction of the object.

"Area Studies" as policy science formed and developed centrally in the United States under the special circumstances of the Cold War, propose the epistemological framework for the formation of national "subject" in the newly independent states, which emerge contingently in a result of international relationships at that time. "Area Studies" as a reference of identification succeed to what Edward Said has called Orientalist relationship from the Colonial Studies. In other words, the "object" of "Area Studies" like the "orient" is constituted as the
"other of Europe". Above all, as is clarified in the dissertation, the Area Studies and the Colonial Studies describe the "object" as that which is lacking and deviant in contrast to the integrated totality.

The epistemological framework of identification offered by "Area Studies" also prescribe the formation of identification of the one who is regarded as the "other of Europe" under the colonial and post-colonial power relationship. In this sense, the colonial subject formation can be traced in the process where "they" internalize the dominant epistemological framework and try to recover the situation, as it should be.

Chapter 1 outlines the construction of national "subject" and the formation of "Area Studies". It consists of three parts. First, the arguments of Orientalism by Edward Said are introduced as the theoretical and methodological account of the thesis of the formation of an academic field and the construction of identity. According to Said, the "Orient" is represented as the "other" of the "West" and through the process representation, the "West" as the self is represented as the mirror-image of the "Orient". Second, the birth of "Area Studies" and the formation of national subject are argued from the viewpoint of Said's Orientalism. Here I show the perspective that the Area Studies succeed to Orientalistic relationships from the Colonial Studies. Third, Southeast Asian Studies and Malaysian Studies are focused to point out that Area Studies are overlapped with the project of national integration of (nation) states born contingently in the background of international relationships after the World War II.

Chapter 2, chapter 3, and chapter 4 trace the developments of both "Malay Studies" as "Colonial Studies" and "Malaysian Studies" as "Area Studies" in terms of continuity and rupture.

In chapter 2, a turning point within "Malay Studies" is set at the end of the 19th century when the British territorial domination of the Malay Peninsular started in full scale. Since the end of the 19th century "Malay Studies" offer the epistemological framework for the later imagination of nation state: a single colonial space, history developed chronologically in the colonial space, the "Malay race". Needless to say, Orientalist features penetrate the framework. Under the very framework the "Malayness" is described as that whose essentiality is under the crisis of loss, and as that whose essentiality must be recovered by the protection of "Europe".
Although the "Malay Studies" propose the framework for national imagination since the end of the 19th century, they do not suggest the perspective of "plural society" where Malaysia is consisting of different "ethnic groups". In this regard, chapter 3 examines Furnivall's concept of "plural society" which connect the "Colonial Studies" and "Area Studies". According to Furnivall, a "plural society" is "comprising two or three elements ...which live by side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit". There are four features in Furnivall's account of "plural society". First, it continuously adopts the colonial space as an analytical unit. Second, "plural society" is successively described in contrast with "homogeneous society". Third, it is regarded as the place with capitalistic penetration. Fourth, the plurality of "plural society" is represented as a racial division of labor.

The "homogeneous society", the second feature of "plural society", prepares the image of the integrated nation state in the era of "Area Studies". Chapter 4 illustrates the way "plural society" is described as being apart from the "integrated nation state" in "Malaysian Studies" as "Area Studies". In "Malaysian Studies", the framework of "plural society" is transformed into that of "three main ethnic groups": the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians. The framework of "thee main ethnic groups" succeeding to Orientalist, continuously views "Malaysia" as lacking in integrity, homogeneity, and essentiality as a nation. This result in the proposal of theories of integration brought about by the ethnic theories developed in Social Sciences.

In concluding chapter, I examine the possibility of "Area Studies" after the criticism of its Orientalist characteristics and shows that the alternative of "Area Studies" must not be what Said has called Occidentalism. I introduce Yano Toru's account of new "Area Studies" whose concept of "area" has an ecological base.

The supplementary chapter explores the formation of "Malaysian's own Malaysian Studies" by analyzing "local" texts. It shows that such attempts "from below" is constructed inevitably referring to the epistemological framework of "Colonial Studies" and "Area Studies" and that they often function to oppress the diversities.