Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order by Amitav Acharya
Review by: David Arase
The American Political Science Review, Vol. 96, No. 2 (Jun., 2002), pp. 460-461
Published by: American Political Science Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3118100
Accessed: 19/05/2013 17:48

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American Political Science Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The American Political Science Review.
The weaknesses of the book are, for the most part, the obverse side of its strengths. Abernethy is well aware of the fact that the two cycles of expansion and contraction that he pays little or no attention to the far more fundamentally significant in shaping the dynamics and legacy of European colonialism. Nevertheless, the overall emphasis is on similarities. More important, some of the differences between the two cycles that have been most significant in shaping the dynamics and legacy of European colonialism do not receive the attention they deserve or are not discussed at all. I limit myself to two omissions that in my view are particularly problematic.

The first concerns the agency of European expansion. In Abernethy’s story this agency is pretty much the same in the two phases of expansion, consisting of the combination of governmental, business, and religious institutions noted above. In the case of religious institutions Abernethy does note the change in agency between the first and the second phase of expansion due to the emergence of Protestant churches as competitors of the Catholic church. But he pays little or no attention to the far more fundamentally significant transformations that occurred in the governmental and business agencies that led expansion in the two phases. Like many others before him, he presumes a system of national states and related business enterprises that expands quantitatively but remains basically the same qualitatively. In reality, the system could expand quantitatively only through recurrent fundamental qualitative transformations that created governmental-business complexes of increasing size and complexity. Neither the dynamics nor the legacy of European overseas expansion can be fully understood except in the light of these qualitative transformations—transformations that, among other things, resulted in the relocation of the primary political, economic, and cultural centers of “European” global dominance outside geographical Europe, that is, to North America.

Closely related to the above, Abernethy pays little attention to a fundamental difference between the settler colonialism prevalent in the first cycle of expansion and contraction and the colonialism of occupation prevalent in the second cycle. European settlers were not colonized peoples but the colonizers themselves—in most instances the primary agency of European overseas expansion. The peoples of non-European descent who lived in the colonies of occupation prevalent in the second cycle, in contrast, were colonized and no amount of collaboration and accommodation vis-à-vis European rule made them colonizers. At least implicitly, Abernethy does take this difference into account when he compares the processes that led to the independence of former colonies in the two phases of contraction. But he ignores it completely in assessing the legacy of the two rounds of European overseas expansion. The fact that settler colonialism added three and a half additional continents (Australasia, North and South America, and the half-continent of Siberia) to the possessions of peoples of European descent—who, after independence, continued to speak European languages and to welcome the inflow of European people, capital, and ideas—while occupa-

ion colonialism left behind no such possessions is hardly ever mentioned; nor is the fact that settler colonialism for the most part eventually resulted in the formation of comparatively or absolutely wealthy nations, while occupation colonialism for the most part eventually resulted in the formation of comparatively or absolutely poor nations.

These are serious weaknesses that are reflected in many dubious judgments concerning the dynamics and legacy of European colonialism. On balance, however, they are overshadowed by the book’s strengths. There is much one can disagree with in The Dynamics of Global Dominance but at least as much to be learned from it.

**Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order.** By Amitav Acharya. New York: Routledge, 2001. 234p. $90.00 cloth, $29.95 paper.

David Arase, Pomona College

Amitav Acharya has produced an innovative and stimulating evaluation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at a crucial juncture in that organization’s development. Acharya does not shrink from the challenge of measuring ASEAN’s rhetoric of regional cooperation against its actual accomplishments, and the theoretical and empirical sophistication that Acharya displays makes this book sure to be a key work on the security and political aspects of ASEAN for academics and policymakers.

At its inception in 1967 ASEAN’s commitment to peaceful and cooperative relations among its members (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand) inspired some skepticism because there were festerin disputes left over from the decolonization period as well as the threat of communist insurgency spreading beyond Indochina. With some encouragement from the West, ASEAN managed to survive its first few years. After the Vietnam War, ASEAN’s members sought to become something more than pawns in Southeast Asian security affairs. Although ASEAN failed to mount effective resistance to Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia in 1978, it did subsequently help to isolate Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge regime diplomatically. As the Cold War came to a close ASEAN helped to broker a peaceful settlement in Cambodia. It then created the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to discuss security matters, and it produced the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) initiative. Borne by the self-confidence produced by these initiatives as well as by the rising tide of prosperity among its members, ASEAN set out at middecade to become a regional organization with comprehensive membership that presumably would allow it to rank in importance with the United States, China, or Japan in determining regional affairs.

What distinguishes Acharya’s analysis of ASEAN’s development is his use of the constructivist approach to understanding international relations similar to that of Peter Katzenstein in his recent work. In contrast to neorealist and neoliberal approaches (which use models of actors making rational calculations of utility under conditions of objective and external constraint), the constructivist approach gives new life to behavioralism by giving transnational relations an essential importance due to the effect they can have in changing norms, perceptions, and identities. Through this process a state, or relations between states, may be peacefully changed or take on a particular character. In taking this approach Acharya goes back to Karl Deutsch’s transactionalist analysis of regionalism and adapts the concept of pluralistic security community (i.e., a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable
expectations of peaceful change) to the task of understanding ASEAN as a socially constructed security community.

Acharya’s constructivist approach is helpful in putting the spotlight on the peculiar nature of ASEAN. It commits members to the informal discussion of issues rather than to formal negotiation processes, to decision making by consensus rather than by voting rules, to noninterference in each other’s domestic matters rather than adherence to common values and practices, to the nonuse of force between members, and to the avoidance of collective defense measures. Together these and other norms constitute what is called the ASEAN Way, and according to Acharya this has provided the foundation for ASEAN as a security community. Thus, ASEAN is really not a formal rule-making and rule-enforcing organization, yet it has developed common aims such as protecting regional stability against disruption by external actors, as well as norms and a distinctive sense of “we-ness” among its members.

The question, however, is how significant these norms have been. Acharya tackles this issue by comparing the actual individual and collective behavior of ASEAN’s members to the rhetoric of the ASEAN Way, and he asks, To what extent has the ASEAN process affected member identities and loyalties over time? The answers are found in chapters 5 and 6, in which he discusses how members have dealt with key episodes such as resolving the Cambodian conflict (chapter 3) and agreeing to admit Vietnam, Myanmar (Burma), and Cambodia (chapter 4). Chapter 5 is devoted to intra-ASEAN tensions over disputed boundaries, competitive military modernization (which undercuts the notion of ASEAN as a true security community), divergent economic priorities, and growing differences over human rights. Chapter 6 deals with ASEAN’s attempt to manage its security environment through the ARF. Each chapter identifies troubling disparities between ASEAN norms and stubborn facts that have already or may in the future damage ASEAN’s prospects. These chapters also contain insightful treatments of the political maneuvering behind the facade of ASEAN unity and are well worth reading on their own.

Acharya concludes that ASEAN has taught its members norms that help to preserve peace between them. In this sense ASEAN-style regionalism has produced a nascent security community. Acharya finds that ASEAN has not been particularly successful, however, in reconfiguring the loyalties and identities of its members, who remain sovereignty-bound actors. And he is not particularly sanguine about ASEAN’s future given the internal strains evident since membership expansion and the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–98, as well as the external pressures generated by Western human rights lobbies and a more assertive and ambitious China. Looking to the future he reckons that “ASEAN…now is in serious need to reinvent itself” (p. 208).

With respect to the theoretical framework of the book there are two minor points one could raise. One is the invocation of Deutsch’s concept of a pluralistic security community while discarding his broader theory of transactionalism. That is, Acharya notes that ASEAN preceded, and did not follow as a result of, intensifying transnational interactions and cultural convergence between member societies and that there is little popular support for ASEAN within member countries. On the question of what then created the ASEAN security community absent the conditions Deutsch imagined, the author refers to the learning and socialization to norms that occur within international institutions, which then may lead national elites to redefine their notions of interest and identity. One supposes that here Acharya could have done more with the elite-led, cognitively based neofunctionalism of Ernst Haas.

The other point has to do with evaluating alternative explanations of ASEAN. The constructivist approach does put the focus on norms, but is this approach in the end better at explaining ASEAN as a security community than, say, Michael Lieber’s realist characterization of ASEAN as a diplomatic community serving the separate interests of its members in maintaining stability or Donald K. Emmerson’s neoliberal characterization of ASEAN as a security regime dedicated to preserving member sovereignty in conditions of peace? It is true that such characterizations tend to rule out the possibility of weakening sovereignty or the formation of a collective identity by individual states engaged in cooperation, but by Acharya’s own account the sovereignty-bound national identities of ASEAN’s members remain stubbornly intact over 30 years after ASEAN’s inception.

Despite these minor quibbles, Acharya has written a vivid and cutting-edge work on ASEAN and the problems of security cooperation in Southeast Asia.


William O. Walker III, Florida International University

**Organized Crime and Democratic Governability** offers an insightful look at one of the most critical and vexing questions of the contemporary era: To what extent is democratic governance possible when it coexists with organized crime? John Bailey and Roy Godson’s edited volume analyzes the many dimensions of the deeply entrenched obstacles to democratic stability in modern Mexico, perhaps an ideal case study for such an inquiry. The reach of organized crime there has long tended to undermine the very lifeblood of democracy, namely, its procedures. As a result, throughout the sweep of Mexico’s postrevolutionary history, the roots of democracy have not been firmly planted. This chronic condition cannot quickly be remedied. Consequently, the editors conclude, organized crime in its various manifestations will continue to present “a significant challenge to democratic governability in Mexico” (p. 218).

Democracy is not necessarily a lost cause in Mexico, however. Problems with historical origins have knowable and explainable causes and, hence, are not wholly at the mercy of quasi-immutable external forces. Yet as the essays in this volume indicate, the effort to bring effective democracy to Mexico is more difficult than explaining its relative absences. The book’s contributors neither engage in model building about the interplay between organized crime and governance nor exactly offer a theory derived from the relationship between the two. Nevertheless, as the editors point out, there exist demonstrable analytical patterns, or images, that might point toward possible corrective action by a Mexican state with the will to address its problems. There are four typologies that help elucidate the crime–governance nexus within Mexico and two that illuminate the nature of conditions near the border with the United States. The former are identified as Contained Corruption, whereby law enforcement at the subnational level is ineffective, even compromised, in the face of criminal activity; Centralized-Systemic (formal), whereby corruption within the central government extends to virtually all levels of law enforcement; Centralized-Systemic (formal plus shadow), whereby a parallel structure exists alongside the central government and abets corruption; and Fragmented-Contested, whereby centralized bureaucratic incapacity tends to compromise local efforts at law enforcement. The other two images or...