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# Introduction: Making Sense of Southeast Asia

*Mark Beeson*

Southeast Asia continues to surprise. In the late 1990s the region's seemingly inexorable economic rise was abruptly derailed by a largely unforeseen crisis which rapidly overturned expectations about the future development of the region and about the durability of its economic development. In the intervening decade, however, much of the region bounced back and some of the former confidence and optimism that surrounded the region returned. While there were always those that questioned the depth and quality of the economic transformation that occurred in Southeast Asia over the last 20 or 30 years, cautious optimism appeared justified as the region's economies seemed to be back on track.

And yet even in the period since the first edition of this book appeared, there have been a number of events that were surprising and which raised fresh doubts about where some of the countries of the region might be heading economically and politically. In September 2006, the Thai military launched a coup which overthrew the democratically elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra, sending the former prime minister into exile and completely overturning expectations about the course of political development in Thailand and the wider region. For years, optimists thought that Southeast Asia was heading towards steady political liberalization – and there were good grounds for doing so. After all, Indonesia had successfully conducted a number of largely fair and competent elections, and one might have been forgiven for thinking that, in the words of George W. Bush, 'freedom was on the march'. But the events in Thailand and the later bloody crackdown by Burma's thuggish military regime placed a very large question mark over the trajectory of political development in the region.

If nothing else, recent events serve as a reminder of the sheer diversity of Southeast Asia. Whether it is measured in terms of differences in economic development, divergent social and religious traditions or differing political regimes, there are few places where such diversity is woven into the very fabric of national life. Indeed, there are considerable grounds for questioning

whether what we think of as contemporary Southeast Asia constitutes a region at all. However, despite this remarkable difference at the level of individual nations, Southeast Asia has also given rise to some of the most enduring transnational or regional institutions in the developing world. This paradox is at the heart of one of the most distinctive features of modern Southeast Asia: despite the national diversity that is its defining feature, there are a number of region-wide processes that have given Southeast Asia both a particular identity and a set of additional political, economic, social and even environmental dynamics that have in turn shaped national outcomes. Consequently, one of the motivating ideas behind this book is to approach Southeast Asia at the regional level, rather than at the level of isolated, national case studies, generally favoured by collections of this sort. By isolating the elements of national and regional forces and the way they interact it is possible to build a more complete picture of their interaction and the factors that are driving development in Southeast Asia at the national and regional levels.

Before attempting to make sense of this complex interaction, it is important to spell out precisely which countries are under consideration and why. Deciding which countries to include in a book about Southeast Asia is not as straightforward as it might appear. Until quite recently 'Southeast Asia' was defined primarily as a – somewhat arbitrary – geographical entity. It was only during the Second World War, when the British began to use the term 'Southeast Asia' to describe a particular field of operations in the fight against the Japanese, that the term came into more general use (Emmerson, 1984). It is consequently useful to make an initial distinction between, on the one hand, Southeast Asia as a geographical identity that includes Burma, Brunei, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, the Philippines and latterly the newly independent state of Timor-Leste and, on the other hand, Southeast Asia as a political region that is defined by its collaboratively based forms of supranational organization. The most famous, enduring and important of these collaborative organizations is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was inaugurated in 1967. However, it is crucial to remember that this grouping originally included just the key states of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines (frequently referred to as the 'ASEAN 4'), plus the smaller city-state of Singapore. Only recently has ASEAN incorporated the majority of the states of the region – a process that will be complete if and when Timor joins the grouping.

The relationship between national goals, potentially constraining contingent circumstances and the emergence of wider regional projects and relationships is one of the key themes of this book. Despite the self-conscious intention of all of the authors to consider the explicitly regional dimensions of activities within Southeast Asia, the relative importance and prominence of the original members of ASEAN means that they inevitably receive the greatest attention. However, there are a number of themes, over and above

the interest in regional–national interactions, that run throughout the book. One of the most important factors shaping the distinctive course of development in Southeast Asia has been the region’s specific history and material circumstances – subjects that are given extensive consideration in Chapters 1 and 2, but which inform the analyses in the other chapters as well. The interaction and consequences of political, economic, strategic and even environmental factors is another key theme that runs through the volume as a whole. Indeed, one of the basic assumptions informing this book is that Southeast Asia can only be understood by attempting to capture the complexity of these factors at both the national and regional levels.

In an era in which scholarly analysis has become increasingly preoccupied with ‘global’ processes, a focus on national and regional factors might seem rather anachronistic. Yet even the most cursory glance at the empirical data associated with ‘globalization’ reveals that global flows of trade and investment, and even the transnational production strategies of multinational companies, manifest a distinct regional bias (Dicken, 1998). In other words, whatever we take globalization to be, it is powerfully shaped by national and regional forces as countries, companies and a range of other actors attempt to respond to the challenges of external competition and the transnational integration of economic and political activity. In this context, globalization is simply a convenient shorthand for that complex array of processes – economic, political, social and even strategic – that have transformed the context within which states conduct themselves and which have constrained their autonomy as a consequence (see Held *et al.*, 1999). If this contention about diminished autonomy has merit as a general statement about the status of contemporary states, it is doubly true of Southeast Asia, where the modern, independent state is a relatively recent invention, and where the sovereignty of states has always been compromised to some extent (Beeson, 2003).

Southeast Asia, like other parts of the world, has responded to the challenge of global processes in an apparently paradoxical but not atypical fashion: at the same time that many writers have drawn attention to increasingly global forces, there has been a similar upsurge of interest in regionally based processes and interactions. Southeast Asia is no exception in this regard. Although there is some question about the depth and significance of regional processes in Southeast Asia as opposed to say the European Union, where the process of economic and political integration has gone furthest, there is no doubt that regionally based initiatives have been important in the past and look like becoming more so in the future, as Richard Stubbs suggests in Chapter 15.

Before we look in any detail at these regionally based processes and developments, however, it is important to say something about the national context upon which such transnational processes are overlaid. Where possible, the individual contributions to this volume adopt a regional- rather than a national-level analysis. As an aid to subsequent discussion it is helpful at

the outset to sketch some of the factors that distinguish the countries of the region at the national level.

## **A Southeast Asian snapshot**

There are a number of ways of thinking about and differentiating between the countries of Southeast Asia. One of the most important broad brush distinctions is dictated by sheer geography: the historical development and strategic position of the archipelagic nations of maritime Southeast Asia has been significantly different from that of mainland Southeast Asia (see Tarling, 1998a). The fertile river systems of what we now think of as modern Thailand, Vietnam and Burma, for example, provided the basis for population growth and the development of significant political power long before the colonial era, the period in which the analyses of this book really begin. By contrast, economic and political development in the maritime regions of what are now Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines was always made more difficult by the material environment. Although the physical barriers of sea and mountain that are so characteristic of much of the region are not the formidable obstacles they once were, the basic distinction between mainland and maritime Southeast Asia is important to keep in mind, for as the modern nation-state of Indonesia reminds us, political authority and effective administration are still rendered more problematic by the very nature of the physical environment.

Although it had a profound impact on the region's internal development, Southeast Asia's geography did not stop it from becoming enmeshed in extensive trade networks that ranged from China to India and the Persian Gulf. Not only did such commercial interaction act as a spur to the development of trading centres across the region in places like Malacca, Java and Sumatra, but it also had the effect of introducing all of the world's major religions to the region via the traders or proselytizers that followed in their wake. One of the most distinctive and enduring characteristics of Southeast Asia, and one of the greatest sources of actual and potential conflict between different communities in places like Malaysia and Indonesia in particular, is the existence of different, religiously demarcated social groups. The importation of major religious traditions into the region has, therefore, left an enduring legacy, with Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu communities existing side by side in Malaysia and Indonesia; Buddhists, Christians and Muslims in Burma, the Philippines and Singapore; Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand; and Buddhists and Christians predominating in Vietnam. Only Brunei (Muslim) and Cambodia (Buddhist) have relatively homogeneous religious social identities.

The importance of these potential societal differences is amplified by demography, as Table 1.1 indicates. Singapore has a multi-ethnic population but its small size – about 4.5 million – and some of the highest living standards

Table 1.1 Main indicators, ASEAN members

2008	Total population	Form of government	Main religion
Brunei	374,577	Constitutional sultanate	Islam
Cambodia	13,995,904	Constitutional monarchy	Buddhism
Indonesia	234,693,997	Democratic republic	Islam
Lao PDR	6,521,998	Communist	Buddhism
Malaysia	24,821,286	Constitutional democracy	Islam
Myanmar	47,373,958	Military junta	Buddhism
Philippines	91,077,287	Democracy	Christianity
Singapore	4,553,009	Parliamentary republic	Buddhism
Thailand	65,068,149	Constitutional monarchy	Buddhism
Vietnam	85,262,356	Communist	Buddhism

Source: CIA World Factbook.

in the world mean that such differences have not generally been sources of major tension. Some of Singapore's regional neighbours are not so blessed. Indonesia has the dubious distinction of having a very large population (over 200 million), combined with fairly low per capita incomes. Indeed, only Singapore and Brunei enjoy developed-country living standards, with Malaysia and Thailand occupying an intermediate rung, and the rest of the region having much lower annual incomes. For essentially poor countries with large populations like Vietnam and the Philippines, the development challenge for national governments is immense, making the prospects for regional stability and development less certain as a consequence.

Table 1.2 indicates just how different the overall circumstances confronting the region actually are. But while there are vast differences in income and population size, one social development is becoming more common: one of the great historical transformations that has characterized human societies everywhere in the modern period has been a shift from the country to the city. Southeast Asia is no exception in this regard, although Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and – more surprisingly, perhaps – Thailand all have populations in which more than half of the population is non-urban. This overall trend towards urbanization is important because, as Table 1.3 makes clear, not all of the new arrivals in Southeast Asia's rapidly expanding cities are able to realize their ambitions: the numbers living in slum conditions remains high in some of the region's poorer countries. This would be problematic enough in itself without the additional pressure that flows from still rising population levels and greater demands for energy. Even without their obvious environmental impact, the cumulative pressures and problems that flow from unfulfilled expectations and growing food insecurity raise questions about political stability and the maintenance of order.

Table 1.2 Urbanization trends in Asia 1950–2030

	GDP per capita (PPP, \$) 2003	Population (million) 2005	Urban population (million) 2005	Proportion urban			Estimated increase in urban population	
				(%) 1950	(%) 2005	(%) 2030	(million) 2005–2030	(%) 2005–2030
World		6,453.6	3,172.0	29	49	61	1,772.7	56
Asia		3,917.5	1,562.1	17	40	55	1,102.2	71
Malaysia	9,512	25.3	16.5	20	65	78	10.8	66
Thailand	7,595	64.1	20.8	17	33	47	14.6	70
PRC	5,003	1,322.3	536.0	13	41	61	341.6	64
Philippines	4,321	82.8	51.8	27	63	76	34.8	67
Sri Lanka	3,778	19.4	4.1	14	21	30	2.4	59
Indonesia	3,361	225.3	107.9	12	48	68	80.0	74
India	2,892	1,096.9	315.3	17	29	41	270.8	86
Vietnam	2,490	83.6	22.3	12	27	43	24.5	110
Pakistan	2,097	161.2	56.1	18	35	50	79.3	141
Cambodia	2,078	14.8	2.9	10	20	37	5.8	197
Bangladesh	1,770	152.6	38.1	4	25	39	48.4	127

Notes: GDP = gross domestic product; PPP = purchasing power parity; PRC = People's Republic of China.

Sources: United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision*; *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision*; United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2005*. Reproduced from Roberts and Kanaley (2006) by permission of the Asian Development Bank.

Table 1.3 Environmental indicators

Countries ranked by descending GDP per capita (PPP \$, 2003)	Percent of urban population				Electric power consumption 2002 kWh per capita	Total energy use from all sources (kg of oil equivalent)			Carbon dioxide emissions 2000
	Living in slum conditions		Using improved sanitation			2002	1991–2001	2000	
	2001	2002	2002	2002					
Malaysia	2	96	n.a.	2,832	2,129	97	5.4		
Thailand	2	95	97	1,626	1,353	63	2.8		
PRC	38	92	69	987	960	30	2.7		
Philippines	44	90	81	459	525	49	1.0		
Sri Lanka	14	99	98	297	430	41	0.6		
Indonesia	23	89	71	411	737	52	1.4		
India	56	96	58	380	513	40	1.0		
Vietnam	47	93	84	374	530	59	0.6		
Pakistan	74	95	92	363	454	44	0.7		
Cambodia	72	58	53	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.0		
Bangladesh	85	82	75	100	155	62	0.2		
Lao PDR	66	66	61	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.1		

Notes: n.a. = data not available; GDP = gross domestic product; kg = kilogram; kWh = kilowatt-hour; kgoe = kilogram of oil equivalent; Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic; PPP = purchasing power parity; PRC = People's Republic of China.  
Sources: World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2005*, Washington, DC; and World Resources Institute, 2005, *World Resources 2005: The Wealth of the Poor – Managing Ecosystems to Fight Poverty*. Reproduced from Roberts and Kanaley (2006) by permission of the Asian Development Bank.

The importance of political organization, and the remarkable variety of forms political life assumes in Southeast Asia, is another major distinguishing characteristic of the region as a whole and between the countries that constitute it. It is something that potentially makes cooperation and the formation of common goals and norms more challenging as a consequence. Although Southeast Asia has predominantly been associated with authoritarian rule in the post-colonial period, it is important to recognize that, some significant implementation problems notwithstanding, democracy is becoming more established in the region. The Philippines has a quite vibrant civil society, and Thailand and Indonesia have made important moves to consolidate more democratic forms of government. Having said that, Southeast Asia is also distinguished by the continuation of ‘communist’ rule in Vietnam and Laos – although quite what this means in reality is another matter. Vietnam, for example, is making significant moves to embrace the market and attract foreign investment – something that suggests that it will remain ‘communist’ in name only, and possibly not for much longer in any case. Elsewhere, Southeast Asia is home to a fairly brutal military dictatorship (Burma) and variations on the theme of constitutional monarchy (Thailand, Brunei and Cambodia). It has even spawned its own distinctive form of ‘pseudo-democracy’ in Singapore and Malaysia, countries that boast the trappings of formal democracy without ever witnessing regime change (Case, 2002).

These distinctive modes of political organization are significant enough in their own right, but complex ethnic and social relations add a further layer of complexity, as David Brown’s chapter reminds us. The multiracial society that is so characteristic of Malaysia, for example, is a direct consequence of the colonial experience and the flows of migrants that were associated with British imperialism and the needs of a colonial economy. But in other parts of Southeast Asia migrants from China in particular have played a prominent part in the region’s overall economic development. Indeed, Chinese migrants have enjoyed great economic success across the region, to a point where they occupy a disproportionate, and at times destabilizing, place in national economies. The figures are remarkable and revealing. In Indonesia ethnic Chinese make up only 3.5 per cent of the population, yet they control 73 per cent of equity in the national stock market. In Malaysia the ratio is 29 per cent of the population to 61 per cent equity; in the Philippines it is 2 per cent of the population to 50 per cent of the equity; and in Thailand it is 10 per cent of the population to 81 per cent of equity (Studwell, 2007: 200).

A number of points are worth emphasizing about these figures, as they are a significant part of the complex economic and political relations that constitute national populations across the region. First, racial tensions have been an issue in some Southeast Asian societies. Malaysian economic and social policies, for example, have been a direct product of

the intercommunal violence that erupted between indigenous Malays and ethnic Chinese in 1969. The subsequent positive discrimination enjoyed by the indigenous *bumiputera* population was a direct consequence of attempts to address underlying sources of tension and resentment. Similarly, of the many problems the Asian financial crisis created for Indonesia, one of the most troubling was the violence perpetrated against an ethnic Chinese community seen as occupying a privileged position relative to the indigenous population. The fact that it was predominantly small-scale Chinese business people, rather than the well-connected business elites around the Suharto family that bore the brunt of this resentment, only highlights the visceral nature of such tensions.

It also provides a reminder of how complex a process making sense of Southeast Asia can be. For many observers, the existence of 'Chinese capitalism' in Southeast Asia is a potential source of economic strength and dynamism. Indeed, some of the more overheated accounts of the so-called 'Bamboo network', like to emphasize the possible power of a Chinese business community that transcends national borders and which can use '*guanxi*' or personal connections to grease the wheels of international commerce (Weidenbaum and Hughes, 1996). While there may be something in the idea that there are distinct, Chinese-style business practices and relationships (Yeung, 2000), they are easily exaggerated, overstated and in some cases reminiscent of the more alarmist debates about the possible influence of the Chinese diaspora at the height of the Cold War. In earlier times, when the People's Republic of China was seen in Southeast Asia in almost exclusively strategic terms, ethnic Chinese were seen by some as a potential fifth column, or agents of mainland influence. Such a prospect was remote then and is even more unlikely now, for as David Goodman (1997–8: 14) points out, 'it is almost inconceivable that those identified as part of the Chinese Commonwealth would be likely to act together any more closely than they do at present'. Nevertheless, the fact that such ideas have seemed plausible at times is another reminder of how the local and the regional can be mutually constitutive parts of multidimensional cross-border processes in which questions of politics, economics and security can become intermingled (Beeson, 2007).

One of the most important distinguishing features of Southeast Asia is the way these national differences mediate global forces and ultimately help to determine political, economic and even strategic outcomes at the regional level. These are issues that are taken up in more detail in subsequent chapters. The key point to emphasize at this stage is that national differences continue to matter and determine the precise manner in which both economic and political space is reshaped by, and integrated into, wider global structures and processes.

## From the local to the regional

One of the great paradoxes of a supposedly global era is the fact that it is characterized by a number of processes that are decidedly regional. An interest in regional processes and organizations is not, it should be emphasized, an exclusively recent phenomenon: for at least 50 years, economists and political scientists have been trying to make sense of regionally based processes. The development of formal political organizations like the European Union and latterly the North American Free Trade Area and – in the region of most interest here – ASEAN has given greater scholarly impetus to the study of regions. One of the most important aspects of the formation of regional institutionalization and putative identity formation is the way that what Acharya (2002: 20) describes as ‘intrusive regionalism’, or regionally mediated external forces and pressures, may contribute to the further consolidation of the region itself. In other words, in the complex dialectical interaction between the regional and the global, local responses are important ‘intervening variables’ that can influence the way in which both regional and global processes are realized (Beeson, 2007). It is for this reason that aspects of regional processes in Southeast Asia remain distinctive and make its regional dynamics rather different to elsewhere.

To make sense of these differences, it is useful to make a widely employed initial conceptual distinction between processes of *regionalization* on the one hand, in which the private sector and economic forces are the principal drivers of regional integration, and *regionalism* on the other hand, in which self-consciously pursued political projects drive closer transnational cooperation (Breslin and Higgott, 2000: 344). One of the most noteworthy comparative qualities of the Southeast Asian experience in this regard is that regional integration has primarily been uncoordinated and principally driven by multinational corporations and the evolving logic of cross-border production strategies. In Europe, by contrast, the attractions of a politically driven single market and lower economic transaction costs have, from the outset, been the central determinants of greater regional integration and the emerging sense of collective fate that has increasingly come to distinguish Western Europe (Katzenstein, 2005).

Given that the idea of ‘Southeast Asia’ is still a relatively new one, it is unsurprising that a common sense of identity or collective fate is as yet relatively underdeveloped across the region. Interestingly, strategic concerns have continued to play a prominent role in helping to define and consolidate the idea of a distinct Southeast Asian region, with the formation of the South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and ASEAN in 1967. These developments highlight enduring regional realities: powerful external forces, be they economic, political, or in this case, strategic, have played a major role in defining a Southeast Asian region. Indeed, Charrier (2001) has persuasively argued that ASEAN did not so much create a Southeast Asian political space through its actions as ‘indigenize’ an existing

one that had been given de facto expression by the activities of the colonial powers in particular and the later discursive enterprises of generations of area specialists more generally. The key point, as Charrier rightly points out, is that the recurrence of this usage has gradually had the effect of bringing it into more substantial reality.

The possible ideational consolidation of Southeast Asia notwithstanding, there are plainly significant, continuing differences that distinguish the Southeast Asian experience from other parts of the world. Differential state capacities, which Scott Fritzen describes in more detail in Chapter 5, are individually and collectively a major constraint on the type or degree of regionalism that can be achieved. The more elaborate structures that characterize the EU are associated with and dependent on 'strong' states with significant capacities to formulate and implement policy (Hurrell, 1995). This difference in state capacities is important because regionalism potentially provides local elites with a strategy for proactively responding to the array of competitive pressures and economic opportunities opened up by globalization. In this context, as Paul Bowles (2000: 438) notes, the implementation of regional economic agreements like the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement offered an important mechanism for signalling to mobile foreign investors that market-friendly policies would be a permanent feature of the regional economic landscape.

The ASEAN Free Trade Agreement is typical of the sort of regionally based initiatives that have become increasingly commonplace across the world. Such initiatives reflect wider global processes that are expressive of, and contributing to, the evolving logic of transnational production and political cooperation. In some ways, therefore, Southeast Asia is simply manifesting a more generalized process of political and economic change that has encouraged similar developments on every continent. What is distinctive about Southeast Asia – and every other region, for that matter – is the specific historical circumstances that effectively mediate such ubiquitous influences. National differences, in other words, continue to matter and determine the precise manner in which both economic and political space is reshaped by, and integrated into, wider global structures and processes. In short, if we hope to understand either the increasingly important initiatives that are occurring at the transnational, regional level, or the forces that are systematically reconfiguring social, political and economic relations within increasingly porous national boundaries, then we must consider both national and regional levels and the dynamic interactions that animate them both.

## **The structure of this book**

The historical backdrop out of which contemporary Southeast Asia emerged is an implicit consideration throughout the book, but it is

addressed explicitly in the first two contributions. In Chapter 2, Robert Elson looks at the impact of the crucially important colonial period on Southeast Asia. As Elson notes, this formative period was critical because it ‘transformed the landscape of Southeast Asia, the lives and livelihoods of its peoples and it regularized, fenced and atomized the region in entirely new and foreign ways’. The economic and political structures that have come to characterize contemporary Southeast Asia had their antecedents in the colonial era, and the present situation and its particular challenges cannot be understood without reference to this period.

The examination of Southeast Asia’s formative historical influences is continued by Mark Berger in Chapter 3, who examines the impact of the Cold War on the seminal nation-building period that began following the Second World War, as a consequence of an accelerating decolonization process. One of the most important insights to emerge from Berger’s analysis is that, although the Southeast Asian region was subjected to powerful external pressures as a consequence of the superpower contestation that unfolded between the United States, the Soviet Union and – to a lesser extent – China, the course of national development was anything but inevitable. Berger traces the ‘diverse paths’ that were followed by Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam to highlight more general factors that shaped the region in this period. It is clear that while the unique circumstances of the Cold War placed important region-wide constraints on the types of regime that would emerge in Southeast Asia, local circumstances were critical too – again, reminding us of the importance of the national–regional interaction.

Southeast Asia has a distinctive political economy and a unique location in an increasingly integrated international capitalist economy. The region has also generated quite distinctive policy responses to the challenge of late development – policies which, until fairly recently, at least, were the subject of widespread admiration. In Chapter 4, Greg Felker analyses the economic development of Southeast Asia, paying particular attention to the historical factors that have both constrained and encouraged development across the region. As Felker makes clear, not only have there been very different and distinctive development outcomes in the region, but they have been shaped by a complex array of internal and external factors: the actions of extra-regional states and powerful multinational corporations engendered ‘deliberate responses’ designed to encourage regional economic integration on the part of Southeast Asian states, something that has allowed regional elites to ‘reconcile globalization with the imperatives of regime consolidation and stability’.

Chapter 5 is a completely new contribution by Scott Fritzen, which primarily looks at the way public administration has developed in Southeast Asia in the post-independence period. Like other chapters in this collection, however, Fritzen pays particular attention to the ‘colonial inheritance’ which, he argues, has played a major part in determining subsequent state capacity. What becomes clear is that state-building is still a work in progress in the region, and the success or otherwise of attempts to implement ideas

about administrative best practice and ‘good governance’ are a measure of just how far the states of the region have come, and of how far some of them have yet to go.

William Case adopts a more exclusively political focus in Chapter 6 to consider the fate of democratic reform in Southeast Asia. Although there has been a good deal of reformist pressure applied to the region, and no shortage of hopes and/or expectations about the seemingly inevitable triumph of democracy, this extensively revised and updated version of Case’s original analysis of Singapore and the ‘ASEAN 4’ – Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand – makes clear that this process has been anything but linear or inevitable. On the contrary, as Case points out, while there have been some important steps taken away from the sorts of authoritarian rule that were synonymous with much of Southeast Asia, ‘many unreformed political practices and patterns of government-business relations persist, greatly dampening prospects for good governance’. Consequently, a spectrum of regime types has emerged across the region, ranging from ‘pseudo-democracies’ to fuller but still ‘low quality’ varieties.

In Chapter 7, Chua Beng Huat extends the focus on Southeast Asia’s political and social practices to consider the impact of communitarian ideas on political thinking and practice in East Asia. There is a very important and long-running debate about the impact of ‘Western’ ideas on other parts of the world and the possibility that different countries will begin to adopt similar social values as a consequence. As Chua points out, Southeast Asia’s communitarian traditions mean that there is no certainty that the sort of liberal individualism associated with the West will be universally adopted in Asia, especially where there are powerful political obstacles that may resist such ideas.

Chua’s analysis provides a useful backdrop for the following chapters on civil society and religion in the region. In Chapter 8 Caroline Hughes looks at the development of civil society in Southeast Asia, and explores how political structures that are primarily associated with the West have developed in the region. Hughes looks at the development of ‘associational life’ and its relationship to the region’s often strong states. Although she details how civil society has expanded in the region, especially since the 1980s, she also points out that it remains a ‘highly fragmented affair’. Such a conclusion helps to explain why Islam has come to occupy a prominent role in the political as well as the religious life of the region.

In another entirely new contribution in Chapter 9, David Brown demonstrates just how important national and ethnic factors remain in Southeast Asia, even at a time when regional and even global influences are becoming more important and attracting greater analytical attention. As Brown makes clear, not only do ethnic differences continue to resonate powerfully throughout the region, but they frequently have the capacity to spill over into the political arena, complicating domestic politics and by implication adding another layer of potential complexity to regional accommodations as well.

In Chapter 10 Greg Fealy explores the role of Islam in regional affairs. He assesses the impact of rising pietism in Southeast Asia's two significant majority Muslim nations, Indonesia and Malaysia, and also analyses the factors driving Islamic extremism and terrorism across the region. He argues that Islam has had less influence on Southeast Asian politics and diplomacy than might be expected, given that Muslims make up almost half of the region's population. But Islam has been a powerful element in Southeast Asian security problems. In Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, Islamic groups have posed the major insurgent and terrorist threat. Fealy contends that state oppression and marginalization of Islamic communities, combined with growing enmeshment with international radical movements, provide the key to understanding the rise in Muslim-based violence.

In an extensively revised and updated discussion, Alex Bellamy analyses Southeast Asia's particular security concerns in Chapter 11. One of the most remarkable things about the region is that, despite some formidable security challenges, both externally and internally, there has been relatively little conflict between the nations of Southeast Asia. One of the reasons for this, as Bellamy's analysis makes clear, is that national elites have been primarily preoccupied with *internal* threats to stability; constructing a permissive institutional and normative external order has allowed the region's elites to concentrate on domestic security issues, free of external 'interference'. If we hope to understand the role and evolution of institutions like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the role specific norms and practices have played in the management of security concerns in the region, argues Bellamy, we must go 'beyond realism'.

Next, three entirely new chapters consider Southeast Asia's relations with the major powers of the wider East Asian region – China and Japan – and with the United States, a country that continues to exert a powerful influence over Southeast and East Asia. Alice Ba's analysis of Southeast Asia's relationship with China in Chapter 12 not only introduces a country that has arguably become East Asia's most important foreign policy actor, but provides a powerful reminder of just how rapidly the region as a whole can change. For Southeast Asia, the 'rise of China' represents a formidable strategic and economic challenge, one which ASEAN may find difficult to accommodate, as Ba's analysis makes clear.

But the rise of China is not the only problem facing ASEAN. Japan has also been a major and direct concern for Southeast Asia, not least because of its continuing economic importance and presence in the region. Yet as Julie Gilson points out in Chapter 13, Japan's relations with the region have frequently been difficult. Paradoxically, however, China's increasing importance in the region is actually providing a catalyst for Japan to take the region more seriously and try to improve its own relations there. There are signs, Gilson argues, that Japan's engagement in regional institutions and its more 'Asia focused' policy is beginning to bring about the sort of changes its

leaders have pursued for years. Japan's relations with the region are complicated by its relationship with the US: a country that is given detailed consideration in the next chapter.

In the final analysis of ASEAN's pivotal bilateral relationships, Jörn Dosch in Chapter 14 explains how Southeast Asia's relationship with the United States has evolved over recent years. One of the key features of US policy, Dosch suggests, is its continuity: a combination of enduring strategic and economic goals have meant that successive administrations have pursued broadly similar goals in the region. Given the US's 'hegemonic' status, this should not surprise us, perhaps, but what this entirely new contribution to the volume makes clear is that even recent, largely unforeseen developments like the 'war on terror' are unlikely to alter profoundly the pattern of relations between the small states of Southeast Asia and what remains the world's sole superpower.

In Chapter 15 Richard Stubbs considers the historical development of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia and assesses recent developments and prospects. Again, it is clear from Stubbs's analysis that even the formal, political expressions of regional integrative processes cannot be understood without attending to the wider economic and strategic environment in which they occur. As Stubbs observes, however, there is cause for cautious optimism: despite the recent economic and political crises that have assailed the region, and despite the deteriorating security climate, the underlying environment constraints notwithstanding, war has not broken out between Southeast Asian nations, the states themselves have not collapsed and regional cooperation remains a part of the behaviour and identity of the region. Whether this will be enough to overcome the region's formidable challenges remains to be seen.

Lorraine Elliott's discussion of the environmental challenges faced by the Southeast Asian states complements earlier chapters with their more explicit focus on regional security challenges. As Elliott's discussion in Chapter 16 makes clear, to gain an appreciation of the complex and multidimensional challenges that confront Southeast Asia, it is necessary to include not just economic structures or political practices, nor simply conventional security threats, however prominent they may have become; only by grounding the region in its specific physical environment can we understand some of the specific challenges and constraints that will effectively delimit the possible range of responses available to regional elites. In this regard, Elliott's chapter provides a sobering reminder that the environmental challenges are potentially formidable, the costs of neglect serious and the capacity to address them is undermined by a combination of policy failure and poverty.

By way of conclusion I provide in Chapter 17 an overview of some of the more important and helpful debates that have attempted to make sense of Southeast Asia's historical development and the region's place in the international system. Not all of this literature is specifically addressed to the Southeast Asian region, but it is important to situate discussions of this part

of the world in the context of wider debates about historical development at the regional and global levels. The discussion is intended to help us make sense about what is different and distinctive about Southeast Asia, as well as those factors that seem more universal. Finally, I offer a few thoughts about the possible future trajectory of this complex and fascinating region. All we can say with confidence is that it will be driven by the continuing interaction of national differences and regional dynamics.

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