The book contains six chapters on China, investigating who the migrants are, how they fare in urban labour markets, the effect of migration on the health and education of children and the contribution to poverty alleviation in rural areas. The four chapters in the second section of the book, dedicated to Indonesia, cover the characteristics of migrants and non-migrants, contrasts in incomes and health outcomes and differences in occupations and earnings.

It is important to commend the editors, researchers and all of those involved in this massive effort for the provision of data on one of the largest “internal” movements of people in history. Both of these nations, not much more than a generation ago were largely agricultural societies. And within a very short span of time, two of the most populous nations on Earth have been transformed into countries with large, productive and growing urban agglomerations holding almost one-half of their respective populations.

The book provides a very specific technical analysis and summary of the data collected. Very little attempt is made to generate a socio-economic or political analysis except to allow the information gathered to speak for itself. Unfortunately, while very competently handled from a technical and statistically analytical perspective, there is no attempt to offer imaginative insights from this illustrious collection of authors. The editors seem to have insisted on a very dry pro forma structure for the book and have required each author to be formulaic in their approach. Each chapter is set out organisationally much the same (which provides for an excess of repetition) as if they were given the headings and asked to fill in the blanks in lock step fashion. This means that the book is largely meant for library bookshelves as reference material and not at all for the general reader who would find it quite dry and stilted. Had not the authors been put in what appears to be scholarly straight-jackets in their presentation this might have been very interesting reading for the non-expert.

As reference material, this book and those that can be expected to follow as annual survey results come in will be a valuable resource for experts on China, Indonesia and migration or demographic studies.

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Whose Ideas Matter?: Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism
Amitav Acharya (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009)

This book extends constructivism’s central argument that ideas matter by showing how indigenous elements play a key, but thus far overlooked, role in adapting external norms and ideas deemed relevant and appropriate, and then adopting the revised ideas and norms in their milieu. In contrast to Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilisation argument that elites in developing nations tend to revert to traditional religious or cultural values when confronted with Western ideas and norms in a
process of “de-Westernisation,” Acharya puts forward the more optimistic argument that indigenous elites are able to come to grip with these new ideas. Through a process of localisation, these previously external ideas are changed. Once modified, they become entrenched in these new locales, thereby indicating that change and progress is possible within international relations.

This monograph’s most significant contribution is to draw attention to the fact that even though the process of globalisation is regarded by many Western policy makers or academics to be common, and the ideas or values propagated to be universal, such an observation is not entirely valid. Even though, as Acharya and Barry Buzan pointed out in an earlier article (“Why is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction,” The International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, 7, 3, 2007, pp. 287-312), this book clearly shows that Southeast Asian indigenous elites possess agency, as they do pick which norms and ideas will undergo a process of localisation. Another major contribution of this book is Acharya’s use of primary documents to support the argument that Asian elites were not merely passive recipients, but were instead active agents in determining the direction and tenor of efforts towards regionalism in Asia. Consequently, this book is of great interest to a diverse audience as it appeals to historians as well as international relations theorists.

However, despite the best efforts of this book at putting forward the argument that Southeast Asian elites and policy makers have the ability to shape and influence norms so that they take on a local flavour, it falls short in two crucial areas. First, posing the question as to “the absence of an Asian NATO” (p. 2) in the book’s introduction, comes across as a normative statement suggesting that NATO appears to still be considered as the blue-ribbon standard in measuring the effectiveness and robustness of a multilateral organisation. In other words, Western ideas and norms still cast a long shadow. It seems that Western ideas still matter more than the rest. After all, no one is asking about the absence of an ASEAN-style multilateral set-up in Europe. Even though Southeast Asian ideas do matter, they still do not occupy the spotlight.

Secondly, Acharya argues that the primary difference between Asian and European regionalism is that the former focuses on non-intervention. At the risk of gross over-simplification, the ensuing implication is that maintaining the sacrosanct principle of non-intervention is the defining trait of Asian multilateral institutions such as ASEAN. However, it has to be noted that this norm of non-intervention “emerged from the writings of eighteenth-century European scholars” (p. 31, emphasis added). Furthermore, this norm only became “a universal principle” (p. 32) after receiving explicit validation from the United Nations in 1945, even though “Asia was hardly engaged in the making of the UN Charter” (p. 33). In this context, it would appear to be rather problematic to accept the norm of non-intervention as an idea that is somehow unique or indigenous to Asia. Ironically, the very acceptance of non-intervention would then indicate the lack of power and agency among Asian political elites since Acharya has already conceded that Asian states were not actively involved in the United Nations Conferences on International Organisation held in San Francisco in 1945. Furthermore, as Acharya noted, “non-intervention was not a key demand of Asian leaders in the immediate post-war period” (p. 34). This would suggest that at least in the mid to late 1940s, notions of Asian regionalism as manifested in the early Asian Relations Conferences did not dovetail neatly with Western notions of regionalism. Furthermore, non-
intervention gained traction in Asia not because it was inherently better; non-intervention became the default response due to domestic problems and constraints in various Asian countries (for instance, see pp. 35-6). In other words, it would appear that the lack of power and agency was why Asian countries latched on to the norm of non-intervention, a European construct, in the post-war period. Given the differences between China and India in the post-war period, it was no surprise that these two states failed to reach a consensus on the nature and operation of any multilateral institutions in Asia then, thereby undermining any efforts towards establishing a more robust form of regionalism in Asia in the future. Hence, the Bandung Conference failed to achieve any significant breakthroughs. This seems to be an enduring legacy it bestowed on later efforts at establishing multilateralism in Asia as multilateral institutions then became the venue “where disputes between members . . . were never discussed” (p. 79). Consequently, a usual complaint against Asian multilateral organisations, such as ASEAN, is that it is “a gentleman’s club,” one that is able to pass resolutions but unable to find solutions. This shortcoming would then be a sign of the lack of power and agency in Asian regionalism since it is characterised by passivity and not activity.

In conclusion, this book has put forward a very good argument on how Asian political elites have managed to pick and modify Western norms to fit the environment they are in, based on very impressive archival research. However, in my view, the actions of cherry-picking and localising Western norms, such as non-intervention, are not necessarily the best examples of demonstrating agency and power in Asian regionalism. However, this monograph represents a very significant initial step in focusing academic attention on the role Asian political elites play in regionalisation.

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On the Borders of State Power: Frontiers in the Greater Mekong Sub-region
Martin Gainsborough (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2009)

Borders are often viewed as “dark” and “dangerous” areas populated by “others” who, in the contemporary era, are often involved in human trafficking, prostitution and drugs, an association, Martin Gainsborough points out, that goes back hundreds of years (p. 3). On the other hand, there has also long been a fascination with peripheries, often border zones, where peoples or things are thrown into unexpected contact, hybrid spaces that yield different or new possibilities for social, political and economic contact and organisation. To explore borderlands, at least for the authors in this collection, is to raise questions not only about geographical delineations between states and among different ethnic, racial and linguistic groups, but also to explore hierarchy, citizenship, labour and migration, state power, administration and the changing contours of cross-border economies in the neo-liberal era. From these perspectives we understand that borderlands are no longer at the fringes of state