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Book Reviews

Emmerson, Donald K. (ed.) (2008), *Hard Choices. Security, Democracy, and Regionalism in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: ISEAS Publications

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Since the 1990s, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has undergone many profound changes, culminating in the enactment of the ASEAN Charter in December 2008. ASEAN, commonly perceived as a rather successful example of regional integration and known for its strong adherence to principles of non-intervention and the rule of sovereignty, has not been famous for promoting, let alone protecting, human rights and democratic values in the region. However, with the adoption of the new charter, ASEAN has created a forum for discussing emerging topics of major concern to its ten diverse member states, which range from democratic countries such as Indonesia to autocratic regimes like Myanmar. The main drivers of this new ASEAN regionalism and the (re-)invention of ASEAN's organizational set-up have until now not been thoroughly discussed in the literature.

The book *Hard Choices*, edited by Donald K. Emmerson, tries to fill this gap by addressing the issue of whether the so-called "ASEAN way" – the principles of non-intervention and the norm of sovereignty – is still maintainable in the face of ever-complexifying relationships between ASEAN's three biggest contemporary challenges: (non-traditional) security issues, democracy, and regionalism.

In four main sections – "Introduction", "Assessments", "Issues" and "Arguments" – and ten discrete, loosely arranged chapters, analysts from six different countries review these interrelated issues in an interdisciplinary manner. Due to ASEAN's major shift in the past few decades, it is even more challenging for the ten authors to explain and assess the changes in ASEAN's institutional framework, its evolution in priorities, and its (supposedly) more engaging policies. With their sensitive and broad accounts on the recent situation, the scholars contribute to a comprehensive description and assessment of the state of regionalism in Southeast Asia today.

Hard Choices, the second volume of a trilogy on Asian regionalism published by the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center is intended for a broad audience, rather than for just scholars or graduate students. Designed to raise awareness of the region, the book not only helps to identify the most prominent and challenging issues in the ASEAN region, but also addresses topics that often lack emphasis in ASEAN literature: for instance,

non-traditional security threats; the emergence and involvement of civil society; and ASEAN's increasing involvement with human rights issues. The assessments of Myanmar's position within the organization reveal the diverse scholarly backgrounds of the authors in particular, as they present manifold approaches to the environmental as well as the political situation of a country that is usually described as the "problem child" of ASEAN.

Hard Choices starts with an empathetic foreword by ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan. Stressing the importance of further cooperation between the member states as well as the goal of creating a shared community and common identity, Pitsuwan calls for increasing transparency and democracy, and a people-oriented ASEAN. Only a year after the new charter was published, on 20 November 2007, the Secretary-General claimed with very optimistic rhetoric that the "challenges pose hard choices – hard, but not impossible to make" (xxi). He even argues that "the New ASEAN [...] can and will make the tough decisions necessary to achieve a secure and prosperous, open and tolerant, caring and sharing community of Southeast Asian societies in the twenty-first century" (xxi). These almost euphoric predictions are further discussed and mostly revised throughout the course of the book.

In the introductory chapter, Emmerson formulates the foundation for the subsequent parts. In clarifying and defining basic terms such as the "ASEAN way", "security", "democracy", and "regionalism" – and even concepts that are often taken for granted such as "state", "country" and "society" – he allows newcomers to the topic of ASEAN regionalism to comprehend its core problems and challenges. He mainly focuses on whether ASEAN's pursuit of sovereignty will dissolve in the next few years and whether the quest for democracy, (especially the international and regional pressure on Myanmar), will lead to further democratization in the region. Whereas topics such as civil society, democracy, and (non-)traditional security issues – such as transnational environmental problems – are comprehensively addressed, discussions about other security challenges like migration and terrorism are rather scarce. Likewise, even though many authors refer to the ASEAN financial crisis as a driving factor for further regional integration, the debate about economic relations is rather underrepresented due to a shortage of space (cf. 5). With his introductory statement, Emmerson stresses that even though ASEAN might not be a *sufficient condition* for democratic change in the region, it seems to be at least a *necessary condition* for a modification in state behaviour.

In the second part of the book, "Assessment", Jörn Dosch addresses the issues of human security and civil society, and their relation to the so-called "ASEAN way" with its principle of sovereignty and non-interference.

Dosch systematically compares early drafts of the charter with the eventual final version, and in so doing, reveals that the clauses on democracy, human rights, human security, and non-traditional security fall far short of civil society's expectations. With a realist perspective, he claims that the importance of the state, and therefore national security, is still the most important concern among Southeast Asian states. In a nutshell, Dosch says: "In South-east Asia, national sovereignty still rules" (90).

Complementarily, Termsak Chalermpananupap gives a great overview of the organizational, historical evolution and the ratification process of the ASEAN Charter and focuses especially on the establishment of ASEAN's three pillars: the political, economic and socio-cultural community. Even though Chalermpananupap calls for clarifications and specifications in the establishment of the ASEAN Community by 2015, he generally views the history of ASEAN as "an encouraging story of regionalism in Southeast Asia" (131). Moreover, he awards the charter with great significance: From his point of view, the ratification process seems to be an essential step to cooperation. However, he also makes clear that there is long way to go for ASEAN as he addresses challenges such as ASEAN's "organizational overload [and] resource scarcity" (92). Stressing the diversity within the ASEAN region, Chalermpananupap claims (a little dramatically): "This is a historic mission. ASEAN cannot fail. The future of nearly six hundred million Southeast Asians is at stake" (131).

The third part, "Issues", deals with a specification of the general topics outlined above. Rizal Sukma links the topic of security with the apparent attempts to democratize the region. He addresses the question of whether and how ASEAN could and should try to impose democratic structures on its member states. Unlike many papers, which focus on positive developments regarding the interrelation of democracy with security, Sukma claims that the relationship between these two issues could be "problematic for ASEAN" (136). From his point of view, "imposing democracy on a member state and intrusively spreading it throughout the region would trigger inter-state tensions harmful to security" (136).

Accordingly, Kyaw Yin Hlaing reveals that the autocratic regime of Myanmar is still the greatest challenge to the development of democracy in ASEAN. His assumption that Myanmar would follow suit as soon as all other member states begin to democratize is debated in literature. Like Sukma, he is quite pessimistic about the overall impact of a top-down approach from ASEAN and assumes that "the more the other nine members practice what their Charter preaches, the better the chance that regionalism will be able, after all, to expedite security and democracy in Myanmar" (189).

Mely Caballero-Anthony's approach to non-traditional security issues is particularly interesting. Discussing the impact of civil society and think tanks on the new 2007 ASEAN Charter, she reveals previously unknown grassroots developments. Her rather positive assessment of the integration process argues that in the 40 years of ASEAN's existence, there has been a tendency towards increasing regionalism in Southeast Asia. Being more optimistic than authors like Chalermphanupap or Sukma, Caballero-Anthony stresses that ASEAN might have an impact on the democratization processes of its member states. From her point of view, the increased emergence of terms such as "human rights", "global governance" and "rule of law" could actually have an impact on the member states' politics.

Distinct from the general assessments above, Simon SC Tay and Michael S. Malley specifically address two contemporary security threats: With comprehensive detailed knowledge and empirical evidence, Simon SC Tay shows how the Indonesian Haze, an example of a non-traditional security threat, could challenge the ASEAN agenda. Likewise, Michael S. Malley evaluates nuclear energy security and its possibly contradictory link to ASEAN's goal of being a nuclear-weapon-free zone (cf. Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Bangkok, Thailand 15 December 1995). In Malley's view, it is essential to address these potential problems within the framework of multilevel governance. This section lacks, however, an evaluation or description of other non-traditional security issues that are very significant to the ASEAN region such as trans-border migration, transnational trafficking, and terrorism.

In the last part of *Hard Choices*, "Arguments", member states' rights to sovereignty and therewith the right or obligation of (non-)intervention in the domestic affairs of other member states are discussed. Whereas David Martin Jones does not regard democratic values and liberalism as very important, Erik Kuhonta argues in favour of regional intervention. Particularly in his case study on Myanmar, Kuhonta claims that ASEAN could and should be a catalyst for the people and a means to create or at least facilitate security and democracy in all member states.

In sum, *Hard Choices* gives basic insight into the subject matter at hand and could almost be seen as a manual for ASEAN regionalism. I highly recommend the book, especially for its comprehensive references and indices, and for the inclusion of the 2007 ASEAN Charter itself.

However, some criticism remains: Even though the topics addressed are representative of the diverse discussions on ASEAN's development and status quo, the chapters are loosely strung together without much stringency. Even though the central themes are clearly outlined, common theoretical foundations or a theoretical embedding in the scholarly discourse remain

scarce. Thus, single authors do latently or openly reveal their theoretical background, but an overall framework would have been helpful to illuminate the general perspective of the book. On the other hand, as this book is intended to serve a broad audience, the lack of theories also contributes to an open writing style, making for an enjoyable reading experience. Furthermore, as many topics are recurring, some chapters are rather repetitive and could have been substituted by further assessments of other “new” security threats, such as terrorism or transnational migration.

To conclude, this book is successful overall in filling the gap in the literature on these specific topics. Especially for students interested in regionalism or in the ASEAN region, this book can give great preliminary insights and provide some basic empirical, quantitative – as well as qualitative – data.

The interdisciplinary approach of the book shows the *zeitgeist* of the organization and reveals the dynamic shifts within the region, which has gone from being a completely sovereignty-based organization to having produced a people-oriented charter that at least starts to openly discuss issues such as human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

However, although some authors stress the importance and impact of the new charter, reveal the existence of civil society organizations, and engage with topics such as human rights and democratic institutions, most of the scholars view the principles of sovereignty and non-interference as still the most dominant ones – the “ASEAN way” still prevails above all other philosophies.

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