

*The EU–Thailand Relations: Tracing the Patterns of New Bilateralism* by CHAIYAKORN KIATPONGSAN. Monographs #5, International Institute for Asian Studies (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010). ISBN 978 90 8964 164 9 (soft)

Within global and regional contexts, EU–Thailand relations can be traced back for centuries. Their bilateral cooperation has been broadened and deepened in most key areas. In recent decades, bilateral cooperation has ranged from trade and investment to political, socio-cultural and developmental cooperation.

A shift from a traditional donor–recipient relationship to the framework of the EU–ASEAN Cooperation Agreement to ensure an effective environment for trade and investment relations, and an upgraded Partnership and Cooperation Agreement has characterized the efforts of both parties during the past few years. The efforts have incorporated all key areas of EU policies as well as those of Thailand into consideration. This is particularly in the realms of economic relations, scientific and technological cooperation and education. Those areas of cooperation have so far been reflected clearly in the latest (2007–2013) version of the EU–Thailand cooperation strategy.

Based on the above notions, this book, which covers the 1997–2007 period of EU–Thailand relations, should contribute to a better understanding of the shifting policy and pattern of their relations during that time, while paving the way for a better

understanding of their relations thereafter from the perspective of the latest EU–Thailand cooperation strategy.

One might argue that this book also serves well as background for students in International Relations to acquire a practical understanding of the theoretical framework of the new bilateralism since it began almost three decades ago. Against the notion that new bilateralism was firstly introduced from the perspective of interaction between two individual nations, the author attempts to look at it from the perspective of that between a region and a nation state.

Among the six chapters of the book, chapters IV and V are mostly recommended for IR students to explore in detail, since the author relies on a two-level scheme of analysis, namely the unit level and the systemic level, in order to identify the pattern of the 1997–2007 EU–Thailand relations.

At the unit level, the author interestingly draws upon three major schools of international relations, namely, realism, liberalism, and social constructivism. At the systemic level, the author draws upon neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism while relying upon Ruland’s set of inter-regionalism functions to analyze the interplay between bilateralism and multilateralism and the implications of the 1997–2007 EU–Thailand relations. To do so, these five functions are investigated: balancing, institution-building, rationalizing, agenda-setting, and identity-building.

While scrutiny of economic and political relations during the period of investigation is the strength of this study,

the book is expected to help improve understanding among IR students, as well as practitioners of foreign policy making, if the following are provided therein:

1. Comprehensive analysis of the connection between the unit and systemic levels of the EU–Thailand relations.

2. Scrutiny of EU–Thailand development cooperation beyond higher education, which serves as an example of post-development cooperation. This would help in validating the author's arguments in the last paragraph of chapter IV.

3. Explanation of why the study particularly focuses on the five functions of inter-regionalism in such an analysis of the relations between a region and a nation state: balancing, institution-building, rationalizing, agenda-setting, and identity-building.

Based on the findings of the study, one can hardly deny that the recent foreign policy pursued by both parties reflects a gradual change in the structure of their domestic interests and in their motivation. Yet, the author needs to cautiously elaborate further on the following notions in his conclusions:

1. The notion on a very high degree of pragmatism raised on the last paragraph of page 232;

2. The concepts of soft balancing and institutional balancing on page 234.

Such supplementary efforts would help augmenting the flavor of his interesting concluding part on the implication of the EU–Thailand relations, from the perspective of whether the new bilateralism is more of

a building block or a stumbling block.

It is quite true when the author maintains in his final conclusion that an investigation into EU–Thailand relations remains unfinished, given significant developments that have been going on since 2007. While the current EU–Thailand relations can also be understood from a number of other lenses of social sciences besides international relations, it is worth further exploring the explanatory power of the new bilateralism in a more comprehensive manner of the relations between the EU as a region and a nation state of ASEAN.

This is particularly the case when one is looking forward to the following:

1. EU–Thai cooperation strategy beyond the period 2007–2013;

2. The role of human resources or people as a new and strategic driving force towards upgraded competitiveness of both the EU and each ASEAN member country;

3. An ASEAN Community, which based upon these three pillars: ASEAN Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

Patcharawalai Wongboonsin

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