Book Review Essay

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This book, “The making of Southeast Asia,” is composed of 9 chapters. The introduction in chapter one covers region, regionalism and regional identity which concentrate on unity in diversity, interaction and identity. The author explores the issue of identity in the international relations of Southeast Asia, which is understood as “Regional Identity.” He argues “the regionness and regional identity have lurked beneath the surface of major issues in the foreign policy and international relations of Southeast Asia States.” I agreed with the author’s major issues, such as the end of the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the birth of globalization that brought the Southeast Asia establishing the ASEAN just for bargaining power.

The questions, such as “Who are Southeast Asians?” and “What is the typical and appropriate Southeast Asian way of doing things?” were mentioned by the author. I think that these are the crucial factors influencing the intraregional ASEAN which affect ASEAN at the present and the future.

Regarding *unity in diversity*, the author urged that, Southeast Asian Countries have diversities in cultural, historical, economic and political matters, for this is why there have been so few scholars who attempted to study the region systematically. I do agree, to some extent, ASEAN is different from the European Union in the case of Supra–National. The EU has Supra–National to control the member states. The EU started with economic cooperation by introducing security in the region order to build economic cooperation. Security in this sense means political amalgamation of which member states should have shared values, assimilation in one Europe by communication continually in order to achieve economic cooperation with creating Supra–National. While ASEAN on the other hand, started with political issues for a long time before the member states initiated economic cooperation. ASEAN was organized by cooperation system in ASEAN Way, which cooperated and coordinated loosely, with no

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interference each from one another. But it does not mean that scholars do not study the region systematically. They have studied the specific issues and prospects deeply in some areas such as political, historical, economic and social aspects. We have diversity and should recognize diversity (Dieter Evers, 1980). Diversity can be developed into cooperation in the long run.

Chapter 2 presents a conceptual framework for understanding regions, drawing upon both the emergent social science perspective on regions and the area studies literature on Southeast Asia. The literature that he reviewed found out that nation states of Southeast Asia might be imagined and socially constructed. Regarding the term of “imagined,” it means that territorial and functional interactions are by themselves inadequate to constitute a region in the absence of an idea of the region. By socially constructed, although identity are not givens, but result primarily from self-conscious socialization among the leaders and peoples of a region. I agree that in the case of “imagination” that ASEAN is absent of this idea of the region, although the leaders try to raise the consciousness. This is because of cultural diversity which the people cannot get along with. So it is an imagined ASEAN. For socially constructed, at this time regional coherence and identity have already been given but for the region is what the politician and people want them to be. Nation – State cannot be viable without a sense of nationalism and region cannot be a region without a sense of regionalism and common interest. At the same time nationalism will be considered the sense of regionalism.

Chapter 3 covers imagining Southeast Asia, which the author does not agree with the literature of Southeast Asia that paid little attention to its pre-colonial interstate system. The Argument of this literature review is summarized in similarity and differences among the states and societies in the region, in terms of their physical attributes, sociocultural characteristics, domestic political and economic systems, which construct an identity of Southeast Asia.

Chapter 4 looks at the interrelationship between nationalism, regionalism and the Cold War international order in Southeast Asia and its contribution to the idea of region. The author reviews pros and cons of the literature on this topic. He began with the literature of post-war Southeast Asia, pointing out that the two most important factors affecting regionalism and international relations in the immediate postwar years were the decolonization process itself and the problems of creating national identity within the former colonial boundaries and the obstacles of regionalism in general.

Chapter 5 looks at the circumstances surrounding the emergence of ASEAN, the development of its political, security and economic cooperation, as well as the relationship between Southeast Asia and the outside powers. The Cambodian conflict helped to accelerate the powers of socialization and norm – setting in the region, while Vietnam remained isolated and excluded from this process. The author concentrated on the norm of the ASEAN Way. I think this norm is still practiced until this day. This is the cooperation system of which the members cooperate loosely in ASEAN Way.
Chapter 6 focuses on the ASEAN-Indochina divide, by discussing and concluding the domestic, intra-regional and international forces that end the polarization of Southeast Asia. It states the ASEAN and the Vietnam Conflict, East Asian Regionalization and Southeast Asia together with the concept of the ASEAN Way.

Because of the ASEAN Way, the reliance on *Musyawarah* (consultation) and *Mufakat* (consensus), the ASEAN members avoid of formal mechanisms and legalistic procedures, it cannot be the module of European Union Style of which they can enforce the rules and regulations of the members by Supra-National, this is the sign of weakness of ASEAN Cooperation that author should explain clearly more on the European as comparing with ASEAN.

Chapter 7 examines the international relations of Southeast Asia from the end of Cold War and the Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia (1991) until the outbreak of the financial crisis in Thailand in 1997. This chapter indicates the political settlement of the Cambodian conflict and the ASEAN’s ability to manage regional order. This is the beginning of member states ability to think about ASEAN Communication in building a regional identity, one Southeast Asia concept, which brings about a picture of unified Southeast Asia in chapter 7. By the end of the Cold War, through fundamental changes to the international relations of building the identity of Southeast Asia, Vietnam became ASEAN’s seventh members in July 1995, Laos and Myanmar were admitted in 1997 and Cambodia’s entry was accepted in 1999. Regarding the entry of the new members, it created the problems of ASEAN as a whole because the levels of development are not equal.

Chapter 8 examines some of the most pressing challenge to the regional concept of Southeast Asia since the Asian economic crisis that began in mid-1997. This chapter explains the crisis posed a critical test of regionalism in shaping international relations of the region in competition with wider regional and global trends. The author ends up with the grouping of East Asian Community with the rise of China. The more interesting issue in this chapter is Civil Society in Southeast Asia, which consists of official regionalism and non-official regionalism. Especially, a non-official regionalism gave birth to the social movement in the region.

Chapter 9 the author concludes that in the future ASEAN should be one ASEAN, which would become a single identity and single market, a more realistic vision in 2015.

To conclude on reviewing about this book, it is an outstanding overview of the international politics of the region, which attempts to discern the conceptual meaning of Southeast Asia’s efforts to force its own identity by reviewing the literature concerned and conclude the possibility of ASEAN regionalism. However it would be extremely invaluable if the author could look into the conceptual frameworks of the European Union and compare it deeply to the ASEAN Regionalism in order to compare differences of the two regions.