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Collins, Alan (2013), *Building a People-oriented Security Community the ASEAN Way*

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The signing of the ASEAN Charter in 2007 and its ratification in 2008 brought a long overdue rejuvenation to regionalism in Southeast Asia and sparked hope among many within the region that its regional organisation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) could be a force for change, economically, politically and socially. The charter created a pillar system comprising Economic, Political Security and Social Cultural Communities as well as seemingly contradictory norms by mixing sovereignty and non-interference with democracy and human rights. This puzzling and contradictory binary was the lead into “regionalism anew” whereby academics, civil society and pundits speculated as to how revolutionary the new ASEAN would be, especially since the mandate given to the Eminent Persons Group were to come up with a text that exhibited “bold” initiatives which would respond to challenges of the new millennium currently facing ASEAN, its states and people. When the final draft of the charter was presented, those outside of government were disappointed to say to the least as high hopes were not realised in ASEAN’s first legal text or as described by scholar Mely Caballero-Anthony (2008) “ASEAN’s constitution”. Eminent scholar Barry Desker (2008) has gone so far as to conclude that the charter simply enshrines ASEAN’s *modus operandi* which have consistently been pointed to as being the primary cause for ASEAN’s general and consistent failure in the face of crisis and upholding of status quo.

However, lofty and idealistic bureaucratic diplomatic language aside, the charter did indeed provide new structures and language indicating that changes may be on the horizon but that achieving such substantial change would be in a gradualist “ASEAN Way”. The primary structure displaying the supposed shift in values was the creation of a regional Human Rights Body and principles of respect for democracy, rule of law and most prescient, the need to create an ASEAN that was inclusive of its “people” so as to build a common identity and identification to a common destiny among its highly diverse populaces. While academic scholarship surrounding ASEAN has tended to give primary consideration to economy, trade and traditional security issues the integration and integrative effects of regional structures and initiatives to try and create a people centred ASEAN have not been studied nearly enough. This volume does indeed chart new territory in ASEAN studies by examining ASEAN through the dual lenses of its traditional top-down elite centred integration and bottom-up communal variations. Collins does a magnificent job of examining ASEAN in the run up to

the charter and afterwards by analysing the concept of community, in particular by offering a refreshing look at the conceptualisation of security regimes and security communities and identifying criteria which stand in opposition to the majority of constructivist literature that cast ASEAN in such a positive light by not reflecting nearly enough on what ASEAN norms mean in terms of regional politics and integration.

The author's theoretical framework draws heavily from constructivist security studies literature derived from Deutsch et al. (1957) and Adler and Barnett's (1998) later refinement of Deutsch et al. Their reflections on security communities and constitutive characteristics stem from norms, values and broadly speaking identity formation. Deutsch et al. posit that security communities are derived from interactions and follow a non-path dependant progression from nascent to mature community whereby peaceful resolutions to conflict become the norm and recourse to violent confrontation is unthinkable. This hinges on countering the traditional security dilemma where perceptions of agents are transformed to trust bearing prior to the formation of self-serving thought processes and military preparation. Adler and Barnett refined Deutsch's et al. work by working out ideological and liberal biases noting that illiberal security communities can indeed form in accordance with prevailing hegemonic norms and do not have to follow a Kantian path dependency (p. 21). This is a critical point of departure that Collins picks up on which provides substance to his claims as Southeast Asian political regimes are by and large to varying degrees, profoundly illiberal in nature (Jones 2011).

The volume has as its core the question of what a community constitutes and if ASEAN thus constitutes a community? Collins substantiates his argument by alluding to a decidedly different view of what constitutes community by stressing that security communities can be illiberal and in converse opposition to Adler and Barnett (1998) and later Adler and Greve (2009) that socialisation takes place producing community effects not only both top-down elite identity formation but must be inclusive of bottom-up communal interaction and identification. Put simply, a true community cannot form (or form only so far) if inclusive identification with masses does not take place thus bridging elite consensus and identity to a broader mass identity. Theoretically the author draws strongly from the above mentioned, and Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) of how norms are socialised by stages of emergence, cascade and internalisation (p. 17). The critical understanding the author puts forth and is central to his claims is that a critical mass threshold (understood as 1/3 of central agents or states) must be obtained coupled with the role of norm entrepreneurship exercised by actors (state and especially non-state) during periods where political space opens for

norm contestation; generally understood as periods of crisis where hegemonic norms can be challenged due to loss of legitimacy of prevailing norms associated with crisis, for example 1997–1998 Asian economic crisis and “Asian values discourse”.

The first two chapters are dedicated to first providing a critical literature review which clearly differentiates regimes from communities which lays the basis for the author’s theoretical framework and secondly by elucidating ASEAN’s constitutive norms. ASEAN’s constitutive norms are reflective of its member states historical trajectory and context in which regional and national formation took place, namely upholding sovereignty, non-interference and consensus decision-making. The next chapter reveals the seemingly divergent and contradictory norms that ASEAN Charter espouses. However, the author clearly shows how the organisations core norms are upheld while providing room for discursive evolution in the future. The last three chapters are case studies of non-traditional security threats facing ASEAN which have been engaged fully by Track II (think tanks namely ASEAN ISIS) and Track III (civil society organizations) players in the fields of human rights, HIV/AIDS and disaster management. These detailed case studies provide readers with critical insight into ASEAN and its strong resistance to organisational change. Collins finds that internal political contention between ASEAN’s new member states (CMLV countries resp. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar/Burma, and Vietnam) and its older members (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines with Brunei and Singapore being outliers) have led to a stalling both the ASEAN Human Rights Body as well as moves toward majority voting. Domestic political shifts of key ASEAN member states from democratic to authoritarian regimes, namely Thailand and Philippines in the 2000’s, have isolated Indonesia in its leadership drive and stalled norm evolution in critical areas such as human rights. External entrepreneurship in HIV/AIDS via various UN bodies has led to national prerogatives and plans taking precedence with limited ASEAN engagement. Disaster management is put in the framework of ASEAN’s engagement with Myanmar and ASEAN’s supposed success during the Cyclone Nargis crisis. However, a closer reading provides the contextual understanding that ASEAN threats of allowing unfettered external intervention in regional affairs provided the stimulus for its success rather than a seamless ASEAN diplomatic engagement.

The author finds that ASEAN indeed is a security community of the illiberal variant. Its norms must be read with care and proper context i.e. sovereignty is meant as strengthening regional autonomy and non-interference should not be taken at face value but understood as flexible. ASEAN’s purpose and current disposition is highly conducive to the region

as it strengthens states and continually reinforces its norms on the regional organisation. Non-state actors have to varying degrees influenced regional initiatives and engaged with regional political elite. The primary impediment to substantive Track III engagement and regional change in action are ASEAN's constitutive norms and its member states divergent perception regarding these norms. The author's primary finding is that ASEAN has failed to evolve to embrace institutionalism and fully institutionalise liberal norms and values by allowing for comprehensive and meaningful engagement by CSO's thereby negating the creation of a bottom-up inspired people-oriented community. Yet a softer reading of the text reveals caveats of particular interest. A people-oriented community may have been thwarted with the charter but the simple fact of people-orientation being mentioned no less than three times in the charter along with functional mechanisms being retrofitted into ASEAN's structure may allow for institutional evolution to occur but at a very gradual pace which is inherently dependent on external pressures of the political environment and its hegemonic norms as well as internal domestic political shifts in norms and behaviour. In many respects by default, the answer to finding out why ASEAN initiatives tend to fail or are only rhetorically adhered to one must engage in the study of member states political economies to find shifts in political culture and how these are transposed onto the regional stage.

This book is well researched offering readers a mix of theoretical insights as well as easy to read and understandable case studies that are prescient and transnational in scope. The way in which the author presents his arguments and evidence is accessible and allows readers insight into the very real nature of Southeast Asian regional politics which makes this book stand apart from so many other books on ASEAN which are stacked with technical jargon or are superficial in engagement with the material at hand. Collins does not cover up or candy coat instances when ASEAN elites have engaged in self-serving behaviour which stands in contrast to aspirations of their populaces. Rather he provides a balanced reading of ASEAN regionalism which spans a great deal of time and insights garnered from years of research. Students with an interest in Southeast Asian regional integration and politics will find this text highly valuable as it sheds light onto a sub-field which is understudied and overshadowed by macro dominated studies of elite centred integration. Those who read this volume will undoubtedly learn a great deal about ASEAN and possibilities for the future of its people with regard to its regional organisation.

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