

Beyond Regionalism: The Politics of the Transboundary Haze

Pollution in Southeast Asia

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This article reviews two influential books by two Southeast Asian scholars that discuss the politics of transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia. In two excellent works addressing the transboundary haze pollution problem in the region, Paruedee Nguitrugool and Helena Varkkey put forward two approaches to understand the failure to address transboundary haze pollution in the region with their own merits and limitations. On the one hand, Paruedee Nguitrugool argues that the persistence of the transboundary haze pollution is linked to the regional dynamics in ASEAN and the ratification of the ASEAN Agreement on the Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP). On the other hand, Helena Varkkey points out a larger political-economic context that shapes the problem regionally, which relates to the palm oil plantation problem. I argue that, while both works have provided essential insights into the transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia, there are still spaces to discuss larger contexts underpinning the problem. I identify three issues that could be discussed in future research on the transboundary haze pollution, namely (1) the normative issue of protection and responsibility in transboundary haze pollution; (2) the role of 'local agency'; and (3) the interconnection between transboundary haze pollution and climate change adaptation. Addressing these issues is necessary to address complex environmental and health issues in the region.

Keywords: Praetorianism, military, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand

Introduction

A spectre is haunting ASEAN since the early 1990s – the spectre of the transboundary haze pollution. When the haze pollution went beyond boundaries in 1997, the haze problem affected around 200,000 people to undergo medical treatment, which prompted Malaysia to declare a “state of emergency” due to the very high Air Pollutant Index (Dauvergne, 1998). The problem, however, reoccurred in several years afterwards, which eventually sparked debates on whether ASEAN should take more com-

prehensive action to resolve the problem, In 2002, ASEAN Member States agreed to sign ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Problem (AATHP) to deal with the emerging haze problem in the region. As of 2015, 10 ASEAN member states have ratified the Agreement, with Indonesia as the latest state to ratify. This issue has become a prominent environmental issue in Southeast Asia, which sparked further academic and policy debates as to how to sustainably overcome the problem in the future (Heilmann, 2015; Nurhidayah and Alam, 2020; Hurley

and Lee, 2020; Ramli and Hashim 2020; Varkkey, 2020).

The books under review here examine transboundary haze pollution as an essentially regional problem that requires a regional solution. Both books highlight the role of ASEAN and complex regional arrangements to resolve the haze problem in Southeast Asia. Written by two Southeast Asia-based scholars, the two books propose two different approaches to understand the transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia.¹ In her pioneering work, Paruedee Nguitrageol argues that the persistence of the transboundary haze pollution is linked to the regional dynamics in ASEAN and the ratification of AATHP. Building on Nguitrageol's work but offering a distinct political-economic perspective, Helena Varkkey argues that it is essential to acknowledge the political-economic roots of the haze problem, which lies in the management of peatland and palm oil plantation in the region.

I discuss the two books because they have two significances. First, both books excellently grasp the root of transboundary haze pollution by posing it as a regional issue rather than merely a specific problem from a particular country. In this context, both books highlight the 'transboundary' nature of the haze problem, as well as its root causes beyond national-level perspective. Second, both books also offer two accounts in understanding haze problem, which could enrich the way we think about haze from a regional perspective. Nguitrageol, on the one hand,

approaches transboundary haze pollution from an ASEAN perspective by highlighting the institutional context of the problem. On the other hand, Varkkey offers a 'political-economic' perspective on haze, which investigates the root-causes of the problem in the palm oil production. Both are significant in their own ways.

While both works have provided essential insights into the transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia and emphasise the role of ASEAN to mitigate the problem, there are still spaces to discuss the more significant problems underpinning the transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia. The first issue relates to the normative problem of 'human rights to the healthy environment', acknowledged through the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2013) but is yet to be incorporated into the national legal framework and broader regional and trans-regional economic cooperation pursued by Southeast Asian governments. The second issue relates to 'local agency' and further sub-national dynamics in transboundary haze pollution. The third issue addresses the nexus between transboundary haze pollution and the regional climate change adaptations, which tends to be disconnected from the transboundary haze pollution problems.

Regionalism and Transboundary Haze Pollution

Paruedee Nguitrageol's book, *Environmental Cooperation in Southeast Asia: ASEAN's Regime for Trans-boundary Haze Pollution*,

¹ The two authors are based in Southeast Asian universities. Paruedee Nguitrageol is an Assistant Professor at the Chiang Mai University, Thailand, and Helena Varkkey is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Malaya, Malaysia.

starts by pointing out one problem underpinning the failure to address the transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia: the failure of ASEAN “to protect its stunning ecology” (Nguitragool, 2010). Along 185 pages of the book, Nguitragool put forward a distinct regional perspective by highlighting the role of ASEAN (among others) in mitigating transboundary haze pollution. The book attempts to unpack the process in which ASEAN try to adopt specific strategies to address the transboundary haze pollution by showing the linkage between regional institutions—the existing multi-layered framework that ASEAN could utilise to address the haze problem—and the state’s domestic politics in ratifying the Agreement (Nguitragool, 2010).

Nguitragool utilises a constructivist framework to unpack the process of regime formation by emphasising the role of knowledge, norms, and ideas to understand the regime to address the transboundary haze pollution, rather than merely criticising the efficacy of ASEAN’s norms and regime (Nguitragool, 2010). Furthermore, Nguitragool presents what she termed as ‘a synergetic model of regime formation. Departing from this model, Nguitragool divides the regime formation—following the works of Marc Levy and his collaborators—into three overlapping stages: agenda formation, institutional negotiation, and operationalisation (Levy, Young, & Zürn, 1995). She argues that the process is affected by several factors, including (1) domestic and regional politics, (2) cultural and institutional origins of the events, and (3) economic, leadership, and normative factors (Nguitragool, 2010).

From these processes, Nguitragool derives four stages of ‘socialisation’ into the environmental norms set up in ASEAN to address transboundary haze pollution. The first stage includes *environmental destruction and the denial of destructive practice*, which leads to international and domestic pressure. States respond to these pressures by implementing *tacit concessions and coerced compliance*, with a specific purpose to reduce criticism by half-heartedly implementing policies to appease oppositions. However, when domestic pressure is fully mobilised to challenge this coerced compliance, state and business actors begin to integrate environmental conservation policy with the code of conduct in daily behaviour, leading to partial or full ratification or institutionalisation of the norms in national context. Once the integration—or what Nguitragool termed as “prescriptive status” works, a rule-consistent behaviour might be achieved if further participation from non-state actors (including business actors) could be encouraged (Nguitragool, 2010).

Nguitragool furthermore substantiates the theoretical framework in seven chapters. In Chapter 2, she traces the history of ASEAN cooperation and how environmental issues were incorporated, albeit slowly, in the regional cooperation. Following the constructivist research programme in ASEAN regionalism that highlights the norms—“ASEAN Way”—and the broader history of regional cooperation, Nguitragool (2010) addresses how ASEAN establishes its cooperation on the environment. Central to ASEAN’s environmental cooperation,

Nguitragool argues, was tropical forest and more significant issues related to deforestation (Nguitragool, 2010). While accepting the concerns of the international community regarding deforestation, ASEAN member states attempt to defend their rights to development and economic exploitation of certain forest areas (Nguitragool, 2010). In short, the concerns over forest reflects the tension between *the right to development and sovereignty* with concerns over *conservation and attempts to fight deforestation*, which certain actors in the international community promotes, primarily since the 1990s. The conservation norms became one of the most crucial debates in ASEAN's environmental cooperation before the transboundary haze pollution (Nguitragool, 2010).

Meanwhile, comes the haze problem in the mid-1990s. While international assistance to deal with deforestation has begun since the 1980s, it was in 1994 that the haze problem became a 'regional issue', with Singapore and Malaysia was affected by the forest fire in Indonesia (Nguitragool, 2010). ASEAN began cooperation plan on transboundary haze pollution in 1995, and ASEAN member states regularly debate the issue in ASEAN forums. After the biggest forest fires in 1997-1998, Pressures were mounted to Indonesia to deal with the forest fire and, more broadly, to improve its environmental record. Therefore, after some diplomatic skirmishes, ASEAN produced AATHP in 2002, which marked a diplomatic achievement to resolve the problem regionally. In Chapter 3, Nguitragool discusses how ASEAN struggled to deal with the regional haze problem

until AATHP was signed off in 2002 (Nguitragool, 2010).

Nevertheless, the problem was far from over. It was not until 2014 –several years even after the publication of Nguitragool's book—that all ASEAN member states adopt AATHP and ratify it in the national legal framework, with Indonesia being the last state to ratify it (Hurley & Lee, 2020). What explains the slow process? In chapter 4 and Chapter 5, Nguitragool explains the problem through, respectively, the process of regime formation and Indonesia's domestic politics that constrained the effective implementation and broader institutionalisation of regional framework to deal with transboundary haze pollution. Regarding the regime formation, Nguitragool argues that three factors constrained the slow institutionalisation process before 2002, including (1) a centralised authoritarian political structure in several key states –particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines— that rendered the negotiation difficult; (2) ASEAN's lack of institutional design and authority to deal with environmental problems; and (3) issues related to economic development in forest fires-affected areas. It clearly shows the slow process of adoption and shows the limit of AATHP (Nguitragool, 2010).

In addition, Nguitragool (2010) also pointed out the broader problems in the political economy of the Indonesian forest, which shows the reluctance of a country with a vast dependence on natural resources and the expansion of market demands to raw resources, which complicated the problem in Indonesia's domestic context. Historical-

ly, Indonesia has exploited forest to finance development programs, which was started from the Dutch colonial era. When global demands for raw resources emerged in the 1970s, Soeharto's New Order expanded the exploitation by half-heartedly addressing the call for conservation from the international community (Nguitragool, 2010). These problems, according to Nguitragool, has led to a slow process in addressing the transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia. It leads to the government's inability to deal with the haze problem through appropriate policies, which could sacrifice its development and projects.

To sum up, Paruedee Nguitragool's book has excellently presented the institutional processes and constraints in addressing transboundary haze pollution. Nguitragool points out a multi-layered problem in the transboundary haze pollution problem and pointing out some strengths and limitations of existing regional efforts to tackle the problem. While acknowledging Indonesia's dependence on natural resources, however, Nguitragool does not go deeper to address the paradox of Indonesia's political economy of development, which she regarded as one crucial point problem in the regional haze problem. Therefore, while successfully addressing the ASEAN regional cooperation problem, her work is limited in explaining its structural underpinning, which was addressed more comprehensively by Helena Varkkey in her more recent work.

The Political Economy of the Transboundary Haze Pollution

Helena Varkkey's book, *The Haze Problem in Southeast Asia: Palm Oil and Patronage*, starts from where Nguitragool's works end. By combining critical political economy and a multi-level governance approach, Varkkey traces the root causes of the problem, which relates to the dynamics of palm oil plantation and peatland management in several countries. Unlike Nguitragool, who emphasises regional mechanism (most importantly ASEAN) in resolving the haze crisis, this book offers critical insights on the root causes of the problem, namely palm oil plantation and its relationship with patronage politics in the region. This book also reveals the gap in current political initiatives at the national and regional level, which fails to address the root causes of the transboundary haze.

The central argument that underpins Varkkey's analysis of the haze problem is the multi-level causes of the regional haze problem, which is located in the intersection between the unfriendly practice of palm oil plantation, economic regionalisation of this sector, and the politics of patronage that halt a comprehensive approach to deal with the hazed problem. In the first chapter, Varkkey (2016) advances a central argument that ASEAN current approach has failed to address the root of the haze problem at the domestic level, namely palm oil plantation and its relationship with patronage politics. The negligence of these root causes was occurred due to the separation between 'domestic' and 'regional' issues in works related to 'haze' and 'ASEAN', with the former focusing on

the technical dynamics at the domestic level and the latter playing more roles in policy coordination (Varkkey, 2016). In this book, Varkkey sees that this separation has been unable to capture the patronage relations between palm oil plantation with the state, which operates through economic regionalisation (Varkkey, 2016). Varkkey (2016), therefore, advances an argument that put forward the relationship between patronage politics at the domestic level and economic regionalisation to understand the complex root causes of the haze problem in Southeast Asia.

Having outlined the main argument, Varkkey moves to identify the Indonesian oil palm sector and its complex relationships with haze. Varkkey (2016) argues that palm oil plantation is a highly “globalised” issue because of the global demand for palm oil, putting Indonesian palm oil plantation at the centre of the global value chain in this sector. Moreover, with the abundant source of plantation in Southeast Asia that was emerged since late colonial rule, the palm oil governance in Indonesia and Malaysia is highly politicised, with a high degree of government intervention in the field (Varkkey, 2016). However, what makes the palm oil plantation problematic is not its exploitation as a growing industry. It is how it affects environmental issues that make palm oil plantation a contentious issue in the region. Varkkey (2016) explains two distinct patterns in

which the palm oil plantation relates directly to fire and haze, namely (1) conversion of degraded lands and (2) conversion of peatland into palm oil plantation. These environmental problems related to the conversion of lands, as Varkkey argues, are inextricably linked to the maintenance of fire and haze in Indonesia since 1997.²

The environmental problems resulting from palm oil plantation and hazardous land conversion (mainly related to degraded lands and peatland) have resulted in the region’s circular haze problem. Varkkey (2016) argues that it was the state that facilitates the regionalisation of the palm oil sector. The regionalisation of this sector has coincided with the establishment of the ASEAN economic community in 2003. Besides Indonesia’s liberal foreign direct investment policies that have been preserved since 1967, Malaysia’s business investment in the sector and Singapore’s plantation companies also benefit from palm oil industry in the country by taking advantage of the booming palm oil market in the region. Both of them were strongly supported by the government (Varkkey, 2016). Therefore, it is difficult to disparage states’ role in the emerging haze problem in the region since it was Malaysian and Singaporean companies, with support from their governments, that financed the problem with palm oil plantation. Moreover, the responses of these states (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) in dealing with the haze problem

² Nevertheless, during a talk based on the author’s book in Yogyakarta, December 2016, Helena Varkkey stressed that the environmental problems caused by the palm oil plantation by no means indicate that palm oil plantation is bad. If the land conversion problem could be halted, the haze problem is more likely to be solved. In doing so, however, a willingness from palm oil companies is required to promote a more environmentally friendly plantation projects in Indonesia.

also tend to neglect this political, economic causes by maintaining some arguments such as that the haze problem is a 'natural disaster' and 'no one is to blame in this issue' (Varkkey, 2016).

The way the government drives and facilitates palm oil, the regionalisation of palm oil plantation in the emerging regional and global market, as well as their negligence of the relationship between the haze problem and the malpractice in the palm oil industry, have undoubtedly created a paradox in the management of haze problem in the region. What explains the persistence of this paradox? Varkkey comes with a straightforward answer: the politics of patronage. Following James Scott (1972), Varkkey (2016) defines patronage as the relationship between the political rulers and business elites who obtained protection and privileges in return for access to economic benefits. Having defined patronage in this way, Varkkey argues that patronage politics is prevalent in Southeast Asia, particularly in the natural resource sectors.

Moreover, after decolonisation in the 1950s, the spread of market capitalism drives patronage politics to the region due to the high demand for primary products like palm oil in the global and regional markets (Varkkey, 2016). In the palm oil sector, the patronage networks could be traced deeper in the land licensing process. The licensing process in Indonesia is deeply connected to a network of patronage in bureaucracy, ministry, and even decentralised local government. The case of AMDAL (Analysis of Environmental Effects of Industry) making process

in local government exemplifies this claim, which witnessed, for example, several palm oil companies to implicated by this patronage politics in West Kalimantan (Varkkey, 2016). During the New Order era, patronage occurred in the Ministry level in the central government, which was enabled by the centralised and authoritarian nature of the Indonesian New Order government (Varkkey, 2016).

Several international commitments have been made to tackle this environment-linked issue, such as the Norway-led REDD. However, as Varkkey (2016) argues, REDD has several inherent weaknesses, particularly its inability to deal with Indonesia's local and national patronage politics. For example, the weakening of Presidential power has halted the effort to moratoria palm oil plantation in several Provinces and Regencies, arguably due to complications in local-central government relationships. As a result, Indonesia has been unable to deal with haze-producing fires in some areas connected to palm oil plantation. The problem was complicated by the Indonesian set of policies on land clearing and fires, which connected the land clearing policies with the local and national politics of patronage and did not oblige the company to protect the company environment through strong land management policies. For example, the confusion over burning laws makes it unclear whether the company should be responsible for haze-producing fires in the peatland or degraded lands.

Moreover, many well-connected firms also attempt to avoid investigations and con-

viction land conversion when the haze came as a regional problem (Varkkey, 2016). These cases exemplify the high politics of patronage and clientelism in Southeast Asia, which is heavily connected to the haze-producing fire and the regionalisation of the haze problem in Southeast Asia. These cases also showed the 'multi-level' politics of patronage that involves local, national, and regional network of patronage in the persistence of the haze problem since 1997.

Critical Assessments

The two books under review here have brilliantly shown what has been neglected in analysing ASEAN and the environmental problem in the region: the multi-level character of regional politics. Recent literature has focused on the failure of ASEAN regional institutions to tackle major environmental problems such as haze but misses the 'multi-level' character of the problem (Aggarwal & Chow, 2010; Jones, 2006). Therefore, whilst this literature has provided good insights into why the regional initiative has failed to deal with the haze problem, they could not trace the root causes, which lies not in the regional problem but each state-market relationship in each region. Moreover, the issue is now getting more complicated due to the trans-regional infrastructure cooperation pursued by Southeast Asian governments with external actors, raising concerns about whether the cooperation project will impact the efforts to combat regionally (Hughes, 2019).

Both works, therefore, have provided a valuable framework to understand transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia.

For Nguitragool, the role of ASEAN is vital for resolving the regional transboundary haze pollution. However, for Varkkey, while ASEAN indeed played an important role in addressing the haze problem and acknowledges that the problem is, indeed, a regional problem that requires a regional solution, the actual problem lies in the persistence of complex patronage politics in the region. These arguments are complementary. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the transboundary haze pollution without discussing ASEAN's concerted regional efforts since the 1990s, although we need to go deeper to address the multi-layered problem in the national-level political economy context. In other words, understanding both regional and domestic political-economic context is essential to deal with the transboundary haze pollution comprehensively.

Nevertheless, more works are still needed to elaborate the complexity of the transboundary haze pollution. While both works have contributed to a significant literature on transboundary haze pollution, there are more complexities that need to be unpacked with regard to the transboundary haze pollution. While Nguitragool has made an excellent assessment on ASEAN's role in addressing the transboundary haze pollution, we need to understand further the politics of addressing the haze after Indonesia's ratification of the agreement in 2015 (Heilmann, 2015). Moreover, there are also issues related to extra-regional actors, which is now emerging in the regional economic cooperation (Dudhraj, 2020). In this context, a regional analysis of the transboundary haze pol-

lution needs to be directed beyond ASEAN's regional cooperation.

In addition, Varkkey's concerns about palm oil plantation also need to be situated in the broader economic context. There are issues that need to be discussed, such as political patronage, global demand for palm oil from external actors, as well as local politics behind the land conversion in Southeast Asia (Wicke, et. al, 2011). Addressing these issues, therefore, necessitates a further understanding of the interconnection between the land conversion and forest fires with the broader global commodity markets.

Therefore, there are still spaces to extend the scope and outreach of both works in a contemporary context, and it is in this context a future research programme that goes beyond the 'standard' regional perspective is important to understand the transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia.

Beyond Regionalism: Future Research Programmes on the Transboundary Haze Pollution in Southeast Asia

Having reviewed the books, I will reflect on some possible future research programme to understand the transboundary haze pollution. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as Aninda Dewayanti (2020) has forcefully argued, forest fires and haze issues doubled the vulnerability of people in certain areas who would face the double threats of the pandemic and haze pollution. It is crucial to understand the transboundary haze problem beyond a mere regionalism issue and address the broader implications of ASEAN's inability to deal with the problem

in the future

I suggest three issues that could be considered a future research programme to extend the existing research on transboundary haze pollution.

The first issue relates to the normative context of the 'transboundary haze pollution, highlighting the importance of addressing the rights of people affected by the forest fires –directly and indirectly—and protecting both citizens and the environment from environmental destruction or any environmental harms. This issue is not without legal basis in ASEAN or Southeast Asian context. ASEAN, for example, has acknowledged such norms through, for example, the concept of 'the right to safe, clean, and sustainable environment' in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (ASEAN, 2012). A similar concept could also be found in the Indonesian Constitution, which stated the rights of citizen to live in a healthy environment (Indonesia's 1945 Constitution, Article 28H) In this context, there are scopes to extend the research programme from this perspective by moving from legal to normative issues to address the current limitation regarding ASEAN non-interference problems.

One way to avoid such a problem is to highlight the institutional process that directly touches upon the *protection of citizens and the environment* during the event, or in the aftermath, of the haze issue. The question of *protection*, in this sense, is a normative one: it highlights the problem of responsibility to reduce the environmental harms, which more broadly brings a question on how powerful actors –primarily, but not limited

to ‘state’— *should* respond to any forms of ‘harm’ emanating from the transboundary haze pollution (see Varkkey, 2020, Linklater, 2011). Addressing ‘harm’ to citizens or environment is an essential issue that needs to be addressed in further research.

For example, the ASEAN Agreement on the Transboundary Haze Pollution has stipulated the objective of the agreement “to prevent and monitor transboundary haze pollution as a result of land and/or forest fires which should be mitigated, through concerted national efforts and intensified regional and international co-operation.” (ASEAN, 2002, Article 2). In this context, two dimensions of responsibility could be mapped: (1) the responsibility to prevent the haze through appropriate policy framework; and (2) responsibility to mitigate the harm emanating from the haze pollution, either health or environmental harms (ASEAN, 2002, Article 3). Addressing these aspects require us to move from mere *legal* issue of compliance/non-compliance to international agreements, but also to protect citizens and the environment from any possible harm emanating from the transboundary haze pollution.

The second issue relates to ‘local agency’: how the transboundary haze pollution could be understood by going deeper to the local, sub-national dynamics, which could add many insights on the governance complexity in the national and regional context. One way to think about a future research programme is to look at grass-root activities from those affected by the haze to deal with

the haze problem through legal suits, political lobbying, or other political movements.

Recent research from Sofyan Ansori, for example, shows that sub-national elites pursue different approaches from the central government and deliberately disobey the instruction from the central government regarding slash-and-burn issues (Ansori, 2019, 2021). There were also several cases in which citizens bring the haze issue to legal battles, some of which were won by citizens.³ In this context, understanding how local actors deal with the transboundary haze problem could bring rich stories that would add to the existing research on transboundary haze pollution. In addition, there have been concerns from Indonesian indigenous leaders—for example, Dayak leaders—for the land conversion and palm oil plantation involving big companies, which contributes to the haze pollution (Potter, 2009). The resistance from local activists and leaders is an important issue to be discussed further in understanding how local people respond to the transboundary haze pollution and forest fires.

Finally, the third issue relates to the regional climate change adaptations, which tend to disconnect from the transboundary haze pollution problems. Generally, climate change adaptation could be discussed as the broader implications to the transboundary haze pollution, which could exacerbate more disasters emanating from the haze issue if the problem is yet to be appropriately resolved in the future. Climate change was absent in the AATHP. While ASEAN Socio-Cultural

³ One good example of this legal battle is the case of Arie Rompas, who won the legal suit against Indonesian President with regard to the haze issue.

Community Blueprint 2015-2025 mentions sustainable climate as one crucial issue, it does not explicitly link it to transboundary haze pollution (ASEAN, 2015).

The absence of climate change aspect is not surprising, given the reliance of ASEAN-related agreements to the principle of non-interference and the right to exploit natural resources in the line defined by the states' own environmental and developmental policies (ASEAN, 2002, Article 3). In this context, the concerns of climate change tend to be overshadowed by the right to development in ASEAN environmental cooperations.

Nevertheless, as Nurhidayah (2014) has aptly mentioned in her PhD Thesis, climate change adaptation should work in line with efforts to thwart transboundary haze pollution. In this context, the climate change adaptation regime –such as IPCC— could address the limitation of the current transboundary haze pollution issue in ASEAN, in addition to effective state implementation of key Agreement in both issues.

Conclusion

To sum up, this article presents a review of two influential books that address the politics of transboundary haze pollution. The two books under review here –from Paruedee Nguitragool and Helena Varkkey—brilliantly proposed two different approaches in understanding transboundary haze pollution. While Paruedee Nguitragool emphasises the multi-layered nature of the haze problem and the importance of ASEAN, Helena Varkkey digs into the root causes

of the problem in the palm oil plantation problem. These works offer us rich stories regarding the politics of transboundary haze pollution in ASEAN. Nevertheless, more work should be encouraged to further the research agenda beyond the classic issues related to regionalism in Southeast Asia. Against this backdrop, I discuss three possible ways to extend the outreach of these studies for future research, which include (1) the normative issue of protection and responsibility in transboundary haze pollution; (2) the question of 'local agency'; and (3) the interconnection between transboundary haze pollution and climate change adaptation.

Addressing these issues means that we need to broaden our research agenda on transboundary haze pollution by connecting the 'domestic' context of transboundary haze pollution with emerging regional and global challenges. It is impossible to understand transboundary haze pollution without understanding the palm oil plantation and the local dynamics that enable –and perpetuates—the forest fires. However, simply understanding the issue merely as 'local' problem is not sufficient, as the problems are linked with global political economic issues such as commodity markets and normative tensions in the negotiation table. It necessitates a broader regional and global understanding of the problem of transboundary haze pollution in the future. From this perspective, International Relations scholars need to pay attention to the local and everyday dynamics of the transboundary haze pollution, besides the complex negotiation in the global and regional context.

Overall, these books have been able to achieve their aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transboundary haze pollution. Further comprehensive research from Southeast Asian IR scholars are important, as we need to inform policy-makers about the complexities of the haze problem and necessary steps to deal with the issue.

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