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Regionalism and Globalization in East Asia: Politics, Security & Economic Development
by Mark Beeson, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, USA, 2007. ISBN:978-0-230-00032-2

This book by Mark Beeson has delivered a thorough explanation about East Asian within the regional and globalization context. Through the discussion in eight closely argued chapters, he discussed the ideas of East Asia as a region (from the multi-dimensional perspectives), the historical elements in the regional relations, the internal politics and security, the processes underlying the development of the region's economic, the possible cooperation among member states, plus the external influence from the rest of the world and the East Asian futures. Within all this author makes sound and measured judgments on concepts such as nationalism, processes such as integration, and factors in the strategic environment such as the roles of, respectively, the United States and China in promoting, hindering, or taking advantage of the nascent region.

The beginning chapter of the book featured some current debates that focusing on the main theme (regionalism and globalization), and within all, he articulates his ideas and measured judgments on sub-concepts such as nationalism, the integration process and the contributing factors in the strategic environment, such as the roles of China and US in promoting or taking advantage of the nascent region. A profound discussion about East Asian history as well as the individual country's contemporary experience is provided in the second chapter, 'The Weight of History'. The author sends a strong message to the reader that history is an extremely potent factor that really force to shape regional development, especially East Asia. However, instead of focusing the history only on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a different set of narrative pointing to ASEAN Plus Three (Declining China, Rising Japan) are also being provided.

In the next chapter, the geopolitics and security in East Asia are being discussed where the opinion of the ASEAN +3 processes as the most likely centre of gravity rather than ASEAN itself for the East Asia of the future is agreeable. The author sounded optimistic when he notes (p. 98) that even in a region as diverse as East Asia, common ground may be found "even in the contentious, seemingly non-negotiable security arena". And if that optimism is well founded, and common ground can be found in the security arena, so too can it be found in almost any other area of common activity undertaken if the will is there.

In chapter 3, he expands the view by analyzing the American foreign policies in East Asia, along with several key military US pursuits. I find this discussion quite sophisticated and full of insights, particularly the part relating to the discussion of the Chinese case. "Given this American dominance and assertiveness, as well as China's recent traumatic history, it becomes easier to understand why its leaders might consider that a strong military is a prerequisite of independence in the contemporary international system. What is more remarkable, perhaps, is that they have not made this an even greater priority." (Beeson 2007, pp.98)

The detailed political and economic developments in East Asia as a region, and its member countries are discussed in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 explores the concept of the developmental state for East Asia after the Second World War. Significantly, the author suggested that economic development for most East Asian countries indeed showcased the active role of the strong state. Next, the East Asia's position in the global economy is commented upon in Chapter 6. Japanese and Chinese development of their global economies is emphasized in this section, along with the economies of other East Asian countries. In Chapter 7, internal regional development and cooperation among its member countries are discussed.

Mark Beeson provides a rich and clear picture of East Asia's developments in various aspects toward regionalism and globalization. His profound knowledge about East Asia has made this job easier, since the topic is complicated by each individual country's development being highly specific and having unique characteristics. Economic growth, for example, has taken place under the auspices of entirely different types of political regimes. The final chapter has several questions related to the stability of East Asia's regional cooperation and global development. In particular, the rising influence of China and the declining power of the US in the region have been considered. This topic is particularly important considering the resource and energy issue.

The author's judgment that the East Asian regional project is important because "for all the inefficiencies, excesses, infringements of national sovereignty and all the other costs of inter-dependence, if the ultimate pay-off of regional institutionalization is a more peaceful, more cooperative and perhaps more prosperous region, it will be a remarkably small price to pay" (p.254). Important certainly, but this perception is less certain as to the likelihood of closer sets of relationship, although "East Asian regionalism is an idea that refuses to go away", (p. 238) and that in itself says something significant about the East Asia project. All this and more is on the positive side of the ledger. But this is not

the final word on the subject of East Asian regionalism. As I indicated above, the work is an overview of East Asian regionalism. Its analysis is at the macro level and consequently much of the detail, the “glue”, of East Asia is either glossed over or ignored altogether.

There is almost no mention of East Asia’s institutions, other than the obvious suspects: APEC, ASEAN, ASEAN Plus Three, the ARF (Asean Regional Forum), and, in passing, the East Asia Summit. Certainly these are the main players, but there is a multitude of other regional institutions which conform to the norms of the “ASEAN Way” (described by Beeson, p. 219) as not only “central to ASEAN’s longevity, but also the principle reason for its ineffectiveness” and all reinforcing the habits of cooperation that help build the region. There are at least 200 formal multilateral institutions with East Asian membership within the wider Asia-Pacific region.

Some of these institutions operate within ASEAN, others take some subgrouping of East Asian states to address narrower concerns and yet others include states from the Asia-Pacific writ large rather than narrowly of East Asia. The institutions are as diverse as the North East Asian Centre for Environmental Data and Training, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region grouping, the East Asia Hydrographic Commission and the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific, all in their own way devoted to making the region work effectively. If this lower level of analysis had been included the conclusions as to the region’s long-term viability might well have remained, but readers would also have a broader base from which to accept or reject the author’s conclusions for themselves.

This book also focuses on the region’s security and economic relationships. This is not surprising given his own background and the high value we as policy analysts place on those relationships. However, there are other sets of relationships which can be analysed as well. For example, the size and direction of regional tourism flows, or the volumes of intra-regional telephone calls, or the size of national diasporas within the region. These are all examples of connectivity and help to prove or disprove a thesis of regionalization. Inevitably in a book-length work there are going to be judgements and conclusions overtaken by events. This book is no exception. The author describes Thailand and the Philippines as the two democracies within Southeast Asia. Since that was written Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has been overthrown by a coup in Thailand, and the May 2007 mid-term elections in the Philippines were marred by high levels of political violence. This all must call into question the reality of democracy in both these countries. Unavoidably, there are probably some errors of fact were being overlooked during proofreading although seem to be very few. One particularly confusing formulation is at endnote 18 to chapter 3 (p. 260) which discusses the ARF and its expansion in 1993 to include China, Russia and Papua New Guinea. This contradicts with the following sentence in the endnote, which stated that the ARF was established in 1994. Despite all that, I think the answers and explanations Mark Beeson gives in this section are convincing and balanced.

Overall, this is a very rich and deeply researched book about East Asia’s contemporary regional and global development. This book will be helpful for those not familiar with this issue and those already experts in this area. What clearly stands out in the book is Mark Beeson’s profound knowledge about East Asia and its individual member countries, and the acknowledgement and respect he has toward the importance of the regional history.

Mohd Iqbal bin Mohd Huda
Centre for Policy and Global Governance,
Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities,
National University of Malaysia,
43600 Bangi, Selangor
MALAYSIA
E-mail: ibahuda@ukm.edu.my