

# **Regional Organization and Order in South-East Asia**

**Arnfinn Jorgensen-Dahl**



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SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

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*For my mother  
and the memory of  
my father*

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# Preface

This book is a result of my interest in issues and problems of international cooperation, organization, and integration. It began as a doctoral dissertation for the Department of International Relations of the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra. The dissertation was completed in early 1975, and at the time I entertained no plans of seeing it in a published form. Developments in Southeast Asia after 1975 began to take such a course, however, that in late 1977 I changed my mind and began revising the earlier version. The result of these labours is the present book which, however, bears only a partial resemblance to the original dissertation.

I am indebted to the Australian National University, the University of Queensland, and the Australian Institute of International Affairs for financial contributions which enabled me twice to spend time in Southeast Asia. I am particularly grateful to Professor Hedley Bull (now of Oxford University) and Mr. John Girling who in their capacities as supervisors of the earlier version provided inspiration, criticism, and encouragement. I should also like to thank Professor J. D. B. Miller for the generosity of the Department of International Relations to which I have periodically returned in the course of researching and writing this book. A similar note of thanks goes to Professor Kernal S. Sandhu, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore where I spent time in 1977–8 gathering material. I am indebted to Mr Bernie Goldman and Professor John Legge for comments on parts of the manuscript. Last but not least my thanks go to all those officials throughout Southeast Asia who let themselves be subjected to my probes and questions. Their willingness to respond positively has done much to ease the burden of the task I set myself.

Some passages in the book have appeared earlier in articles of mine published in various journals. The articles are 'Forces of Fragmentation in the International System: The Case of Ethno-Nationalism',

*Orbis*, vol. XIX, no. 2 (Summer 1975); 'ASEAN 1967-76: Development or Stagnation?' and 'Extra-Regional Influences on Regional Cooperation in S.E. Asia', in *Pacific Community* (Tokyo), vol. 7, no. 4 (July 1976), and vol. 8, no. 3 (April 1977) respectively; and 'The Emerging External Policies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. XXIV, no. 1 (April 1978). I am grateful to the publishers for permission to reproduce parts of these essays.

To Bilsen, above all, my thanks for her faith and encouragement, and to Aylin who has seen much less of her father than she wished.

*January 1980*

ARNFINN JORGENSEN-DAHL

# Introduction

In this book I shall inquire into the conditions and development of regional organization in Southeast Asia and examine the contribution or otherwise of regional organization to regional order.

I shall be guided in my inquiry by the following questions: Is there a trend towards increased cooperation, integration, and a greater sense of community among the countries of Southeast Asia? What are on the one hand the significant factors urging such processes along? What are on the other the factors hampering such developments? Has the development of regional organization in Southeast Asia added to or detracted from such order as may exist among the states of the region?

## I

That Southeast Asia constitutes a region in any meaningful sense is not to be taken for granted. Much depends quite clearly on the criteria employed. Superficially one might label as Southeast Asia that area which lies between East and South Asia or between China and India (excluding Bangla Desh). One could also perhaps advance the claim that the countries involved distinguish themselves as a separate region more in terms of interstate conflict and disorder than cooperation. Without wishing to make them serious definitional criteria, both arguments, however, direct our attention to factors which long have been part of Southeast Asian existence; the former by pointing to the influence of extraregional forces, and the latter to unresolved problems and conflicts of which many are of long standing.

In the real world, however, 'regions are what politicians and peoples want them to be'.<sup>1</sup> The empirical diversity implied in this remark is reflected in the academic literature on the subject in which reasons for regarding a group of states as a region vary from writer to writer according to interests and purposes. We are nevertheless not

confronted with a completely fluid situation in academic writings on the nature of regions. Common to most, though not all, definitions is the notion of geographic contiguity,<sup>2</sup> because to dispense with it would open up 'the possibility that any entities related to each other with respect to one or more attributes will meet the requirements for consideration as a region. This leads to a situation in which the term "region" is apt to become so inclusive that it is useless.'<sup>3</sup>

Instead of attempting a precise definition of Southeast Asia qua region a position of convenience will be adopted by drawing a line around a particular group of geographically contiguous states and calling them a region for the purposes of this study.<sup>4</sup> This approach is advantageous in that it does not prejudice the issue of the manner in which, if any, Southeast Asia may be regarded as a region. The choice of this method should not of course be taken to mean that in approaching the group of states called Southeast Asia one is without any indication of an entity of sorts. The use of the term to designate the area north of Australia, east of India and Bangla Desh, and south of China and Japan is alone an indication that to outsiders at least the area displays commonalities of sorts. Known to the Chinese and the Japanese as Nanyang and Nanyo respectively (both of which means the southern seas), and labelled Südostasien by German and Austrian geographers and anthropologists in the interwar period, the term Southeast Asia only gained wide currency after it was used to designate the theatre of war commanded by Lord Louis Mountbatten in the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> The countries included have on occasions varied, but it is now most commonly agreed that Southeast Asia comprises Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia (The Khmer Republic or Kampuchea), Vietnam (before 1975-6, North and South), Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. It also includes the Sultanate of Brunei – a British Protectorate.

Equally as important as the perceptions and views of outsiders are those of the peoples and governments within the area. Later in this study there will be opportunities to observe that by those it concerns the most, the countries in the area are increasingly seen to form a region distinct from others.

## II

It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive survey of the large number of regional organizations which have come into existence in Southeast Asia over the last two decades or so. To do so would

clearly be an impossible undertaking in a relatively slim volume such as this. Nor is it necessary to the task I have set myself. Ever-mounting information about a particular phenomenon does not necessarily enhance our understanding of it. The goal must surely be to collect the information which is necessary to the formulation of answers required by the questions one has set oneself. In Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, there are many regional organizations, some of which perform nearly identical or overlapping tasks and are influenced by much the same conditions, pulls and pressures from inside and outside the region. Hence to undertake a comprehensive examination of all is likely to produce little additional understanding compared to an investigation which makes a more discriminating selection. I shall consequently concentrate on two organizations; the defunct Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), which was formed in 1961, and the existing Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was formed in 1967, the year ASA ceased to exist.

My reasons for selecting these two organizations are several. First, both are regional in the sense that membership was and is confined to states within Southeast Asia. Second, unlike the great majority of functionally exclusive organizations, both ASA and ASEAN are inclusive in that they were created with the fulfilment of many purposes and tasks in mind. The scope and range of their activities are considerably more ambitious than those of other organizations. Third, although ASA no longer exists and therefore naturally will receive less attention than its successor, an examination of it and the conditions which prevailed during its lifetime provide the historical perspective necessary to an understanding of ASEAN and the circumstances under which this organization and others operate at present. Embodied within the formation and imperfect life of ASA were also the beginnings of certain trends whose existence in an augmented form is reflected in ASEAN. And finally, because of their functional inclusiveness, the formation and development of ASA and ASEAN reflect much more fully than other organizations the political, economic, and cultural conditions present in Southeast Asia. Like magnets, they have served as the focus towards which have been drawn, and within which have mingled – often very uneasily – the many tensions, divisions, and all manner of calculations, pulls, and pressures at large in Southeast Asia itself. Like no other organizations they have also attracted the attention of extra-regional forces which in various ways have strongly influenced their existence. Even military and security considerations, which

ostensibly were not within their ambit, have had a profound impact, especially on ASEAN. In short, the two organizations represent a microcosm of regional cooperation and organization in Southeast Asia to a degree not matched by others.

### III

There are essentially two routes by which to approach an undertaking such as mine. One can start with specific generalizations and hypotheses taken from the wider body of already accumulated knowledge about regional cooperation, organization, and integration and proceed to test them within the context of Southeast Asia. The alternative route is of course to go to the task from the opposite direction; that is to say, to examine the conditions and processes in Southeast Asia and relate the results to relevant elements of the wider body of theoretical understanding. When I have chosen the latter path, one consideration has been uppermost in my mind; little or nothing of the evidence on which present theoretical understanding rests has been drawn from Southeast Asian experiences. This is not an accident but until recently was a reflection both of the actual state of affairs in the region itself and the scant attention paid to this aspect of regional affairs by scholars who in the past have seen little cause to devote time and energy to it. Whatever the reason, however, the fact remains that in the overwhelming number of cases the focus has been on Europe, Latin America, and Africa. It seems therefore advisable to retain an initial but open-minded scepticism in regard to the relevance of existing theoretical knowledge to the conditions and developments in Southeast Asia. Even more sobering is the realization that the empirical generalizations arrived at until now deal with conditions and processes the outcome of which represent levels of cooperation and integration not reached in any parts of Southeast Asia. They may indeed be considered 'ideal' outcomes in whose attainment in the region there is no *a priori* reason to believe. To rely on existing generalizations as the starting point, moreover, may lead to acts of oversight with regard to possible alternative outcomes and to the rejection or neglect of factors and variables unique to the area. Finally, to explain why levels of cooperation, organization, and integration achieved elsewhere have not been reached in Southeast Asia, which would seem to be required by the adoption of the first approach, would necessarily involve a considerable amount of speculation about possible intervening factors as well as extrapolation.