
Introduction

European and Asian regionalism: Form and function

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In investigating the relationship of the European Union (EU) and the East Asian region, and the comparisons of these two regions, this special issue on *European and Asian Regionalism: Function and Form* brings together a collection of articles that contributes to an understanding of these regions – and regional bodies – in an interdisciplinary and comprehensive manner.¹ They contribute to our understanding of the EU as a political, economic and security actor with civil society dimensions, and a clear regional integration agenda and that agenda's influence on East Asia. They further deepen our understanding of East Asian developments in regionalism. Much more than a simple examination of EU–Asia relations, this special edition critically examines the proposal that the EU may constitute a paradigm for East Asian regionalism. Among other things, it looks at EU–Asia links in the Asia Europe Meetings (ASEM) and role of formal and informal integration and networks within the East Asian region; the new wave of regionalism in Asia in the aftermath of the Asian Currency Crisis of 1997–1998; and the role of institutions and of state and non-state actors.

This special edition of *International Politics* is distinctive in that it is multidisciplinary in approach and brings together a set of articles, which, although they share common themes relating to political and economic integration, are nonetheless diverse in their subject matters and disciplinary approaches.² The contributors draw on a rich and diverse literature and on original research that examines the experience of regional integration in both Europe and East Asia, as they come from varied academic backgrounds, in political science, economics, cultural and legal studies. This special issue challenges specialists on the EU to understand the impact of the EU on



Asia and Asia's impact on the EU, while seeking to illustrate that there is a commonality of interests and shared concern about challenges in both Europe and East Asia. It challenges specialists on East Asia to examine the role of the EU in that region and to comparatively examine the two very different experiences of regional integration. It is clear that understandings of regional architecture and institutions differ considerably in each region. Further, it explores and critically assesses arguments that the EU can or should constitute a model for Asian regionalization.

There is a concurrence of views among the scholars in this special issue that the EU's own experience has been far from perfect – a point made by de Prado, for example, regarding foreign policy and security cooperation and Murray regarding institutional development, yet there is a desire to see that experience as a model for East Asia, as Cameron and Murray illustrate. This has led to considerable debate between scholars and policymakers, especially within Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and in particular with the ratification of the ASEAN Charter.

The role of crises and serious challenges are examined in many of the contributions to this volume, with regard to the re-assessment of informal regionalism in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis, for example, and the current crises facing both regions, such as security, pandemics and the global financial crisis. In addition, the role of regionalism in multilateralism and in international negotiations also features in many of the contributions to this special issue. There is discussion of the importance of intensified regionalism as a response to globalization and global challenges and the role of interdependence in this context, for example in multilateral negotiations and ASEM.

Finally, it is noteworthy that there is a ghost at the feast in this volume – the United States. The role of the United States in the two regions differs considerably, a point made by Yeo, Murray and de Prado, for example, with regard to, first, the nature of the US response to regionalizing tendencies in each region, and, second, in terms of its hard power status in each region over time. The role of the Cold War legacy is also pertinent in this context – the EU was founded during the Cold War and in the embrace of the United States. The main efforts at more formalized East Asian regionalism have taken place after the Cold War, albeit in the shadow, rather than embrace, of the United States.

The first set of articles in the volume focus on the forms that regional integration has taken, as well as the functions that regional organizations perform, whereas the latter articles consider specific issues including human rights, Myanmar, security and monetary integration.

In the opening article, 'Comparative Regional Integration in the EU and East Asia: Moving Beyond Integration Snobbery', Philomena Murray provides an overview for the volume looking at the comparative experience of the EU with East Asia in regional integration. These twin problems of, on the one



hand, lauding or reifying one's experience as the best and, on the other, of advancing one's experiences as a model are evident in some comparative regional integration analysis – but also in the rhetoric of those actors who see their own experience as a model, namely the actual policy community. The article seeks to explore this twin problem by focusing on some comparative aspects of regional integration in the EU and East Asia. It argues that there are important and valid aspects of comparison, such as the origins and objectives, but fewer comparative factors when it comes to achievements and results. It suggests that historical differences constitute the major reasons that a direct comparison is neither useful nor productive. It explores challenges of comparative analysis related to the problems of the centrality – and the exceptionalism – of the EU in some comparative regional integration analysis. It argues that the promotion of the EU experience as a form of model or paradigm is far from analytically helpful – the method of comparative analysis needs to be the focus of our study as much as the objects of comparison.

Ralph Pettman's article on 'Asian Perspectives on the European Experience of Regionalism' contrasts the EU's experience of integration with that of East Asia. He asks how European state-makers have managed to coordinate various key activities to the point where many of them see the EU as providing a model for the rest of the world in general and Asia in particular. For example, most of Europe now shares a common market and a common currency. This was originally considered unthinkable. He notes that most European state-makers did surrender significant aspects of their sovereign power to make this happen, although recent developments around the Lisbon Treaty highlight the continuing importance of sovereignty. He argues that state-makers in the Asian region have not yet followed suit. This informs our understanding about their competing politico-strategic, economic and social concerns. It is suggested that East Asian state-makers are nonetheless capable of sustaining their own form of regionalism, contributing to scholarly understanding of the different politico-cultural context in which they live. This context makes it possible to promote distinctly 'Asian' perspectives. It provides an East Asian alternative to European regionalism and a way of compensating for the limits and distortions of the EU. This again highlights how the form that regional integration takes, as opposed to the specific functions performed, differs between the regions.

In a similar vein, Yeo Lay Hwee, in her article on 'Institutional Regionalism versus Networked Regionalism: Europe and East Asia Compared', suggests that East Asian regionalism may take a very different form. She notes that for much of the second half of the twentieth century, regionalism was conceptualized with reference to the European experience. The EU is seen as the most successful example of regional integration and this 'model' is largely based on an exclusive 'institutional' regionalism in which integration is achieved through



endowing specific institutions with far-reaching decision-making powers to shape the behaviour of the member states. In contrast, the East Asian region-building process seems to operate on a different logic, with an emphasis placed on open-ended networked regionalism. Her article sketches out the process of regional construction in Europe and East Asia and attempts to develop and contextualize the idea of networked regionalism in order to assess how useful it can be in explaining the trajectory and contours of region building in East Asia.

Michael Smith and Natee Vichitsorasatra in their contribution, 'The European Union's Asia Strategies: Problems of Foreign Policy and International Relations', seek to conceptually understand the relationship between the two regions. EU–Asia relations raise linked problems (on the one hand) of EU collective action and identity and (on the other hand) of cooperation. The relationship is characterized by complexity and variety in three dimensions: first, 'voices' and history; second, institutional engagement and structure and, third, issue structure. In order to explore the implications of this complexity and variety, and to generate propositions for further research, they use International Relations theories based on material interests, ideas and institutions. These help them to demonstrate not only the application of 'analytical theory' but also the role of 'practitioner theory' in the evolution of relations between the EU and Asia, and thus to reflect systematically on the problems of collective action and cooperation identified at the beginning of the article.

Pradeep Taneja's article on 'China–Europe Relations: The Limits of Strategic Partnership' examines the evolution of EU–China relations, as well as the limitations of the partnership. He highlights how the China–EU relationship has grown rapidly over the past three decades, with international trade being its mainstay. China and the EU also share a number of common strategic interests and positions. He suggests that to maximize the potential of this relationship, both sides decided to build a comprehensive strategic partnership. However, serious differences remain between the two sides on questions of norms and values, delaying progress on a strategic framework. The article argues that although these differences constitute a serious obstacle to the realization of a genuine strategic partnership, the growing importance of trade and investment relations between China and the EU will cushion the impact of these differences, thus allowing each side more leverage over the other in dealing with complex bilateral and international issues.

In a provocative article, Fraser Cameron, in 'The Geopolitics of Asia – What Role for the EU?' builds on Taneja's argument, suggesting that the EU, while engaged in East Asia, has punched below its weight and lacks a strategic vision. The article reviews the EU's policy towards East Asia since 2001, when an ambitious Communication from the European Commission suggested that the EU should play a political and security role in the region commensurate with its economic strength. After assessing a number of political and security issues



in East Asia, the article concludes that the EU has had little or no impact on the major geopolitical issues in the region, but that it is making some impact on security issues of lesser importance. The article also touches on integration as a contribution to security. It reviews the limited progress in East Asian integration and suggests that the basic criteria for integration are missing in East Asia. He concludes that some aspects of the EU experience, or 'model', however, might be useful for East Asian countries wishing to move forward towards closer integration.

Following on from this article, César de Prado in 'Regions in the World: EU and East Asia As Foreign Policy Actors' examines the relationship between the EU, the ASEAN and key regional players, including states and non-state actors. The article argues that multidimensional regional processes have an external projection that may be explained by their semi-liberal governance structures. It analyses the EU and the East Asian grouping of countries, focussing on ASEAN and the active participation of Japan, South Korea and the People's Republic of China within ASEAN Plus Three. Both regional processes have a multi-level external projection as seen in their links with key states (especially the United States), other regional processes, and global regimes like the United Nations and the G20. In both cases, one finds that public actors have to collaborate with private actors, although they do so in a restricted fashion and often using think tanks and elite public-private intellectual (track-2) actors. The comparative analysis concludes with some hypotheses regarding the consolidation of regional processes in the world.

The remaining articles in this volume look at the role that regional organizations and forums play in addressing specific issues, such as human rights, Myanmar, security and monetary integration. Georg Wiessala in 'Intellectual Legacies, Ethical Policies and Normative Territories: Situating the Human Rights Issue in EU–Asia Relations' offers a critique of human rights in Asia–Europe relations and in the 'Asia Policies' of the EU. The article investigates EU foreign policies regarding human rights with Asia. The perspective adopted here argues for a consideration of selected, social-constructivist, perspectives. The article emphasizes ideas, identities, values, educational exchange and human rights in EU policy towards Asia. Through a number of case studies (ASEAN, ASEM, Burma/Myanmar, China, Indonesia), the article demonstrates that there is both an 'enabling' and an 'inhibitory' human rights dynamism in EU relations with Asian partners. The article suggests ways of translating this into policy prescriptions and concludes by proposing that a more inclusive, 'holistic', understanding of human rights discourses in East–West contacts is needed.

Nicholas Rees in 'EU and ASEAN: Issues of Regional Security' looks at the EU and ASEAN's responses to terrorism and non-traditional security threats. The article critically explores how, and in what ways, the EU and ASEAN have



addressed contemporary security issues, including non-traditional security threats such as pandemics. The comparison of the EU and ASEAN responses to these threats highlights the different forms and functions that regional integration has taken in Europe and East Asia, and the implications of these differences for intra- and extra-regional security cooperation. The article also considers how the EU and ASEAN might work more cooperatively together, noting some existing examples in which experiences and good practice are already shared, as well as other areas in which cooperation might be possible. The article concludes that while security cooperation in the EU and ASEAN, as well as between the two regional entities, is problematic, reflecting differing regional and national interests, elite attitudes and organizational capabilities, there are concrete areas in which cooperation is possible.

The continuing dilemma that the situation that Myanmar has posed to regional organizations, such as the EU and ASEAN, is addressed by Alistair Cook in his article on the 'Positions of Responsibility: A Comparison of ASEAN and EU Approaches towards Burma/Myanmar'. Recent challenges have tested the approaches of both the ASEAN and EU to adequately respond to forced migration in Burma/Myanmar. This article provides a comparison between the European sanctions regime and ASEAN's 'constructive engagement' with Burma/Myanmar. In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, it is ASEAN, along with the UN, that has offered an effective mechanism to access populations of concern in Burma/Myanmar. The article draws on the experience of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) on the western border and argues that while the new ASEAN–UN-led mechanism offers a new way to assist people in the delta region, this access is contingent on three constraints: maintenance of personal relations with military decision makers; continuation of an ASEAN–UN-led mechanism; and ongoing funding from donor nations.

Finally, the issue of monetary integration is considered by Hee-Yul Chai in 'European and Asian Monetary Issues'. He notes that in recent years, there has been considerable scholarly and policy community attention accorded to comparisons between the EU's monetary integration and attempts to create monetary integration in East Asia. The article examines these in a comparative perspective, focusing in particular on the challenges in Asia. After explaining the recent development of financial and monetary cooperation initiatives in East Asia, such as the Post-Chiang Mai Initiative and the attempt to introduce a Regional Currency Unit (RCU), the author argues that East Asia should follow a path similar to the European experience, rather than alternative paths such as a parallel currency approach or a harmonized inflation targeting. In the future, he suggests that the RCU could well be issued by the so-called 'Asian Exchange Rate Stabilization Fund' (AERSF), which would assure the stability of regional currencies taken as a whole vis-à-vis third currencies and between



themselves, and pave the way for full monetary integration in Asia. The article explores comparisons with Europe and the implications for European and Asian regionalism.

The special issue provided an opportunity for scholars to come together across continents and disciplines to comprehensively and critically examine the current forms and function of European and Asian regionalism across regions and contemporary problems. It is clear that the role of both form and function in each region has varied over time and depending on the region. While many forms of regionalism and regional architecture exist in each region, the importance of form in terms of institution has often been a focus of EU studies while the function of collaboration, regardless of institutional form, has been a priority in the consensus-driven ASEAN context, for example. Both remain central to our study of European and Asian regionalism, as this volume illustrates.

Notes

- 1 We thank Bronwyn Hinz for her excellent work as editorial assistant on this volume.
- 2 We thank the European Commission for its Jean Monnet Transnational Research Grant 2005-2762/001-001 for the research project 'Europe And The Asia-Pacific: Models And Linkages'.