

## Book Reviews

***(Re)Negotiating Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. Region, Regionalism, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.* Alice D.Ba. Singapore: NUS Press, 2009, xiv + 325 pp. ISBN-13: 978-9971-69-491-3 (pbk.)**

The notion of 'resilience' is one of the most underlines adaptive capability owns by ASEAN in facing challenges and opportunities. In essence, the formula of 'regional resilience' remain relevant to ASEAN nowadays, especially facing the rising trends of China-US competition in the region. In many scope, this manifests ASEAN's recent goals and aspirations. Differ from what Acharya's arguments on regional (dis)order, this book prefer to see Southeast Asia as the subject of its own regional entity, rather than just an object to be 'ordered' by outsiders. Notwithstanding, there is a distinct culture which the countries in the region embrace after the long period of power influence. Southeast Asia do learn and pay for their own distinction on 'unity in diversity' to later form an 'ASEAN way' as ASEAN centrality in Southeast Asian region, even beyond that in East Asia.

Focuses on Southeast Asia and ASEAN's development in relation to the wider regions of East Asia and the Asia Pacific, Ba looks at the ideational factors on ASEAN's evolution. By using the social constructivism, it frames the process of regionalism in Southeast Asia as the form of their 'regional resilience'. She argues that the regions and regionalism in Asia are resulted from cumulative dialogue or series of social negotiations on the material and normative foundations or regional order. This also part of their nature of intraregional ties, as well as their relationship between both major powers and minor powers. Also she notice that the appropriateness occurred from the great power guarantees and their intervention within the region (p.8).

ASEAN for the 10 members states were seen as both regional organization and main regionalism efforts in the region. Despite the differences on viewing the value of Southeast Asia and various efforts on their own

national building, the 10 member states struggling to keep ASEAN runs well. This part, Ba mentions as 'regional resilience' (p.29-32), the efforts from ASEAN members to reconcile their diverse situations and values to maintain the resilience of Southeast Asia. Through this book, Ba explains the material realities faced by this regionalism of SEA countries which also bring the so called re-making of new norms in the region. By realizing the threats of major power influence and internal fragmentation, ASEAN already pushed many efforts on spinning off their regionalism into some 'enlargement' to manage their 'regional resilience'(p.240). Although those 'spin off' process were debatable in terms of the centrality of ASEAN, but this book tries to view that this is at least has shown the struggle of ASEAN to realize the ASEAN Way in the region of East Asia or even greater in Asia-Pacific.

It is good to understand that there were not only material gains like common interest or common threats able to tight and moreover maintain a regionalism in Southeast Asia. Like many argues that ASEAN as Southeast Asian regionalism is ineffective and inefficient, even some called this as 'too much talks' without concrete result in the end. Those arguments were answered nicely by using the perspective of social constructivism by seeing those many talks as part of 'ideational exchanges' which resulting the new ideas which able to maintain the relations and its foundation on regionalism in the area. However, talking mostly on the process of cumulative ideational exchange, makes the reader bias on their judgement on Southeast Asian countries behavior. There were of course, material gains as factors of those ASEAN members to move closer or away from certain cooperation or regional arrangements. In terms of economical or security gains, the power capabilities (as many realists scholars view) drive the renegotiating process of regionalism.

Published in 2009, this book is still relevant to understand the happening moments of 'negotiation process' as 'cumulative ideas' which resulted norms within the organization as well as the region. This book surely benefited for those who wants to

understand the form of 'regional resilience' that ASEAN's members could pursue by ASEAN regionalism. ASEAN formation were not as simple as gathering all Southeast Asian states in an organization. As from the beginning, regional concern of ASEAN countries was to formed a strategic way in dealing with global conflict between the two superpower rivalries. Nevertheless, this book already filled the niche on understanding Southeast Asian regionalism from a different angle. Even though the author did not mention too much about material gains of each countries within the ASEAN as organization but by describing the narrative on each circumstances of regional moments helps the reader to guess what kind of material gains possible received by countries.

**Sarah Anabarja**

Ph.D Student

International Doctoral Program in Asia Pacific Studies (IDAS), National Chengchi University (NCCU), Taiwan.

[sarah.anb86@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.anb86@gmail.com)