

## BOOK REVIEWS

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***Regionalism and Globalization in East Asia: Politics, Security and Economic Development.* By Mark Beeson. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Softcover: 324pp.**

Mark Beeson has delivered a masterly overview of the place of East Asia within the regionalizing and globalizing trends apparent to us all. In eight closely argued chapters he discusses the ideas of East Asia as a region, the important role of history in regional relations, the processes underlying the development of the region's economic and security relationships and his understanding of East Asian futures. Within all this Beeson makes sound and measured judgments on concepts such as nationalism, processes such as integration, and factors in the strategic environment such as the roles of, respectively, the United States and China in promoting, hindering, or taking advantage of the nascent region.

Beeson is surely correct to point us to the ASEAN Plus Three processes rather than ASEAN itself as the most likely centre of gravity for the East Asia of the future. He is optimistic when he notes (p. 98) that even in a region as diverse as East Asia, common ground may be found "even in the contentious, seemingly non-negotiable security arena". And if that optimism is well founded, and common ground can be found in the security arena, so too can it be found in almost any other area of common activity undertaken if the will is there. Overall, Beeson's judgment (p. 254) is that the East Asian regional project is important because "for all the inefficiencies, excesses, infringements of national sovereignty and all the other costs of inter-dependence, if the ultimate pay-off of regional institutionalization is a more peaceful, more cooperative and perhaps more prosperous region, it will be a remarkably small price to pay". Important certainly, but Beeson is less certain as to the likelihood of closer sets of relationship, although (p. 238) "East

Asian regionalism is an idea that refuses to go away”, and that in itself says something significant about the East Asia project.

All this and more is on the positive side of the ledger. But this is not the final word on the subject of East Asian regionalism (and Beeson does not claim that it is). As I indicated above, the work is an overview of East Asian regionalism. Its analysis is at the macro level and consequently much of the detail, the “glue”, of East Asia is either glossed over or ignored altogether. There is almost no mention of East Asia’s institutions, other than the obvious suspects: APEC, ASEAN, ASEAN Plus Three, the ARF and, in passing, the East Asia Summit. Certainly these are the main players, but there is a multitude of other regional institutions which conform to the norms of the “ASEAN Way” (described by Beeson, p. 219) as not only “central to its [ASEAN’s] longevity, but also the principle reason for its ineffectiveness” and all reinforcing the habits of cooperation that help build the region.

There are at least 200 formal multilateral institutions with East Asian membership within the wider Asia-Pacific region. Some of these institutions operate within ASEAN, others take some sub-grouping of East Asian states to address narrower concerns and yet others include states from the Asia-Pacific writ large rather than narrowly of East Asia. The institutions are as diverse as the North East Asian Centre for Environmental Data and Training, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region grouping, the East Asia Hydrographic Commission and the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific, all in their own way devoted to making the region work effectively. If this lower level of analysis had been included the conclusions as to the region’s long-term viability might well have remained, but readers would also have a broader base from which to accept or reject Beeson’s conclusions for themselves.

Beeson focuses on the region’s security and economic relationships. This is not surprising given his own background and the high value we as policy analysts place on those relationships. However, there are other sets of relationships as well. I would have welcomed some analysis of, for example, the size and direction of regional tourism flows, or the volume of intra-regional telephone calls, or the size of national diasporas within the region. These are all examples of connectivity and help to prove or disprove a thesis of regionalization.

Inevitably in a book-length work there are going to be judgments and conclusions overtaken by events. This book is no exception. Beeson describes Thailand and the Philippines as the two

democracies within Southeast Asia. Since that was written Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has been overthrown by a coup in Thailand, and the May 2007 mid-term elections in the Philippines were marred by high levels of political violence. This all must call into question the reality of democracy in both these countries.

Also almost inevitably, there are going to be errors of fact not caught during proofreading. There seem to be very few. One particularly confusing formulation is at endnote 18 to chapter 3 (p. 260) which discusses the ARF and its expansion “in 1993 to include China, Russia and Papua New Guinea”. The ARF, as Beeson points out in the next sentence in the endnote, was established in 1994.

At the beginning of this review I described the book as a “masterly overview” and so it is. It is less, however, about regionalisation within East Asia and more about how East Asia is dealing with globalizing processes as there is only a chapter length summary of the development of East Asia as a region and a discussion of its possible futures. There is still a gap in the literature for a book-length work that would go into the detail of how East Asia is coming together, albeit slowly, hesitatingly and reluctantly and certainly not inevitably, but nonetheless at the moment is coming together. Such a book would examine the different motives for cooperating and the different forms of engagement practised by the region. Some of these are close, some less so. This is the detailed evidence that would help confirm Beeson’s judgments in this book.