Regionalism’s multiple negotiations: ASEAN in East Asia

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Abstract  This article explains East Asian regionalism as the product of two sets of negotiations. The first negotiation is between East Asia on the one hand and global forces and structures on the other. The second negotiation is intra-regional and includes a critical negotiation between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Southeast Asia and East/Northeast Asia, which also provides the primary focus of this article. This article details ASEAN’s extensions into East Asian regionalism as part of interdependent efforts to adapt transitioning global and regional systems. Conceiving these regional negotiations to be not just economic and utilitarian but first and foremost normative, this article details the opportunities and dilemmas represented by ‘East Asia’ for ASEAN, ASEAN-Southeast Asia and Southeast Asia as a meaningful organizing principle. Dilemmas associated with the ASEAN Plus Three process, an East Asia free-trade area and the ASEAN Charter provide illustrations of East Asia’s understood challenges for Southeast Asia in addition to the ways that Southeast Asian agencies have been shaping the form and content of recent East Asian efforts and also how regional-global and intra-ASEAN negotiations continue to provide key constraints.

Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was created in 1967 to be an organization of and for Southeast Asian states. Despite what most understand to be Southeast Asia’s relative newness as a regional conception, ASEAN and its activities have done much to give substance, form and reality to ‘Southeast Asia’. Forty years later, Southeast Asia remains an important organizing principle for states of the region; however, it is also an organizational principle under stress. Of note are recent trends—East Asian regional and regionalizing trends—involving intensified economic, societal and now institutional interactions that...
increasingly tie Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia. For ASEAN-Southeast Asia, these trends hold the promise of transforming an East Asia that has been divided by historical and Cold War suspicions into a region that is internally and externally more secure. However, at the same time, they also challenge the very notion, existence and relevance of ‘Southeast Asia’. East Asia’s challenge to Southeast Asia is not just that the voices and interests of Southeast Asian actors may be lost vis-à-vis the larger powers of Northeast Asia; it is also that Southeast Asia, as a part of East Asia, may be rendered invisible by these new trends.

Such concerns have compelled ASEAN states to move the organization beyond its founding Southeast Asian purview and comfort zone. Indeed, since the late 1980s, ASEAN has been slowly doing just that—beginning first with extensions into Asian Pacific regionalism and now East Asian regionalism. As a result of those efforts, one of the more notable features of post-Cold War regional landscape in East Asia has been the emergence of new regional frameworks that have a coalition of lesser powers at their core. Both sets of regional extensions can be also viewed as part of states’ ongoing efforts to adapt to a transitioning US-centric regional security system and political economy. At the same time, while these activities have helped keep ASEAN institutionally relevant in the face of economic and political trends that increasingly blur the lines between ‘Southeast Asia’ and ‘Northeast Asia’, they also increasingly raise questions about the utility and meaningfulness of ‘Southeast Asia’ as an organizing principle.

This article examines the difficult and still evolving relationship between ASEAN—an organization of Southeast Asian states—and ‘East Asia’, here defined as the ten Southeast Asian states (all members of ASEAN) and the three Northeast Asian states of China, Japan and Korea. It does so by drawing attention to the multiple and interacting negotiations that are producing and shaping current East Asian trends. The article begins by situating East Asian regionalism in the context of the new regionalism literature. While there is debate about how new this new regionalism really is, the concepts and dynamics featured in that literature nevertheless provide some useful ways to think about what is going on in East Asia and also Southeast Asia. However, in addition to the regional-global interactions highlighted by much of the recent literature on East Asia’s post-Asian financial crisis regionalism, I also draw attention to the interactions and political-normative negotiations between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia—especially ASEAN states’ individual and collective efforts to define and direct East Asian trends in ways that preserve the relevance of ASEAN and ASEAN-Southeast Asia in the face of global and regional change. Both sets of negotiations—the regional-global and ASEAN-East Asia—illustrate the importance of thinking about the structure of Southeast Asia’s relations with both the world and East Asia. At the same time, these negotiations also demonstrate the importance of ASEAN agency in shaping the form and content of a still-evolving East Asian regionalism.

It is to this last point that this article gives special attention. In this sense, this article also responds to those who see East Asian (and Southeast Asian) regional efforts—including ASEAN’s role as focal point—as merely a function of great power competition or inattention. As further discussed below, major powers (global and regional) provide important impetus and structure, as well as space, when it comes to ASEAN’s various regional efforts, but I argue that local efforts at minimum shape in critical ways the form and content of a still evolving East Asian regionalism. The article then turns to a discussion of ASEAN-Southeast Asia’s
emergence under Cold War conditions, the ways that transitioning global and regional systems challenged the Southeast Asia that ASEAN created and the particular role of the Asian financial crisis in intensifying both regional-global and Southeast Asia-East Asia negotiations already in train. The last section then turns to the particular challenges of East Asian regionalism, with special attention to the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) framework, debates about an East Asian free trade area and ASEAN’s efforts to maintain its centrality in East Asia.

**Regionalism’s multiple negotiations**

Regionalism, which is understood to involve formal coordination between states and to give political and institutional expression to a geographic space, has been slow in coming to East Asia. Of the world’s three major economic centres—Europe, North America and East Asia—East Asia has been the last to pursue regionalism. East Asia also lagged behind Southeast Asia, for which regionalism had long been considered more materially challenged but claimed the only regional organization (ASEAN) of any durability in the East and Southeast Asian neighbourhood. This situation in East Asia began to change in the 1990s and especially with the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis. What followed was the intensification of state-to-state coordination along East Asian lines to a degree that was unprecedented.

Not surprisingly given its potential significance for existing global and regional arrangements, the growth of East Asian processes—state and non-state—have generated much attention from those inside and outside East Asia. As discussed below, East Asian regionalism has particular significance for ASEAN-Southeast Asia. The emergence of East Asian regionalism also generated new scholarly inquiry, in which East Asia became part of a growing literature on ‘new regionalism’—new because its approach to the study of regionalism diverged from the neofunctionalist emphases of early regionalism studies on European integration, as well as the highly state-centric emphases of neoliberal-institutionalist/realist approaches that characterized discussions in the 1980s. In general, the new regionalism literature is considered more pluralist and inclusive of different actors, institutional forms, combinations of actors and developmental experiences beyond Europe; is more interdisciplinary and multi-level in its analysis; is more likely to give consideration to ideas and identity claims, including the conscious, not just functional, actions of elites in the construction of regions (Hurrell 1995; Pempel 2005; Yeo 2005; Warleigh-Lack 2006).

Meanwhile, others focus more on differences in the phenomenon itself—that is, today’s regionalism is new because they see something qualitatively different about the phenomenon compared to the past. For example, East Asian regionalism is characterized as new because it did not exist previously (Dent 2008; Frost 2008). Others characterize East Asian regionalism as exemplary of a more recent global resurgence of regionalism since the 1990s. In particular, they see today’s regionalisms as a response (mostly of beleaguered states) to the intensified and often inescapable forces of globalization. Consequently, instead of the ‘old regionalism’ that was often characterized as a supporting ‘building block’ of global order, new regionalisms existed in tension with the global, and might be even justified by the politics of resistance (Higgott and Phillips 2000;
Nesadurai 2000; Phillips 2001). Put another way, new regionalism understood globalization as changing not just functional needs but also actors’ perception and understanding of states and the existing (neoliberal) global system.

As Breslin and Higgott put it, for developing countries especially, the 1997–1999 economic crises (Asian and global) produced a ‘sharpened interrogation of the benefits of globalization and specifically the utility of the “Washington Consensus”’, which, in turn, began ‘changing the basis for regional organization in general and the articulation of regional responses to global financial disorder in particular’ (Breslin and Higgott 2000, 338). Given that the growth of East Asian regionalism is associated with the Asian financial crisis, it is no surprise that discussions have given particular attention to regionalism as a product of such regional-global interactions—or more accurately, national-global interactions from which regionalism is a product. As Breslin and Higgott explain, post-crisis regionalism in Asia speak to ‘the potential roles of nascent regional organizations as mediating layers of governance between the nation-state and global financial institutions’ (Breslin and Higgott 2000, 337–388).

Some raise questions about the features that supposedly make recent approaches and regional efforts distinct (Warleigh-Lack 2006). For example, the regional-global tension may not be that novel—at least for regionalisms of the global south. Regionalisms that emerged in the period just after World War II, for example, were almost across the board characterized by ideas of anti-colonialism, autonomy and self-determination: in other words, resistance against existing global structures (for example, Western imperialism and the Cold War). This was partly because, as Vayrynen details, developing states’ conceptualizations of themselves as parts of larger regions or regional identities ‘grew out of the process of decolonization’ (Vayrynen 2003, 27). In this sense, the developing, mostly post-colonial world, may find the ‘new regionalism’ not so new but rather an echo of a historical theme. This includes ASEAN, a regionalism forged well before recent financial crises. Indeed, despite the literature’s particular preoccupation with ASEAN’s intra-regional relations, this has been an organization that is also very much an exercise in self-determination vis-à-vis world forces.

Nevertheless, while there is debate about how ‘new’ both the phenomena and approach are, the concepts highlighted by the new regionalism literature still provide useful starting points for thinking about what is taking place in East and Southeast Asia. For example, from new regionalism’s pluralism, we get an expanded view of the different ways in which East Asia’s different units are being tied together and why. The distinction between regionalization and regionalism, for example, has been especially useful as applied to East Asia. Regionalization moves us beyond the state and refers to societal and market-driven processes that can also tie peoples and localities together. Regionalization—which can take the form of various societal and business networks—allows us to see the ways that East Asia has been integrating, even if not formally so and not in ways that look like Europe. Regionalism, in contrast, is about state-to-state coordination. Compared to regionalization, regionalism is understood to be less spontaneous and more directed involving ‘an articulated idea of creating a region with specific goals in mind’ (Akihiko Tanaka quoted by Bergsten 2007). Regionalism can also be a ‘normative concept, referring to shared values, norms, identity and aspirations’ (Kim 2004, 40). East Asian processes, regionalization and regionalism,
today provide structure, impetus and new challenge for ASEAN and ASEAN-Southeast Asia.

Especially useful towards explaining the evolution of East Asian regional processes and trends are the national-regional-global interactions highlighted in new regionalism discussions. Two points here deserve particular emphasis. The first is that the structure of the global system matters. New regionalisms may be characterized by greater resistance vis-à-vis global structures and processes, but neither can regional actors ignore them. This is especially true of the developing world, where states are often materially and normatively less well equipped to begin with. Consequently, they are more likely to be constrained (or forced to be more novel) in the ways they navigate and push back at the global system. The second point is at least equally important. This is the question of local agency, especially as regards the developing world.

Local agency as regards the developing world is what particularly distinguishes the new regionalism discussions from some 'old' regionalism discussions that more often than not privileged the roles played by major powers. Indeed, the emphasis placed on new regionalism's critique of global arrangements has sometimes obscured just how novel it is to conceptualize weaker actors as being agents, not just objects of great power designs. Thus, to highlight how 'Asia', 'Africa' or 'Latin America' are pushing back and shaping regional and global arrangements is of some conceptual significance. Developing world actors may be more constrained compared to their European counterparts, but they do take active parts in defining their regions and worlds. Though not typically associated with the ‘new regionalism’ literature, Amitav Acharya (2007) has made the point that our studies of regions (both recent and not so recent) have tended to overlook and at least minimize the role played by local agency—especially the agency of lesser powers. For Acharya, local adaptations and interpretations—'localization'—are in fact key to explaining the particular characteristics of places as well as their degree of congruence with global structures and politics (Acharya 2004). Thus, as he puts it, '[p]ower matters, but local responses to power may matter even more in the construction of regional orders' (Acharya 2007, 630). Taking the argument further, as illustrated by debates as those over the IMF and WTO agendas, local and regional actors can also effect change in the global system itself. The point here is that regions and world are in constant negotiation.

However, while regional-global negotiations have been key features of East Asia’s ‘new regionalism’, the focus can also obscure the fact that East Asia also remains very much a product of internal, intra-regional negotiations. As many note, it is what is going on within East Asia that may matter most to whether or not East Asia exists. Or put another way, the challenge of East Asian regionalism is not just vis-à-vis extra-regional/global forces, but also vis-à-vis intra-regional ones. East Asia’s existence as a region may be ultimately dependent more on internal, than external, recognition of East Asia as a region. In this sense, the security communities literature, which experienced a resurgence of its own during the 1990s but has since been moved to the wayside by financial crises, also continues to provide critical insight into East Asian regionalization and regionalism (Adler and Barnett 1998). More to the point, the form and content of East Asian regionalism will be the product of not one but at least two interacting negotiations. The first is between region and world and the second between actors and
states within East Asia. The second negotiation is multilayered and multifaceted in that it includes intra-Northeast Asian and intra-Southeast Asian negotiations, in addition to negotiations between ASEAN-Southeast Asia and East/Northeast Asia.

Again, I give special attention to this last negotiation between ASEAN-Southeast Asia and East/Northeast Asia. It should be noted that I use the term ‘negotiation’ in a particular way. Following from Kim’s characterization of regionalism as a normative concept that expresses shared values, norms, identity and aspirations (Kim 2004), the negotiations highlighted below are thus more than the utilitarian kind used in discussions of strategic bargaining. They are also more than mere ‘interactions’. Rather, negotiations are perhaps first and foremost political and normative. Viewed thusly, the negotiation between ASEAN-Southeast Asia and East Asia also becomes more visible. Though often characterized as a ‘sub-region’ (thus, making it seem less ‘real’ or legitimate compared to ‘East Asia’), ‘Southeast Asia’ is in critical ways more ‘real’ than East Asia. True, thinner regionalization has historically challenged Southeast Asian and specifically ASEAN regionalism. And East Asia, compared to Southeast Asia, is substantiated by economic networks and greater regionalization (though, as discussed below, whether the patterns of interactions express East Asia as usually characterized can be debated). Nevertheless, as a normative concept, ‘Southeast Asia’ enjoys greater acceptance and legitimacy as an organizing principle among its component units than does East Asia.

Put another way, because ASEAN-Southeast Asia is more normatively established—it is a region with internal recognition and is thus understood as deserving to exist, not subsumed as a subregion—recent East Asian regionalism efforts are being critically shaped by the negotiation between ASEAN-Southeast Asia and East Asia as a whole. Regional-global negotiations alone do not capture completely the hows, whys or forms of recent East Asian regionalism efforts. Indeed, I argue that one cannot understand the emerging East Asian regionalism without considering the role played by ASEAN states and their efforts to assert Southeast Asian agency vis-à-vis both global and East Asian forces. Below, I give attention to those negotiations in relation to transitioning global and regional systems.

Southeast Asia and East Asia

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is the institutional expression of a geographic concept. However, as an organizing principle for politics, the idea of Southeast Asia as a basis for organization may be more contested than most. This is in fact a long running theme of post-World War II scholarship on Southeast Asia’s international relations. Moreover, despite what Tim Huxley (1996) describes as a Southeast Asia’s ‘unquestioned’ analytic usefulness as a political region among scholars of the region for much of the Cold War,⁴ Southeast Asia

⁴Huxley (1996) provides a good chronological literature review of Southeast Asia as an ‘analytic concept’ (understood in his account mostly in terms of ‘security complexes’ a la Buzan 1988, 1994) in studies on Southeast Asian international relations. See also Emmerson (1984).
remained challenged as an organizational principle for politics. By conventional arguments, Southeast Asia is economically irrational as primary trade dependencies lie outside the region, politically problematic given intra-regional competition and externally challenged where systemic manipulations by major powers in Southeast Asia are constant reminders of the ‘softness’ of Southeast Asia as a geographic expression (Leifer 1974). Such regional-global interactions, dependencies, vulnerabilities and intra-regional conflicts also intensified and underscored the contestability not just of region but also Southeast Asian states in a post-colonial era (Job 1992; Alagappa 1995; Collins 2000). ASEAN and Southeast Asia as an organizing principle emerged as a way to bring new order to forces from within and without. In Southeast Asia, regionalism preceded regionalization. The contestability of Southeast Asia as a region and principle for political organization, however, remained, as evidenced by the persistent challenges of intra-ASEAN, let alone intra-Southeast Asian, regional cooperation and coordination, as well as persistent criticisms and scepticism levelled at ASEAN by scholars and analysts.

Given the comprehensiveness of challenges, it is worth underscoring that the subsequent conscious ‘quest for identity’ described by Acharya (2002) aimed for recognition of Southeast Asia both inside and outside Southeast Asia. Attention has been rightly placed on the internal coherence of Southeast Asia as a region and of ASEAN as the institutional expression of regional reconciliation after conflict (Leifer 1989). However, just as important have been ASEAN’s and ASEAN-Southeast Asia’s evolution vis-à-vis external actors and forces. ASEAN initiatives like the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN-1971) and Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ-1995) treaty, for example, point to an important external orientation that moreover aims to establish the integrity of Southeast Asia vis-à-vis external actors. The regularization of annual (post-ministerial conference) meetings between collective ASEAN and key economic partners since the mid-1980s and most of all, the strong correlation between major power flux and some of ASEAN’s most defining initiatives similarly point to the understood role played by ASEAN in mediating states’ relations with the world (Ba 2009).

Nevertheless, as in debates about ASEAN’s intra-regional relations, questions about the external validity of Southeast Asia remained. Perhaps nowhere was this as clear as in ASEAN’s relations with the United States (US) whose Cold War policies and commitments gave ASEAN states critical space and time to stabilize both intra-state and intra-ASEAN relations. More to the point, ASEAN-Southeast Asia emerged under conditions of US hegemony where the United States provided ASEAN states with development support and an economic motor.

Thus, I make a distinction between Southeast Asia as an analytic concept and as political organizing or coordinating principle, though this should not be read to mean the two are unrelated or do not inform the other. Theories generally claim, for example, that their scholarship and concepts describe and are founded on actual politics. Others have argued, in contrast, that scholarship and concepts can also inform and affect the practice of Southeast Asia’s international relations. (See Emmerson 1984; also Ba 2009, Introduction and Chapter 1). In this article, however, my focus is primarily on the appropriateness and challenges of Southeast Asia as a political organizational principle for Southeast Asian states.
as well as a deterrent and stabilizing force vis-à-vis other major powers (Beeson 2003). Those conditions were notable not only for their support of the development of individual ASEAN states but also for the ways that they helped insulate ASEAN-Southeast Asia from the politics and potential ambitions of Northeast Asian states. While Japan and ASEAN states were not unconnected due to their common Cold War and US associations—as well as Japanese aid and war reparations (Pempel 1996)—US policies and bilateralism, including the US-Japan security alliance, allowed ASEAN states to keep Japan mostly at arms length. Most of all, Southeast Asia’s world and region of relations were distinguished by the relative absence of China, which had provided a gravitational force for many in the regional neighbourhood in past eras.

However, especially since the late 1980s, global and regional changes reintroduced questions about Southeast Asia as a meaningful concept and organizing principle. Coinciding changes in US policy, the emergence of Japan as an economic superpower, as well as a growing and marketizing China, all began to blur the lines between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. Indeed, shifting major power relations were a reminder of what some such as Barry Buzan saw to be the artificial conditions under which ASEAN-Southeast Asia had emerged and developed—a point underscored by Southeast Asia’s absence from Buzan’s and Waever’s more recent listing of the world’s regions (Buzan 1994; Buzan and Waever 2003). These challenges would increasingly press ASEAN states to think beyond ASEAN’s original Southeast Asian purview. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC-1989) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF-1993/4)—ASEAN’s first forays into official regionalisms beyond Southeast Asia—for example, were notably both products of this period.6

At the same time, ASEAN states notably embarked upon both those initiatives with more than a little caution and even resistance. In both cases, concerns about being dominated or (worse) marginalized by major powers in larger forums factored large in deliberations about whether to move into regionalisms beyond Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, in both cases, non-ASEAN proposals put pressure on ASEAN states to think beyond ASEAN. Australia, with epistemic leadership from Japan, played the primary instigator role behind APEC. In the case of the ARF, ASEAN states were the initiators but only after being confronted by no fewer than five different proposals from non-ASEAN states (Kerr 1994). In both cases, fears of marginalization ultimately trumped fears about domination; however, guarding against the latter, ASEAN states also succeeded in pushing for a more informal, consensus-based regionalism modelled on ASEAN’s (Ravenhill 2001; Caballero-Anthony 2005). While ASEAN elites understood their consensus-based regionalism within ASEAN in mostly relationship-building (and relationship maintaining) terms, the ‘ASEAN Way’ also took on more explicitly instrumental and tactical characteristics in these larger forums. That is, the ‘ASEAN Way’ became a way to guard against larger powers imposing unwanted agendas on ASEAN’s lesser states. In the case of the ARF, lessons were also likely learned from

6 Though APEC was not an ASEAN initiative, ASEAN as a group was courted by APEC’s Australian and Japanese proponents (Ravenhill 2001) and the decision to enter into APEC was collective as well as individual. All ASEAN members at the time joined simultaneously and ASEAN as an organization is explicitly referenced in APEC’s founding documents and statements.
APEC’s early years when APEC’s Western members pushed for greater institutionalization and agenda specificity, breaching what ASEAN states understood to be founding promises to them that APEC would remain mostly informal and gradual in its process. That experience provided important context and likely impetus for ASEAN’s decision to initiate (and thus claim ownership of) the ARF, as opposed to merely accept an externally initiated forum with ASEAN characteristics as they had with APEC (Ba 2009).

Reflective of the institutionalized nature of US-ASEAN relations and questions about Northeast Asian powers, it was additionally notable that neither of these first ‘ASEAN plus’ regionalisms were East Asian in scope or membership. Notable because in very real and material ways, ‘East Asia’ had already begun to emerge after being suppressed and hidden by the Cold War global system. In security, for example, changing US priorities and pressures on Japan to ‘burden share’ by the late 1980s had already begun to produce security adjustments on the part of Tokyo. While scholars may debate their significance and how deeply entrenched Japan’s post-World War II pacifist culture is (Oros 2008; Samuels 2008), Japan’s budgetary, political and even normative adjustments as regards its ‘peace constitution’, were nevertheless reminders of a time when Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia were much more connected and even integrated—in that case, forcibly under Japanese power. Intensified economic interactions also increasingly tied Southeast Asian economies to Japan. Here too, changing post-Cold War US priorities played a part as US economic troubles and trade tensions with Japan resulted in the 1985 Plaza Accords, the subsequent appreciation of the Japanese yen and increase of Japanese (and also Korean and Taiwanese) investment to Southeast Asia in search of lower production costs and, consequently, the intensification of economic and production ties between ASEAN-Southeast Asia on the one hand and Japan, South Korea and Taiwan on the other (Bernard and Ravenhill 1995; Pempel 1996). Put another way, regionalization processes began to intensify Southeast Asia’s economic ties (and dependencies) with Northeast Asia. Many argue that economic regionalization was market driven, in the sense that private investment was responding to new economic imperatives but it was also very much a function of state policies adapting to a transitioning (Cold War) global system and policies.

Meanwhile, ASEAN-Southeast Asia’s relations with China were also changing. The advent of the reform era in China in 1978 opened the door to new economic exchanges between China and Southeast Asia—especially the non-communist ASEAN states whose Cold War relations with China had been more limited. In this sense, Deng Xiaoping’s reforms did not just introduce market-based development to China, it also (re)introduced China to the regional political economy of East and Southeast Asia. Similarly, as in the case of Japan, the economic blurring of the lines between Northeast and Southeast Asia was accentuated by security developments in the 1990s—in this case, China’s heightened attention to its South China Sea claims, which pointed quite literally to the porosity and softness of Southeast Asia’s frontiers (Leifer 1996). Here too,  

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While US-ASEAN relations were not characterized by multilateral institutionalization, they were institutionalized in the sense of the web of US-centric, mostly bilateral arrangements and agreements, as well as what had become a culture of expectations as to the role—even perceived indispensability—of the United States in East and Southeast Asia.
post-Cold War US changes—the closing of US bases in the Philippines combined with changing US trade policies toward ASEAN economies—both pushed and reinforced the idea and the reality of regional and global systems in transition.

As the above suggests, regional and global changes confronted ASEAN states with a dual challenge. The first challenge was how to mitigate its vulnerabilities in relation to the transitioning US-centred system on which states had come to depend. The second challenge was regional—namely, how to manage growing economic and security interdependencies with Northeast Asian states, especially China and Japan. In this sense, it is no surprise that ASEAN’s first experiences with regionalism beyond Southeast Asia were Asian Pacific, not East Asian. Both APEC and ARF emerged as ways to manage the multifaceted transition at both regional and global levels. In this sense, Asian Pacific regionalism represented a bridge between the old Cold War system oriented around the United States and a still-emerging East Asia-like regional system towards which there remained much ambivalence and concern. That ambivalence and concern, as well as acute awareness of the still very relevant structure of ASEAN’s relations with the global system, especially the US, was very much in evidence when Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir proposed the creation of an East Asian Economic Group (EAEG), which debuted practically the very day that the Uruguay Trade Rounds collapsed in December 1990. For Mahathir, the EAEG responded to both global uncertainties and global-political realities involving ASEAN’s institutional and geopolitical limitations. For Mahathir at least, ASEAN needed the larger economies of Japan, Korea and China. However, as discussed by others, US opposition—‘power to block’ (Rapkin 2001)—was instrumental to the EAEG’s defeat (Higgott and Stubbs 1995: Wesley 1999; Webber 2001; Beeson 2003).

Concerns about their individual relationships with the US certainly factored large in intra-ASEAN debates, but for ASEAN states, there was also the additional concern about the EAEG’s significance for ASEAN and ASEAN-Southeast Asia. As Samuel Kim notes, it is not particularly unique to East and Southeast Asia that ‘structural and policy changes’ at the global level of politics would heighten the ‘significance of the intrinsic dynamics of regional forces’ (Kim 2004), but for ASEAN-Southeast Asia, there was also the additional challenge of having to re-relate to Northeast Asian regional powers that had been kept at a distance. In the end, only Singapore was really convinced and Mahathir was unable to marshal sufficient support within ASEAN for the EAEG. As a concession, states did agree to a downgraded ‘caucus’ version of the original proposal—the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), which at least provided a process for expanded regional discussion more or less along East Asian lines. As Stubbs (2002) and Terada (2003) detail, the EAEC—and subsequent processes such as the Asia Europe Meetings (ASEM) to which it helped give rise—also began to ‘embed’ East Asia into the discourse and consciousness of governments and opinion leaders. It also illustrated the adaptability and entrepreneurship of pro-East Asia ASEAN elites such as Goh Chok Tong in giving those processes additional definition. Nevertheless, the downgraded EAEC was still testament not just to the global structure of relations of which East and Southeast Asia were parts, but also to the internal legitimacy problems of ‘East Asia’ for those who supposedly belonged to it. In fact, not until the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis could one say with a degree of confidence that any consensus existed about the merits of East Asian
regionalism and even then, there would be a reluctance to give explicit recognition to East Asia as an organizing principle.

ASEAN’s twin challenges—global and regional

The 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis (AFC) is generally understood to be the turning point for East Asian regionalism that grew in response to critical reassessments of global (especially US) dependencies, regional interdependence and the limitations of both national and regional institutions. While afflicted economies directed particular frustration at the United States for its neglect and even disdain for Southeast Asia’s troubles (Higgott 1998; Higott and Philipps 2000), the larger lesson for ASEAN states was the absence of real policy or practical options without US support or approval. Consequently, the key distinguishing feature of the post-AFC East Asian regionalism is not just that it is East Asian; it is also that it does not include the US. Following APEC and ARF above, the emergence of East Asian regional options without the US thus represents another stage in East and Southeast Asia’s efforts to adapt and transition from the US-centred system of the past.

The growth of East Asian regionalism was also a response to states’ economic interdependence and interconnectedness. While economies might not rise as one, the Asian financial crisis did dramatically demonstrate that they could all fall as one. The ASEAN Plus Three (APT) framework—which serendipitously held its first informal summit in December 1997 as the crisis intensified—was a direct beneficiary of that conclusion. As Denis Hew and others emphasize, the AFC ‘proved to be a major catalyst for the establishment of the ASEAN+3 as practically every country in the region was adversely affected in varying degrees from the crisis’ (Hew 2006). Or to quote the Philippines’ then Secretary of Foreign Affairs Siazon, ‘ASEAN+3 is logical because of a shared experience and a recognition of the interlinkages during the financial crisis’ (quoted by Terada 2003, 265).

The insufficiencies of other regional arrangements—namely, APEC and ASEAN—only made the APT and East Asian cooperation in general more compelling as a necessary mechanism to manage global forces and influences, as well as states’ growing interdependence with one another (Wesley 1999; Webber 2001; Low 2003). Of special note were conclusions that ASEAN was especially ill-equipped to manage global economic flows or global political pressures. In the end, ASEAN states reached the same conclusion as that of Mahathir seven to eight years earlier; that is, the economic and political limitations of ASEAN. Japan, especially, had to be brought into any meaningful functional or political response to economic crises. Similarly, ASEAN states, lacking recognition or place at most global tables, needed a Japan or China if their voices were to be heard. As the Jakarta Post would later put it, ‘ASEAN … painfully recognizing its own institutional and geopolitical weakness, has acknowledged … that the East Asian region could be much stronger and influential in world affairs if the three major Asian powers up north are eventually brought into the picture’ (Jakarta Post 2000).

Thus, East Asian cooperative meetings, mechanisms and processes, especially in the form of the APT, gained strength in response to related challenges, external and internal to East Asia. Not surprisingly, the greatest area of activity has been in the areas of monetary and financial cooperation, including the Chiang-Mai Initiative and Asian Bond Market Initiative. Each emerged and developed
as an important mechanism by which to moderate and mediate external forces (Beeson 2003). The APT also offered a means by which ASEAN and Northeast Asian economies could better manage their growing interdependence and interconnections. As the East Asia Study Group (EASG) affirmed in 2002, ‘the 1997 Asian financial crisis has awakened the urgent need for institutionalized cooperation and stronger economic integration that transcends the geographic distinction between Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia’ (EASG 2002). The result is that since 1997 ASEAN, along with East Asian, governments have taken a more active role in facilitating East Asian cooperation and integration. To quote Urata, the AFC helped produce a ‘shift from market-led to institutional-led regional economic integration in East Asia’ (Urata 2002). Regionalism thus began to mirror the regionalization in train since the late-1980s.

ASEAN in East Asia

In the decade since the Asian financial crisis, ASEAN has seen the growth of East Asian cooperative meetings, mechanisms and processes. Moreover, global and regional developments since have continued to confirm and intensify the above regional-global themes and East Asian trends. Indeed, recent developments sometimes seem not just variations on a theme but déjà vu—repeats of the same challenges that first pushed ASEAN states to move beyond their Southeast Asian comfort zone in the 1990s. Troubled Doha Rounds have replaced the troubled Uruguay Rounds of the 1990s. Concerns about US trade protectionism and trade/investment diversion today focus on the US-proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas in place of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Angst and anxiety about the US as a critical final market for ASEAN and East Asian goods today, as they did fifteen to twenty years ago, focus on US economic troubles and consumer markets.

Such global and US uncertainties thus continue to sustain interest in developing regional frameworks but the challenge for ASEAN states is which region to focus on. As already suggested, ASEAN regionalism has been historically stymied by the fact that individual domestic markets lack scale, size and complexity. Also, no one economy is large enough to be the driver of Southeast Asian growth the way, for example, Germany or France might do for Europe or the way that the US has done for the Americas (and indeed much of the world). Meanwhile, historical, colonial and Cold War relationships have contributed to a structure of trade that is intra-regionally competitive as opposed to complementary and outward directed, all of which continue to constrain intra-ASEAN trade liberalization efforts like the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA).

East Asian integration, relative to ASEAN integration, is thus more economically attractive because of the potential roles played by Japan, Korea and increasingly China as regional motors for growth. Hence, as with monetary regionalism above, trade regionalism—if it were to be effective in protecting local actors from uncertain and volatile forces—seems to require that ASEAN bring in the larger economies of Northeast Asia. At minimum, different levels of development mean that there is greater intra-regional complementarity and thus, a priori, potential for intra-regional trade. Indeed, regional trade trends do bear this out. For example, between 1995 and 2004 intraregional trade doubled in value.
and now makes up over sixty per cent of total regional trade, which is as high as the European Union (Asian Development Bank [ADB] 2007).

As noted, the APT framework has been a particular area of activity with no less than 48 different mechanisms in place to manage and facilitate cooperation between APT states (Severino 2007). Annual (separate) meetings of APT Finance, Economic and Foreign Ministers have respectively met twelve, ten and twelve times as of 2008. Considerable consultation and negotiations have also taken place towards the creation of an Asian currency unit (Dent 2008), as well as increasingly regular meetings between the thirteen states on a growing number of other issues. For example, as of June 2009, ministerial level meetings have been held in areas of health (four times), labour (six times), tourism (eight times), the environment (seven times). Meetings at lower levels targeted at developing technical skills and functional capacities provide additional threads to the fabric of East Asian regionalism (Hamilton-Hart 2003).

However, even as the APT process has grown, there remains considerable ambivalence about recent East Asian trends. On the one hand, APT offers a mechanism to manage better Southeast Asia’s relations external and internal to East Asia. On the other hand, the APT also represents a step towards institutionalizing the idea of East Asia. The APT and its associated processes, along with Southeast Asia’s growing interdependencies with Northeast Asia, thus continue to blur the distinction between ASEAN-Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. Among ASEAN states, significant concern remains that both ASEAN and Southeast Asia will be overwhelmed by larger Northeast Asian actors, if not subsumed by a larger East Asia. Again, for ASEAN, East Asian regionalism involves internal, as well as external, negotiations.

As noted above, one measure of East Asia’s regionalization has been the growth of intra-East Asian trade and investment flows, though the larger geo-economic significance of that growth (especially in relation to the trade vulnerabilities highlighted above) is mitigated by the fact that North American and European markets remain major final destination markets. In other words, regional markets have become more important and there appears to be greater diversification and integration within East Asian production networks. However, those networks still depend on external markets buying their final products (International Monetary Fund [IMF] 2007). As a consequence, the global vulnerabilities described above have not been completely addressed.

Yet, the continued growth of China seems likely to make it a more significant regional economic motor in future that will provide more insulation from global and US economic shocks—a point recently made by current ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan. Speaking in 2008 on the most recent US-born global economic crisis, Surin noted:

China can do a lot to help because as a big and large economy...it can absorb negative impact from outside and along the way, it can also help the ASEAN economies to increase or at least to maintain the levels of their export into the Chinese market. (Japan Economic Newswire 2008)

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8 Eleven if the number includes the two informal summits in 1997 and 1998. The twelfth—originally scheduled in December 2008 but delayed due to political crisis in Thailand—eventually took place on 26 February–1 March 2009.
And indeed, trade figures the first quarter of 2008 were better than expected despite a slow down in US-bound East Asian exports.\(^9\) Developments since then also continue to fuel speculation about a more prominent Chinese economic role in mitigating Southeast Asia historical sensitivity and vulnerability to US and global fluctuations—though, as noted above, there remains much debate about the extent to which East and Southeast Asian economies in fact have been ‘de-coupled’ from the US market.\(^10\) As regards this particular discussion on ASEAN’s place in East Asia, China’s growing economic role may be helpful but it also does not come without concerns. For one, while ASEAN as a whole has enjoyed a trade surplus with China, the gap is also narrowing, with Chinese exports to ASEAN growing at a faster rate than ASEAN’s to China (Asia Times 2008). For another, high-value ASEAN exports have tended to grow more slowly compared to low-value exports (Economic Intelligence Unit 2007). Especially as China moves up the production chain,\(^11\) Southeast Asia may find itself not just with a shrinking trade surplus (if not a trade deficit) but also the low-end supplier of inputs and raw materials to Northeast Asian economies (Felker 2003; 2004; Wattanapruttipaisan 2005).

Put another way, the patterns of intra-Asian trade are at least as significant as its growth. Intra-Asian trade has grown but the above suggests a North-South, hierarchical integration pattern in East Asia. In addition, trade growth is concentrated in Northeast Asia, especially China. As Kim similarly notes, while the growth of intra-East Asian trade does suggest the emergence of East Asia as a significant geo-economic entity in the world economy, the geo-economic weight within East Asia is distinctly Northeast Asian, not Southeast Asian. China, Japan and Korea are not only the largest economies in East Asia responsible for nearly ninety per cent of East Asia’s total GDP\(^12\) but they also collectively hold over 90 per cent of East Asia’s total foreign exchange reserves (Kim 2004, 44).

As a result, ASEAN has continued to be cautious and restrained in its approach to East Asian regionalism—this despite the fact that ASEAN has become East Asia’s ‘de facto hub’ or focal point for much of East Asia’s diplomatic and institutional activity (Ravenhill 2008). More to the point, while the above developments show that East Asia is increasingly a material, institutional and cognitive reality, ‘Southeast Asia’ also remains very much a relevant organizing principle for ASEAN states. Three debates—the first over the creation of an APT Secretariat and East Asia Summit, the second over the creation of an East Asian Free Trade Area (EAFTA) and the third over the ASEAN Charter—provide illustrations to this point.

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\(^9\) In addition to East Asian markets, European markets were also seen to be offsetting the slow down in US demand, developments that contributed to conclusions that East and Southeast Asian economies might be less vulnerable and dependent on the US economy compared to the past (Lloyd’s List 2008; The Australian 2008)

\(^10\) The IMF and World Bank, in particular, have questioned East Asia’s insulation from the US market (Rowley 2008). See also Pearlstein 2009.

\(^11\) For the period 2000–2007, China was the only East Asian economy whose high value exports grew faster than its low value exports (Economist Intelligence Unit 2007).

\(^12\) This number includes Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao.
ASEAN, the APT Secretariat and the East Asia Summit

As noted above, ASEAN has become a kind of hub for various East Asian-regional activities: the APT is held in conjunction with ASEAN’s annual meetings. Each is hosted by an ASEAN chair and each follows ASEAN’s own annual ministerial meeting. ASEAN’s presence is also in the name—the ASEAN Plus Three. Partly ASEAN’s centrality is because ASEAN is, to quote Hadi Soesastro, ‘least objectionable’ to various parties—China, Japan, South Korea, but also the US (Soesastro 2007). Partly, this is also due to competition between China and Japan and their respective lack of legitimacy as potential leading powers vis-à-vis ASEAN states as much each other. But ASEAN has centrality also because ASEAN and ASEAN states seized the initiative early on—for example, through the six plus three, seven plus three, and then ASEAN Plus Three meetings.

Still, questions persist as to what APT processes mean for ASEAN as an institution and Southeast Asia as a region. Those questions featured large, for example, in 2002 debates about the creation of an ASEAN Secretariat. In those debates, Mahathir, in addition to promising a million dollars in seed money for a secretariat, also pushed to change the APT’s name to acknowledge explicitly its East Asian composition. Of ASEAN members, however, only the Philippines expressed any support. Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore, on the other hand, perceiving the APT secretariat as a potential threat to ASEAN, argued for strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta first. That way, as the director-general of the ASEAN Department of Thailand’s foreign ministry put it, ‘at least we will continue to steer it’.13 Another ASEAN diplomat was even more direct in his concern that a weak ASEAN might ‘lose its lustre as a regional entity’ and even ‘be “neutralized” by the North Asian giants, especially China’ (Parameswaran 2002).

What this debate reveals is that even with the APT, where ASEAN is nominally and institutionally the hub, there remains considerable concern that East Asian processes will eclipse ASEAN. As Kavi Chongkittavorn, a long-time reporter for Bangkok’s The Nation put it: ‘Deep down, opponents [of the APT Secretariat] fear the new secretariat will transform ASEAN+3 to 3+ASEAN…’ (Chongkittavorn 2002). To call the APT process ‘East Asia’ would be even worse, a sign that ASEAN had been completely eclipsed by the larger body. As a compromise to those such as Mahathir, who pressed for official recognition of East Asia as a region, and per the conclusions of the East Asian Study Group (EASG) in 2002, ASEAN and their Northeast Asian counterparts did agree to an East Asian Summit. Notably, however, it was originally identified as a ‘long-term’ objective and ‘step-by-step process’ because, to quote the EASG report, discussions ‘revealed concerns that ASEAN may be marginalized if the transition towards an EAS [East Asia Summit] moves too fast’ or encumbers members with ‘too many meetings’ (EASG 2002). Diplomatic jockeying for position (vis-à-vis China) by Japan (Terada 2006), Malaysian impatience and opportunism (Soesastro 2007) and irresolvable differences over potential membership led to the EAS’s premature emergence and an EAS that has become more the APT’s rival than its evolutionary extension as originally intended. Thus, despite general agreement that East Asian

cooperation is ‘inevitable and necessary’ towards greater security *vis-à-vis* global forces and challenges (EASG 2002), the EAS is emblematic of the internal tensions and conflicts yet to be worked out *within* East Asia. Hence, even in the face of now understood global challenges and their common interdependence, internal East Asian political-normative negotiations continue not just between ASEAN-Southeast Asia and the larger East Asia, but also within ASEAN and among Northeast Asian powers.

As for ASEAN itself, the EAS’s expanded membership is notable. With the addition of Australia, New Zealand and India, ASEAN Plus Three has essentially become ASEAN plus six (as opposed to three) under the EAS framework. Its mixed membership has raised questions about its ‘East Asian’ content, leading some to attach the adjective ‘pan Asian’ to the EAS. In general, Australia’s and New Zealand’s inclusion was more contentious, while India as an ‘Asian’ state received more support given its cultural and historical influence in Southeast Asia. Indeed, for many in Southeast Asia—as *bridge and a buffer between the two great civilizational areas of China and India*—including India corrects an aberration of recent history in which India has been of marginal importance to Southeast Asia. Including India also serves the purpose of offsetting some of the Northeast Asian bias of APT-East Asia discussed above. Most important, ASEAN has also taken steps to institutionalize ASEAN’s centrality in the EAS process (Severino 2006). As with the APT, EAS meetings are tied to ASEAN’s annual ministerial meetings and are held in ASEAN countries. ASEAN also is given the authority to determine membership. In order to join the EAS, states must not only gain the approval of existing members but they also must accede to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).

**EAFTA**

A proposed East Asian free trade area is another debate that points to ASEAN states’ general ambivalence toward East Asia and the continued normative importance of Southeast Asia as an organizing principle in ASEAN. The East Asia Vision Group (EAVG), a group of ‘eminent intellectuals’ responsible for identifying goals that would support the formation of an East Asian community, identified an EAFTA as an objective in 2001 (East Asia Vision Group 2001). The group was also responding in part to the proliferation of bilateral and sub-regional free trade agreements in East Asia (and worldwide). Since the EAVG report, that general FTA trend has gained additional layers. In particular, the ASEAN China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) proposed by China in 2001 and agreed to by ASEAN in 2002, generated economic and political competition from other major economies, including Japan and Korea for whom ASEAN and China were critical markets. In the case of Japan, there was the additional and growing concern about China’s growing political influence. Consequently, both Japan and Korea offered ASEAN FTA proposals of their own. The competitive dynamics driving Japan’s new FTA emphasis, in particular, is illustrated by the lower priority assigned to a Japan-China FTA. The so-called FTA ‘domino effect’ was

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further strengthened by FTA proposals offered to ASEAN by the United States, India, the EU, Australia plus New Zealand. By 2006, ten FTAs had been concluded in East Asia, with another seven in process (Dent 2008).

Though these FTAs vary widely in scope, conditions and the degree to which they engage ASEAN as a collective, they nevertheless tended to reinforce ASEAN’s role as the primary hub for East Asian regional activity conceptually and practically. At the same time, while these competitive dynamics have helped affirm ASEAN’s relevance, many also see the proliferation of regional and bilateral trade arrangements and negotiations as distracting and inefficient, if not regionally fragmenting for East Asia as a region (Low 2003; Ravenhill 2003). Consolidating East Asia’s many FTAs into one could address some of those concerns and stymie potentially destabilizing effects of intra-regional competition. Some studies also show that of all East Asian economies, collective ASEAN has the most to gain in terms of both GDP and net welfare gain (Chirathivat 2006).

As with the APT secretariat debate, however, ASEAN’s general approach to East Asian integration has been to take an ‘ASEAN first’ approach—that is, ASEAN needs to prioritize strengthening ASEAN and ensuring ASEAN’s relevance within the larger East Asian region before moving into an East Asia-wide FTA. ASEAN’s hesitation towards an EAFTA was already in evidence in the 2002 EASG report, which basically downgraded the EAVG’s original recommendation. Identifying the EAFTA as a ‘long-term measure’ (albeit ‘with high priority’), the EASG expressed concern about intra-East Asian developmental gaps and variations. An ‘ASEAN community’ would have to be prioritized, as discussed below.

But in the meantime, the EASG suggested building an EAFTA upon existing bilateral and subregional FTAs, which could provide its building blocks. That suggestion has become the basis for one of three potential pathways to the creation of an EAFTA. In other words, the three ASEAN Plus One processes would be prioritized and then consolidated to form the foundation for an EAFTA. The second pathway is to develop the EAFTA all at once, while the third involves developing separately and then combining Northeast Asian and Southeast Asian FTA’s (Soesastro 2007). As suggested by the EASG report, ASEAN’s preference and approach has been to favour the first. Soesastro further notes that a ‘3 × (ASEAN+1)’ approach basically allows ASEAN to have it both ways: ASEAN maintains its political centrality and role as de facto hub but also gains the competitive advantages of a larger market (Soesastro 2007). The third pathway (the ASEAN Free Trade Area plus a Northeast Asia FTA) is probably the least attractive given the already strong Northeast Asian bias of the East Asian political economy. Southeast Asian strategies may aim to convince major powers of their common stake in regional security, but worse than one dominating would be more than one acting in concert possibly in opposition to Southeast Asian interests. Thus, it again makes sense to pursue each FTA one by one, not only because ASEAN remains the focus of attention but also because it keeps Northeast Asian economies from coordinating in ways that might work against Southeast Asian interests and reduce ASEAN’s centrality. As above, such competition for ASEAN’s regard has also served ASEAN well as regards its normative and material position in East Asia.

In the meantime, two others FTA proposals have also been floated—an ASEAN Plus Four (APT + India), as well as a regional FTA made up of the 16 EAS economies (the latter of which was proposed by Japan in 2006). However, ASEAN
representatives have generally been cool to the latter idea. As one ASEAN official put it, ‘ASEAN thinks it is important to strengthen the APT cooperation [first] because if there are 16 countries, ASEAN would be diluted’.  

The ASEAN Charter

The ASEAN Charter was adopted in 2007, ASEAN’s 40th anniversary year. Ratified in 2008 the ASEAN Charter identifies three pillars of ASEAN community: an ASEAN economic community, an ASEAN political security community\(^\text{16}\) and an ASEAN socio-cultural community. Most discussions on the ASEAN Charter focus on its significance for intra-ASEAN relations and ASEAN’s institutional culture. However, the ASEAN Charter and its emphasis on ASEAN community building is also very much connected to the above East Asian regionalizing and regionalism forces. Following China’s and ASEAN’s agreement to ACFTA in 2002, for example, states in 2003 adopted the ASEAN Economic Community, which aims to create a single Southeast Asian market and production base. Similarly, while ASEAN’s fortieth anniversary was a natural time for self-reflection, it also does not seem a coincidence that this comprehensive effort at solidifying ASEAN community also followed intensified East Asian trends above. Indonesia especially has been concerned that ASEAN is not sufficiently consolidated to maintain its centrality in the APT.

In this sense, the ASEAN Charter can be seen as an effort at self-strengthening and consolidation in the face of intensified East Asian regionalization processes. As Hew and Anthony put it, ASEAN can be the ‘building block’ and ‘linchpin’ to East Asian regional integration, but only if ASEAN is itself strong and integrated (Hew and Anthony 2000). Building on ASEAN’s 2003 Bali Concord II and then mandated in 2004, the Charter’s effort to build community is thus ultimately aimed not just at its own members but also at ensuring the forty-year old organization’s relevance in East Asia. Doing the latter requires not just greater intra-ASEAN integration, but also greater coordination and even active leadership. Put another way, if ASEAN is to remain the gravitational centre of the new East Asia, then ASEAN has to demonstrate to others that it is an effective body, able to lead others in the building of consensus and at minimum not stymied by its own divisions. If not, marginalization will be more likely because others will seek out other arrangements that meet their needs.  

As Rodolfo Severino puts it:

\(^{15}\) Quoted in ‘ASEAN Cool to Japan’s 16-Way FTA’, Japan Economic Newswire (23 August 2006). This position suggests some tension with the above point about India’s participation in East Asian processes, but it may also point to specific opposition to Australia and New Zealand. The 2007 EAS, however, did agree to study it.

\(^{16}\) The 2007 ASEAN Charter’s preamble maintains ASEAN’s 2003 Bali Concord II’s original reference to an ‘ASEAN security community’ but it has actually been renamed ‘ASEAN Political Security Community’ (APSC). A reference to the APSC can be found in the Article 9 of the Charter that elaborates ASEAN’s three ‘Community Councils’. See <http://www.aseansec.org/145.htm>.

\(^{17}\) In the political security realm, this may already be happening as members such as the United States, finding the ARF unresponsive to its interests, has begun to pursue and prioritize other forums such as the Shangri-La Dialogues.
[The extent to which the nations and peoples of ASEAN benefit from this circumstance [of being at the centre of the APT institutional architecture] will depend on two things: the degree of political solidarity and economic integration that ASEAN achieves and the wisdom of the policies of its individual component states. (Severino 2006)]

The process of negotiating, adopting and ratifying the Charter, in fact, exposed and underlined persistent and newer internal challenges and tensions in ASEAN. These included divisions between old and new members and between more liberal and less liberal ones. Such tensions illustrate the continued challenges of Southeast Asia as an organizing principle even among Southeast Asian states. Indeed, the decision to pursue the Charter is itself an acknowledgement by Southeast Asian states of ASEAN’s internal and coordination challenges, challenges that now hindered its ability to shape and define the regional politics around it. In particular, a regionalizing East Asia now significantly increased the stakes where Southeast Asia and ASEAN were concerned. Consequently, in addition to promoting greater ‘community’ in the three areas above, the Charter was also justified by the need to make ASEAN into a more rules-based organization that was also more efficient in its decision-making processes. While the recommendations of the original Eminent Persons Groups were diluted, the Charter was thus still a proactive effort towards trying to meet the conditions identified by Severino and to ensure a visible and practicable Southeast Asian economic and security community within a larger East Asia. Whether or not it will be successful in that effort remains a question subject to much debate.

Conclusion

In sum, the above discussion highlights the ways that East Asia is the product of multiple negotiations. The first negotiation is between East Asia on the one hand and global forces and structures on the other. The second negotiation is intra-regional. Here, I have focused on the intra-regional negotiation between ASEAN-Southeast Asia and ‘East Asia’. Both external and internal negotiations are also part of a still ongoing transition from a US-centric regional system towards a regional system that is more geographically encompassing and connected than it was before. The above illustrates regional actors pushing back at global structures, attempting to manage global forces and pressures, but also at the same time still constrained by entrenched economic and political relationships outside and also inside, East and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, despite the challenges, intra-East Asian relations have become a more stable, more interdependent and more institutionally connected through ASEAN and ASEAN-led processes. Again, today’s East Asia and its particular content and characteristics will be determined by the outcomes of East Asia’s interacting and interdependent external and internal negotiations.

Most of all, the above discussion highlights the particular challenge of these transitions for ASEAN-Southeast Asia and the ways that ASEAN has tried to adapt, protect and steer the process beginning first with Asian Pacific regionalisms and now East Asian regionalism such as the APT. ASEAN’s extended processes, which importantly preceded the recent East Asian regionalization push, also importantly provided a comfortable space for past adversaries to get used to the
East Asian idea. ASEAN’s efforts also challenge the conclusion that ASEAN’s centrality is due solely or primarily to major power policies. While power matters—specifically, here major power opposition would matter—the above also shows ASEAN taking proactive steps to better situate ASEAN-Southeast Asia within an East Asia that is increasingly viewed as ‘necessary’ and ‘inevitable’. The perceived necessity of East Asian regionalism vis-à-vis global forces in combination with ASEAN-Southeast Asia’s efforts is the reason that East Asia has become more real, but also why its form and content reflect ASEAN’s influence and centrality. Again, ASEAN’s efforts clearly show that for all the internal tensions and contradictions of Southeast Asia, it remains a meaningful organizing principle to ASEAN states. Nevertheless, if Southeast Asia is to remain a meaningful organizing principle and if ASEAN is to maintain the position it has carved out for itself, it will have to demonstrate to both its own member-states and others its own coherence and internal strength. They will also have to show that ASEAN-led frameworks are able to provide guidance and lead others to solutions they can all find mutually acceptable.

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