

January

29 (THU) 2026

15:00–16:30 (Japan Time)

Tonantei (Room 201)

Inamori Foundation Memorial Building,
Kyoto University



Tonan Talk Manifesto of the Durian: Smell and Area Studies

ABSTRACT

Since the emergence of Southeast Asian Studies in the 1950s, the concept of “area” in area studies has referred to a geopolitical construct of a country or a region. The intensification of global Anthropocene problems and transnational mobilities have shown that the geopolitical concept is no longer sufficient for conceptualizing area beyond the political identity of the state or the region. The critique of area studies, however, still finds it difficult to avoid the trap of geospatial formation. The problem emerges in particular because there has been no attempt to criticize the concept of “area.” Instead of returning to the area as a place, in this talk I work against the limitation of the concept in resorting to materialities that entangle the space into temporary, ambiguous, and fleeting spatial constructs.

The talk tells a story of how durian hails, captures, and relates to people through their odor and taste, sharing affects and shaping embodied sensorial experiences of durian eating. I draw from the idea of rhizomatic entanglement to discuss a “topology of area studies,” an understanding of an area less as a geographical container but as a web of practical connections of bodies, more-than-humans, technologies, and capital. The durian creates a fellowship, which differentiates Southeast Asian people and their Others. The pungent odor and mushy taste delimit a form of topological belonging. The smell and the taste bring the experience of eating durian into an ontological world. From remote corners of Indonesia to the highland region of mainland Southeast Asia, the infrastructures, practices and experiences of smelling and eating durian are constitutive of a Southeast Asia, which is at once similar and very different from the one known to conventional area studies. This durian topology leads me to argue that multispecies turn in STS is an important embodied and tactile complement to the critique to area studies.

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Fadjar Ibnu Thufail is Senior Researcher and Head of Research Center for Area Studies at the Indonesian National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). He studied at Rutgers University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He specializes in the anthropology of more-than-humans, heritage, and science, technology, and society (STS) studies. At BRIN, he initiated the MetHuman Lab, a research program focusing on the intersections of multispecies relationships and non-human materialities. Thufail is the editor, with Casper Bruun Jensen, of “Entangled Areas”, a Special Edition of the *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society Journal*, and the author of “Street Feeding Stray Cats: A Multi-Species Cosmopolitics in Urban Indonesia” in *Southern Anthropocene* (Routledge) edited by Casper Bruun Jensen. He has been working on the cosmopolitics of Mt. Merapi and more-than-human entanglements in heritage sites in Japan and Indonesia. He also serves in the Editorial Board of *Indonesia* (Cornell University).



Organizer: Tomohiro Machikita, Youdiil Ophinni (CSEAS)

