



# ”Chasing Pavements”: The East Asia Summit and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Discursive Regionalism as Disguised Multilateralism

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# “Chasing Pavements”: The East Asia Summit and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Discursive Regionalism as Disguised Multilateralism

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# **“Chasing Pavements”: The East Asia Summit and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Discursive Regionalism as Disguised Multilateralism <sup>1</sup>**

*“Should I give up or should I just keep chasing pavements  
Even it leads nowhere?  
Or would it be a waste even if I knew my place  
Should I leave it there?”*

Adele 19

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## **Abstract**

Revolving around the concept of “Community”, or “community” – the use of the capital “c” being seen as indicative of cultural homogeneity - debate on an Asian region has ostensibly pitted those who favour an entity limited to East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea and the ten countries of ASEAN) against those who propose a much wider entity embracing India, North (and, perhaps, South) America, as well as Australasia. Previously these two conceptualizations possessed their eponymous translation in the East Asian Economic Caucus (reincarnated as ASEAN +3) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum respectively. However with the creation in 2005 of the East Asian Summit (EAS) to include India, Australia and New Zealand and, above all, its 2011 enlargement to include the United States and Russia, the distinction between the two conceptualizations of an Asian region has become confused. In order to explain this development, this paper suggests that the language of “region” or “community” is a discursive smokescreen disguising changes in approaches to multilateralism. An examination of the EAS, contrasted with another recent regional project, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), suggests that the actors involved, both state and non-state, are seeking overwhelmingly to ensure the primacy of individual nation-states in intergovernmental multilateral relations.

**Key words:** multilateralism, regionalism, regional integration, Asian community, East Asia Summit, Trans-Pacific Partnership

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# **“Chasing Pavements”: The East Asia Summit and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Discursive Regionalism as Disguised Multilateralism**

## ***Introduction***

Defining Asia is not at all self-evident. As argued elsewhere, in the period beginning with the high age of Western imperialism and the related rise of movements for national independence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a larger Sino-Indic conceptualization of “Asia” was prevalent amongst Asians themselves (Camroux 2007). This notion of Asia reached its apex at the Afro-Asian summit at Bandung in 1955, an event, as Acharya (2009) has argued, that determined many of the norms of regionalism and multilateral behaviour in Asia. However, with India’s withdrawal inwards, following independence and within the context of the Cold War this notion fell into abeyance until the 1990s and the ‘Look East’ policy of the then Indian Finance Minister, and later Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. At that point India seemed, at least rhetorically, to have entered into the Asian developmental state schema that in various nuances is a common characteristic of political trajectories within developing Asia (Devare 2006).

If defining Asia has had its pitfalls, describing Asian regional integration has also posed a challenge for scholars. Is this like the lyrics in the British pop singer Adele’s soulful 2008 hit cited above about “chasing pavements”, that is confusing the static platform with the object of pursuit? Such confusion especially occurs in trying to differentiate Asian forms of regional integration from forms elsewhere, especially in relation to the European Union, which remains, for better or worse, a reference point in terms of institutionalised regional integration (Breslin & Higgott 2000). Neo-realists (Jones & Smith 2009) and scholars in the IPE school (Ravenhill 2009) have raised serious reservations concerning Asian regional integration, suggesting that process overwhelms substance. In this context it is not surprising that a plethora of adjectives have emerged to qualify Asian regionalism starting with the term “open regionalism” associated both with APEC (Ravenhill 2001) and also with the Japanese approach (Terada 1998, 2003) and moving more recently to concepts of “monetary regionalism” (Dieter & Higgott 2003), “regulatory regionalism” (Jayasuriya 2009), “networked regionalism” (Jetschke 2009, Yeo 2010), “mandalic regionalism” (Dellios 2008) and

“strategic regionalism” (Gilson 2010). Defining its limits has led to formulating expressions such as “frustrated regionalism” (Nair 2009), “reactive regionalism” (Searight 2011) and “reactionary regionalism” (Beeson 2003). If a phenomenon requires so many qualifications to define it then does this not raise serious doubts about its existence, let alone substance? Moreover, suppose in our search for regional integration in Asia we have been searching for the wrong political animal?

This paper is concerned with examining trajectories of regional integration. However, such processes may involve not only forms of intra-regional cooperation and ostensible community-building, but also forms of bilateralism and, above all, multilateralism. Yet, what if the processes involved were only limited to the latter? In other words, were “region” and “regionalism” merely misleading labels to indicate multilateral behaviour within a geographically defined area sometimes described as “minilateralism”? This article aims at answering these questions by providing an analysis of the East Asian Summit and providing a comparison with another regional project, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The choice of these two case studies for comparison is prompted by two factors. On the one hand, and most importantly, they are ostensibly examples of, respectively, East Asian regional integration and trans-Pacific regional integration referred to above. On the other hand, they are both recent creations, whose membership contours are in a state of flux an analysis of which provides the occasion to contribute to the burgeoning literature in the field of comparative regionalism.

The paper is structured in the following way. It begins with an overview of theories of multilateralism, particularly those elaborated within the FP 7 MERCURY project on the European Union and multilateralism within whose intellectual agenda this paper has been prepared. In the second section, the origins of the East Asian Summit are examined prior to turning, in the third section, to its enlargement in 2011 to include Russia and the United States. An overview of the Trans-Pacific Partnership provided in the fourth section suggests that similar factors are at play in both cases of Asian regional integration. The paper concludes by resituating the language of “region” in contemporary Asia.

## ***Multilateralism Clothed in Regionalism***

As John Ruggie, the pre-eminent scholar of the concept, admitted “multilateralism” is a difficult notion to pin down. He defined it himself as meaning “coordinating relations among three or more states... Multilateralism represented a ‘**generic institutional form**’ and implied institutional arrangements” (Ruggie 1993: 8-10; emphasis in the original). He saw multilateralism as relying on generalised principles of conduct, indivisibility and diffuse reciprocity. With time and the rapid evolution of the global system over the last two decades, such a definition has been found wanting, on the one hand, for failing to take into account the role of non-state actors and, on the other, for being preconditioned on the existence of institutions. Thus, this article takes as its definition a broader and institutionally neutral definition proposed by Caroline Bouchard and John Peterson, following from their critique of Ruggie on the above lines. They posit contemporary multilateralism, as “three or more actors engaging in voluntary (and essentially) institutionalised international cooperation governed by norms and principles, with rules that apply (by and large) equally to all states” (Bouchard & Peterson 2011: 10).

Taking into account this wider and more satisfactory definition of multilateralism and returning to the original formulation by John Ruggie does provide insights into an analysis of phenomena of regional integration. In particular his insistence on the importance of architectural design (Ruggie 1993: 12) is of direct relevance. Indeed the trope “regional architecture” is a constant theme for political actors in Asia and the Asia-Pacific in terms of referring to the multilateral structures they are seeking, rhetorically at least, to put in place. Ruggie’s (1993: 18) reference to the early nineteenth century “Concert of Europe” as a first example of such a framework is of particular salience. For example, the former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd’s, promotion of what was depicted as an equivalent 21<sup>st</sup> Century “Concert of Asia” led to a hostile reaction from his Asian peers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, qualifiers such as “nominal” and “qualitative”, or “formal” and “substantive”, applied to multilateralism have their echoes in discussions of regional integration. James Caporaso’s further refinement of the concept of multilateralism also provides useful insights to stimulate our thinking on “regionalism”. He argues that much of ostensible “multilateralism” is in fact forms of “aggregate bilateralism” (Caporaso 1993: 61), a description that is particularly appropriate for

<sup>2</sup> This was indeed the impression this author gleaned during informal conversation with Southeast Asian participants when attending the conference - organized by the Australian Foreign and Trade Ministry in Sydney from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> December 2009 - in order to promote the idea of an Asia-Pacific community. The Singaporean participants were particularly incensed that such a Concert would exclude the smaller countries and would draw Indonesia out of ASEAN.

the three quarters of FTAs that exist in the Asia-Pacific today, which are purely bilateral, despite some claims to their regional purview. Caporaso (1992: 77), furthermore, indicates that multilateralism involves “shared language and norms”, the very aspects that constructivist scholars such as Amitav Acharya (2004, 2009) see as lying at the heart of Asian regional integration.

Finally, part of the difficulty in using “multilateralism” as a concept is that it is an “ism”, a doctrine that has evolved over time (Lazarou *et al.* 2010). Whether it is viewed positively or negatively depends on one’s standpoint. Hence, for example, the preference of Chinese policy-makers for a “sovereignty based multilateralism” (Wu 2009: 68) that, while recognising economic interdependence and a concomitant acceptance of some degree of multilateral oversight of such issues, regards questions of, say, human rights as purely domestic matters. The language of regionalism would appear to offer a solution to resolving some of the domestic-global tensions, for it can be seen as an acceptable face/form of multilateralism legitimized by reference to accepted, and much vaunted, aspects of economic and socio-cultural (but not political) integration. Political actors in East Asia may not be ready to proclaim themselves as “Citizens of the World”, but they will glory in their membership of a (dynamic) Asian world. The two case studies developed below have been chosen with this in mind. Both the terminology chosen, and the discourse surrounding, respectively, the East Asian Summit and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, would suggest an adherence to “regionalism as a doctrine”, in a way often attributed to “multilateralism” as doctrine. Yet, as suggested below, “regionalism as doctrine”, involving a confusion of the object pursued with the platform of the pursuit, also poses its own difficulties. Are indeed the actors involved merely chasing pavements?

### ***The East Asian Summit, the First Phase***

The East Asian Summit (EAS), with a rhetorical spin is generally conceptualized as a putative East Asian Community with a capital “c”, or at least a community with a lower case “c”. Yet the empirical evidence shows it is indeed just a summit or even, as expressed prosaically by an eminent American scholar, “a dinner followed by sixteen speeches” (Emmerson 2010: 2). The summit is an annual half-day meeting tacked onto the annual ASEAN Summit, the ASEAN+3 Meeting plus a series of bilateral summits with ASEAN countries involving China, Japan and—rather significantly since 2009—the United States. At



the conclusion of the Summit a largely pre-prepared chairman's statement is read out. Unlike ASEAN summits, which are the culmination of literally hundreds of meetings between ASEAN policymakers supported by a permanent secretariat in Jakarta, the East Asia Summit is a one-off event in which the photo-op is the message. While there are the usual meetings of "sherpas" (senior officials) before the event, there is no permanent secretariat or even permanent institutional arrangements, the ASEAN Secretariat acting merely as a clearing-house. These initial remarks are not meant to diminish the symbolism of such a meeting. On the contrary, in justifying the Obama Administration's self-proclaimed reengagement with Asia (Choi 2009), US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stealing a line from Woody Allen, declared that "half of diplomacy is getting there" (Clinton 2010).

Back in 2005 there was no question of an American representative being asked to turn up. "One Vision, One Identity, One Community": the banners adorning the streets of Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 revealed the grandiose ambitions of the Malaysian hosts for the first East Asia Summit. They also revealed many ambiguities in defining Asian regional integration. The key question in the context of the EAS was whether the intergovernmental meeting being promoted was that of the ten ASEAN governments or that extended into ASEAN +3, i.e. including China, Japan and South Korea. These issues were highlighted - and not entirely resolved - in the inaugural meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December of an East Asia Summit, an "ASEAN +3 +1 +2" with the invitation extended to India, Australia and New Zealand, as had been envisaged for several years (East Asian Vision Group 2001, East Asian Study Group 2002). Behind the tedious international relations algebra lay three questions of importance: Southeast Asia's cohesiveness and centrality in the construction of a putative (East) Asian Community, coping with an increasingly economically powerful and diplomatically assertive China, and the "return" of India to Asia.

The first two days of the ASEAN summit in 2005 saw the Association, having fully recovered from the economic crisis of 1997, return to being concerned with its own internal consolidation. By expressing demands for tangible political reforms in Burma/Myanmar the Association broke with its sacrosanct principle of non-interference. Moreover, the appointment of an Eminent Persons Group to draft an ASEAN Charter demonstrated that the Association had finally come to grips with establishing rules for club membership. Perhaps the greatest success for the summit chair, the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, was to ensure ASEAN's centrality in the process of regional construction, at least

rhetorically. To use the shorthand language of the summit, ASEAN would remain in the “driver’s seat”, and future annual East Asian Summits would be held in ASEAN countries “back-to-back” with the Association’s annual meetings. Given Sino-Japanese rivalry, and the unwillingness of the governments of either country to accept the leadership of the other, by default, ASEAN remained the least unacceptable alternative as regional coordinator, a view ostensibly also held by the new invitees, India, Australia and New Zealand. In the diplomatic formula decided upon in the Summit, a compromise was reached with the East Asian Community being defined in terms of ASEAN +3, with the three new partners invited to the East Asian Summit seen as sharing common interests while, not necessarily, being part of the “community”. However, at the same time, in the jargon of “inclusiveness” and “openness” it was agreed an Asian Community could extend to embrace them as well as Russia. Regions, as Katzenstein (2005) has suggested, are porous entities indeed.

Nevertheless, concerns over China remained and engendered competing strategies (Yu 2008). The summit demonstrated divisions within ASEAN as a regional organization, with the Singaporean, Thai and Indonesian support for enlargement from the ASEAN +3 formula being at odds with the more exclusive membership proposed by Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam. These cleavages, reiterated in think tank and other meetings immediately before the summit (Matsubara 2006), reflected not only geopolitical considerations, but also internal political factors: some non-state actors, essentially those involved in advocacy NGOs, in ASEAN countries were more favourable to a broader Asia including the three new democratic invitees. Moreover, different Asian actors had, and continue to have, rather different expectations for an Asian community. For example, documents emanating from major pro-governmental think tanks in Korea and Singapore advocated a putative East Asian Community, essentially as an exercise in confidence-building concerned primarily with security questions (Kwon & Hong 2005, Malik 2006, See & Emmers 2005).

Developments in the year following the Kuala Lumpur summit and in the second summit just over a year later underlined the tensions already present there. The Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) held in Hyderabad in early May 2006 was revealing in this regard. For the first time a multilateral body was called upon by some participants, including the Chinese representative Jin Renqing, to encourage Asian regional integration through, for example, developing local bond markets, and to “help Asia find its voice”. Manmohan Singh, in particular, sought ADB aid in creating a pan-Asian free trade agreement (FTA) (Singh

2006). In developing an Asian Currency Unit, based on a basket of hard and soft East Asian currencies, the ADB is building on the monetary regionalisation that involves swap agreements and cooperation between Asian central banks (Dieter and Higgott 2003). The negotiation of an India-ASEAN FTA, similar to that between China and ASEAN which came into force in January 2010, would seem to be an element in a larger pan-Asian FTA, but it is juxtaposed with the bilateral FTAs signed with individual ASEAN countries such as Singapore and Thailand. While the Chinese negotiated for an ASEAN-China FTA by offering “early harvest” advantages to all of their partners, the Japanese, through the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry, remained favourable to cooperation among the thirteen participants in Kuala Lumpur, *taken individually*. In practice this involved concentrating on bilateral agreements, for example with the Philippines, and down-playing ASEAN as an interlocutor.

By the time of the second summit there had been two contingent developments. The first, it would appear, was an acknowledgement by the Chinese leadership that it would need to accept the virtual enlargement of an “Asian community” to include India (as well as Australia and New Zealand) and, therefore, to complete the negotiations for an East Asian inner circle (i.e. ASEAN +3). Within it, China would be the main player through the signing of a China-ASEAN FTA in order to limit the impact of such an enlargement (Huang 2005).

The second was to relegate this intra-regional level compact to being subordinate to a number of bilateral initiatives, for example, in securing energy supplies in Africa or Australia and in reinforcing relations in Central Asia. At the same time, on the multilateral level, the Chinese leadership, albeit with a great deal of reluctance, demonstrated a willingness slightly to readjust the value of the *renminbi* and thus to contribute to a readjustment of global trade balances.<sup>3</sup> The second summit held in the Filipino city of Cebu was postponed from the original December 2006 dates to mid-January 2007, ostensibly because of the weather, but also – or perhaps because of – concerns with terrorist threats. The Cebu summit was dominated by a further step towards the promulgation of an ASEAN Charter and specific bilateral initiatives with both China and India. Yet in its very low-key banality, Cebu and the following summits confirmed that the Sino-Indic conceptualisation of an Asian community of Bandung had re-established itself as another acceptable imagining of a twenty-first century Asia. However this summit and the following three confirmed that the creation of the East

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3 This, however, was not an act of political altruism. As, on average, almost two thirds of the cost of a product made in China is composed of imported components, etc. usually denominated in dollars, a putative devaluation would have meant an increase in the costs of these elements therefore leading to less competitive prices for Chinese goods in relation to Asian competitors.

Asian Summit was a superficial addition to Asia's complex regional architecture. In the words of the late Hadi Soesastro, "the creation of new clubs did not necessarily mean progress" (Soesastro 2006: 53). Moreover its creation had not diminished the search for bilateral solutions, especially the pursuit of bilateral Free Trade Agreements. On the contrary, the five years following the first summit saw an acceleration of this process in the Asia Pacific, a development discussed below.

### ***EAS Enlargement: Widening Trumps Deepening***

During the five years following the first two summits, differing conceptualizations of an Asian region continued to compete. With the ratification of the ASEAN Charter in 2009, the Association not only made a further step toward institutionalisation but also became a recognized legal entity in international law. The ASEAN Secretariat found representation both as an invitee to the G20 and within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The latter itself experienced two enlargements, firstly with India and Mongolia in 2008 and then in 2010 with the participation of Australia, New Zealand and Russia at their first summit held in Brussels. These enlargements further challenged a purely East Asian conceptualization of the Asian region while raising questions about the efficacy of a body now comprising some forty-seven members (Lenihan 2011). Be that as it may, ASEM enlargement demonstrated, for those who desired such an outcome, that widening could effectively undermine deepening.

For the EAS the proposal to extend membership to the United States and Russia first presented at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting of July in Hanoi and then confirmed at the ASEAN Summit and East Asia Summit of December 2010 is a crucial development, despite receiving little media attention. When this becomes effective in 2011, any pretence that membership is exclusively East Asian will disappear. Given previous Chinese hostility to such an enlargement, US reticence to engage regionally, and Japan's notorious difficulties when it comes to exercising regional leadership, this development represents a watershed in Asia-Pacific relations and is worthy of explanation. Paradoxically, enlargement occurred against the background of the ousting of the two political leaders in Asia and the Pacific who had been most vocal in articulating a vision of an Asian community in the first two years of their shortened terms: Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and his Japanese counterpart, Hatoyama Yukio. While Rudd had agitated for an Asia-Pacific community involving the United States, Hatoyama had been ambiguous and ambivalent about potential US membership,

reflecting disagreements amongst Japanese political leaders and their ministries on the subject (Terada 2010).

The key to understanding this evolution is **an intra-regional convergence**, albeit a convergence that may simply be an acquiescence in developments beyond the control of any one major **global actor**. As a number of authors have argued, the evidence would suggest an increasing Chinese preference for engagement in multilateralism due, in part, to domestic pressures (Wu 2008; Wu 2009; Yoshimatsu 2009; Pearson 2010). An examination of the evidence would suggest that there has been a convergence between Chinese, US and Japanese views about the appropriate regional architecture (to use the jargon of policy-makers). Furthermore ASEAN, possibly because of its own internal divisions, has welcomed such a widening of membership as long as the symbol of its “being in the driver’s seat” is maintained. In the following we deal in order with contemporary Chinese, Japanese and American approaches to the Summit.

## **Chinese Hedging**

Writing on China's rise and the marshalling of its soft power for this purpose has become a growth industry. It is not our purpose to assess this vast literature, but rather to draw out several essential points from these analyses. In recent years, China has become a normal status quo power whose foreign relations are subservient to domestic political objectives (Breslin 2010, Chung 2008). If China is not yet a hegemonic power in Asia (Foot 2005, 2006), it is clear that US dominance is not as assured or unchallenged as it once was (Beeson 2009, Pempel 2010a, 2010b). Prior to the international economic crisis, China was already a global power with global ambitions, if only by dint of the search for raw materials, energy sources and markets in Africa and Latin America. But the crisis has seen a rapid acceleration of this trend, with China becoming the lender of last resort in Europe and in the United States, while, at the same time, bank-rolling infrastructure development amongst its southern neighbours. Yet China’s regional initiatives are secondary to its global role (Kavalski 2009), which perhaps is being reluctantly forced upon it (Wan 2010). From this perspective, within the Beijing policy community the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) - as both a Chinese initiative and one in which Beijing controls the agenda (and the secretariat) - is probably of greater importance than other organisations in which it is merely a participant (Yuan 2010). Most importantly the SCO deals with issues crucial for China domestically (e.g. separatist movements in its borderlands) as well as its global power (e.g. access to energy

sources to fuel its export-oriented economy). In Southeast Asia only in the case of Burma/Myanmar is there a direct internal security concern, namely a concern with an influx of refugees into Yunnan in the event of a Burmese implosion. However China, with its massive investment in that country and its provision of support to the military junta, deals with this potential problem in a bilateral, not regional context.

Since the first summit of 2005, while the Chinese may still remain cautious concerning regional institutionalisation (Chung 2009), their view of multilateralism has evolved to the extent that some observers in China are no longer preoccupied with trying to exclude the United States from the region. Indeed, if China is a global actor then many analysts in China recognize that an international order requires multilateral norms and must be inclusive (Zhang 2010, Zhao 2011). Outside China there is an increasingly wide spectrum of views about Chinese foreign policy generally (Shambaugh 2011, Sutter 2010), and about Chinese regional policy in particular, which is much more nuanced than the dichotomy between the so called "panda huggers" and the "dragon bashers". In the five years following the Kuala Lumpur summit the Chinese policy-making community undertook a re-evaluation of its policies in relation to Southeast Asia to discover that the concept of "peaceful rise" was not always welcomed without reservations (Sun 2010, Zhang & Tok 2008). Allen Carlson (2011) has highlighted the re-emergence of the concept of *tianxia* (all under heaven) in Chinese foreign relations discourse as a reflection at the multilateral level of the ideal of a harmonious society, applied in the Chinese domestic context. This is not to suggest that the objective of a Sino-centric regional order (Breslin 2010) or a new form of tributary system (Kang 2007) has fallen into abeyance. Rather, these objectives have been subsumed into a global project, or maybe more, involving a more committed approach to multilateralism within the international environment. The consequence is a reformulation of Chinese foreign policy in terms of multiple levels of multilateralism in which the pan-Asian, Asia-Pacific, Eurasian are placed in an evolving hierarchy.

As the "playing of the India card" (Richardson 2002) to balance China in the East Asian Summit had proven to be ineffectual in the first five years of the EAS, there was no reason for Chinese policy makers to be apprehensive about an enlargement to include the United States. Even if there was a risk, by bringing in Russia at the same time, China could play the same hedging game *vis à vis* the US. Moreover given the predominantly realist views that pervade Chinese foreign relations, by extending membership at the expense of a strengthened agenda, the East Asia Summit could be reduced to even lesser significance. In

other words, given the EAS's largely decorative function, as with ASEM, issues of membership would seem to be of minor consequence. Finally, acceptance of enlargement would reassure the countries of the Asia-Pacific of China's inclusive peaceful intentions, at minimal political cost.

## **US Re-Engagement**

Chinese reassurance for its neighbours about the continuity of the Middle Kingdom's benign intentions was certainly required. As evidenced by the Defence White Papers published in 2009 and 2010, respectively in Australia and Japan, the United States' major allies in the Western Pacific, there has been increasing apprehension in the Asia-Pacific region about significantly increased Chinese military expenditure, China's acquisition of increasingly sophisticated weaponry (such as missiles and stealth aircraft), and the enlargement of its blue water navy (including the planned construction of an aircraft carrier). In reaction to an incident between a Chinese trawler and Japanese Coast Guard vessels in the South China Sea, Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, had announced that the US had vital interests in free navigation in these waters. Subsequently the US Seventh Fleet was invited back to its Vietnam War-era naval base of Danang and a joint training exercise with the Vietnamese Navy was undertaken. It could be argued that a more assertive Chinese leadership had sacrificed a decade of diplomacy in Southeast Asia attempting to reassure its southern neighbours that its "peaceful rise" would be beneficial to all. Certainly political leaderships in the most traditionally pro-Chinese Southeast Asian countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia were willing to concur with the wariness of Chinese intentions found amongst their counterparts in, say, Vietnam or Indonesia.

This rapprochement with the United States is taking place within the context of potential divisions within ASEAN. Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra<sup>4</sup> had previously proposed his own regional concept, that of BIMSTEC, involving Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, which would see two ASEAN members joined with three South Asian countries (Chachavalpongpun 2010). This project seemed to have been largely forgotten after Thaksin's ousting in a military coup in September 2006, although it may return with the overwhelming victory of his relabelled *Thai Rak Thai* party and the nomination of his youngest sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, as Prime Minister in July 2011. In Southeast Asia forms

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<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it would appear any ambitious Asian political leader needed to propose his regional vision.

of *de facto* economic regionalization could potentially have the effect of dividing ASEAN between its mainland members and its island members. Propelled by the Chinese government, and with the support of the (Japanese-led and partly Western financed) Asian Development Bank, the Greater Mekong Sub Region has become the most dynamic part of Southeast Asia. Nominally its membership includes Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar as well as the two southern Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi. The ADB alone has contributed a third of the approximately US\$11 billion of infrastructure investment since 2000, the lion's share of the remainder coming from China. In Myanmar alone in 2010, the Chinese invested some \$8 billion in oil, gas and hydropower and had agreed to US \$80 billion in investment projects in Cambodia. These forms of economic integration on the ground will see mainland Southeast Asia, along with Yunnan and Guangxi served by a Chinese-sponsored, integrated network of high speed rail networks, pipelines and highways by 2020 (Wade 2011). Following the China-ASEAN FTA that came into force on 1st January 2010 - which in reality involves various separate FTAs with individual ASEAN members - it is not unreasonable to see these developments, clearly related to the rise of China, as being harbingers of future divisions within ASEAN. Yet can a divided ASEAN, especially one in which its largest member, Indonesia, by dint of its membership of the G20, is now a global player in its own right remain central and in the "driver's seat" of Asian regional integration?

Be that as it may, while the incidents discussed above provided a more enthusiastic renewed welcome for an American presence in Southeast Asia, the United States' reengagement with Asia can be traced to the election of the Honolulu-born Barack Obama as the first self-proclaimed Pacific president of the US. In relation to thinking in Washington and the Beltway on the East Asian Summit (Cook 2008) one useful indicator is a comparison of two documents from the Congressional Research Service, one dating from the time of the EAS's inception (Vaughn 2005) and the second five years later (Nanto 2010). In the former the EAS was considered mildly inimical to US interests. While it was realized that expressing strong US opposition would be counterproductive, it was hoped that the EAS "would simply 'die on the vine' leaving APEC as the premier venue for regional cooperation" (Searight 2011: 58). This did not happen and in the latter document the EAS is presented as a body to be potentially embraced. In taking office as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, began a campaign to demilitarize American foreign relations and to put greater emphasis on diplomatic means. The first *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* published in late 2010 proclaimed a first priority in adapting to the new international environment was "building our capacity to organize ourselves regionally and work through regional organizations" (US Department of State 2010: 52). As for the Chinese and Japanese political



leaderships, this new approach on the part of the US is not seen as necessarily undermining either unilateralism (Cumings 2008) or hub and spokes bilateralism between an American “hub” and Asian “spokes” (Hemmer & Katzenstein 2002), but rather as a potentially useful adjunct. It is also a reactive approach prompted by concerns with China’s increasing global activism (Saunders 2006) and the interdependence between the United States and China strengthened by the global economic crisis. Contrary to much popular opinion, the rise of China’s military power in Asia and its increasing assertiveness is seeing a related increase in American influence, one to which the political and economic elites of the smaller Asian and Australasian countries - ever keen to balance and hedge against China - are quite receptive (Sutter 2010).

### **Japanese Perseverance**

The United States and China would appear to have converged around a position advocated for some time by the Japanese. The Japanese provided much of the intellectual input prior to the first summit (Council on East Asian Community 2001, Japan Forum on International Relations 2003, Kohara 2005) as they had previously on the ASEAN +3 concept (Terada 2003). Yet, prior to the appointment of Kan Naoto as Prime Minister in June 2010, the internal disagreement about building an Asia-Pacific regional body (one usually associated with the Japanese Foreign Ministry) and that of an exclusively East Asian body (usually associated with the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry) remain unresolved. Former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro (2002), like his successor Hatoyama Yukio, had been more favourably disposed toward the ASEAN +3 project of regional cooperation, while still continuing to pay lip service to APEC. Nevertheless, the Japanese were also the strongest advocates of Indian (and Australian and New Zealand) membership of the East Asian Summit as a balancing measure in relation to China (Terada 2010). Yet two factors militated for the extension of the Summit to include the United States, albeit at the price of membership of a Russia with whom the Japanese have a long-standing territorial dispute. On the one hand, in pursuing the logic of balancing a China whose economic (and military) potency seem even more threatening in 2010 than in 2005, a US presence seemed increasingly desirable (Sohn 2010, Sudo 2010). On the other, the global economic crisis saw a revival of the concept of “open regionalism” central to APEC (Oga 2009). Like their counterparts in China and the United States, the Japanese political and economic elites saw their regional actorness as subsidiary to Japan’s global role (Fukushima 2009). From this

perspective an enlarged East Asian Summit would be a useful, if minor, adjunct to a G20 in which Asian countries have at last found a place commensurate with their economic weight.

### ***The Trans-Pacific Partnership, the APEC Phoenix?***

While at a superficial level, the EAS may indicate a new impetus to a dominant form of regional integration, other indications are that this was not the case. In particular, the Trans-Pacific Partnership project discussed below can be seen as not only competing with, but also undermining, such a movement. However, in order to explain the present regional architecture it is necessary to go back a decade or so. The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998 was expected to provide a boost to Asian regional integration and, indeed the signing of regional free trade agreements is seen, misleadingly, as being an expression of regional integration. Moreover, the Chiang Mai Initiative, which permits swaps between Asian central banks initially of \$80 billion and now \$120 billion is often hailed as evidence of this. This expression of “monetary regionalism” (Dieter & Higgott 2003) is a rather weak foundation to argue for a reinvigorated Asian regionalism, however, since only 10% of the funds can be disbursed without the agreement of the World Bank and IMF. Moreover more substantive institutional creations such as an Asian Bond Market, an Asian Monetary Fund or even a common currency remain largely works in progress. Moreover, to be counter-factual, it would have been expected that when another crisis occurred, namely the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009, then there would be renewed displays of Asian solidarity. In practice, very little of this occurred (Camroux 2010), rather responses have been rather more dispersed and driven at the national level (Emmers & Ravenhill 2011). On one level, given that Asia was little impacted on by the crisis, an intra-regional response was, perhaps, superfluous despite expectations to the contrary. However, it is surprising that no major political leader jumped on the occasion of further evidence of the decline of the West to promote a pan-Asian agenda. Some public intellectuals such as Kishore Mahbubani (2008), however, took this position, yet with the purpose of arguing for trans-Pacific cooperation on a more equal footing.

The decade or so following the Asian Financial Crisis has seen a two-fold tendency. First there was a questioning of the reliance on exports and a concomitant concern to strengthen domestic economies. For political elites, both internal factors, namely the need to strengthen their political legitimacy, and external ones, the shrinking markets in the US and Europe due to the crisis, are engendering this focus on national markets. Secondly, there has been a proliferation of Free Trade Agreements in Asia and the Asia-Pacific. According to the Asian

Development Bank, the number of FTAs had increased from just three in 2000 to sixty-one at the end of 2010. Furthermore, again according to the ADB, another 79 were either being negotiated or proposed (Kawai & Wignaraja 2010: 4). Yet these FTAs hardly provide evidence of multilateralism, let alone, regionalism within Asia, for 77% of them are bilateral arrangements.

The ADB report cited above sees four factors underlying the spread of FTAs in the last decade: deepening market driven-integration; a response to economic integration in the EU and North America; a reaction to the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis; and disenchantment with the slow progress in the WTO Doha negotiations (Kawai & Wignaraja 2010). Political economists would add a further two factors, namely a catch-up effect, owing to a fear of being left out if neighbouring countries are signing FTAs (Dent 2010) and, in the case of FTAs signed with the US, an expression of the instrumentalisation of trade as part of a global securitisation strategy (Ravenhill 2009). Most of the debate on FTAs centres on the question whether they contribute ultimately to global free trade. Certain bodies such as the ADB (Kawai & Wignaraja 2008) and some trade economists see them as building blocks (Badwin 2006) or a matrix (Petri 2008) for a pan-Asian, or Asia-Pacific FTA, and thus as part of a global movement to free trade. On the other hand, there are those who, like Jagdish Bhagwati (2008), see the development of the “spaghetti bowl” as undermining the movement towards free trade at both the regional and global level (Dent 2006, 2010). The concern here is not to enter into that debate but rather to suggest that the proliferation of FTAs reveals a good deal about regionalism, or rather, multilateralism in Asia as an analysis of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the most recent attempt to negotiate an Asia-Pacific FTA, will show.

APEC's obituary may have been written rather prematurely. Following the initial entry of Australia and New Zealand, the enlargement of the East Asian Summit to include the United States and Russia can be interpreted as a revival of Asia-Pacific regionalism of the type envisaged in APEC. Whether this will be the case for another development in Asia-Pacific regional integration remains to be seen. In proposing membership of the TPP the newly appointed Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, appeared to be the first Japanese political leader prepared to confront powerful farmers and agricultural organizations in Japan. Such an outcome is symptomatic of the impact of the present global crises on the domestic political economies in Asia and ensuing conceptualizations of an Asian region. Adding to this development, many of the earlier influential non-state proponents of APEC such as Fred

Bergsten have now become supporters of the TPP (Bergsten 2009, 2010). They have been joined by members of the business community, especially in the service sector particularly in the US (Atkinson 2011). Thus, as indicated previously, an exclusive, 'specifically Asian' form of regional integration has been weakened by the signing of bilateral Free Trade Agreements between certain Asian countries, such as Singapore and South Korea, and non-Asian partners such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

The on-going global financial crisis appears to have provided a boost to the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (usually called the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, for short) negotiations (Hirata 2010). The TPP has its origins in the P4 agreement that came into force in 2006 between four of the smallest countries in the Asia-Pacific: Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore (Gao 2010). In the last days of the George W. Bush Administration in September 2008, the United States announced that it would join the talks when the P4 partners began working in outstanding chapters in the agreement concerned with Financial Services and Investment. However, actual participation in talks waited till the Obama Administration determined its trade policy, with the President himself announcing in Tokyo on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2009 that the US would join the talks. In the first round of negotiations in Melbourne, Australia in March 2010 the new US Trade Representative, Ron Kirk, was joined by his counterparts from Australia, Peru and Vietnam. They were later joined by Malaysia, a player of considerable symbolic significance, for previous Malaysian governments had been defenders of a purely East Asian regional construct. For proponents of the TPP (Bergsten 2009, Barfield 2011) including the Asian Development Bank (Hamanaka 2010) it is, potentially, the single most important US trade initiative in Asia since the still to be ratified US-Korea FTA of 2007. The TPP is, in a sense, the latest avatar of an Asia-Pacific FTA first mooted almost a quarter century ago at the time of the creation of APEC, and its existence likewise needs to be situated in the global context. Just as APEC was seen as an antidote to the problems in the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations that ultimately led to the establishment of the WTO (as well as dealing with a "fortress Europe"), so the agitation around the TPP is linked to rather pessimistic assessments about the prospects for successfully concluding the Doha Round under the auspices of the WTO (as well as a reaction to a Europe ostensibly in decline). In other words, opting for "microlateralism", (i.e. in this case regionally bordered multilateralism) has become a default option due to the ostensible limits of bilateralism and the impossibility of achieving global multilateralism. Anne Capling & John Ravenhill see several distinctive features of the TPP: it is trans-regional (Asia-Pacific); designed as a political signal symbolizing the 'return' of the US in Asia; and attempts to deal with domestic regulatory policies. Fourthly, and most

significantly from the perspective of this paper, it seeks to 'multilateralise regionalism' by rationalizing existing FTAs, being open to future members and, above all, aiming to achieve the APEC goal of free trade amongst its members (Capling & Ravenhill, forthcoming).

Initially, there were meant to be five rounds of negotiations (Elms 2010), but at least another four were added with a ninth round to be held in Lima, Peru in late October 2011. Despite its initial intentions, the Japanese government postponed making a decision scheduled for June 2011 on whether to participate in the talks, due to internal divisions. While this postponement was justified as caused by Japanese preoccupation with the aftermath of the 11<sup>th</sup> March earthquake and tsunami, it does seem to have hindered study of a trilateral China-Japan-South Korea FTA (Akita 2011)<sup>5</sup>. Once again Japanese political actors find themselves torn between their country's bilateral relationship with the US - and a related Asia-Pacific focus - and the continuing salience of a pan-Asian region. The change from the long rule of the Liberal Democratic Party to that of the Democratic Party has not resolved this dilemma (Sneider 2011).

Within the United States, disagreements of a different order exist: between labour unions and employers, between manufacturers and those in the service industries, amongst producers of agricultural products, etc. (Elms 2009, 2010). Furthermore, the poisonous political climate in the US Congress in the lead-up to the 2012 presidential elections does not augur well for the ratification of any FTA, let alone one that is not bilateral (Gannon 2011). As James Gannon suggests, "elite attitudes towards an East Asia community are linked to the dynamics of the trilateral China-Japan-US relationship" (Gannon 2011: 20). As for the first in this *ménage à trois*, the PRC has neither been invited, nor has it (yet?) sought to participate in the TPP. Indeed from Beijing's perspective, the TPP can be seen, at best, as creating a *fait accompli* in the trade regime to which the Chinese will have to acquiesce or, at worst, as part of the strategy discussed above (one that is often given the epithet "congame") designed to hedge against a more globally assertive China.

Expectations have been lowered (Elms 2011), with a meeting of the 21 APEC trade ministers in Montana in May 2011 agreeing merely on a joint statement to push for "the broad outlines of an agreement by November" of that year (*Reuters* 2011). It thus remains, at this point debatable whether the APEC Leaders' Summit planned in Hawaii in November 2011 could

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5 It is outside the boundaries of this article, but the question of the lack of regional bodies in Northeast Asia, emphasizes once again that multilateralism is, by default, the normal *modus operandi* in the region as a whole. (See Aggarwal, Koo & Lee 2008)

potentially be the most significant since the Bogor Summit of 1994. In particular, resolving what T.J. Pempel (2010b) calls the economic-security nexus in US approaches to regional integration remains a work in progress. Nevertheless, the APEC 2011 Summit will demonstrate both the level of US recommitment in Asia under the Obama Administration and, also, a possible return to the Asia-Pacific conceptualization of region very much to the fore in the mid-1990s (Higgott & Stubbs 1995).

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the first decade of the new millennium, conceptions of region in Asia thus still remain in a state of both competition and complementarity. Ultimately, finding a conception of an Asian region that reconciles economic imperatives with underlying geopolitical concerns (Murray 2010) while still being able to generate a sense of adhesion/identification (He 2004) continues to be an elusive task. However, perhaps it does not preoccupy many political leaders in Asia and the Pacific. As one Thai scholar/activist has aptly phrased the question “Who wants an East Asian Community (and who doesn’t)?” (Phongpaichit 2006) Perhaps Asian regional integration is a little like Saint Augustine's chastity: something to be prayed for... but not to have quite yet. The present global financial crisis has accelerated a number of developments already *en train* (Wolf 2011), the most important being the virtual emergence of a “G2” of China and the United States, although both parties would vehemently deny its existence. The result has been, at least potentially, a new lease of life to the Asia-Pacific multilateral project that had previously been seen as being potentially superseded by specifically East Asian entities. However, it would be premature to predict whether this will mean a revival of APEC or the creation or strengthening of another structure (such as the East Asia Summit).

The implication of the preceding argument is that “region”, “regionalism” and the concomitant notions of “community”, with a lower case or capital “c”, are discursive subterfuges for promoting multilateral relations within a porous Asia. The dilemma of “widening” versus “deepening”, which presents an on-going fundamental challenge in European integration would appear to be much less a problem in Asia. Why is this indeed the case? In part the answer lies in the particularly Asian notion of concentric circles of “regions” with ASEAN at the centre. However, as suggested above, regional integration is not an objective *per se*. Rather, the overriding quest of the major actors is for new mechanisms of pan-Asian (and

Asia-Pacific) multilateralism and cooperation (Webber 2010). The East Asian Summit and the Trans-Pacific Partnership are merely two of a number of these.

If “regionalism” can be a misleading heuristic device for examining international relations in Asia, does it have another utility? This question is pertinent because, as described above, actors function multilaterally at the Asian regional level in order to promote various interests and achieve certain tangible goals. In Arnold Wolfers’s (1962) seminal distinction these can be described as “possession goals” (e.g. gaining market access, defending sovereignty, constraining China). Nevertheless, as Amy Searight has suggested concerning American interest in a pan-Asia Pacific FTA, this “is not really about delivering a final deal; it is rather about shaping process and perceptions” (Searight 2011: 59). Using again Wolfers’s terminology, the promotion of a discursive regionalism can thus best be seen as pursuing a “milieu goal”, i.e. one designed to frame the norms of multilateral behaviour at the regional level. In the end the ‘pavement’ is the pursued object in itself.

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