

Contents

- Introduction by Anne L. Foster, Indiana State University
- Review by Laura M. Calkins, Texas Tech University
- Review by Balázs Szalontai, Mongolia International University
- Review by Nicholas Tarling, New Zealand Asian Institute, The University of Auckland
- Review by Robert H. Taylor, City University of Hong Kong
- Author’s Response by Ang Cheng Guan, National Institute of Education, Singapore

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A large and problematic gap has existed in the vast literature exploring the First and Second Indochina Wars. Ang Cheng Guan has stepped up to begin to fill that gap with his examination of the ways in which the Second Indochina War shaped foreign relations of other states in Southeast Asia. He is among a handful of scholars in the world qualified to take on this important but vast task, having previously published several studies on Vietnamese perspectives of the war as well as on Indonesia’s foreign relations in this time period. *Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War* is a beginning, one which suggests many new research possibilities and which reminds us of the difficulties of conducting that research.

Ang’s task was not a simple one. He laments in the introduction that “there is still no sign that Southeast Asian governments are considering making documents of the Cold War years accessible to scholars” (1) and describes his creative research strategies for trying to piece together the policy process. Balázs Szalontai praises Ang’s “extensive use of U.S. archival documents” to discover much about internal Southeast Asian policy debates. Ang also has mastered the record of public speeches, memoirs, and interviews of Southeast Asian political leaders, allowing him to follow nuanced changes in presentation and approach. He explains that in most Southeast Asian countries foreign policy is made by a handful of top officials with little input from parliaments or the public, and cites this practice as another hindrance to research. Nicholas Tarling notes how the absence of knowledge about the process is a problem: “not knowing the options canvassed is a serious deprivation for the historian.” Historians of foreign relations are a bit spoiled, however, in the primary sources available to them. Rarely do historians in other subfields get sources which provide the “options canvassed” and the minutes of meetings at which those options were discussed. Future scholars will build on the careful reconstructions Ang has been able to do, and to use techniques of interpretation familiar to social and cultural historians, as well as newly revealed documentation to extend the analysis.

The title of the book suggests it treats the entire region of Southeast Asia, but the focus is on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The Philippines and Thailand also receive substantial attention, while Burma is relatively neglected. Robert Taylor disputes Ang’s claim that the “paucity of sources” (118) meant Burma could not be included. Taylor notes that a “few days’ search” in British and U.S. records “would have revealed that Burma’s position was much the same as the other regional states which were not militarily involved in Vietnam.” Burma had a “tacit near alliance” with the United States as “an insurance policy should China become a serious threat to the country,” and Ne Win, Burma’s leader, had personal relationships with many U.S. and non-communist Southeast Asian leaders. Burma’s foreign policy in this time period would be difficult to research, but Taylor’s comments suggest that a full understanding of regional politics in the 1960s and 1970s requires greater attention to the role of Burma.

Regretful as the neglect of Burma is, the primary focus on Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore is welcome, as is the inclusion at some points of the Philippines and Thailand.
Ang is largely interested in the ways in which Southeast Asian countries attempted to navigate a precarious anti-communist neutrality. Since the Philippines and Thailand were allied with the United States, their interest to Ang comes primarily as they attempt to move away from that alliance, and to forge stronger bonds with other non-communist Southeast Asian countries. Laura Calkins comments that “invasion [by China] remained Thailand’s principal fear” leading that country to strongly back U.S. efforts in South Vietnam. But as the U.S. commitment waned after 1968, the Thais began to have second thoughts and Calkins notes, “had moved to hedge their bets” by 1971, in part by greater participation in regional cooperation. Calkins also argues that the Philippines was a “more complex problem” for the United States in this era “than its reputation for providing enormous, open facilities for U.S. forces at Subic Bay and Clark Air Base would suggest.” The discussion in Ang’s book of this process of moving from close ally to friend at arm’s length is tantalizingly brief. The sources for expanding that discussion do likely exist, especially for the Philippines.

The heart of the book is the developing policies of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, and for scholars in the United States especially, this contribution is invaluable. Szalontai finds that Ang’s “analysis of Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean reactions to the war breaks completely new ground.” The careful attention to the relationship between external and internal security concerns in these three countries, which all felt threatened by the People’s Republic of China, internal subversive movements, and sometimes each other, in the context of the Second Indochina War reveals the complexities of the foreign relations of these new countries. The voluble Lee Kuan Yew speaks his mind throughout, and while his predictions about the dire consequences for the region if South Vietnam collapsed proved not prescient, he also bluntly stated what others only hinted at. Many in Southeast Asia welcomed the U.S. fight in Vietnam. Indonesia’s efforts, especially led by Adam Malik, to become the region’s leader are also well treated. Malaysia’s foreign policy appears the most carefully balanced in the region, concerned about internal communism as well as Indonesia and the PRC, and finding a solution in modest support for the United States but also relatively early openness to the Soviet Union. The book is at its best when carefully examining the developing style of Southeast Asian regionalism at the Jakarta Conference in 1970, or exploring the perceptions of threat posed by communism, whether from the Soviet Union and PRC or from domestic communist parties.

Taylor called the book “slender but informative.” Its brevity may make it more accessible to non-specialists and graduate students, but means also that it leaves specialists wanting more. Sadly, the number of typographical and other errors is so high that all reviewers called attention to them. The history introduced here is so fascinating that it is sure to prompt other scholars, and we can hope Ang Cheng Guan himself, to continue working in this now more familiar but still understudied field.
Participants:


Laura M. Calkins holds a PhD in the Modern International History of Asia from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. She is an Assistant Professor of International History at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, and is the co-author, with Richard Burks Verrone, of *Voices from Vietnam: Eyewitness Accounts of the War, 1954-75* (2005). Recently, in 2010, she has published "Detained and Drugged: A Brief Overview of the Use of Pharmaceuticals for the Interrogation of Suspects, Prisoners, Patients, and POWs," in *Bioethics* 24 (1), 27-34, and her article on "Patrolling the Ether: US-UK Open Source Intelligence Cooperation and the BBC’s Emergence as an Intelligence Agency, 1939-1948" is forthcoming in the journal *Intelligence and National Security*. She is currently writing a book manuscript on Sino-Viet Minh relations in the 1947-52 period.

Anne L. Foster teaches History at Indiana State University. She is the author of *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941* (Duke University Press, 2010). She recently has published articles in *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* and *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* about her current research project, a comparative study of opium policies in late colonial Southeast Asia.

Balázs Szalontai is Assistant Professor at Mongolia International University in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Having received a Ph.D. in Soviet and Korean history, he has done archival research on the modern history of North Korea, the USSR, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, and Mongolia. His publications include *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964* (Stanford University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), and peer-reviewed articles on Vietnamese domestic and foreign policies. His current research projects are focused on the Korean War, Indochinese-ASEAN relations, North Korea’s involvement in the Vietnam War, and DPRK-Middle Eastern relations.

Formerly Professor of History at the University of Auckland, Nicholas Tarling has been Fellow of its New Zealand Asia Institute since he retired in 1997. He was editor of the *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*. His most recent works include *Britain and the West New Guinea Dispute, 1949-1962* (Lampeter: Mellen, 2008); *History Boy: A Memoir* (Wellington: Dunmore, 2009); and *Southeast Asia and the Great Powers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).
Robert H. Taylor is currently Visiting Professor in the Department of Asian and International Studies, City University of Hong Kong. Formerly he was Professor of Politics in the University of London, Pro-Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buckingham. He is a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore. His publications include *The State in Myanmar* (2009), *The Foreign and Domestic Consequences of the KMT Intervention in Burma* (1973) and many other scholarly works. Currently he is researching a biography of General Ne Win, the former dictator of Burma.
Scholarly examinations of the Vietnam War during the 1961-75 era, even in works that deal primarily with the history of international relations, have rarely ventured beyond the Saigon-Hanoi-Washington axis. In Ang Chen Guan’s latest book, *Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War* (Routledge: Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia, 2000), we have a compelling work which takes us well beyond these traditional scholarly confines to explore the regional political and security implications for Southeast Asia countries of the period of the American War in Vietnam.

Indonesia’s complex history during the period 1965-66 is dealt with in sufficient detail to allow readers to see the sharp turnaround from the communist-influenced Sukarno period when U.S. involvement in South Vietnam was seen as a threat, to the post-abortive coup period when Indonesia actually suspended diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China in October 1967. At this point, Ang reveals, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Adam Malik approached the U.S. with news that although its non-aligned status would require a public condemnation of such moves, in fact Indonesia “would understand” if the U.S. undertook further escalation of the war against Hanoi or the deployment of troops into Cambodia (50). Although differently arranged, Malaysia also offered its support for the developing war in South Vietnam, providing direct police, counter-insurgency and administrative training to officers from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) as early as 1961 (30). Political support was also forthcoming after the end in 1966 of the ‘Confrontation’ with Indonesia, but it was support of a kind, always couched in terms of the threat from China. Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman stated in September 1966, for example, that without American military support all of Southeast Asia would ‘fall’ to the communists, and that the role of external communist powers, notably North Vietnam, in aiding the insurgents in South Vietnam demanded more publicity and public attention (31). After the 1968 Tet Offensive, and looking ahead to the U.S. Presidential election later that year, Malaysia may have sensed a shift coming. According to Ang, fear that mainland Southeast Asia would become vulnerable to communist invasion – that is, a fundamental belief in the basic formula of the domino theory – led Malaysia to open diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union; after all, the USSR was espousing ‘peaceful coexistence’ while China, beset by the turmoil of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was bent on exporting revolution. Interestingly, Malaysia used the new opening to Moscow to put forward the suggestion that since Kuala Lumpur “supported US action to reduce bombing, ... Moscow [should] persuade Hanoi to reciprocate” (56).

Also supportive of American policy, albeit to a much greater degree, was Thailand. The Thais helped to broker the 1966 agreement which formally brought the communist-backed Indonesian-Malaysian ‘Confrontation’ to an end, and at the same time began offering clear assistance to the Americans in South Vietnam. Thailand’s role in this regard was unambiguous. During the 1950s “Thailand clearly saw itself as the next domino,” Ang asserts, and he moves on to marshal evidence of what this perception demanded of Thai foreign policy (18). As early as 1961, following the crisis in Laos, Thailand was concerned that the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) would be less than effective in the...
event of overt communist aggression in the region, and it quickly sought tighter ties with
the U.S., becoming the “‘unofficial and disguised base of operations for the United States in
Southeast Asia.’” (19). Thailand certainly had its concerns about internal subversion as
well, both by pro-Communist ethnic Vietnamese networks in the northeast and by the long-
running insurgency on the Thai-Malaysian border.

But invasion remained Thailand’s principal fear, and it was willing to back both South
Vietnam and the United States to stave off such an eventuality. The author points to
Thailand’s deployment to South Vietnam of a small training contingent from the Royal Thai
Air Force in September 1964 (pp. 19-20), and then to its 1967 dispatch of the ‘Queen’s
Cobra’ combat battalion (51). After the Tet Offensive and President Johnson’s decisions to
implement a bombing halt over North Vietnam, to offer peace talks, and to forego
participation in the 1968 U.S. Presidential election, of all the allies assembled by the U.S.
only Thailand was willing to send additional troops, deploying the ‘Black Panther Division’
force in July 1968 (pp. 51-52). This did not mean Thailand had no concerns. The Tet
Offensive and Johnson’s decisions in March 1968 fueled fears that the peace talks would
legitimize the Communist-led National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam and that
the Tet Offensive would push the U.S., riven by domestic dissent over the war, to withdraw
as a world power. After years of supporting several large U.S. Air Force units at major bases
in north central Thailand, providing border monitoring, maintaining troops in the field in
South Vietnam, and offering rest and recreation facilities for American troops, Thailand
balked at the idea of giving territorial recognition to the NLF, remembering that the Pathet
Lao had been awarded whole provinces in the 1954 Geneva Conference Accords. By 1971,
the Thais had moved to hedge their bets by expanding their dialogue with the Soviet Union,
seeking as much assistance from the U.S. as their provision of bases and other support
could garner, and turning toward other regional states, notably Malaysia, to work toward a
unified solution to the problem of great power presence (and absence) in Southeast Asia
(99-100).

The policy of the Philippines emerges in this study as a more complex problem for the
United States and South Vietnam than its reputation for providing enormous, open facilities
for U.S. forces at Subic Bay and Clark Air Base would suggest. Although the Philippines
provided an engineering and civic development group, known as ‘PHILCAG’, to South
Vietnam, it did so reluctantly in 1966 under newly-elected President Ferdinand Marcos.
The venture caused strains from the very start. The author recounts that the dispatch of the
unit was so “controversial... that Marcos instructed that the troops departed [sic] for
Vietnam in the early morning hours as quietly as possible and without publicity” (35).
PHILCAG and its operations remained a contentious issue in Filipino domestic policy:
squabbling over the size and costs of the unit and the type of actions in which it
participated continued until its abrupt dismantlement -- without prior notice to the US or
other allied forces -- in November 1969. In this work Marcos appears as a crusty,
meddlesome, problematic ally. After urging Kissinger to open secret negotiations with
Hanoi outside the context of the Paris Peace Talks, Marcos himself, the author notes, “tried
to establish contact with the North Vietnamese communists in Paris in the vain hope to
facilitate a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam War (69).”
Perhaps the strongest element of the book is its presentation of the positions and statements of Singapore’s ‘strong man’ Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. In 1965 Lee greeted the deployment of U.S. combat forces to South Vietnam with a statement claiming that the American policy would help in “safeguarding the island-state’s fragile independence” (27). Other regional leaders may have thought along these lines, but Lee was the most vocal regional champion of American involvement in the war. According to Ang, the evidence suggests three fundamental reasons for this. First, Lee wanted to see actual steps taken by a world power actively to contain expansionist Chinese radicalism in Southeast Asia during the Cultural Revolution era. He also specifically wanted to prevent such revolutionary upheaval from infecting Singapore’s largely ethnic Chinese population. Further, Lee wanted some non-Chinese replacement for the “vacuum” that would prevail as Britain made clear its intention to withdraw completely (apart from Hong Kong) from Southeast Asia; if China filled that vacuum, Lee calculated, it could mean the end to Singapore’s independence within a matter of years (30). For Singapore, American’s projection of military power into Southeast Asia was a relief because it helped address all three concerns in the post-’Confrontation’ period. Once American troops were committed in force, Lee was also a vocal proponent of their continuing presence in South Vietnam. For example, in June 1967 Lee declared that if the U.S. were to withdraw from Vietnam, “there could only be a communist Chinese solution to Asia’s problems” (44-45). Lee continued making similar speeches on the future dynamics of Southeast Asia in destinations as varied as Washington, London and Cambodia, as well as in Singapore itself.

Ang indicates, however, that Lee Kuan Yew’s position was anything but uni-dimensional. While supporting the American military presence in South Vietnam, he was also prepared to openly criticize U.S. bombing tactics, personnel rotation policies for officers, and troop deployments around the Mekong River delta (47). He also raised questions about the United States’ willingness to remain in Vietnam because of the racial composition of the U.S., noting that most of the population was white and essentially Atlanticist, and might lack the resolve for an Asian land war (48). If the U.S. pulled out, Lee – a keen adherent of a late 1960s version of the domino theory – argued not only that Laos and Cambodia would ‘fall’ to communism, but also that no Communist invasion of Thailand would be necessary because the Thais, who had offered so much substantive support for the U.S. military effort in South Vietnam, would ‘switch sides’ and “take the first plane to Peking” (47-48).

The book devotes a full chapter to the little-studied “Jakarta Conference” of 1970, a meeting which invited the leaders of 21 countries including India, China, North Korea, North Vietnam and the countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to consider the problems of the continuing war in Indochina. Before the conference opened in mid-May, South Vietnamese forces supported by American troops and air support crossed the border into Cambodia with the objective of destroying the communist sanctuaries that had been developing there for years. This incursion greatly complicated the preparatory arrangements and came to dominate the work of the Conference, which the author describes as “the first attempt to realize the slogan ‘Asian solutions to Asian problems’ (87). Such solutions were also very much on the minds of the communists in Vietnam, and the author notes that later in 1970, after the Allied troops had withdrawn, the sanctuary zones were reinforced and a new wave of attacks on Cambodian government forces was launched.
by the communists, who “destroyed 40 enemy battalions under Lon Nol and widened the liberated areas” (88).

This study presents important new layers to our understanding of the international consequences of the American military intervention in South Vietnam. It discusses Southeast Asian reactions to and policies toward both the early years of U.S. advisors in the Kennedy era and Nixon’s Sino-American rapprochement and the Paris Peace Accords, finally ending with the conclusion of the Vietnam War in 1975. It is essential reading for historians of the Vietnam conflict and for students of the modern international history of Asia. Apart from unfortunate typographical errors, this slim but densely documented volume is an invaluable corrective to the notion, cultivated by the vast literature on the Vietnam War, that this conflict should be defined principally as an American war. The analysis presented here makes clear that the repercussions for regional countries expanded well beyond mainland Southeast Asia, and it contextualizes American policy in the complex dynamics of a very complex region.
This book investigates a subject that has hardly, if at all, been covered in the immense literature on the Vietnam War: the Southeast Asian angle of that conflict. True, in recent times a few scholars, most notably Robert M. Blackburn and Gary R. Hess, did analyze the participation of Thailand and the Philippines in the war, but their research was focused on Washington’s efforts to bring “more flags” to Vietnam, rather than the motivations and perceptions of Manila and Bangkok.\(^1\) In contrast, Ang Cheng Guan’s monograph shows the war from the perspective of the five founding members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Describing how and why the latter two countries became militarily involved in the conflict, the author adds various colorful details to the picture drawn by Blackburn and Hess, whereas his analysis of Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean reactions to the war breaks completely new ground.

In fact, Ang is exceptionally well qualified for writing a comprehensive and nuanced work on his chosen subject. A Singaporean scholar with a deep insight into the history and politics of the neighboring ASEAN states and with a long-standing research interest in Vietnamese Communist policies, he successfully integrates these two fields into a sophisticated synthesis.\(^2\) Moreover, his extensive use of U.S. archival documents considerably helps him in overcoming a formidable obstacle: the still-classified status of related primary sources in the various Southeast Asian countries.

Thanks to his impressive familiarity with the history of the various Southeast Asian guerrilla movements, Ang proves able to place the activities of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) in a far broader international context than most other historians have done. Citing Thai and Malaysian Communist publications, he throws light on the long-overlooked but highly important fact that in September 1961 – that is, at the same time when the NLF dramatically stepped up its military operations –, both the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) resolved to adopt a line of armed struggle, even if this required disciplinary measures against the intra-party proponents of a moderate policy. These notable coincidences seem to have been

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rooted in “the close cooperation of Siamese, Lao, Vietnamese and Chinese Communist parties” (11) and the financial support which China started to provide to the CPM at that time. In fact, the memoirs of CPM leader Chin Peng reveal that his party adopted a militant strategy primarily “to accommodate Beijing and Hanoi and their Indochina aspiration” (11).

The simultaneous militant shift in post-1961 Vietnamese, Thai and Malaysian Communist policies deserves particular attention, all the more so because it can be interpreted in radically different ways. From one perspective, it seemingly justifies the opinion of those U.S. policy-makers who, under the influence of the Domino Theory, regarded the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam as yet another manifestation of Chinese expansionism, rather than a problem confined to Vietnam and caused primarily by local factors. By dispatching troops to Vietnam – so this argument goes –, Washington sought not only to protect the RVN from North Vietnamese aggression but also to prevent China from taking over the whole of Southeast Asia by means of subversion. A number of local anti-Communist politicians certainly saw the situation in that light. For instance, in June 1967 Lee Kuan Yew declared that “if American power were withdrawn [from Vietnam], there could only be a communist Chinese solution to Asia’s problems” (44-45). While these perceptions of Chinese expansionism were considerably exaggerated, Beijing’s determination to extend the guerrilla war to Thailand and Malaysia indicates that in 1961, the catastrophe caused by the Great Leap Forward did not discourage the CCP leaders from pursuing confrontative policies in Southeast Asia to such an extent as some authors have asserted.  

The other side of the coin is that if the actions of the Thai and Malaysian Communist parties were closely linked to the events in South Vietnam, so were the post-1957 policies of the Thai and Malaysian governments. The related publications of Daniel Fineman, Arne Kislenko, Danny Wong Tze-Ken and others, most of which are cited by Ang, reveal that the start of Thai and Malaysian involvement in Indochina’s conflicts substantially predated the aforesaid shift in CPT and CPM strategies. For example, Thailand, having initially tolerated Viet Minh activities on its territory, eventually became one of the few Asian countries willing to recognize Bao Dai’s regime. In 1958, Thai pressure seems to have played a significant role in forcing the Pathet Lao out of the newly-formed coalition government in Laos, and Bangkok resorted to similar measures against Cambodia’s Norodom Sihanouk as well. Malaysia, for its part, began to provide training and other forms of assistance to South Vietnam’s military and security forces as early as 1959.  

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4 See, among others, Daniel Fineman, “Phibun, the Cold War, and Thailand’s Foreign Policy Revolution of 1950,” in Christopher E. Goscha and Christian Ostermann (eds.), Connecting Histories. Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford,
Malaysian governments, which Hanoi and Beijing must have regarded as hostile, probably influenced China’s decision to encourage the CPT and the CPM to launch an armed struggle. Remarkably, in Burma, where the non-Communist leadership made great efforts to cultivate friendly relations with the PRC and adopted a neutral stance during the Vietnam War, the local Communist party did not become fully committed to a strategy of all-out confrontation until 1967.\(^5\)

In his analysis of the factors which shaped the Southeast Asian countries’ attitudes toward the Vietnam War, Ang pays substantial attention to the events of the pre-1965 period, such as the Communist insurgencies in Malaya and the Philippines. Still, the fact that his narrative starts, by and large, in 1954, rather than 1945, may have somewhat hindered the author in illuminating the historical background of these attitudes. That is, the book does not describe how the individual countries reacted to the Franco-Vietnamese War (1946-1954), though their approach to that conflict considerably foreshadowed their post-1965 conduct. For instance, both Thailand and South Korea, which had recognized the Bao Dai regime in 1950, decided to send troops to the defense of the RVN, whereas Indonesia, which had not, allowed both the DRV and the NLF to maintain diplomatic representations in Jakarta, not only before but even after the 1965 coup.\(^6\)

Interestingly, the Southeast Asian leaders, despite their conviction that any serious American setback in Indochina was bound to adversely affect their countries, seem to have realized the limits of the Domino Theory. While only a few of them, such as Malaysian Foreign Minister Tan Sri Mohammad Ghazali Shafie, went so far as to openly question its assumptions, their readiness to seek a modus vivendi with Beijing and Hanoi after 1973 indicated that they did not overestimate the threat posed by the established Communist regimes. Another sign of their sophisticated understanding of the nature and extent of the Communist challenge was their critical assessment of the performance of the Saigon regime. In their talks with American diplomats and policy-makers, Lee Kuan Yew and Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik stressed not only the necessity of a firm U.S. commitment to the defense of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) but also the importance of

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\(^6\) On the importance of this issue, see Christopher E. Goscha, “Choosing between the Two Vietnams: 1950 and Southeast Asian Shifts in the International System,” in Goscha and Ostermann, *Connecting Histories*, 207-237.
raising the efficiency and popularity of the South Vietnamese political system. "Only modern social policies and rapid economic development can banish the danger of Communism," Singaporean Foreign Minister Sinnathamby Rajaratnam pointed out (58). C.C. Too, a Malaysian psy-war expert, became so frustrated by the inability of his South Vietnamese counterparts to put into practice the lessons of Malaysia’s successful counter-insurgency campaign that he declared "he would not go back to South Vietnam unless directly ordered to do so" (43).

The Southeast Asian leaders showed similar astuteness in taking advantage of the rivalries between the various Communist powers. In the late 1960s, Malaysia and Singapore sought a rapprochement with the USSR in order to counter the growth of Chinese influence, for they perceived Moscow as being less inclined to resort to aggressive actions against Southeast Asia than Beijing. In 1975, barely a month after the fall of Saigon, Lee Kuan Yew foresaw that “Cambodia would be the arena of a struggle between Beijing and Hanoi” (108), while the Thai government went so far as to directly seek Chinese support against Vietnam.

Nevertheless, disagreements and disputes occurred not only between the Communist powers but also between the members of ASEAN. The U.S. diplomatic documents studied by Ang recorded some rather critical comments which Lee Kuan Yew made regarding his fellow ASEAN leaders during his conversations with American policy-makers. Among others, in 1967 he acidly remarked that if the U.S. decided to disengage from Vietnam, “the Thais, which [sic] he described as ‘the greatest anticipators of history,’ would bring in a new set of leaders who would ‘take the first plane to Peking’” (47). Similar differences of opinion appeared between Malaysia and its southern neighbors in the early 1970s when Kuala Lumpur decided to go ahead with its policy of seeking rapprochement with China, no matter whether Jakarta and Singapore acted likewise or not.

Ang’s colorful description of intra-ASEAN tensions deserves particular attention, all the more so because the declassified Hungarian diplomatic reports I have read reveal that the Vietnamese Communist leaders were not only aware of this phenomenon but also ready to take advantage of it, much in the same way as ASEAN tried to play one Communist power against another.7 As the following episode demonstrates, disunity within ASEAN persisted even in the face of serious challenges to regional security: in July 1979, Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja told a Hungarian Communist diplomat with undisguised Schadenfreude how he and his Filipino counterpart, Carlos Romulo, managed to embarrass Rajaratnam at a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers that was supposed to discuss the recent wars between Vietnam, Cambodia and China. Kusumaatmadja went on to say that Indonesia had to be extremely careful not to offend the “phobias and sensitivities” of its

smaller ASEAN partners, but he was authorized by President Suharto “to put Rajaratnam in his place from time to time.”

Such intra-ASEAN disagreements also occurred during the Jakarta Conference (1970), at which the Southeast Asian countries discussed the situation that Lon Nol’s coup and the subsequent U.S. intervention had created in Cambodia. Since that conference has not been extensively analyzed in previous publications, and transcripts of the closed door discussions are still inaccessible, Ang’s efforts to fill this historiographical gap through the skillful use of U.S. archival documents are highly commendable. The intense attention he pays to the conference is fully justified, because the Cambodian crisis seems to have influenced North Vietnamese-ASEAN relations to a great extent. That is, the emergence of two rival Khmer governments – Lon Nol’s in Phnom Penh and Sihanouk’s in exile – pitted the ASEAN states (which recognized the former) and the Communist powers (which supported the latter) against each other, much in the same way as the proclamation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam was perceived by the non-Communist Southeast Asian countries as a challenge or even a threat.

To summarize the objectives and perspective of this book, one feels somewhat tempted to rename the title as “Southeast Asia and the American War” (the common Vietnamese name of the Second Indochina War). Focused as it is on how the ASEAN states viewed and evaluated Washington’s military and diplomatic actions in the Far East, Ang’s work does not cover South Vietnamese-ASEAN relations as extensively as, say, Danny Wong’s monograph, *Vietnam-Malaysian Relations During the Cold War*. Nevertheless, this partial omission is more than offset by the information provided about those steps of U.S. foreign policy whose effect was not confined to Vietnam, such as the process of Sino-American rapprochement, the gradual improvement of U.S.-Singaporean relations, or Washington’s reaction to the post-1965 political changes in Indonesia.

The bibliography of the book is admirably comprehensive. It encompasses most of the monographs written on this subject, though one might add a few more works to the list. In contrast, the index is very short and in some cases embarrassingly incomplete or inaccurate. For instance, it contains only a single reference to Burma (118), though the author also mentions that country on pages 59 and 72; fails to include certain names, such

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as Spiro Agnew, Jiang Jieshi and Nguyen Cao Ky, which repeatedly appear in the book; omits the first names of some individuals, including Nehru, Magsaysay and Macapagal, but lists the others with their full names; and mentions a few names (Macapagal and Romulo) in misspelled form.
Ang Cheng Guan’s work has been focused on the Second Indo-China War, or what the Americans call the Vietnam War. On that there is, of course, a vast literature, much of it focused on the Americans. He has made a distinctive contribution through focusing on the Vietnamese. Three books cover Vietnamese Communist Relations with China and the Second Indo-China Conflict, 1956-1962 (1997), The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective (2002), and Ending the Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective (2004). His new book attempts as it were to cover a third side. What was the Southeast Asian context of the war? In particular, how was it viewed by states in the region? Outsiders have formed their opinion, usually in the form of the so-called ‘domino’ theory, though anyone who has played dominoes will always wonder what game President Eisenhower had in mind. But what were the views of those on the inside? And what account did the Americans take of them?

The former question is Ang’s main focus, but it is not surprising that it is sometimes dislodged by the second. It is, of course, interesting, and Ang offers some interesting answers. But the shifts in focus are largely explained by the nature of the source materials that he has at hand. His mentor, the late Ralph Smith, wrote his International History of the Vietnam War, sadly left incomplete by his early death, at a time when few archival sources were available. Since then, of course, documents have been released under the thirty-year rule that has become common in English-speaking and European countries, and some governments have engaged in large-scale publication, notably, of course, in the long-standing series Foreign Relations of the United States. But the example has not been followed in Southeast Asia.

Ang rightly laments the unavailability of Southeast Asian primary sources: “Although the Cold War ended more than a decade ago, there is still no sign that Southeast Asian governments are considering making documents of the Cold War years accessible to scholars, except perhaps in some cases on a very selective basis” (3). In the West, scholars turned to “subaltern history”, he argues, partly because there had supposedly been an over-emphasis on political and diplomatic history. In Southeast Asia, an emphasis on “subaltern history” was in part the result of the inability to undertake research into the history of foreign policy. Ang seeks to fill a gap by the only possible means, re-examining the published material, and, more important, utilising the archives that have been opened, even though they are those of ‘outside’ powers.

The result had, of course, to be less comprehensive than he hoped. In particular the Communist powers are not covered, nor Burma, given “the paucity of sources” (118). Ang focuses on “three ostensibly non-aligned countries”, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, and “the two troop contributing countries who were formal allies of the US”, the Philippines and Thailand. Each of his chapters covers a particular phase and deals with those five countries more or less serially.

There are other drawbacks in the course to which Ang has had to resort. Of some of them at least, the present reviewer has had his own experience when working on Southeast Asian regionalism. In almost every kind of historiography, we have to reckon with the motive or purpose of the writer or speaker: he or she is addressing another or others, trying to explain, persuade, justify. But we may also have to find a way through another channel of reportage.
What an ambassador cables back to the metropolis is what he or she sees fit to report of what was elicited from a foreign minister or from an official in a foreign office, and that was likely, even under the impact of the most skilled questioning, to be what was seen to be fit for foreign ears.

This material, though still valuable in itself and given extra value by the restriction of access to national archives, does not, of course, expose how policy has been made. For the Southeast Asian powers we lack most of what, say, the British Foreign Office documents so enticingly reveal: minutes and memoranda and epistolary exchanges that show what options were considered, what factors, domestic and foreign, were taken into account in choosing among them, who made the final decisions and on what basis. And not knowing the options canvassed is a serious deprivation for the historian, whose task is to depict men and women making choices or deciding that there were no alternatives to choose.

Another drawback might in a sense be described not in terms of the paucity of sources but of the reverse. For every embassy and legation in the region was doing the same thing, and what we may examine in the U.S. and the UK may be amplified by examining the archives in France, in Australia, in New Zealand, and in other countries whose archives are open. Ang has largely confined himself to archives in the U.S. and to a lesser extent Australia. Perhaps partly as a result, his book tends to become an account of the inter-action between the U.S. and the five countries on which he has concentrated.

The Singapore archives are closed, but Lee Kuan Yew, a frequent speaker and interlocutor of other leaders, is often quoted. The views he expresses shift a little as the war and the book move through their various phases, but he was consistent in the argument, later borrowed by others ex post facto, that the American commitment in Vietnam won time for other countries, such as Singapore, to consolidate. He was often critical of the forms that commitment took. How practical his own ideas were is questionable. Late in 1968, for example, he discussed American disengagement from the war with Henry Kissinger, and suggested the introduction of an international control group when US troops withdrew in order to ensure a fair election (60). Surely the DRVN would not have accepted that?

The book is full of worthwhile material and perceptive insights. There is too much evidence that the publishers – who have done a great deal for the study of modern Asia’s history and politics – are now economising on copy-editing and proof-reading.
Review by Robert H. Taylor, City University of Hong Kong

Ang Cheng Guan’s slender but informative study of the positions of the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore on the American war in Vietnam as well as Cambodia and Laos in the 1950s through the mid-1970s is a useful addition to the historiography of modern South East Asian diplomacy. While it contains no data that is likely to force a revision of most perceptions of the politics and policies of the regimes in question, it pulls together usefully in one place information not previously assembled so systematically.

The author points early on to a problem in writing this type of history in South East Asia. Governments remain loath to open up their archives and even though thirty-five years have passed since the end of the Vietnam War and the American withdrawal from the former Indochina, still there are figures alive and active in South East Asian politics from that period and they have the ability and the interest to keep sensitive materials out of the public domain. However, in addition to a number of published sources, the author has had access to both published and archival records of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australian governments and he has used these, indirect and second-hand as they may be, effectively.

The title of the volume is a bit misleading. While the author concentrates on the policies of the three known anti-Communist but pro-Western governments of South East Asia that did not send troops to fight along side the Americans, unlike Thailand and the Philippines which are mentioned where appropriate, the author has ignored the position of the one anti-Communist but neutralist government in the region, Burma. A more complete account would have strengthened by this inclusion. It is not completely accurate to contend, as the author does, that there are no sources on the Burmese position.

A few days’ search in the British Public Record Office and the United States National Archives would have revealed that Burma’s position was much the same as the other regional states which were not militarily involved in Vietnam. That is to say, like them, Burma’s foreign policy during that period was made by a very few persons, and increasingly by only General Ne Win as head of state and government. Moreover, while not wishing to become aligned in any formal and obvious sense with the United States in the Cold War, Burma was more than willing to concur in an American role in the region, just as its government never criticised the United States publicly as did other more obviously pro-Western regimes. Ne Win’s state visit to Washington in 1966 and very close personal relationship with certain American figures who were welcomed to Rangoon, including Senator Mike Mansfield and Ambassador Henry Byroade, underscored the tacit near alliance that Burma was will to countenance as an insurance policy should China become a serious threat to the country. Ne Win was also personally known and occasionally visited informally with the non-Communist South East Asian leaders but his relations with the Communist leaders of former French Indo-China were much more reserved.
The author might have brought more to the fore of the book that it was China, not Communism, which drove the policy perceptions of South East Asian leaders during the Cold War. Whether, when and why the countries of South East Asia established diplomatic relations with the giant to the north reveals something of their relationship with Beijing. Distance made for more calculated decisions allowing for time and interests to overcome ideology and naivety. Malaysia during the 1960s and 1970s comes out rather well in retrospect. There was a degree of detachment and consideration to the framing of its position on the part of Malaysian leaders. Indonesia does not appear, comparatively, as sagacious in the conduct of its foreign policy despite its size and changing relations with China and the West. “Blundering to find a role,” as Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik did in the wake of the ouster of Prince Sihanouk by General Lon Nol in Cambodia in March 1970, might be an apt description of Indonesia’s attempts to position itself in regional politics after the fall of President Sukarno and the rise of General Suharto.

The volume is worth reading alone for the account, previously unknown to this reviewer, by the daughter of former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of the attitude of her father as the Americans fled Saigon in 1975. Prime Minister Lee summoned his family to their bedroom and announced in the spirit of the blitz that his children, other than son Lee Hsien Loong, then a member of the Singapore Armed Forces, were free to leave as they hunkered down to face the tumbling dominoes. However, he and Mrs. Lee would "stay here to the bitter end." (81) Lee Kuan Yew, who has established a reputation in many circles for his sagacity, does not in retrospect look to have been all that knowledgeable and understanding of the forces at work behind the American war in Vietnam. The dominoes did not tumble. Accepting the American version of things, he failed to understand that the Vietnamese were not fighting to advance international Communism, but for national unification and sovereignty. He learned that lesson later.

Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War is a fine little book. Ang Cheng Guan has added additional luster to his reputation as a leading authority on the international politics surrounding the Vietnam war. Sadly, the book is produced with many typos and grammatical errors which any copyeditor should have picked up. Once more Routledge has lived up to its reputation for shoddy but expensive publications. Nonetheless, we are wiser for having Dr. Ang’s contribution.
Author’s Response by Ang Cheng Guan, National Institute of Education, Singapore

I wish to thank Professor Anne Foster for writing her thoughtful introduction to this roundtable, and Professors Laura Calkins, Balaz Szalontai, Nicholas Tarling and Robert Taylor for taking time to read my book and for their kind reviews and useful suggestions. I am grateful for all their comments which I will bear in mind as I continue to research and write on this subject.

Let me first respond to Professor Szalontai. My intention was to concentrate on the period of the American War in Vietnam and it did not cross my mind when I was writing the book that I should spend some time on the responses of the Southeast Asian countries during the French War as most of the Southeast Asian countries were caught up with their immediate concerns – the process of decolonisation and their own struggle for independence. On hindsight, I should and could have said more about Thailand. There is some secondary literature in the English Language (Christopher Goscha’s work comes to mind) to beef up on the Thailand section in the Background chapter. I am not sure I could have said very much more about South Vietnam-ASEAN relations during this period of my study. Professor Szalontai referred to Danny Wong’s monograph of Vietnam-Malaysia relations during the Cold War which is in my Bibliography. I had extracted most of the useful and relevant information for the period up till 1975. There wasn’t much. Indeed, it is not just South Vietnam but also Southeast Asian relations with North Vietnam during this period which I had glossed over. From what I know, there was really nothing significant or substantial about both sets of relationships. Having said that, there is certainly much more work that can be done in the Vietnamese archives to improve my narrative.

My response to Professor Taylor is that he is right and I should have included Burma in my study. I think the British records (which I have not seen) must be more substantial than the available American documents pertaining to Burma and the Vietnam War. Not that I did not come across any American documents pertaining to Ne Win. In fact, there are some relevant documents in the FRUS volumes pertaining to Southeast Asia. I left Burma out because at the point of writing, I did not feel that with the limited sources (compared to the other five countries) in hand, I could weave a balanced narrative. My sections on Burma would have been very thin and sparse in comparison with the other five countries. Professor Taylor’s observation has motivated me to focus on Burma in my future research. Perhaps, there is potential for an article on this topic.

I thank Professor Nicholas Tarling for his empathetic review of my book. His comments on the issues of motive and decision-making -- “...who made the final decisions and on what basis” is something which I struggle with in my writings on both the Vietnamese communist side of the Vietnam War and in this case, the Southeast Asian dimension. I am always conscious my writings is lacking in this aspect. My only excuse is that I am constrained by my sources and my own reluctance to speculate.

Finally, I wish to thank Professor Laura Calkins for her endorsement of my book.