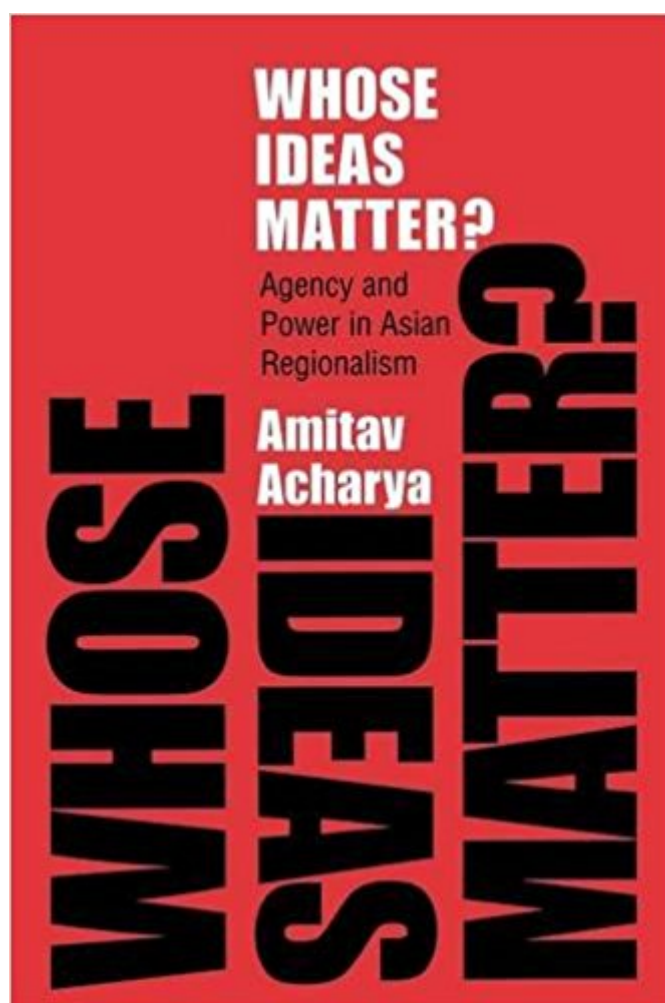


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# Whose Ideas Matter?: Agency And Power In Asian Regionalism (Cornell Studies In Political Economy)



## Synopsis

Asia is a crucial battleground for power and influence in the international system. It is also a theater of new experiments in regional cooperation that could redefine global order. *Whose Ideas Matter?* is the first book to explore the diffusion of ideas and norms in the international system from the perspective of local actors, with Asian regional institutions as its main focus. There's no Asian equivalent of the EU or of NATO. Why has Asia, and in particular Southeast Asia, avoided such multilateral institutions? Most accounts focus on U.S. interests and perceptions or intraregional rivalries to explain the design and effectiveness of regional institutions in Asia such as SEATO, ASEAN, and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Amitav Acharya instead foregrounds the ideas of Asian policymakers, including their response to the global norms of sovereignty and nonintervention. Asian regional institutions are shaped by contestations and compromises involving emerging global norms and the preexisting beliefs and practices of local actors. Acharya terms this perspective "constitutive localization" and argues that international politics is not all about Western ideas and norms forcing their way into non-Western societies while the latter remain passive recipients. Rather, ideas are conditioned and accepted by local agents who shape the diffusion of ideas and norms in the international system. Acharya sketches a normative trajectory of Asian regionalism that constitutes an important contribution to the global sovereignty regime and explains a remarkable continuity in the design and functions of Asian regional institutions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Especially when discussing the Cold War period, the work is an important contribution to the understanding of the history of multilateral cooperation in the region. It usefully complements rational theorizing, as well as the usual explanations of why ASEAN is so weakly institutionalized: incomplete processes of nation-building (for instance in Cambodia and Timor-Leste); intra-ASEAN dissonances (for instance about the future regional role of the United States and China, and contested territorialities in the South China Sea); and the vast economic, social, cultural and political differences between the countries." — Oliver Hensengerth, *International Affairs*, January 2010

"Whose Ideas Matter? — constitutes a carefully constructed historical argument about Asian regionalism that challenges the prevalent top-down constructivist view that ideational forces move exclusively from Western institutions to Asian organizations. Employing primary sources, including interviews with relevant officials and original documents from regional conferences, Acharya demonstrates that Asian actors modified Western ideas to conform to existing Asian concerns. This is an important book, the most thorough explication of how constructivist theory enhances understanding of Asian regionalism. Amitav Acharya has written not only the most thorough application of constructivist theory on Asian regionalism but he has also added a new dimension to that theory on the localization of norm diffusion." — Sheldon W. Simon, *Perspectives on Politics*

"Whose Ideas Matter? is profoundly relevant to current policy issues, especially the future shape and content of Asian regional architecture. It fills a gap not only in International Relations theory but also in our perceptions of Asian efforts to build a stable and prosperous community." — Ellen Frost, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*

"In this book, Acharya arguably provides the most clearly stated volume in support of the constructivist tenet that a relatively low level of cooperation in Asia nevertheless has to be regarded as an outcome of normative interactions." — Ryoma Sakaeda, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*

"Amitav Acharya has led the way in thinking not only about the international relations of Southeast Asia but also about how to conceptualize international security more generally. This is another important contribution from him, with fascinating new historical material on the evolution of ASEAN." — Stephan Haggard, Krause Professor, Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies, University of California, San Diego

"Amitav Acharya's book is a must-read for students of regionalism, international relations theorists, and constructivists. In this carefully argued account, he gives domestic politics and agency pride of place. This not only fills

significant and serious gaps in recent constructivist theorizing; equally important, it gives us a powerful analytic frame for understanding the unique contours and features of Asian multilateralism." Jeffrey T. Checkel, Professor and Simons Chair in International Law and Human Security, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University "When it comes to Asian regional institutions the ideas that have mattered most have not, Amitav Acharya argues, been those of external Western thinkers that eventually wormed their way into resistant local cultures. Instead, this tightly argued book demonstrates that the deeply rooted norms and values of Southeast Asians themselves were truly definitive. By so privileging the constructive power of indigenous thinkers and their ideas Acharya provides fresh insights on the relationship between ideas and agency that will be influential well beyond Asia." T.J. Pempel, University of California, Berkeley

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