

THE CONCEPT OF SIMULTANEOUS CONTRADICTIONS AND ASIA PACIFIC REGIONALISM

Alma Maria Ocampo Salvador
University of the Philippines

About the Author

Alma Maria Ocampo Salvador obtained her Masters in International Studies from the University of the Philippines. She is Assistant Professor of Political Science and teaches courses in international relations, politics and governance, and environmental policy. She is a member of the UP community-based Coastal Resource Management Resource Center where she pursues an advocacy in participatory resource management, also a central theme of an ongoing doctoral dissertation. Her publications include studies on local governance, environmental politics, and local participation.

Keywords

globalization, political economy

Editor's Note

This article is a review of Joseph Camilleri's *Regionalism in the New Asia-Pacific Order: The Political Economy of the Asia Pacific Region*.

The Asia Pacific region is considered one of the most promising regional blocs this side of the world. It is emerging as a region of sub-regions made up of both developing and advanced economies and states. Today the region that is called Asia Pacific or Pacific Asia is bounded by the Oceania, the United States (US), Canada, Japan, South Korea, ASEAN (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand), China, Hong Kong, Chinese Taipei, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, and Chile.

Camilleri's book is a contribution to the literature on the contradictions of globalization and its unintended consequences—which among others include the flourishing of regional formations. The value of the book lies on the author's way of organizing and framing the events that surround Asia Pacific regionalization as a unique example of integration. In contrast to the European Union (EU), Camilleri argues, the phenomenon of regionalization in Asia Pacific is taking place at a time when bipolarity, the period when some of the earlier regional formations such as the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have been formed, yields to interconnectivity and yet, does not become an impediment to regionalization.

To put it more succinctly, the author's main argument rests on the contrasts and contradictions of the Asia Pacific regionalism experience as he considers the dimensions of diversity of membership, ideological attributes, political development of constituent states, and the globalization context. By choosing to situate the analysis of Asia Pacific regionalism in the idea of a globalizing environment, Camilleri is able to set apart the phenomenon in Asia Pacific from cold war regionalism, such as that of the European Union, which initially built itself from the European Coal and Steel Community in order to contain communism. Related to this is what the author sees as a contrast between the basic assumptions of integration theories (which have been patterned after the EU experience) and a "different brand of multilateralism" that the current Asia Pacific phenomenon represents. Camilleri thus argues that the Asia Pacific model is a veering away from theoretical templates and historic reality.

Thus, the author's conceptual frame of regionalism in globalization highlights the elements of contradictions that define the globalizing world. The first of these contradictions is derived mainly from how politically and economically interconnected environments ironically breed regionalism. According to Camilleri, the global environment does not in fact impede regionalism—a thinking that is already anchored on existing arguments framed along the lines of globalization theories. What appears to be novel in the author's view of regionalism is the way he expounds on the concept of simultaneous contradictions taking place in the larger global environment and in the Asia Pacific region itself.

In order to do this, Camilleri transposes certain elements found among precursor theories of integration against the experience of Asia Pacific regionalism. He looks at a number of things. The first of these is the ingredient of external threat (i.e., of communism) as a major incentive for community building. The EU was originally inspired by a common desire to prevent the spread of communism; Asia Pacific regionalism, however, is happening in a highly interconnected world. Second, Western European integration was conditioned by plural and democratic environments. While both the EU and NATO were formed mainly to showcase peaceful foreign policies and democracies allied to the US, the regionalism in Asia Pacific is a "mosaic" of differing ideologies and governments. And third, the earlier form of EU integration was conditioned by member states with complimentary interests; in contrast, Asia Pacific today is made up of ASEAN, Oceania, Northeast Asia, and regional powers, US, Japan, China, and Australia. For the author, it is the element of divergence and contest as opposed to complementarity that conditions Asia Pacific regionalism.

Obviously, Camilleri describes the phenomenon of the Asia Pacific regionalism as a contradiction of sorts and in the book constructs a conceptual frame based on regional versus global as the best way to capture this phenomenon. These contradictions are heightened by what the author views as an emergent decentered environment in which networks of actors and non-states overlap. The author examines multi-tiered forms of multilateralism in Asia Pacific which includes ASEAN, the APEC which is a loose forum for economic dialogue, the business advisory group Pacific Business Forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Eminent Persons Group, and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific among others. The author also examines the non-formal institutional innovations of the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asia Growth Area or the BIMP-EAGA, the Indonesia Malaysia Thailand Growth Triangle, and the West-East Corridor of the Mekong River of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

Camilleri's framework is thus a resonance of the basic arguments of globalist writers. What he fails to emphasize, however, is that the European Union experience is totally unlike that of the Asia Pacific primarily because, in theoretical and practical terms, the EU has proceeded and committed to furthering objectives beyond community building in order to achieve integration. This was achieved mainly by a long and tedious process of transferring loyalties from territorial states to a federal entity—a process that may not at all be evident from both previous and ongoing experiences and from the intentions of member states in Asia Pacific. In fact, what possibly prevents this from further occurring is the contradictory nature of regionalism in Asia Pacific itself.

But as Camilleri succeeds in providing his readers with another way of appraising the elements and contradictions of globalization, his work also lends the Filipino reader a necessary respite from the chaos of contemporary domestic politics. The work is surely another way of appreciating the importance of the region—not only politico-economically but culturally. The book also yields a further appreciation of our work as Asians and Southeast Asians and as a nation interested in promoting the formation of a more inclusive community of states and perhaps of cultures and groups in Asia Pacific. If we Filipinos can show the international community our relative power as a small member state of an emerging region, i.e., the ASEAN, then our activities in ASEAN in Asia Pacific cannot be overlooked.