

BOOK REVIEW

Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order by Amitav Acharya, London and New York, Routledge, 2001, xx + 234 pp.

Since experiencing their historic currency and financial crises in 1997, the members of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, have been grappling not only with the reforming of the association itself but also with the unprecedented problem of rebuilding the regional order. Meanwhile there have been suggestions coming from European and American researchers of ASEAN's pending demise. Confronted with these fundamentally new difficulties, it is not surprising that a radical questioning is taking place in ASEAN research. Therefore a reexamination of ASEAN's problems from a synthesis of viewpoints would be a significant step, and the book presently under review has come as one response to these problems.

The purpose of Acharya's book is twofold: (1) to analyze the process for constructing ASEAN as a security community, and (2) to examine whether the ASEAN approach, the so-called ASEAN way, would be an effective means for Asia-Pacific security. But before focusing on these two issues, I would like to look at the main questions of interest and the analytical framework of this new book.

First of all, why the question of an ASEAN security community? The author's main interest in this question is how a regional organization made up of developing countries moves toward forming a regional order, and early in the Introduction, he tells the reader that one of the most difficult challenges in the study of international relations is giving a clear presentation of the conditions under which nations can avoid the recurrence of war and seek to establish permanent peace (p. 1). One approach is that of security communities, a thesis first proposed by Karl Deutsch and which was later succeeded by the thesis of regional integration. By the end of the 1980s, however, this approach had not generated much interest or research. This changed with the onset of the post-Cold War period. A third approach arose to challenge neorealism and neoliberalism, that of constructivism, and this stimulated new interest in the study of security communities. The questions of particular interest for Acharya are: (1) why, despite its initial period of instability, ASEAN was able to survive, and (2) how to explain the organizational setback of the latter half of the 1990s when compared with the optimism that prevailed within ASEAN during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s—in effect, to see if the so-called ASEAN way has been something real or just a myth.

Figure 1.1 (p. 29) provides the framework for examining these questions. Put simply, it shows the sort of effects that norms and socialization exert on a regional organization, and how they are linked together with a security community. Relating it to ASEAN specifically, it explains what sort of regulatory and constitutive effects ASEAN norms have exerted, and

examines the formation process of the resultant security community. Or to use the author's own words: "The project to construct a pluralistic security community in Southeast Asia can thus be assessed by looking at ASEAN's record in dispute settlement and war avoidance, the progress of collective action, and the development of 'we feelings'" (p. 40).

Chapter 2 provides a concise summation of the forms and features of two types of ASEAN norms which act as independent variables. One type is legal and rational norms exemplified by: (1) nonuse of force and pacific settlement of disputes, (2) regional autonomy—i.e., regional solutions to regional problems, (3) a doctrine of noninterference, and (4) no military pacts and a preference for bilateral defense cooperation (pp. 47–48). The second type is social and cultural norms which encompass the following three points, what in general can be termed the "ASEAN way": (1) a preference for informal forms, (2) an avoidance of systematized cooperation, and (3) importance placed on consensus.

To understand the definition of ASEAN norms, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 first analyze the Cambodian conflict, the formation of "ASEAN 10" and the management of intra-regional problems; they then examine the impact that ASEAN norms have had on these issues, and as a result whether or not ASEAN has become a security community. Looking at Chapter 5 specifically, this chapter analyzes the management of intra-regional relations (i.e., the setback problem of the 1990s) based on an examination of five of the region's problems: (1) intra-regional conflicts and conflict management, (2) the Spratly Islands dispute, (3) an arms race, (4) enhancing economic interdependence, and (5) ASEAN as a defense community.

Chapter 5's conclusion about ASEAN norms in the management of intra-regional relations is that their role has been rather subtle, and two of the big crises of the post-Cold War period, the environmental crisis and the financial crisis, definitely have compelled a reexamination of ASEAN's norms. The organizational setback in the latter half of the 1990s occurred because advocates of a policy of constructive engagement had begun to reexamine the virtually sacred doctrine of noninterference. The danger of ASEAN's breakup began to grow, but this was averted by a meeting of foreign ministers which reaffirmed the principle of noninterference. But democracy is progressing in the ASEAN countries, and this is sure to increase the pressure for a reexamination of ASEAN norms.

Turning to the issue of whether ASEAN has the aspects of a security community, to summarize the conclusions of the last chapter, since the end of *Konfrontasi*, President Sukarno's policy of confrontation against Malaysia, the countries of ASEAN have not gone to war against one another, and have adhered to attributes associated with a security community, particularly the absence of war and the absence of any systematic preparation for war against another ASEAN country. However, considering the lack of coordinated action, a problem stemming from the ASEAN way of conducting intra-regional relations, the chapter concludes that ASEAN as a security community is at a nascent stage (p. 204). The reason for this conclusion is that although the regulatory effects of ASEAN norms have certainly been great, their constitutive effects have been limited.

Acharya's second major theme, whether the ASEAN way would be effective for security issues in the Asia-Pacific region, is examined in Chapter 6. The author looks at the problem from two perspectives: (1) rethinking autonomy as a regional norm, and (2) the benefits and burdens of multilateralism. Regarding the first, since the end of the Cold War, ASEAN has

set up the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which is based on the principles of multilateralism. This has meant that the principle of “regional solutions for regional problems” (autonomy) has been abandoned. It should be noted, however, that ASEAN had already been laying more stress on concepts of common security and cooperative security following Europe’s success in the 1990s in forming the EU, and there were already calls from ASEAN’s dialogue partners for a new security system. However, since a Euro-American-type of cooperative security (as exemplified by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE) would not work in the Asia-Pacific region, ASEAN with the support of Japan decided to set up a dialogue forum using the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conferences. But if the new system were led by the great powers, ASEAN as a grouping of small nations would be swallowed up. Thus what ASEAN needed was a forum that was based on ASEAN norms. Such a forum has allowed ASEAN to secure the driver’s seat, but the trade-off has been an inevitable shift away from the norms of regional autonomy. In sum, a regional system based on the concepts of autonomy and neutrality and which had sought to exclude the great powers from involvement in the maintenance of regional order has changed to a system with an inclusive approach, one that seeks to keep the great powers engaged in the maintenance of regional order.

Will ASEAN norms and the ASEAN way be successful as guides for ARF? During the half decade since its establishment, ARF has experienced considerable difficulties. For European countries and the United States, the main criticism is that ARF urgently needs to overhaul its cautious, incrementalist approach to decision making and adopt a system that can quickly and effectively implement policies. Another strong criticism is that the ASEAN way is not suitable for a framework that encompass disputes of a different nature like the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan problem where the great powers with completely different norms are involved. And in the South China Sea dispute where the greatest concern is policy to deter or counter China, the ASEAN way is working to the benefit of China.

Concerning the second problem of ASEAN way suitability, there is growing opinion in line with criticisms from ASEAN leaders as well as European and American scholars for an alternative approach to regional security based on a balance of power concept like that operating among the big powers. However, Acharya’s argument is not of choosing between alternatives of a multinational approach or a balance of power approach; instead he stresses a concept where both approaches supplement one another. This is because the balance of power approach is not complete onto itself, and it has to be supplemented by multilateralism in order to promote dialogue and cooperation among the great powers (p. 181). As an example, Acharya points to China which initially had rejected multilateralism but has now come to recognize its benefits (pp. 183–84). For these reasons the author concludes that although ASEAN has made a big trade-off for securing the driver’s seat, there is good reason for having an ARF that is guided by ASEAN norms, at least for one that is more than a mere adjunct to a balance of power approach.

This new book superbly brings together theoretical and practical research, and overall it is a highly worthwhile study. But this reviewer would like to bring up three points which he feels are problems. First, the central theme of this book is security communities, but there are considerable problems with the author’s judgment of whether a security community has or has not been formed. This is because depending on either Deutsch’s definition of a

community or that of constructivism as is used in this book, our assessment would be different.

A second problem is with the author's analytical framework and the verification of his examples. This can be regarded as a methodological problem. His analysis of identity is insufficient, and he does not clearly show whether "we feelings" have been formed or have been strengthened. Probably, considering the difficulty to evaluate the extent of identity formation, the author confines "identity" to collective identity which is limited to the policy level (see the figure on p. 39). However, to measure "we feelings," it seems that some sort of device would be needed, like surveys of popular opinion and of policymaker opinion. Such surveys are lacking which makes it difficult to evaluate the extent of identity formation. Also it would seem that an ASEAN regional identity based on elite-oriented and very limited leadership circles is only an identity in the midst of formation and can hardly be regarded as including the common strata made up of ordinary citizens. Acharya's research is insufficient on this point, and he needs to make a more comprehensive study of "socialization."

A third point, which drew this reviewer's concern, is the book's exceedingly inadequate examination of the region's economic cooperation with Japan. Japan's role in economic cooperation with ASEAN has been very great, and its role in dealing with the region's financial crisis and in the Cambodian problem should not have been overlooked. In order to get a more complete picture of ASEAN and its security issues, Acharya needed to make use of more sources dealing with Japan-ASEAN relations, the reason being the continuing need for research on ASEAN that takes in Japan-ASEAN relations.

In closing I would like to suggest an issue for future research. This is the "ASEAN Plus 3" concept for East Asia that ASEAN together with Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea have been working toward since the latter half of the 1990s. The possibility of this concept being realized and the suitability of ASEAN norms and the ASEAN way in the formation and function of such an East Asian framework will become an increasing concern as the twenty-first century progresses and is an issue needing further comprehensive study.

(Sueo Sudo)