

Book Reviews

Southeast Asia

Regionalism in Southeast Asia: To foster the political will

By NICHOLAS TARLING

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Regionalism in Southeast Asia is Nicholas Tarling's final work in his trilogy of books on the emergence of modern Southeast Asia. Together with *Imperialism in Southeast Asia* (2001) and *Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (2004), Tarling has traversed a roughly chronological path, charting the impact of three defining forces in the history of modern Southeast Asia. This book, then, is to be welcomed as a rare historical account of regionalism in Southeast Asia.

Like the trilogy itself, the book is chronological, both in time and theme. In the first two chapters, Tarling considers prevailing definitions of 'region' and 'regionalism' before mapping out how these concepts were manifested in world history, beginning with their origins in early-modern Europe. The next six chapters are divided evenly into two parts: regionalism, first, as imposed from without the region by foreign nations, and then that which is built from within by the newly independent nation-states. The first part traces the colonisation of Southeast Asia by the Western colonial powers and then the Japanese in a brief interregnum, and the returning Western powers' security arrangements for the region in the decade following the Second World War. The second part of the book is primarily about ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations); it covers in the period between the 1950s and 1990s, the efforts of Southeast Asia's political leaders to establish a regional association which could safeguard the security of each individual state. In concluding, the book argues for the role of history in understanding and establishing regionalism in Southeast Asia – that '[o]nly upon "what actually happened" may a true sense of regionalism be built' (p. 226). As Tarling quotes favourably Anthony Milner, it is timely, in the ongoing making of the region, to undertake a 'return of history' (p. 226). There is an elegance to the overall structure of the book, although the reader would have benefited from a list of abbreviations and explanatory notes on the official sources used.

The volume is written for the specialist. Much of the story told is familiar, but the sum of the whole is greater than its constituent parts. The 'inside-outside' division in the book tends to simplify the complex interplay between the foreign powers and the political elites of the region but to his credit, Tarling sets out these interactions clearly in his narrative. More questionable is the periodisation: that regionalism was predominantly influenced by the Western powers in the first decade after the Second World War, and by the indigenous political elites thereafter. While the latter clearly walked the region's political stage in the later period of study, the role of the West should not be underemphasised in the context of the Cold War.

Tarling has drawn from official records declassified under the 30-year rule, containing correspondence between foreign diplomats and Southeast Asian leaders. The documentation is impressive, but there is a problem with using British records to depict 'the view from within', although this stems from the disparity of practice in the declassification of official records of the contemporary past in the former colonial and colonised states.

The focus is decidedly political. Where others have pointed to economic interests in the colonisation and voluntary association of the Southeast Asian countries, Tarling's narrative emphasises the driving force of politics and his actors are political elites. He argues, quite rightly, that ASEAN did not emerge from a common desire for economic, social and cultural cooperation as is commonly stated but was political from its very formation; indeed its 'stress on the non-political was in itself a political act' (p. 186). The book's subtitle, which indicates the primacy of politics, comes from a speech by former Indonesian President Suharto.

While it is apparently the concluding book in the trilogy, it is more useful to read *Regionalism* as a sequel to the *Nationalism* volume. ASEAN and its related regional projects are, in Tarling's argument, extra-national means of securing the long-term future of the nation-state – in order to 'meet the both the pressures from outside the region and the disequilibrium within it' (p. 95). Tarling is sympathetic to the much debated 'ASEAN Way' of Southeast Asian regionalism, 'characterised by non-interference, informal interaction, consensus decision-making' (p. 210). The self-interest underpinning ASEAN, he contends, is necessary in an era of nation-states, and the association's long-term viability is consequently possible. Tarling's conclusion, as opposed to critics who prefer a more integrated form of regionalism, comes from an empathetic reading of Southeast Asian history.

One could hope for studies of other facets of Southeast Asian regionalism in the future, such as the non-political, non-national forms of regionalism, imagined by actors whose interests are social, economic or cultural. But this is not to devalue Tarling's contribution to a topic which is still contested among Southeast Asians.

LOH KAH SENG

Murdoch University

Secret trade, porous borders: Smuggling and states along a Southeast Asian frontier, 1865–1915

By ERIC TAGLIACCOZZO

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Eric Tagliacozzo's ambitious monograph, *Secret trade, porous borders*, while building on the regional studies of Ferdinand Braudel and Anthony Reid, makes its mark by showing how in Southeast Asia, the spaces where 'illegality happens' mattered in the creation of geopolitical borders and how illegal trafficking in the form of smuggling and contrabanding went hand in hand with the formation of an international border between the British and Dutch colonial regimes in Southeast