

Global International Relations in Southeast Asia

Chanintira na Thalang and Yong-Soo Eun (eds.)

Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2025, 245 pages, ISBN: 9781032555348 (Hardback)

Ferhat Durmaz

Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Ankara University, Ankara.

E-Mail: ferhatdurmaz2013@gmail.com

Orcid: 0000-0002-1315-7686

The book titled *Global International Relations in Southeast Asia*, edited by Chanintira na Thalang and Yong-Soo Eun, significantly and remarkably contributes to understanding the Southeast Asian region's engagement with and impacts on Global International Relations (IR). At the beginning of the book, the authors geographically define Southeast Asia as a region that hosts a wide variety of cultural and political structures, has a colonial history, and is gaining increasing importance in today's global dynamics. Based on the features and experiences of the region, the authors emphasize the potential of Southeast Asia to contribute to Global IR and the importance of theoretical approaches that can be developed for Global IR. The book describes Global IR as an approach that aims to enhance the diversity and inclusiveness of the discipline by considering the local issues, histories, and cultural contexts of different geographical regions, such as Southeast Asia, outside the West. According to the book, Global IR seeks to develop a broader perspective on how IR is shaped in different geographies and contexts, such as Southeast Asia, by overcoming the dichotomous divide between the West and non-West.

The book reveals the interaction between Southeast Asia and Global IR¹ by analyzing the historical experiences of Southeast Asian countries, the research of scholars from the region, and the teaching trends in universities. The book examines Southeast Asia's theoretical contributions to Global IR and the efforts to integrate these contributions into the discipline. This study's starting point is that although substantial research has been conducted on the contributions of regions outside Southeast Asia (such as China, Africa, and the Middle East) to Global IR, academic interest in Southeast Asia's engagement with Global IR has remained relatively limited. In this context, the book is structured around three main objectives: The primary aim is to explore the contributions of local knowledge to Global IR, focusing on Southeast Asia-specific pre-theories (elements of thought that do not independently form a

1 Bilgin, P. and Z. Gülşah Çapan. 2021. Introduction to the Special Issue Regional International Relations and Global Worlds: Globalising International Relations. *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 18, 70: 1-11.

theory), theories (a more developed system of ideas), and concepts (the meanings of terms). A secondary goal is to evaluate the extent to which contributions of Southeast Asia to Global IR are integrated into national education systems, teaching practices, and research activities. The final objective is to analyze the current state of IR in Southeast Asia by comparing academic communities in different countries. To achieve these objectives, the study divides the IR community in Southeast Asia into country-based chapters, examines local knowledge, and conducts surveys in the relevant countries. These methodological and content-related approaches make the study a crucial and valuable contribution to understanding the current nature of IR in Southeast Asia and its relationship with Global IR.

The book consists of twelve chapters. Seven chapters focus on Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Cambodia). These chapters allow readers to explore how countries with diverse historical backgrounds and modern developments contribute to Global IR. The book's other chapters provide insights into the current state of IR in Southeast Asia, including comparative analyses with China, and discuss potential contributions to Global IR and how Global IR may progress.

In the first chapter, Chanintira na Thalang defines the boundaries of Global IR, presents the study's conceptual framework, and discusses the rationales for examining Global IR in Southeast Asia. In the second chapter, Alan Chong discusses key turning points in Southeast Asia, rather than relying on periodizations based on European history (pp. 21-37). This discussion contributes to the literature by incorporating "non-Western" temporal markers into IR studies, which Western perspectives have long dominated. In the third chapter, I Gede Wahyu Wicaksana and Yohanes William Santoso analyze the trends in IR research and education in Indonesia, exploring the challenges and opportunities for developing a Global IR perspective in the country. Wicaksana and Santoso state that Indonesia's strategic culture provides a critical pre-theory framework for explaining issues related to Indonesia's foreign policy, such as its security and defense policies and the relationships between Australia and Indonesia (p. 53). Building on this point, the authors illustrate how Indonesia's cultural ideas and practices can enrich Global IR. In the fourth chapter, Chanintira na Thalang examines how mainstream theories continue to influence Thailand and discusses the role of policy-oriented research and primary sources in forming pre-theories. In the fifth chapter, Cheng-Chwee Kuik, Guido Benny, and Zikri Rosli investigate how the Malaysian IR community contributes to Global IR through specific themes grounded in local issues. They provide a different perspective on the behavior of small states (pp. 91-98). Instead of being seen as passive pawns, they are described as active agents capable of driving regional integration, establishing multilateral institutions, and shaping global interactions. According to Kuik, Benny, and Rosli, the most notable example of Southeast Asia's conceptual contribution to Global IR is the development of the concept of "hedging", which is based on experiences in Southeast Asia but has garnered academic interest from various regions (p. 7). In the sixth chapter, Ja Ian Chong addresses why the Singaporean IR community has not demonstrated a strong impetus for theoretical innovation and discusses the consequences of this situation. In the seventh chapter, Herman Joseph S. Kraft examines why traditional approaches continue

to dominate the field of IR, despite the emerging recognition that IR in the Philippines can be studied through the lens of local issues.

In the eighth chapter, Thuy T. Do explores the dynamics that shape attitudes towards Global IR in Vietnam and discusses why the Ho Chi Minh School of Diplomacy holds significant potential for contributing to Global IR. In the ninth chapter, Vannarith Chheang investigates why IR in Cambodia has only recently begun to develop compared to other countries and explores the opportunities for advancing Global IR through education. These two chapters demonstrate that although small states have limited material capacities, they use alternative paths to achieve their primary goals. This perspective challenges the Realist assumption, which argues that great powers dominate small and weak states. These chapters contribute to the literature by questioning the assumptions of Structural theorists who view small and weak states as mere objects in international relations. In the tenth chapter, Jiajie He focuses on the interactions between the IR communities in China and Southeast Asia, analyzing their similarities and differences. In the eleventh chapter, M.L. Pinitbhand Paribatra focuses on a contemporary development rather than a theoretical discussion, highlighting how timing and delay tactics became significant in Myanmar's hedging strategy amidst great power competition. In the twelfth chapter, Chanintira na Thalang analyzes the state of the IR discipline in Southeast Asia by comparing it with China and discusses how Global IR can be further developed in the region.

When we examine the study's strengths, the book emphasizes that Southeast Asia's unique historical experiences, modern developments, and local perspectives form the foundation for pre-theoretical and conceptual contributions. It also comprehensively analyzes the region's impact on Global IR. Furthermore, the work challenges the Western-centered nature of the IR discipline by offering a framework that critiques various historical assumptions and theories. Methodologically, the study strengthens its scientific foundation by employing quantitative methods, such as surveys distributed to university-based academics (including faculty members and researchers), and qualitative methods, including case studies, process tracing, and the comparative method.

On the other hand, the non-inclusion of countries such as Laos, Brunei, and East Timor in the study and the focus on a policy-oriented analysis rather than a theoretical discussion regarding Myanmar has prevented the presentation of a complete picture of Southeast Asia as a whole, thereby highlighting a gap in the scope of the study. Even though the editors, due to valid reasons (financial and logistical constraints in accessing Laos, Brunei, and East Timor; internet outages and the political environment in Myanmar), chose not to include these countries, examining the nature of previous IR studies conducted in these countries could have provided an overall picture of the IR communities. In the tenth and twelfth chapters, the authors of the respective chapters address the China connection. However, instead of comparing Southeast Asia to China, a great power with ancient civilizations and a rich historical past, it would have been more effective to compare Southeast Asia to other non-Western regions, such as Africa and the Middle East. This approach would have effectively highlighted Southeast Asia's contributions to Global IR.

In summary, this book offers a significant breakthrough in understanding the current state of the IR discipline in Southeast Asia and its relationship with Global IR. The consideration of the historical experiences of the region's countries, the emphasis on local knowledge, the inclusion of teaching activities, and the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods are crucial elements that enhance the academic value of the book. Although there are some shortcomings regarding the scope of the study, it can be said that the study provides an essential insight into examining Southeast Asia's interaction with Global IR and the future development of IR studies in Southeast Asia.