does not add anything new to the narrative about or historiography of the Nixon presidency. The book would be of limited use to a student of Cold War history, or the Nixon presidency in particular, but Woodward is writing for a broad audience, and this shows in the book’s functionality. It includes no searchable index, and the individual chapters are not titled in a way that would allow the reader to locate a particular period of the Nixon administration. The book is worth reading for those interested in the Nixon presidency but adds nothing new to the overall narrative.


*Reviewed by Keith W. Taylor, Cornell University*

Although based almost entirely on secondary sources, this book offers something that no book heretofore has provided: a survey of the Cold War from the perspective of the countries in Southeast Asia. Ang Cheng Guan tends to become entangled in seemingly disparate details about Communist movements and government policies in the different Southeast Asian countries. His mostly implicit theme is expressed most clearly in words attributed to Lee Kuan Yew about U.S. intervention in Vietnam: “the long [U.S.] effort gave the rest of Asia the time needed to develop the strength to resist communist takeovers” (p. 192). The formation and development of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is front and center in the book, indicating the importance of ASEAN and its role in creating the idea and expanding the sphere of regional security.

The book views the Cold War in Southeast Asia as a phase in a larger regional issue arising from the colonial era in the early twentieth century: When the colonial era had passed, what kinds of nation-states would emerge from the anti-colonial movements and from the struggles between Communist and non-Communist models? These struggles took different forms in different colonies/countries, but all were amplified by internationalist policies of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party. A major analytical contribution of the book is its emphasis on how events during the 25 years before 1945 have shaped our understanding of the subsequent Cold War period. In Southeast Asia, the divide between Communists and non-Communists was already well established as a fundamental political problem before the outbreak of the Cold War.

Ang Cheng Guan observes that Communist parties in Southeast Asia “had most appeal and were most influential” when fighting against colonialists—and, in the 1940s, against the Japanese—but were also handicapped by “organizational weakness as well as strategic errors” and became potent political movements only when external Communist powers took a direct interest in them, as with the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in Vietnam (p. 195). Consequently, the book pays close attention
to the relationships between the PRC and the Communist movements in the region and suggests that these relationships, although seemingly superseded by the end of the Cold War, remain as plausible elements of a future narrative of Chinese policy in the region.

The book appears to position the ASEAN countries as dominoes that did not fall because of U.S. intervention in the region. Despite each ASEAN country having its own reasons for participating in the formation of the organization, the author quotes the Singaporean foreign minister’s statement that the “principal object” they all shared was “reversing the domino theory” (p. 140). Then, later in the book, without comment, Ang Cheng Guan appears to dismiss the domino theory by citing statements the Malaysian foreign minister made in 1975 (p. 159) when, after the U.S. withdrawal from the region, the war in Indochina ended with no further threat to the rest of the region. This use of contradictory quotations without sufficient contextualization is an example of the weak level of analysis sometimes displayed in the book. In another example of possibly excessive dependence on the statements of prominent figures, the author uncritically uses a 1950 interview of Ho Chi Minh by two U.S. journalists to affirm Ho Chi Minh’s motivations in his relations with the PRC (p. 57), surely not an unproblematic source considering Ho Chi Minh’s famous skill in propaganda.

The title of the book is most apt, for the Cold War, as the author demonstrates, did not come to Southeast Asia as the intrusion of some external problem into the region. Well before the emergence of the global Cold War, Southeast Asia had its own Cold War, with antecedents in colonial times. What is remarkable about the story presented in Southeast Asia’s Cold War is that with ASEAN there was a regional response to the Cold War that has outlived the conflict to become a structure of regional security that continues to redefine itself in response to changing conditions. This is perhaps the most telling evidence that Southeast Asia is a region with a certain coherence. As a model of regional cooperation, ASEAN is an experiment incomparable with any other apart from the European Union. Thanks to its proven capacity to change and adapt, ASEAN, which arose from and then survived the Cold War, is now generally accepted as an important part of international security in Asia.


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Jamil Hasanli is a prominent Azerbaijani scholar well known for his books on the contemporary history of Iran. His book At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941–1946, published in 2006 in the Harvard Cold