Epistemic Reflexivity and its Applications to Southeast Asian Studies*

Yekyoum KIM**

[*Abstract*]

With a view to contributing to the epistemological and methodological debates in Southeast Asian Studies, the aim of this paper is to examine critically the epistemic concepts and approaches in the social sciences and then to seek an epistemic reflexivity and its potential methodological applications to Southeast Asian Studies. Although the field of social sciences has attempted to search for a means of tackling the ontological and epistemological dilemmas in its major paradigms, Southeast Asian Studies still demands a more 'actor-centered' epistemic account of reflexive interaction between actors and social structures. Bearing in mind the need for a more 'actor-centered' epistemic approach, this paper continues to discuss the 'epistemic reflexivity' in the social sciences and its potential applications to Southeast Asian Studies. In this paper, I will consider 'epistemic reflexivity' as an alternative methodological orientation. It emerges as interlinked with the ontological standpoint of what is called 'reflexive approaches' and its application to the detailed 'reflexive methodology' which I am proposing in

** Professor of Southeast Asian Studies, Busan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea. yekyoum@bufs.ac.kr.

this paper. In doing so, this paper discusses the autobiographical experiences of the author arising from his ethnographic field research in North Sulawesi, Indonesia and their implication for a reflexive methodology in Southeast Asian Studies. In conclusion, the paper argues that we need a 'more actor-centered' epistemic framework to compensate for the epistemological and methodological dilemmas in the social sciences and the alternative framework will equip Southeast Asian Studies with a reflexive methodology relevant to the life-dynamics of the social world in the process of developing its inquiries, methodological technics, analysis, and validation.

Keywords: Southeast Asian Studies, Indonesia, Methodology, Reflexivity, Fieldwork

Ⅰ. Introduction

The multi-disciplinary journal of Southeast Asian Studies, SUVANNABHUMI, has been an international academic journal since 2009 that extensively focuses on epistemological and methodological issues in Southeast Asian Studies. This was thanks to the 10-year-research project agenda (2009-2019) of the journal organizer (Korea Institute for ASEAN Studies, Busan University of Foreign Studies) sponsored by the National Research Foundation of Korea, 'the Recognition and Construction of Southeast Asia as a Holon: Building Southeast Asian Studies on Compounding Area Studies and Cultural Studies'. In particular, Victor King has published with SUVANNABHUMI a number of significant articles in a search for alternative epistemological concepts and methodological approaches in Southeast Asian Studies (King 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2018a, 2018b, 2020a, 2020b). With a view to contributing to the epistemological and methodological debates, the aim of this paper is to examine critically the epistemic concepts and approaches in the social sciences and then to seek an epistemic reflexivity and its potential methodological application to Southeast Asian Studies.

In a previous paper (Kim 2019), I had an opportunity to discuss extensively the three major ontological paradigms (realist,

interpretative-actor perspective and reflexive approaches) in the social sciences in the analysis of the relations between the two main determinants of social outcomes, 'social structure' and 'human agency'. The paper argues that the premises of 'reflexive approaches' seem to provide a means of tackling the ontological dilemmas in the 'realist' and 'interpretive-actor' paradigms. Nevertheless, Southeast Asian Cultural Studies still demand a more 'actor-centered' account of reflexive interaction between actors and social structures (Kim 2019: 206). Bearing in mind the previous argument, this paper continues to discuss the 'epistemic reflexivity' in the social sciences and its potential methodological applications to Southeast Asian Studies. In this paper, I will consider 'epistemic reflexivity' as an alternative methodological orientation. It emerges as interlinked with the ontological standpoint of the previous paper (see Kim 2019) and its application to the detailed 'reflexive methodology' which I will suggest. In doing so, this paper examines the detailed application of 'reflexivity' in the social sciences and then proceeds to discuss autobiographical experiences of the author from ethnographic field research in North Sulawesi, Indonesia and their implication to epistemic reflexivity in Southeast Asian Studies..

This paper largely reflects on ethnographic field research in a Minahasan region (Tomohon), North Sulawesi, Indonesia, between June 1999 and July 2000 (see Kim 2004). It still clearly shows a stereotyped example of the epistemic nature in transition of Southeast Asian Studies at the beginning of the 21st century. The discussion and argument of this paper are primarily based on qualitative approaches in the field research and distinguished from those of macro-level or quantitative approaches. In this regard, what I mean by 'Southeast Asian Studies' in this paper is Qualitative or Cultural Studies on Southeast Asia.

Ⅱ. Towards a reflexive methodology

In social research, conceptions of 'reflexivity' range from 'self-reflection on self-consciousness' to the 'careful interpretive accounts of empirical data' (see Alvesson et al. 2000: 5-6; Dodgson 2019; King 2021; Palaganas 2017; Wacquant 1992: 37). For such scholars as

Cohen (1992) and Davies (1999), 'reflexivity' is concerned primarily with the 'self' of social researchers and their reflection on their self-consciousness in the processes of knowledge production. For such scholars as Rabinow (1977) and Bell (1993), the concept of 'reflexivity' emerges as the critical appreciation of the ambiguous position of social researchers who explore the 'subjectively' grounded lifeworld but then translate it into 'objective' formats of scientific reification. For other social researchers, however, the notion of reflexivity is directed primarily to the 'social and intellectual consciousness' embedded in an epistemological framework rather than to the individual researcher, while they are also significantly aware of the equivocal distinction between subjectivity and objectivity (Alvesson et al. 2000; Bourdieu 1992; Giddens 1984; Habermas 1987; Hervik 1994;). They all vigorously tackle the prevailing 'social and intellectual unconsciousness' in functionalist, structuralist, and interpretive-actor paradigms, the unconscious that leads social researchers to be biased in comprehending the 'intersubjective' nature of the social world. Aware of the phenomenon of 'social and intellectual unconsciousness', I will move on to explore the detailed application of 'reflexivity' in the social sciences.

2.1. 'Epistemological turn' in the interpretive-actor paradigm

Over the past century, the various schools of social sciences have attempted to search for reflexive ways of analyzing or interpreting human agents and their social world according to their own epistemological and ontological commitments. The scholars working within the functionalist and structuralist paradigms have emphasized the pre-eminence of the social structure over its individual parts. With this view, they have drawn upon the Comteian positivist epistemology which holds that the scientific methods of the natural sciences can be employed in social science so as to explain the coexistence and succession of natural and social phenomena and to generate true scientific knowledge of objective social facts. They thus focused on 'scientific' and 'quantitative', rather than 'naturalistic' and 'qualitative', methods by means of which they believed that 'objective' and 'concrete' structural properties of society as 'social facts' are made analyzable (see Comte 1853; Dilthey [1910]1976: 177;

Giddens 1984: 1; Husserl [1931]1958: 80-97; Kim 2019: 13-25). On the other hand, scholars in the interpretive-actor paradigm have rejected the positivist epistemology of Auguste Comte (see, for example, Comte 1968-1970). Instead, they turned 'inwards' towards individual human beings and attempted to reflect their consciousness and subjective experiences in their understanding of the lifeworld (Kim 2019: 15-18).

Phenomenologists such as Husserl and Schutz were the earlier pioneers who adopted the epistemological properties of hermeneutics. According to hermeneutics, 'the mental' [meanings] is distinguished from 'the physical' [contexts] and the mental affects the physical through the development of its structure across time. For this reason, hermeneutics attempts to rise to a 'higher' understanding [*verstehen*] in order to grasp the 'mental content expressed in the normal context of human beings' (see Dilthey ([1910]1976: 170-171, 220-231). With the epistemological properties of hermeneutics, Husserl treated the essence of being as transcendentally 'pure' phenomena and facts as 'real' but not purely universal. He thus believed that the 'pure' essence of being is given in the 'natural attitude' of human beings, not in social facts. With this view, he attempted to interpret this 'natural attitude' and reflect the essential universality of human beings in their lifeworld. In so doing, his way of reflecting the essence of being was to employ a phenomenological reduction, '*epoché* [bracketing]'. It was designed to 'disconnect' the 'pure' themes of phenomena from the 'fact-world' and clamp them to the 'natural standpoint' with a view to delimiting empirical 'facts' and concentrating on the transcendentally 'pure' essence of beings (Husserl [1931]1958: 41-47, 107-110). Following Husserl, Schutz also believed that the existence of the lifeworld is given in the 'natural attitude'. However, he inverted Husserl's phenomenological '*epoché*' to the '*epoché*' of the natural attitude and thus focused on 'trivial' social phenomena which he believed reveal the 'typicality of contents of lifeworld' (Schutz 1970: 116, 1971: 229). To develop the concept of '*epoché*', the epistemological concept of 'relevance' is crucial to Schutz. For him, the observer stands in a face-to-face situation but what he called 'Thou-orientation' (awareness of the others, for the observer) is one-sided: the observational conduct of

the researcher is oriented to the others observed but the others' conduct need not be oriented to the researcher. Consequently, the motives of the researcher do not necessarily interlock with those of the others being observed. To solve this discrepancy, Schutz suggested that the researcher should establish the 'relevancy' of the conduct of the observed to 'his past experiences' [motivational relevancy], 'stock of knowledge typification' [thematic relevancy] and 'his inference' [interpretive relevancy]. As he admitted, however, it is an inescapable fact that what is relevant to the observer is not always relevant to the subjective reality of the observed (Schutz 1964: 33-36, 248; 1970: 122-127; 1971: 26-27, 34-46). Ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel and Sacks also utilized a variation of the phenomenological procedure of '*epoché*' in investigating 'indexical expression' and 'other practical actions' in everyday life; this is 'ethnomethodological indifference', a reflective way of interpreting members' practical actions and their organized everyday activities. They bracketed off 'professional' scientific reasoning in favor of what they called 'members' methods', that is, how they produce, accomplish, recognize, or demonstrate the practical purposes of their action in everyday life. They asserted that a phenomenon for the interest of ethnomethodologists is congruent with members' phenomena. They thus sought to describe members' accounts of formal structures of action while abstaining from the view that members' accounts are inadequate, valueless, unimportant, unnecessary, impractical, unsuccessful, or inconsequential (Garfinkel 1967: 1-10; Garfinkel et al. 1986: 165-166).

Symbolic interactionists such as the Chicago School (e.g. Mead) and Blumer also turned attention towards human agents and their empirical conducts. Strictly speaking, their advanced methodological positions are distinct from those of phenomenologists who concentrated on the construction of phenomenological models, and those of ethnomethodologists, who paid attention exclusively to conversation analysis and documentary method. Like phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists, symbolic interactionists argued that the empirical world has an 'obdurate' character, as the mark of reality, which can 'talk back' to or 'resist' the scientific pictures of it. The 'obdurate' character cannot be seen and cast in terms of the findings of advanced natural science. Their project thus was to

search for answers to questions directed to the 'obdurate' character of the given empirical world. In so doing, their 'naturalistic' methodology, which avoids mathematical models, formal schemes to construct definitive theories, the application of natural science schemes, and such statistical and quantitative techniques as survey research, occupies a pre-eminent status in their project and appears to be more elaborate than the analytical methods of phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists (Blumer 1969: 22-27). Another element unique to the naturalistic methods of symbolic interactionists is a distinction between 'sensitizing concepts' and 'definitive concepts'. For Blumer (1954: 7-9, 1969: 40-47), a 'sensitizing concept' provides the researcher with 'a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances'. This may be achieved through what he called 'exploration' of the empirical world and developed through so-called 'inspection' to become a 'definitive concept' which serves as 'a means of clearly identifying the individual instance'.

2.2. Epistemic 'unconsciousness' in the interpretive-actor paradigm

Having discussed 'reflexivity' in the interpretive-actor paradigm, it is recognizable that interpretive and qualitative properties of the paradigm have contributed significantly to the 'epistemological turn' towards accounts of the subjective experiences of people observed and encountered in social research. Indeed, the social researchers mentioned above have made an indicative footprint in the advancement of qualitative research methods such as 'interviewing', 'life-history analysis', and 'participant observation'. Nevertheless, the interpretive-actor paradigm has epistemological weaknesses with regard to 'reflexivity' in the methodology (also see Kim 2019: 19-20). Firstly, those who use this paradigm focus too much on spatio-temporal phenomena, thereby failing to grasp diachronic instances across time and space. Secondly, they have no adequate scheme to probe the objective reality of the social world while exclusively concentrating on the subjective experiences of the people observed. However, what is fundamentally problematical in the interpretive-actor paradigm is the 'epistemic unconsciousness' which encompasses all problematical implications of reflexivity in their research methods (see Bourdieu 1992; Habermas 1987). To interpret the social world,

the social researchers in the interpretive-actor paradigm utilized interpretive methods such as '*epoché*', 'ethnomethdological indifference', and 'naturalistic research methods' on the basis of the principle of 'relevance'. At the same time, however, they were ontologically biased insofar as they believed that the objective reality of social life is solely an internal social construct of knowledgeable and skilled human agents. On the basis of this, what was relevant as a research topic or theme to these social researchers was what is relevant to their ontological commitment (see Bourdieu 1998: 80-83; Garfinkel 1967: 7-9). With this view, they bracketed off what was not relevant to their ontological commitment and took as themes the spatio-temporal phenomena and subjective experiences of human agents. Consequently, they failed to explicate the unavoidable objective reality of human agents and to come to terms with what is objectively relevant to their social world. Moreover, they repudiated quantitative research methods which they believed were too blunt in reflecting subjectively-grounded instances of the empirical world. As a result, they failed to generate a reflexive methodology relevant to the objective reality of the social world in the process of developing their inquiries, adopting new points of observation, changing the directions of observation, examining the units of analysis, and defining their validation.

2.3. Epistemic consciousness: 'reflexivity'

Bearing in mind the epistemological deficiencies mentioned above, I will move on to the search for an alternative reflexivity, that is, 'epistemic consciousness' which addresses both the subjective implications of human agency and the objective reality of the social world. It was Max Weber who was one of the earlier pioneers to seek 'epistemic consciousness'. He based his epistemological understanding heavily upon the concept of '*verstehen*' [interpretive understanding] in 'hermeneutics' (Weber [1924]1968: 8-26). Using the concept of '*verstehen*', he attempted to interpret social actions in terms of subjective social reality involving motivation, consciousness, and tradition. However, what distinguishes his approach from hermeneutics and the interpretive-actor paradigm is that he applied epistemic reduction to the subjective understanding of the empirical

world so as to attain objective 'verification of subjective reasoning'. His research methods were thus ideally open to the use of quantitative data such as statistics which he believed constituted a kind of understanding of the empirical world (Weber [1924]1968: 11-12). Clifford Geertz also argues for the importance of 'epistemic consciousness' by seeking a 'thick' interpretation in which peoples, cultures and local knowledges are described in a reflexive way, not in terms of the use of ethnographic techniques per se but as products of an elaborate epistemic consciousness (Geertz 1973: 5-6). In 'Local Knowledge', Geertz reveals clearly what he means by 'thick interpretation':

> the interpretative study of culture represents an attempt to come to terms with the diversity of the ways human beings construct their lives in the act of leading them. In the more standard sorts of science the trick is to steer between what statisticians call type-one and type-two errors - accepting hypotheses, one would be better advised to reject and rejecting ones, one would be wiser to accept; here is to steer between overinterpretation and underinterpretation, leading more into things than reason permits and less into them than it demands (1983: 16).

Here he suggests a flexible approach to an understanding of the empirical world, accepting reflexive dimensions to avoid subjective exaggeration or objective manualization of cultures (also see Bourdieu 1993: 29; Steedman 1991: 55). As briefly mentioned earlier, Habermas and Bourdieu also advocate epistemic consciousness as reflexivity. Habermas asserts that society is characterized by 'communicative' and 'intersubjective' features of both 'social systems' objectively external to human agents and lifeworld subjectively internal to human agents (Habermas 1987: 153-197, 1994: 11). In this circumstance, human agents are the social constructs of social systems as publicly-shaped social structures and also social initiators who master the lifeworld through their communicative action and subjective experiences (Habermas 1987: 119-152; Habermas 1990: 135). If social researchers are ontologically biased, however, they tend to represent society exclusively either as social system or lifeworld alone. The fundamental task of social researchers is thus to connect in a reflexive way the two perspectives (Habermas 1987:

150-153). Habermas points this out in a clearer way.

> If we understand the integration of society exclusively as social integration, we are opting for a conceptual strategy that, [….], construes society as a lifeworld. The reproduction of society then appears to be the maintenance of the symbolic structures of the lifeworld [….] If, on the other hand, we understand the integration of society exclusively as system integration, we are opting for a conceptual strategy that presents society after the model of a self-regulating system. It [….] poses the problem of interpreting the concept of a system in such a way that it can be applied to interconnections of action. [….] The fundamental problem of social theory is how to connect in a satisfactory way the two conceptual strategies indicated by the notions of 'system' and 'lifeworld' (1987: 150-151).

In a similar sense, Bourdieu argues that the double truth, objective and subjective, constitutes the whole truth of the social world. Thus, neither objectivist nor subjectivist schema alone can fully explicate the nexus between 'objective truth of the world' and 'the lived truth of what we are and what we do in it' (Bourdieu 1992: 254-255). He thus urges that social researchers have to rise to a 'higher' objectivity which makes room for subjectivity by reintroducing into themselves the epistemic consciousness of presupposition and prejudices associated with human agents (Bourdieu 1993: 17). He clarifies this point in another form:

> *il est trop évident qu'il faut se garder de prendre des limitations conditionnelles pour des limites de validité inhérentes aux méthodes de l'ethnologie: rien n'interdit d'appliquer aux sociétés modernes les méthodes de l'ethnologie, moyennant que l'on soumette en chaque cas à la réflexion épistémologique les présupposés implicites de ces méthodes concernant la structure de la société et la logique de ses transformations.*

> [it is too obvious that one should not take for the conditional limitations the limits of inherent validity in the methods of ethnology: nothing prevents the application to modern societies of the methods of ethnology, provided that, in each case, one submits to epistemological reflection the implicit presupposition of these methods concerning the structure of the society and the logic of its transformations.] (Bourdieu et al. 1973: 67)

Ⅲ. An autobiography and reflexive methodology

Having discussed epistemic 'unconsciousness' and 'consciousness' in the social sciences, I will move on to talk about autobiographical experiences of the author from ethnographic field research in a Minahasan region (Tomohon)[1], North Sulawesi, Indonesia, between June 1999 and July 2000 and then their implication to epistemic reflexivity in Southeast Asian Studies.

<Figure 1> The Location of Tomohon
(Source: www.minahasa.net / accessed on 13 December 2020)

---

[1] Tomohon was a sub-district (*kecamatan*) while the author was carrying out field research. It was acknowledged as a municipality on 4 August 2003. Eventually, the municipality (Kota) of Tomohon today consists of 44 quasi-urban villages which are divided into five sub-districts.

3.1. My Field Research: an autobiography[2]

Before I went to my research site, I was tempted to surf on the Internet, in search of a glimpse of the 'imagined' community! Actually, most of the web-sites concerned with Minahasa provided information for tourists. On the Internet, I established contact with a young Minahasan called 'Maxi' from Tomohon. When I encountered him on the Internet, he was doing a Master's degree in marine sciences in Denmark. He was later to become a lecturer in *Universitas Sam Ratulangi* in Manado, the provincial capital of North Sulawesi. During my field research I received great help from him.

For the first month of my fieldwork, I stayed in Manado. The primary reasons were to find an ideal research site which seemed to me to satisfy my research interests, and to complete the formal registration procedures required for foreign researchers. Maxi introduced me to a local family in Manado, with whom I lived during my residence there: pak Frans, ibu Merry and two cute boys (Randy and Noldy). They unconsciously or consciously became my 'faithful' teachers of the lingua franca in Minahasa, *bahasa Manado*, which I used throughout my research. In Manado, I also contacted local scholars at *Universitas Sam Ratulangi* who had undertaken some research on Minahasa, and I collected local materials in the university library. Since my local sponsor was the Professor of Anthropology in the local university, I had an opportunity to present a paper on my research methodology there. I found the presentation very useful in the sense that I could test the methodology and then try to fill the yawning gaps between my amateur ways of getting to know the locale, and the mastery of local knowledges.

During the field research, with the help of Maxi, I visited several sub-districts (*kecamatan*) and villages in search of a research site, identifying various socio-cultural features of these different locations. Eventually I decided on the sub-district, Tomohon (now municipality of Tomohon). There were several reasons for this choice. First, I wished to undertake research in a small village, in

---

[2] Names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms, thereby protecting the privacy of the informants.

line with my initial ethnographic commitments. Yet I then decided that it was 'unwise' to depend only on a single case whose findings might be inadequate in explicating multi-faceted instances of the empirical social world. I was thus tempted to carry out multiple case-studies in a wider unit, a sub-district rather than a single village. Second, Tomohon is a microcosm of Minahasan society in terms of socio-cultural and economic features. I thus assumed that the findings of case-studies in Tomohon might be applicable to Minahasan society as a whole. Third, my local friend Maxi was from Tomohon. He had family in a Tomohon village, Tinoor I. Fortunately, his father was the village-head of Tinoor I, where I later carried out research. It meant that I had already gained access to at least one village before moving into Tomohon.
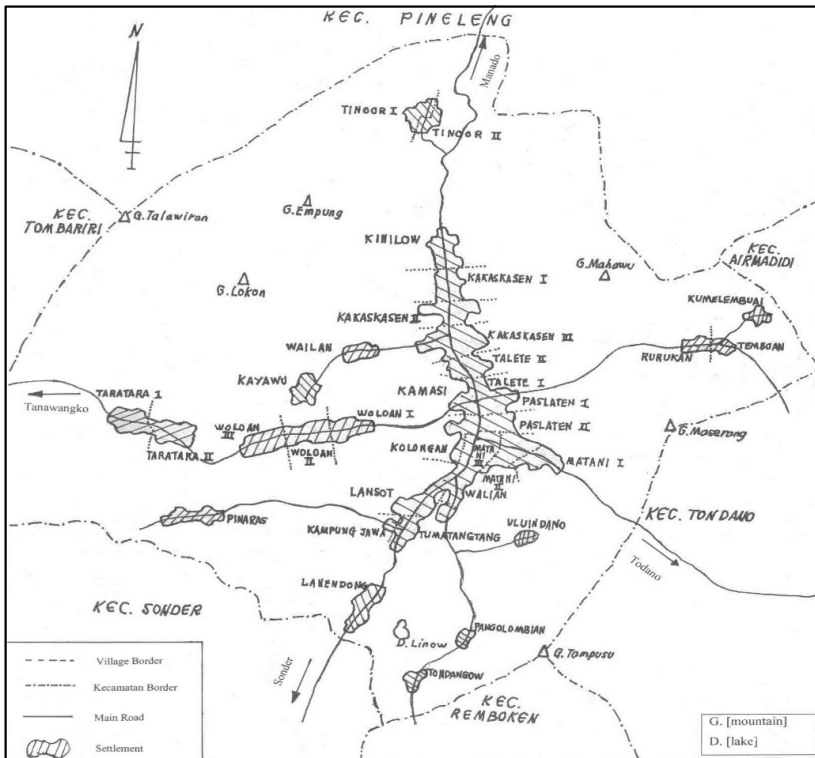
<Figure 2> Sub-District of Tomohon Until 2003
(Source: Kim 2014: 177)

In Tomohon, I initially base-camped in Talete II. I lived with a poor local family until I finished my research: om Marten, tante Anni, their son (Agus), and their married daughter (Dortje) and her daughters (Jenny and Lenny). My first task was to select sample villages, and after selecting four villages in Tomohon (Tinoor I, Taratara I, Rurukan and Talete II), I went through them one by one. I lived in each village for about one-and-a-half months. After finishing research in a village, I came back to the base-camp Talete II and arranged materials for a week, then moved again to another village. This practice continued for about six months. Before moving into a village, I always had to contact the village-head in advance of any research, according to official regulations for every foreign researcher. At the first meeting with the village-head, I usually asked for a local family with whom I could live. I still remember I was very warmly welcomed to each host family. I was usually recognized as their '*anak angkat* (adopted son)', which helped make me naturally acceptable to their communities.

In Tinoor I, I lived with the family of a female petty trader. Her 'business' was catering (food trading): she made pork sate and leaf-packed rice and sold them in offices in Manado. Her husband was a farmer but mostly helped her to prepare the food rather than going to the farm. One of my interests in Tinoor I was petty trading, and on several occasions I followed her selling routines to Manado and sometimes even sold food with her, as an adopted son. The news rapidly went through the whole village and even to other villages through the local market: '*Tu bulé, Olke pe anak angkat, dia bajual sate deng Olke di Manado*' (The foreigner, Olke's adopted son, he sold pork sate together with Olkein Manado). After that I gained much more open confidence from other people.

In Taratara I, I stayed with the head of the village. His wife was the head of the women's organization (*PKK*) in the village, so I could obtain some official information on women's activities. But my concern in the villages was primarily women's activities in traditional reciprocal organizations and in agricultural sectors. My research was made more difficult in Taratara I than in Tinoor I. There were several reasons for this. First, unlike Tinoor I, in Taratara I, I did not have privileged access to the society. Second,

the head of the village and his wife were rather formal and official: I guessed they were too cautious about government warnings regarding suspicious foreigners. I found it rather hard to get close to them. This situation unfortunately generated a dilemma in that I was recognized as a foreigner carrying out research and staying with the head of the village for this purpose. Instead of the head of the village, the secretary of the village helped my research, even when the head was reluctant to give any information. But even though it was partly true that this awkward situation made it hard to get closely engaged in the community, my research did not go too badly because I eventually gained the confidence of the people, mostly through active participation with them in agricultural activities. But, to solve the problem, I had to spend much more time getting acquainted with the local people in Taratara I than in Tinoor I.

In Rurukan, I lived with the family of an ordinary housewife. Her husband was a carpenter. I was also called their adopted son in the village. Because of this I once had to introduce myself formally to a meeting of the kin group of my host family. After that, I was 'officially' accepted as a member of the kin group. This atmosphere gave me immediate acceptance to the community. The family also had a daughter who was a final-year student in a high school. With the girl's help, I was able to gain access to the world of adolescent girls, which I did not expect. So I usually focused on the domestic activities of women and the young girls' worlds. At the same time, I was mainly working with petty traders called '*tibo*' who mostly traded vegetables from their farms to the markets. I often followed their marketing routines intensively from morning through to late night, from their farms to the market places. Because of this, from time to time, I stayed at the market all day long.

In Talete II, I was interested in the transitory professions of Tomohonese women from the traditional to modern sectors. Because my assistant Agus was living in Talete II and my base-camp was also there, I already had wide access to the society. In Talete II, as in other villages, I usually attended church on Sunday and tried to participate in all socio-cultural ceremonies like funerals and weddings. This socializing helped me to get to know more people. I found attending socio-cultural events, not only as a researcher but

also as a village member, very 'productive' in terms of getting known by the local people. While doing research in Talete II, I also carried out surveys in various schools and also in shops in my attempt to understand the socio-economic constellation of young Tomohonese women. In addition, in each village I undertook an initial census. For this, I usually employed four to five local people in each village. The reason, as I have already explained in relation to Agus's reluctance to come along with me to each village, was because each Minahasan community is relatively exclusive in relation to outsiders. Thus, I thought it would be best to get help from 'amateur insiders' rather than 'trouble-making professional outsiders'. I had a format for the census, and always gave my assistants a thorough orientation. But, in some cases I had to double-check personally the results because some were inadequate. This was not surprising, given that my assistants were not trained researchers. However, most of them already had some census experience from the regional government and results overall were good.

Following my research in the four villages in Tomohon, I then undertook research in four other research sites: Manado; a resettlement site, Ikarad; a Minahasan harbor city, Bitung; and Sorong in West Papua (then Irian Jaya). For research activities in Manado, I did not stay there because it was only a 35-minute bus-ride to Manado and there was relatively frequent transport between there and Tomohon. Towards the end of the field research I stayed in Maxi's house complex in Manado for a month. During that time, I concentrated on collecting statistical data in regional offices and arranging the findings gathered from the field. After my stay in Tomohon, I went to the resettlement site Ikaradin Bolaang Mongondow, North Sulawesi. It took about eight hours or so on a bus to the site, but there was no direct transportation. The reason I chose Ikarad was that around 400 Tomohonese households moved there when the volcanic mountain Lokon erupted in 1991 and the ash and debris covered most of the Tomohonese villages. I wanted to see how women had made out in this transitory environment. I went there on my own and stayed there around three weeks. Fortunately, I had already met some resettlers in Tinoor I as they

visited their home village while I was doing research there. I had also once visited the resettlement site for a *pengucapan* (thanksgiving feast). In Ikarad, I followed women's economic activities and men's logging work in the mountains. During this period, I often found that it was practically impossible to avoid any involvement in the issues affecting the regional resettlement scheme. For instance, I faced an ethical dilemma while I was gathering data on logging activities, hygiene and health conditions, water supply management and road management. In response to the people's appeals, for example, I had a talk with the regional officials about the poor conditions of the access road to the site and about health conditions, but they seemed to be unimpressed with my concerns.

After Ikarad, I crossed over to Sorong, West Papua. It took me two days on a shanty ocean liner. I had planned to go there earlier than this, but because of the unstable situation in Sorong, my departure was delayed: there was a movement for the independence of Papua. I went there with my assistant, Agus, who had been a seaman for about three years in Sorong. So before I went I already had some knowledge of the place from what I had heard from Agus. Agus contacted his brother in Sorong and arranged our activities with him. In Sorong I concentrated on Tomohonese women working there and the possible influences on their lives from the changing and unstable situation. Because Agus's brother was a head of the Tomohonese sub-ethnic group (Tombulu) in Sorong, I easily made friends and carried out the planned research even though the independence movement rendered the political situation unstable. Following Sorong, I carried out research in Bitung, focusing on Tomohonese women working in factories. I went there without my assistant, but I already had some people in mind whom I wished to contact; during my stay in Tomohon, I had already made a list of Tomohonese women working in Bitung and asked their families to inform them that I would contact them in due course. I also made visits to selected factories and completed a general survey on working conditions.

3.2. Notes on reflexive methodology

My field research in Tomohon attempted to resolve the methodological

dilemmas generated by an emphasis on 'spatio-temporal elements' and 'phenomenological reduction' embedded in the realist and interpretive-actor paradigms. I therefore advocate: 'itinerant' research and 'diachronic' research to address the epistemological limitations of a concentration on 'spatio-temporal elements'; and 'multiple-case' studies for the epistemological shortcomings posed by 'phenomenological reduction'.

Bearing these points in mind, my research was based on one-year of ethnographic research between June 1999 and July 2000 in different locations, using multiple methods of data collection and multiple case-studies. The major motivation for undertaking this kind of research was to scrutinize the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese which was spatially spread over different places with independent instances. The research centered primarily on the sub-district Tomohon. In Tomohon I chose four villages as cases (Tinoor I, Taratara I, Rurukan, and Talete II). The research then continued to follow the socio-economic life-patterns of the Tomohonese in other research sites as well:

<Table 1> Secondary and Other Research Sites

Secondary Research Sites	• A resettlement site (Ikarad), Bolaang Mongondow, North Sulawesi • An industrial harbor city (Bitung), North Sulawesi • The provincial capital Manado, North Sulawesi • Sorong, West Papua • Jakarta
Other Research Sites (Not Visited)	• Malaysia / Hong Kong / Singapore (but about which ex-workers were intensively interviewed)

The methods I employed in this 'itinerant' research comprised: 'documentary data collection', 'multiple case-studies', 'participant observation', 'censuses and surveys', 'interviewing and questionnaires', 'drawing life-histories' and 'collecting local stories'.

Firstly, documentary data collecting was carried out mainly in libraries in the preparatory stage of the research: in the UK (Hull University, the British Library and SOAS Library); in the Netherlands

(KITLV Library at Leiden); and in Indonesia (LIPI Library in Jakarta, *Universitas Sam Ratulangi* in Manado and *Universitas Kristen Indonesia Tomohon*). During the fieldwork, I also regularly collected statistical materials and government documents in the regional government offices in Manado and Tondano (*Kantor BPS*, *Kantor Bappeda*, *Kantor Transmigrasi* and *Kantor Gubernur Sulut*).

Second, I incorporated 'multiple case-studies' in my research, rather than single case-studies (see Yin 1989: 27-60). The major reason for doing this was because the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese were intertwined with various cases and independent instances that occurred in and at different places. For instance, the sampled research sites inside and outside Tomohon, each has unique socio-economic features that have profound effects on the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese in different ways. However, this application of multiple case-studies was not aimed primarily at comparing one case with another, but at avoiding the possible reduction [*epoché*] of the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese to a single theme or topic.

Third, participant observation was utilized mainly in observing religious and agricultural ceremonies, traditional feasts, and women in workplaces such as markets and rice-fields. Where necessary, I was often actively involved in the activities. My field-role can thus be said to be that of 'participant-as-observer' (see Burgess 1984: 80-82).

Fourth, in providing empirical material on the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese, I also focused heavily on recording verbatim people's responses to my questions and drawing individual life-histories by interviewing. In so doing, I employed unstructured questions (open questions), rather than structured ones (closed questions), and attempted to describe individual cases in a manner that is as faithful as possible to the way the Tomohonese experience and feel them, and let them speak through and about their experiences from their standpoints. In this regard, collecting local stories was also a significant part of my ethnographic research, in order to sketch out the intrinsic and symbolic images of the Tomohonese. The local stories include myths, legends, folktales,

songs and sayings.

Fifth, in research sites outside Tomohon (Bitung, Manado, Sorong and Jakarta), I employed face-to-face interviewing and the following of everyday routines in describing the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese. However, in the four villages in Tomohon and in Ikarad, I generally went through three research phases: (1) 'census' to grasp the grand picture of the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese and then select 'appropriate' informants (see Appendices I – V); (2) 'semi-structured interviews' with key-informants; (3) 'in-depth interviews and following their daily routines' to draw the more detailed picture of the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese in particular cases. To complement the primary findings, I often employed three types of techniques: structured questionnaires, focus groups and private diaries. I utilized structured questionnaires in order to expand the primary findings to larger and more diverse social locations (e.g. different age groups or gender categories). In the search for more dynamic discussion, focus groups, consisting of 12 or so participants, were used where necessary. I also encouraged some key-informants to keep their private diaries so as to see their daily lives from their own perspectives. This complementary research generally helped me to develop my primary interests and to enrich my primary findings. Given the research phases mentioned above, therefore, it is wise to hold to the view that employing some objective quantification in Southeast Asian Studies is essential for understanding the intersubjective social world of people. But this is only to the extent to which it can provide background material for qualitative findings and to which it connects fruitfully with empirical data. In this regard, in Southeast Asian Studies qualitative and quantitative methods need to be treated as complementary, rather than antagonistic (also see Alvesson et al. 2000: 4; Giddens 1984: 327-334; Hammersley 1992: 159-173; Kim 2019: 25; Maynard 1994: 14).

Ⅳ. Conclusion

In my view from ethnographic experiences of the field research in Tomohon, the 'interpretive capacity' and 'reflexive interaction with

social systems' of the Tomohonese were more dynamic and heterogeneous than the 'realist' (functional and structural) and 'interpretive-actor' paradigms would suggest. In contrast to the ontological perspective of the 'realist' paradigm on human agency, the Tomohonese did not simply internalize social norms and values and performed functions to meet the requirements of those norms and values, but instead they were capable of interpreting social systems and their individual circumstances of the life course and exploiting social norms and values for their own individual life-strategies and choices. Moreover, 'reflexive interaction of the Tomohonese with social systems' across time and space cannot be adequately mapped out in terms of the ontological standpoint of the 'interpretive-actor paradigm'. In many cases, the Tomohonese continued to interpret their circumstances of the life course and the opportunities available to them and constructed their subjectively-grounded aspects of the lifeworld according to their individual choices and life-strategies. However, the interpretive capacity of the Tomohonese was often constrained by certain objective realities of the lifeworld, which in turn conditioned the Tomohonese to reflect on the constraints on their life-dynamics and to produce alternative socio-cultural practices to cope with them.

A number of scholars such as Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas attempted to search for an alternative paradigm to both the 'realist' and 'interpretive-actor' paradigms (Kim 2019: 20-24). These scholars emphasized that social structures are also 'regenerative' out of action across time and space (Giddens 1979; 1984); 'constituted' by social practices resulting from the so-called '*habitus*' as a generative scheme of enduring social disposition (Bourdieu 1977; 1990; 1998); and society is characterized by 'communicative' and 'intersubjective' features of both 'social systems' objectively external to human agents and lifeworld subjectively internal to human agents (Habermas 1987; 1990; 1994). Overall the premises of the alternative paradigm seem to me to provide an epistemic means of tackling the ontological dilemmas in the 'realist' and 'interpretive-actor' paradigms by paying balanced attention to both the 'interpretive capacity' of the Tomohonese and their 'reflexive interaction with objective realities of the lifeworld'. It

emerges as an incisive 'sensitizing' framework relevant to the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese, which are communicative with social structures in the continuous process of social interaction.

Nevertheless, the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese still demand a more 'actor-centered' epistemic account of reflexive interaction between actors and social structures. The social practices of the Tomohonese are interlinked not only with the reproduction of social systems but also, to a greater extent, with individual circumstances of the life course, individual choices and life-strategies. Moreover, the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese are not always the product of the logic of social systems such as *habitus* (Pierre Bourdieu) and structuration (Anthony Giddens). In other words, the choices and life-strategies of the Tomohonese are not always in response to the demands of the particular objective conditions of the lifeworld. Consequently, in approaching the life-dynamics of the Tomohonese, in addition to the sensitizing ontological properties of 'reflexive approaches', I argue that we need a 'more actor-centered' epistemic framework to compensate for the epistemological and methodological dilemmas of the alternative paradigm: a framework which regards people as 'acting subjects' and positions them in the center of its premise, and aims to emphasize and to respect indigenous people's own view of their lifeworld, their worldview and their own images of the future (see Chambers 1985: 3-4; King 1999: 33; Long 1977: 187-188; Mair 1984: 10-14; Rhoades 1986: 49-55). The 'more actor-centered' epistemic framework will equip Southeast Asian Studies with a reflexive methodology relevant to the life-dynamics of the social world in the process of developing its inquiries, methodological technics, analysis, and validation.

References

Alvesson, Mats and Kaj Sköldberg. 2000. *Reflexive Methodology: new vistas for qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
Bell, Diane. 1993. Introduction 1: the context & Yes Virginia, there is a feminist ethnography: reflections from three Australian fields. *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography*.

　　　　　Diane Bell, Pat Caplan and Wazir J. Karim, eds. 1-18 &
　　　　　28-43. London and New York: Routledge.

Blumer, Herbert. 1954. What is Wrong with Social Theory. *American
　　　　　Sociological Review,* 19(1): 3-10.

＿＿＿＿＿. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: perspective and method.*
　　　　　Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge:
　　　　　Cambridge University Press.

＿＿＿＿＿. 1990. *The Logic of Practice.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

＿＿＿＿＿. 1992. The Practice of Reflexive Sociology'. *An Invitation
　　　　　to Reflexive Sociology.* Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D.
　　　　　Wacquant, eds. 218-260. Chicago: The University of Chicago
　　　　　Press.

＿＿＿＿＿. 1993. *Sociology in Question.* London: Sage Publications.

＿＿＿＿＿. 1998. *Practical Reason.* Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, Pierre, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude
　　　　　Passeron. 1973. *Le métier de sociologue: Préalabes
　　　　　épistémologiques* [deuxiéme édition]. Paris: Mouton Éditeur.

Burgess, Robert G. 1984. *In the Field: An Introduction to Field
　　　　　Research.* London: George Allen & Unwin.

Chambers, Erve. 1985. *Applied Anthropology.* Illinois: Waveland Press.

Cohen, Anthony P. 1992. Self-conscious anthropology. *Anthropology
　　　　　and Autobiography.* Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, eds.
　　　　　221-141. London: Routledge.

Comte, Auguste. 1853. *The Positive Philosophy* (Volume II). Harriet
　　　　　Martineau, trans. London: John Champman.

＿＿＿＿＿. 1968-1970. *Oeuvres d'Auguste Comte.* Paris: Anthropos,
　　　　　11 vols.

Davies, Charlotte A. 1999. *Reflexive Ethnography: a guide to
　　　　　researching selves and others.* London: Routledge.

Dilthey, Wilhelm. [1910]1976. Construction of the Historical World.
　　　　　Dilthey Selected Writings. Hans Peter Rickman, ed. &
　　　　　trans. 168-245. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dodgson, Joan E. 2019. Reflexivity in Qualitative Research. *Journal of
　　　　　Human Lactation,* 35(2): 220-222.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Englewood
　　　　　Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Garfinkel, Harold and Harvey Sacks. 1986. On Formal Structures of

Practical Actions. *Ethnomethodological Studies of Work*. Harold Garfinkel, ed. 338-366. London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers.

_____. 1983. *Local Knowledge*. London: FontanaPress.

Giddens, Anthony. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. London: Macmillan.

_____. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action* [Volume 2]. Cambridge: Polity Press.

_____. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

_____. 1994. *The Past as Future: Jürgen Habermas, interviewed by Michael Haller*. Max Pensky, trans. & ed. Cambridge: Polity.

Hammersley, Martyn. 1990. *What's Wrong with Ethnography?: methodological explorations*. London: Routledge.

Hervik, Peter. 1994. Shared reasoning in the field: reflexivity beyond the author. *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge*. Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik, eds. 78-100. London: Routledge.

Husserl, Edmund. [1931]1958. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Kim, Yekyoum. 2004. *Living from hand to mouth provided there is happiness: Life-dynamics of Tomohonese Women, Minahasa, North Sulawesi, Indonesia*. Ph.D. Thesis. Centre for South-East Asian Studies, Hull University.

_____. 2006. Re-localization of the Culture. *SeonGyoSinHak* [Journal of Mission and Theology], 13(2): 177-201.

_____. 2014. Socio-cultural identities in multilayered contexts: An ethnographic study of Tomohon, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. *DongNam Asia YeonGu* [Southeast Asian Studies], 24(3): 159-206.

_____. 2019. Ontological Reflexivity in Southeast Asian Cultural Studies. *Asia YeonGu* [Asian Studies], 22(2): 179-214.

King, Victor T. 1999. *Anthropology and Development in South-East*

Asia: theory and practice. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

_____. 2015a. [Introduction to the Issue] Southeast Asian Studies: Areas, Method and Comparison. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 7(1): 7-11.

_____. 2015b. Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Studies: Issues in Multidisciplinary Studies and Methodology. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 7(1): 13-57.

_____. 2016a. [Introduction to the Issue] Revisiting and Reconstructing Southeast Asian Characteristics. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 8(1): 7-13.

_____. 2016b. Southeast Asian Studies: Insiders and Outsiders, or is Culture and Identity a Way Forward?. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 8(1): 17-53.

_____. 2016c. [Introduction to the Issue] Identities in Maritime Southeast Asia: Ethnicity and Nation-state. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 8(2): 7-11.

_____. 2018a. [Introduction to the Special Issue] Alternative Approaches in Southeast Asian Studies: Compounding Area Studies and Cultural Studies. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 10(2): 7-27.

_____. 2018b. Other Southeast Asias? Beyond and Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 10(2): 57-85.

_____. 2020a. [Introduction to the Special Issue] Debating Southeast Asia. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 12(2): 7-15.

_____. 2020b. Who Made Southeast Asia? Personages, Programs and Problems in the Pursuit of a Region. *SUVANNABHUMI,* 12(2): 157-200.

_____. 2021 (*Forthcoming*). Chapter 1 (Fieldwork and the Self: Perspectives and Debates), Chapter 2 (Prologue: Rehearsing the Self and Reflexivity), Chapter 4 (A Sociological-Anthropological Gaze on Changing Perspectives on Southeast Asia). *Fieldwork and the Self: Changing Research Styles and Methodologies in Southeast Asia*. Jeremy Jammes and Victor T. King, eds. Singapore: IAS-UBD-Springer.

Long, Norman. 1977. *An Introduction to the Sociology of Rural*

Development. London: Tavistock.

_____. 1996. Globalization and localization: new challenges to rural research. *Future of Anthropological Knowledge*. Henrietta L. Moore, ed. 37-59. London: Routledge.

Mair, Lucy. 1984. *Anthropology and Development*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Maynard, Mary. 1994. Methods, Practice and Epistemology: the Debate about Feminism and Research. *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. Mary Maynard and June Purvis, eds. 10-26. London: Taylor and Francis.

Palaganas, Erlinda C., Marian C. Sanchez, Ma. Visitacion P. Molintas and Ruel D. Caricativo. 2017. Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Journey of Learning. *The Qualitative Report,* 22(2): 426-438.

Rabinow, Paul. 1977. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Rhoades, Robert E. 1986. Breaking new ground: agricultural anthropology. *Practicing Development Anthropology*. Edward C. Green, ed. 22-66. Boulder and London: Westview Press.

Robertson, Roland. 1995. Glocalization: time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. *Global Modernities*. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, eds. 24-44. London: Sage Publications.

Schouten, Maria J. 1998. *Leadership and Social Mobility in a Southeast Asian Society: Minahasa, 1677-1983*. Leiden: KITLV Press.

Schutz, Alfred. 1964. *Collected Papers* (Volume 2: Studies in Social Theory). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

_____. 1970. *Collected Papers* (Volume 3: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

_____. 1971. *Collected Papers* (Volume 1: The Problem of Social Reality). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Steedman, Peter H. 1991. On the Relations between Seeing, Interpreting and Knowing. *Research and Reflexivity*. Frederick Steier, ed. 53-62. London: Sage Publications.

Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 1992. Toward a Social Praxeology: the structure and logic of Bourdieu's Sociology. *An Invitation to*

Reflexive Sociology. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, eds. 2-59. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Weber, Max. [1924]1968. *Economy and Society: an outline of interpretative society*. New York: Bedminster Press.

Wilken, George A. 1883. Overde verwantschap en het huwelijks- en erfrecht bij de volken van het Maleische ras. *Indische Gids*. 5(I): 656-764.

Yin, Robert K. 1989. *Case Study Research: design and methods*. Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.