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Redrawing Regionalism: Southeast Asian Responses to Globalization in a Post-Cold War World

Following the decline in theory and practice in the 1970s, regionalism both revived and changed dramatically in the 1980s and has gained strength in the 1990s. Regionalism today is emerging as a potent force in the globalization process. If globalization is understood to mean the compression of the time and space aspects of social relations, then regionalism may be regarded as but one component of globalization. In this sense, regionalism is a chapter of globalization. But regionalism may also be a response or a challenge to globalization.

Thus, the central questions that frame this study are: Is regionalism merely a way station toward neoliberal globalization or a means toward a more pluralistic world order in which distinct patterns of socioeconomic organization coexist and compete for popular support? What forms does this dialectic take? What is the analytical key to understanding the evolving linkages between these multifaceted processes? In answers to these questions, regionalist processes may best be understood as arenas for contestation among rival forces from above and from below, gaining and losing ground in different parts of the world as the intensity increases. In an emerging post-Cold War configuration marked by globalizing tendencies, there are multiple (sometimes overlapping) regional projects, detailed below: the autocentric, development, neoliberal, degenerate, and transformative forms.

The point of entry to the top-down/bottom-up distinction, central to deriving these types, is the "new regionalism" approach, an important advance over the different versions of integration theory (trade or market integration, functionalism and neofunctionalism, institutionalism and neo-institutionalism, etc.). While this is not the place to rehearse a critique of each variant, all of them are deficient inasmuch as they understate power relations, deal inadequately or not at all with production, and fail to offer an explanation of structural transformation. In some ways a break with this tradition, the new regionalism approach explores contemporary forms of transnational cooperation and cross-border flows through comparative, historical, and multilevel perspectives. Building on this foundation, I try to provide the conceptual framework for addressing the new regional realities in a coherent and analytical manner. This article stakes out the postulates that constitute the new regionalism approach, critically evaluates the literature, and extends the theoretical framework to include neglected dimensions. The architecture of the new regionalism is incomplete without analysis of the interactions between (1) ideas and their ties to institutions, (2) systems of production,

(3) labor supply, and (4) sociocultural institutions, all undergirded by (5) power relations.

Although the discussion here is primarily at a conceptual level, it is supported by illustrations from my fieldwork in Southeast Asia and southern Africa in 1991 and 1993. These subregions provide a sound basis for comparison, one being a key node in the world's most dynamic regional economy (the Asia-Pacific sphere), the other representing an increasingly marginalized zone (sub-Saharan Africa). By drawing on the experiences of Southeast Asia and southern Africa, this essay suggests some of the interactions between different levels of regionalism - macroregionalism, subregionalism, and microregionalism, to be defined below - and with the Westphalian state system.

I first examine the concept of the new regionalism and then challenge the Eurocentric scenario. In the third section I identify key actors and patterns of institutionalization under divergent conditions. Next is a discussion of relationships between the aforementioned elements missing from the extant theoretical framework. Although this essay cannot provide a fully elaborated alternative conceptualization, it will point toward a reformulation of the new regionalism thesis.

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