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# The Degeneration of Tropical Geography

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## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Audrey Kobayashi and the anonymous referees for their many helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. The article has also been reformulated through presentations and subsequent discussions. The first presentation of the article was a paper given at the second meeting of the East Asian Regional conference on Alternative Geography (December 2001) in Hong Kong, China. The paper was also presented at a session on “Putting Philosophies of Geography into Practice” at the Annual Conference of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers in Belfast in January 2002. A reworked version of the paper was then presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Los Angeles in March 2002. In July 2003, the paper was also presented to an audience including former colleagues, students, family, and friends of Keith Buchanan at the Victoria University of Wellington as the first Asia Pacific Viewpoint Annual Lecture.

A large white rectangular area, likely a placeholder for an image or a large text block, with a small dark circular icon containing a white dot pattern in the bottom left corner.



## Notes

[Steel \(1984\)](#), later wrote a history of the first fifty years of the Institute of British Geographers (founded in 1933), but this volume says virtually nothing about tropical or development geographies.

2. We have in mind [Gregory's \(1994\)](#) consideration of the distinction between the discourses of geography and the (narrower) discipline. For [Gregory \(1994, 11\)](#), “‘Geography,’ in the former sense, is not confined to any one discipline, or even to the specialized vocabularies of the academy; it travels instead through social practices at large and is implicated in myriad topographies of power and knowledge....‘popular geographies’ are as important to the conduct of social life as are our understandings of (say) biography and history.”

While we acknowledge the potential of geography defined thus as an expansive discourse, for this paper we shall leap back into the academic discipline.

3. The journal was published as the Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography (1953–1977), then the Journal of Tropical Geography (1958–1979), and subsequently the Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography (1980–present). For a retrospective on the journal, see the papers in the 40th anniversary issue (December 1993, vol. 14, no. 2), especially [Raguraman and Huang \(1993\)](#) as well as [Savage's \(2003\)](#) retrospective on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.

4. At least one of the main problems of the discipline is its over-reliance on descriptive texts. The number of descriptive texts in the Journal of Tropical Geography is a testament to this. The texts. Challenging the production of knowledge and the geographies of power here, but

5. Carl Sauer's concept of landscapes as place has been questioned, still western question of the late 1960s), Welsh and Scottish nationalism and English regionalisms were quiescent.

6. We are grateful to Reginald Cline-Cole [e-mail, 23 May, 2002] for this information and wider observations on the career and life of Pierre Gourou. Gourou's life almost spanned the 20th century (he was born in Tunis in 1900 and died in Brussels in 1999). [Bowd and Clayton's \(2003\)](#), 164) account of Gourou is revealing of the influences upon him and how his appreciation of difference and constraints “was over-determined by the prevailing ideas and assumptions of his day about the legitimacy of colonialism and the backwardness and exoticism of the tropical landscapes that he studied and appreciated because of their difference.” Commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, Ray Watters [comments on “The Degeneration of Tropical Geography,” written correspondence via Warwick Murray, 16 December, 2003] also reminds us that “notwithstanding his [Gourou's] blindness to political trends and dynamic power relations, he fully understood the great physical factors that continue to underpin life in the hot wet tropics such as the Monsoon cycle, the nature of tropical soils outside the great river valleys, the clearing of large areas of tropical rain forest (at a time before we were

7. Although dependent trajectories are comprehensible had  [1975](#), through contact,

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16. It should be added here that Antipode began publication in the United States (at Clark University) and was an embodiment of radical critiques of America's Vietnam war and the emergence of a counterculture and New Left in the United States amid the rediscovery by academia of poverty and racism in the country. It is interesting to reflect that Economic Geography also began at Clark in 1925 and might also be understood—in the light of the comments in note 4—in part as representing a different (in this case uncritical) register of networks of (colonial and quasi-colonial) trade and commodity production.

17. On geography, history, and (auto)biography, see [Billinge, Gregory and Martin \(1984\)](#) and more recently, [Gould and Pitts \(2002\)](#), [Lorimer \(2003\)](#), [Moss \(2001\)](#), and Yi-Fu [Tuan \(1999\)](#).

18. We will note, too, that the map was reprinted in distance learning material produced by the Open University in Britain in the early 1980s and would have had a wide circulation among students studying for degrees in the Open University program. The Open University then had (and still has) the largest number of undergraduate students of any British University.

19. [Lorimer and Spedding \(2002\)](#) and [Withers \(2002\)](#) point to some of the ways that other documents, artefacts, and agents constitute the complex networks within which geograph



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