Foreword

Hal Hill

For anybody working on Southeast Asia, the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (hereafter ISEAS) has been a “light on the hill”, a beacon of warm hospitality and serious scholarship for fifty years. ISEAS has quickly established itself as unquestionably the leading institution in the field, a great testimony to the vision of its founders and to the wonderful work of its staff, past and present.

In what is arguably its flagship publication, *Southeast Asian Affairs* (hereafter SEAA) has been published annually since 1974. Each year, the Southeast Asian community, both within and beyond the region, and from the academic, policy, media and NGO worlds, eagerly awaits the arrival of this volume.

The series has generally followed a winning formula that has clearly stood the test of time. There are general overviews of politics, international relations, economics and social affairs. Then follows detailed country surveys highlighting, interpreting and assessing recent developments. The guiding principle has been to invite scholars with a deep knowledge of the subject matter to write analytical yet accessible and concise papers looking backwards and forward.

Perusing the pages of the present volume — *Turning Points and Transitions: Selections from Southeast Asian Affairs 1974–2018* — the reader is introduced to a veritable “who’s who” of Southeast Asian Studies since the 1970s: Wang Gungwu, Chan Heng Chee, Michael Leifer, Rodolfo Severino, Sharon Siddique, Sjahrir, Suchit Bunbongkarn, and many, many others.

 Appropriately, the editors have selected papers that call attention to key turning points and trends in the region. These are well reflected in some of the chapter titles: “the handling of contradictions”, “the ASEAN economic miracle unravels”, “from Bali to Iraq”, “Kampuchea 1979–81”, “the fall of Soeharto and the rise of Habibie”, “what went wrong with the Thai democracy?”, among many other arresting titles.

The timing of this volume is propitious. It is an opportunity to celebrate ISEAS’s fiftieth birthday, to showcase its unrivalled network of scholars and to reflect on the “journey” that the region has taken since 1974. Few if any regions of the world can match Southeast Asia for its dynamism, its diversity, its rising economic and political coherence, and its effective international engagement. All these dimensions are evident in this wide-ranging volume.

An older generation clearly recalls the great challenges these new nation states faced as they began to make their way in an uncertain world. It needs to be remembered that the region’s prospects in the 1960s were highly uncertain. South-
east Asia in Turmoil by Brian Crozier (1965) was a widely read volume at the time. This was the era of the “Peking-Pyongyang-Hanoi-Phnom Penh-Jakarta axis of newly emerging forces”. Indonesia was “confronting” Malaysia. Malaysia and Singapore separated after a brief union. In the Cold War era, the countries in the region were seen as “dominoes” in some quarters, likely to fall to communism’s southern thrust.

How wrong were these gloomy prognostications! ASEAN has emerged as the most durable and influential regional grouping in the developing world. The World Bank labelled several of the countries “miracle economies”. Poverty has fallen more rapidly in this region than any other in the world.

But history doesn’t stand still. New challenges abound throughout Southeast Asia. Composed of small and medium-sized states, the region has to juggle great power rivalry and its unpredictable effects. The democratic forces in the region are fragile. Some of the former economic stars appear to have lost their dynamism. There is rising inequality between and within nation states. The “ASEAN Way” has both strengths and limitations. Profound environmental challenges are on the horizon. We will look to future editions of SEAA to help us anticipate, interpret and understand these and many other issues.

Daljit Singh and Malcolm Cook have achieved the herculean task of judiciously selecting these 57 papers from the 960 published since 1974, and condensing the original versions where relevant. I congratulate them for this magnificent volume, and for expertly piloting the SEAA series over many years.

I also wish to congratulate ISEAS on its uniquely important, perceptive and durable contributions to understanding this fascinating region over the past fifty years. In an era of instant communications and “fake news”, the work of the Institute is as important and as relevant now as the day it was established.

Hal Hill

H.W. Arndt Professor Emeritus of Southeast Asian Economies
Arndt Corden Department of Economics
Crawford School
College of Asia and the Pacific
Australian National University