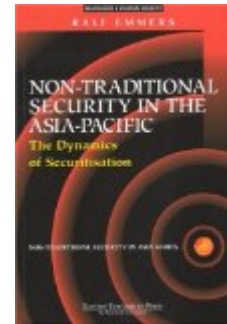


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Ralf Emmers. *Non-Traditional Security in the Asia-Pacific: The Dynamics of Securitisation*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004. ix + 84 pp. No price listed (paper), ISBN 978-981-210-347-5.

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Does Constructivism Add Much to Security Studies?

Various offshoots of constructivism have gained some ground in theoretical debates in the study of international relations in recent years. In the subfield of security studies, this trend also coincided and merged with yet another trend of increasing attention to non-traditional and transnational security issues.

Emmers's book employs an approach within constructivism known as the "Copenhagen School" to discuss three cases of non-traditional security issues: drug trafficking in Thailand, piracy and maritime terrorism in the Malacca Straits, and people-smuggling into Australia. This approach emphasizes the socio-political process of when and how various issues become "security" matters (securitization) and when and how security issues become mere "political" matters (desecuritization). Emmers looks at not only verbalization of security issues in official statements, but also actions taken by the government to respond to the newly defined "security" situations.

The three case studies provide rich up-to-date description of official statements and policy responses by the respective governments in the three countries. However, description of the "securitization" process, which allegedly makes the Copenhagen School's approach superior to others, is only artificially done. Emmers emphasizes electoral politics in the cases of drug trafficking in Thailand and people smuggling into Australia and external factors, such as the September 11, 2001, terror attack

against the United States (in the case of Singapore's response to piracy in the Malacca Straits), but the book does not escape from suspicion that these events were subjectively selected for consideration whereas other important factors may have been ignored or overlooked.

More empirically and quantitatively oriented constructivist literature employs time-series data to demonstrate shift in public opinion. If not quantitative, historians too try to achieve more comprehensive empirical description. Emmers fails to achieve such empirical thoroughness, which may have helped the book's theoretical claim about supremacy of the Copenhagen School. This is regrettable, since the book is very short and therefore lack of space does not seem to be an inhibiting factor.

The book, however, does a good job of deconstructing the three security issues and examining whose (in)security is (de)emphasized in the policy process by looking at the level of sub-national actors.

Overall, however, despite good description of the three cases, the book fails to achieve its claimed objective. This is so largely because the approach of the Copenhagen School is little different from conventional methodology in history, and therefore there hardly is a new theoretical debate to begin with. In this sense, the three case studies would be more valuable if presented as three separate articles that are both descriptive and analytical, but without making theoretical claims.

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