

Book Reviews

Regionalism in the New Asia–Pacific Order: The Political Economy of the Asia–Pacific Region, Volume II

Joseph A. Camilleri (Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar, 2003) 408 pp.

This sequel to Joseph Camilleri's earlier volume on markets and civil society in the Asia–Pacific is a big book by any definition—long in gestation, ambitious in scope, analytically insightful and rich in its contextualisation of the shifting, multi-hued contours of Asia–Pacific regionalism. What distinguishes this book is its unusually sharp focus on the interplay between markets, states and civil society, the quality of Camilleri's analysis, and his lucid and compelling writing style in which narrative and enquiry are seamlessly interwoven in the first truly overarching account of Asia–Pacific regionalism.

Although endowed with different meanings and interpretations, 'regionalism' here refers to the process of integration, identity formation, institution building and the development of shared norms within a particular political and geographical space but, crucially, one that extends beyond the borders of a single state. Regionalism, of course, is hardly a new phenomenon. Indeed its historical lineage can be traced back many decades. But the new regionalism is markedly different from its antecedents and the direction and outcome of this work in progress will have major implications for the 2.5 billion people who live within the boundaries of the Asia–Pacific, as well as the rest of the world.

However, the author is not about judging the success or failure of the enterprise but rather about helping us to better understand the forces that are driving regionalism as well as its consequences. Camilleri ventures where most fear to tread. Eschewing the largely descriptive formulas of lesser works, he grapples with some of the most complex and challenging questions in international relations. Does multilateralism offer the region a helpful path for negotiating the often slippery geopolitical, economic and cultural terrain? Does the emerging regional architecture in the Asia–Pacific show signs of integrating state, market and civil society in ways that are likely to make for a solid, enduring, convivial house?

These are not easy questions to answer. Camilleri does not claim omniscience, but his study is more enlightening than anything yet written on this subject. The first part of the book explores the concept of region in general and Asia–Pacific regionalism in particular, with its many distinctive features, complementarities and conflictual patterns as well as those it shares with other regions.

Refreshingly, non-state actors, civil society and the impact of exogenous factors such as transnational corporations, financial markets, international governmental institutions and non-government organisations are accorded much greater attention than in more limited, conventional analyses, resulting in a richer, more subtle and probing study.

Of course, states remain pre-eminent players and the US, China and Japan are crucial if not paramount influences in shaping regional norms. Moreover, their interaction gives the region a degree of political coherence that might not otherwise exist. But, as Camilleri argues, a fuller grasp of the dynamics of regional interaction 'requires that considerations of power and conflict be complemented and qualified by the role of homogeneity and community. In other words, both difference and identity, division and cohesion must be regarded as integral to the growth of regional exchanges and institutions' (p. 7).

Furthermore, multilateralism may not be related to system maintenance because it can engender system transformation and, under certain circumstances, even undermine the prevailing hegemonic order. This has certainly been the case in Asia and the Pacific, where, in recent decades, small and medium-sized states have effectively leveraged their collective power at the expense of the region's traditional hegemons.

An important theme, which runs throughout the book, is the tension between the competing ideas of a 'Pacific community', supported by Japan, South Korea, Australia and the US; and 'Pacific Asia', which is more narrowly cast in terms of geography and culture and is the preferred community of China and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) states. This fault line is most evident in the political and ideational divide between supporters of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the emerging ASEAN + 3 grouping, the genesis of which was former Malaysian prime minister Mohammed Mahathir's East Asia Economic Group (EAEG).

In keeping with his holistic approach, Camilleri gives considerable attention to what he calls 'multilateralism by other means'—the raft of interregional (Asia-Europe Meeting, ASEM), subregional (growth areas), Track II (Council for Security Co-operation in the Asia-Pacific, CSCAP) and *ad hoc* processes (South China Sea Workshops) that support the regional edifice. His chapters and sections on these building blocks are at times quite masterful, as is his

deconstruction of the 'Asian values' debate, which, while ostensibly about the importance of culture, is more a political contest for supremacy between Western and Asian notions of power and community. In effect, 'Asian values' has become a euphemism and code for the idea that Asia should be run by Asians. This is not an abstract argument, since cultural relativism has been used as a rhetorical tool to develop political space for an assertive pan-Asianism that is fundamentally at odds with the Western-supported notion of a Pacific community.

Camilleri has some interesting things to say about the broader, comprehensive approach to security favoured by Asians. One is the obvious conflict between the sovereignty norm and respect for human rights, in which the security of the individual may be at odds with the security of the state. How Asians resolve this conflict will have direct implications for a human rights agenda still dominated by the legalistic and individualistic ethos of the prevailing human rights discourse.

As if to challenge the perception that academics aren't much good at policy prescription, Camilleri sketches out a blueprint for future action that incorporates a number of sensible suggestions such as a declaration of common norms and principles to underpin a regionally acceptable comprehensive security framework; a general endorsement of the principle of non-provocative defence; and more clearly defining the region's geographical footprint. Under the rubric of institutional reform he advocates giving the APEC Leaders' meeting a wider brief, constructing more regular and meaningful dialogue between the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and APEC and enhancing the effectiveness of CSCAP through the involvement of other epistemic communities.

Despite its erudition this book is not without blemishes. Camilleri could usefully have added a few pages on the 1.5 track process to flesh out his section on multilateralism by other means, and his penchant for concluding his chapters with a new set of unanswerable questions is sometimes cause for mild irritation. But these minor peccadillos do not greatly detract from this first-rate piece of investigation, which cements Camilleri's reputation as one of the most prolific and perspicacious scholars of Asia-Pacific affairs that Australia has produced.

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