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Malcolm H. Murfett, ed. 2012. *Cold War Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2012, 376 pp.

The book *Cold War Southeast Asia*, edited by Malcolm H. Murfett of the National University of Singapore, starts with the premise that the role of the Cold War in Southeast Asia needs to be scrutinized. The main foundation of this critique is *not* to deny the influence of the Cold War in Southeast Asia; rather, scrutiny in this context means to establish the limits to which the Cold War analytic can be used in Southeast Asia.

Of course, the mere mention of the Cold War will invariably direct the conversation at some point to the "domino theory" and the Vietnam War. What does that prove? It merely shows that from a strategic standpoint, it was crucial for American policymakers that Southeast Asia did not fall to Communism. Does this mean that Southeast Asian leaders were unaware of this strategic thinking by the Americans? Far from it. In fact, one of the key points in many of the essays in the book is that Southeast Asian leaders sought to exploit this strategic thinking by the Americans to their own and maybe their country's benefit.

To be sure, Southeast Asian leaders also endeavored to exploit to their benefit the strategic entanglements of the Soviet Union and the

People's Republic of China due to the Cold War. Although in the case of China, it was lured into the Southeast Asian imbroglio not only due to the ideological split embodied in the Cold War but also because of its geographic location and historical ties with neighboring Southeast Asian nations. As expected, this is also one of the major points in several essays in the book.

It is hard to imagine scholars on the region and the Southeast Asian leaders themselves not being aware of these distinctions. Yet, this may be something new to discover for many out there who are not as knowledgeable about the region and its history. Moreover, the tendency of Southeast Asian leaders to take advantage of the Cold War is, as mentioned, only one of the many points raised in the book.

Another very important point raised in the essays that comprise the book is how the Cold War period coincided with the decolonization of the region and how the transition from colonial rule to the postcolonial era shaped what kind of impact the Cold War will have on their respective nations. Put differently, the Cold War in Southeast Asia was mediated by either national or intra-regional issues, probably simmering below the surface during the colonial era but appeared during the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial period.

The Cold War had the tendency to magnify these issues because, as mentioned, the local players were intent on attaching them to the Cold War framework if only to gain access to valuable resources from the big players. As such, with the Cold War having ended, it seems high time to reassess national or intra-regional issues in Southeast Asia that were once thought of having the Cold War imprint, which is the overall message of *Cold War Southeast Asia*.

Does the Cold War framework for studying Southeast Asian history from the late 1940s–1948 to be precise—to the 1980s hold water? Yes, it does, albeit in a limited capacity. National and regional security was a common agenda for Southeast Asian nations and the major players of the Cold War. Southeast Asian history during the period mentioned can be written from the perspective of national and regional security, thus can be influenced by the Cold War framework. But as seen from *Cold War Southeast Asia*, the question of national and regional security can also be framed using the lens of border issues, ethnic conflicts, decolonization, even party politics, among others, with the ideological or geopolitical confrontations embedded in the Cold War as a secondary issue.

Cold War Southeast Asia is a promising start toward a reassessment or scrutiny of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. It opens a lot of doors to further research not just by historians of the region but also by international relations (IR) practitioners. My only concern stemming from the way the book was structured is that greater emphasis seems to have been given to national or limited-regional (i.e., Malaysia and Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, Thailand and Laos, Cambodia and Laos) rather than broader regional issues. This may be due to the reality that national or limited-regional issues were more vital than broader regional issues such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in the context of a reassessed Cold War in Southeast Asia.

I am suspicious that this treatment reflects the deeper problem of Southeast Asia as a region. Does Southeast Asia as a whole region actually exist from a historical standpoint? Or has *Cold War Southeast Asia* helped prove that Southeast Asia as a region is just a sum of all the parts? The Cold War framework was something that could have tied the entire region together historically. But as *Cold War Southeast Asia* has shown, rather than being the focal point of regional history, the Cold War seemed to be a sideshow in national history. If *Cold War Southeast Asia* is to be used as an indicator of sorts, the only way to view Southeast Asia as a whole region is if it is seen from the perspective of the major Cold War players: the United States–initiated SEATO (in Brian Farrell’s essay) and the United States Army (in Brian Linn’s chapter).

Was there no way to emphasize the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which the Southeast Asia nations themselves organized, for instance, as the lynchpin for postcolonial Southeast Asian history even in the context of the Cold War? The ASEAN was mentioned briefly in Ricardo Jose’s chapter on the Philippines and in Dewi Fortuna Anwar’s essay on Indonesia (as well as in the introduction and the concluding essay), but it was never sustained as a subject in the whole book. The ASEAN, established in 1967 during the height of the Cold War, certainly should not have been ignored, especially if the purpose is to support the existence of a regional history.—VICENTE ANGEL S. YBIERNAS, *DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY.*

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