POWER TO THE WEAK: 
ASEAN’S ROLE IN EAST ASIAN REGIONALISM

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Abstract

East Asia presents a puzzle for students of comparative regionalism. In each of the world’s major regional groupings the regionalism project has been promoted and shaped by the region’s major powers. However, East Asia it has been the ASEAN members rather than China, Japan or even the extra-regional superpower, the United States, that have been at the heart of attempts to advance the cause of regionalism. Theories of European integration, which are generally based on the experience of a France/Germany-led regional integration project are of limited help in exploring why the relatively weak members of the East Asian region have been so successful in steering the regionalism project. The argument is made that ASEAN’s success may best be analysed by employing an institutionalist/constructivist approach which examines ASEAN’s developing central role as a regional institution as well as the code-of-conduct and political economy norms that ASEAN has been able to propagate throughout the region.

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East Asia, which includes for the purposes of this discussion Northeast and Southeast Asia, presents an intriguing puzzle for students of comparative regionalism. In each of the major regional groupings the regionalism project has been promoted and shaped by the region’s major powers. In Western Europe, both the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Union (EU) regional integration projects were driven by Germany and France. In North America the key player championing regional cooperation under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has been the United States. And in Latin America the region’s two largest economies, Brazil and Argentina, have advanced regional cooperation through the development of Mercosur. However, in East Asia, despite the presence of the two major powers in the region, Japan and China, as well as the continuing influence of the extra-regional superpower the United States, it has been the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), that have been at the centre of the promotion of East Asian regional cooperation. Certainly, none of the ASEAN members - Burma/Myanmar, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam - can be considered a major economic or military power, yet through ASEAN they have been at the heart of attempts to advance the cause of East Asian regionalism.

Collectively, the members of ASEAN have been instrumental in developing regional cooperation in three significant ways. First, ASEAN has been responsible for launching a number of key regional institutions. For example, ASEAN established the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. The ARF brings together within a multilateral security forum all the states, including the major powers, with security interests in the East Asian region. Similarly, ASEAN took responsibility for organising the Asia side of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in the months leading up to the first meeting in Bangkok in March 1996. Organising for the series of ASEM Conferences has brought most of the East Asian states together so as to prepare for and engage in the informal process of dialogue and cooperation on a range of political, economic and cultural issues with their European counterparts. But perhaps most importantly, ASEAN has taken the lead in promoting regional cooperation through the creation of ASEAN Plus Three (APT). This emerging organization, which shows every sign of being the main vehicle for East Asian regionalism, brings together the ten members of ASEAN with the three Northeast Asian states of China, Japan and South Korea. The aim of the APT, which held its first summit meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 1997 is to ensure regional cooperation in various areas, most notably economic, security, culture and development strategy. And more recently ASEAN has signed the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area agreement, the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, and the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation agreement.

Second, ASEAN not only launched these key regional institutions but has also been the
main driving force behind their subsequent development. Significantly, for both the ARF and the APT the annual meetings are held in the ASEAN member states and with the hosts essentially driving the agenda ASEAN has considerable leverage over the direction taken by these organisations. Host members, after consultation with other members of the organization, decide on the priorities to be advanced at particular meetings; what topics are placed on, and what is kept off, the agenda; and have considerable influence over the drafting of the final communiqué summarising a meeting’s achievements and the direction in which the organisation will move in the future.

Third, ASEAN has been central in developing a code of conduct governing relations among member states of the region. The main features of this code were set down in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) which was signed at the first ASEAN summit in Bali in 1976. Since then the TAC ‘code of conduct’, which emphasises such principles as the renunciation of force to settle disputes and non-interference in each others internal affairs, has been informally adopted by countries seeking to develop relations with the ASEAN states. Moreover, the TAC principles have been broadened out over the years to embrace what has been termed the ‘ASEAN Way’. This ‘stresses informality, organization minimalism, inclusiveness, intensive consultations leading to consensus and peaceful resolution of disputes’ (Acharya 2001: 63). Significantly, in 2003 China, Japan, India and South Korea formally signed on to the TAC principles and in 2005 so did Australia and New Zealand. In other words ASEAN has persuaded most neighbouring countries - which include the region’s major powers and which together are home to almost three billion people or nearly half the world’s population - to agree to conduct their relations with members states under rules set out by ASEAN itself.

Putting the spotlight on the role of ASEAN in the development of regionalism in East Asia should not be taken as an attempt to downplay the importance to regional cooperation of the actions of Japan and China. Japan has led the way in promoting financial cooperation in the region most especially by championing the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) which establishes a framework for a series of bilateral currency swap agreements that provide a safety net for any regional currency under attack. For its part China has led the way in developing trade agreements by pushing for the ASEAN China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA). The ACFTA prompted other countries most notably Japan and India to sign their own trade agreements with ASEAN. In other words, then, both Japan and China have contributed to the economic cooperation within the East Asian region. However, while China and Japan have been instrumental in helping to develop aspects of East Asian regional cooperation it has been ASEAN that has been at the forefront in advancing the idea, and the institutionalization, of East Asian regionalism. The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore the ways in which smaller states can make a difference; to indicate how they can avoid being relegated to the sidelines as regions are designed and built.

 Obviously East Asia is not unique in instituting a measure of regional cooperation. Indeed, other regions of the world have gone a good way down this road. As a result there has emerged a range of theoretical approaches that have sought to help us understand the process of region building. It would, therefore, appear useful to explore the main theoretical approaches to regionalism, especially European integration, in order to better appreciate the way in which
ASEAN has been so critical to regionalism in East Asia. This paper, then, first assesses the extent to which various theories of regionalism can contribute to an unravelling of the puzzle of the power of weak states in promoting East Asian regionalism. Both the benefits and limitations of employing each approach are outlined. The paper then develops an argument which employs a combination of an historical institutionalist approach with a constructivist approach in order to help explain why ASEAN has been so influential in setting the stage for East Asian regional cooperation.

Theories of Regionalism and Regional Integration

The process of region building has been going on for many years especially in Western Europe. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are numerous theories which seek to explain how regionalism emerges. The question is then, how much can these theories help students of East Asia understand the central role in promoting regionalism played by ASEAN’s relatively weak member states. In terms of European regionalism traditionally there have been two major sets of theories of regional integration. First, there are what have been termed the ‘supranationalist’ approaches to regional integration such as federalism and neofunctionalism (eg Burgess 2000; Hass 1968; Rosamond 2005). Second, there are the intergovernmentalist approaches favoured mostly by international relations scholars who see regional integration as a process of interstate bargaining (Hoffmann 1995; Moravcsik 1998) Most recently, a set of new theories of regional cooperation and integration have appeared that have started to challenge the two dominant approaches. These include notion of multilevel governance, ‘new regionalism’, new institutionalism and constructivism (eg Hooghe and Marks 2001; Warleigh 2004; Bulmer 1998; Checkel 2005)

The two traditional sets of theories that have been employed to evaluate European integration have relatively little to offer students of East Asian regionalism seeking to explore how ASEAN has been so influential in the development of regional cooperation. First, ‘supranationalism’, which includes federalist and neo-functionalist approaches tends to assume a fairly high level of economic and political integration and, therefore, have little applicability to East Asia which has yet to move beyond a framework of increased cooperation. Certainly, federalism has virtually nothing to offer analysts of East Asian regionalism. The federalism approach implies a sharing of power between the centre and the component units within the framework of an overarching constitution. There is no federal constitution, no central federal institutions such as the European Court of Justice or the European Commission and there is a deep-seated distrust of any movement by any regional organization to follow this aspect of European integration. Indeed, at every opportunity Southeast Asian and East Asian states affirm their commitment to a limited role for any regional secretariat. For example, the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta has been kept relatively small and its responsibilities have been kept to a minimum with a considerable amount of the administrative work for ASEAN done by ASEAN secretariats housed in the foreign ministries of each member government or in specific ministries such as trade or finance.
Neo-functionalism has become closely associated with the way in which European integration has evolved. It emphasises ‘spillover’ or the way in which cooperation on one issue, usually a technical project, necessitates cooperation in other areas. This in turn promotes further cooperation to yet other issue. Generally, the neo-functionalist approach emphasises every day political interactions which accumulatively lead to greater and greater integration. However, neo-functionalism is of limited help in understanding the role that ASEAN has played in the development of East Asian regionalism. While there is an interest in regional cooperation to deal with economic challenges, there is no interest at present in full integration or, indeed, in any great limitation on the exercise of sovereignty by the member states. Certainly, there is not much sign of ‘spillover’ taking place although some might argue that the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) has some potential in this regard. The CMI is an agreement in principle to put in place a series of bilateral currency swap arrangements that provide a safety net for any regional currency under attack. The possibility is that the end result of the series of bilateral swap agreements (BSAs) will allow ASEAN members to tap into the more than US$2 trillion held in central bank reserves around East Asia. However, for this to come about a more formalized, rigorous financial surveillance system would have to be needed to monitor currency movements. This may in the long term lead to a ‘spillover’ effect in terms of cooperation on wider financial issues. However, while this approach may help us understand future developments it tells us little about how ASEAN has achieved its pivotal role in the region up to this point. Moreover, there have been very few other technical issues over which the APT has developed an extensive web of cooperative arrangements that might lead to a ‘spillover’ effect.

The second major approach to European integration is ‘intergovernmentalism’. At first glance this approach may appear to offer some help in understanding ASEAN’s role in the region. Intergovernmentalism emphasises state-centred interaction in the development of the regional cooperative enterprise. Sovereignty may be pooled but is not irrevocably ceded to a central agency. This approach, which has its roots in the theories of international relations, essentially conceives of a region as a political system in and of itself. Yet the main problem in trying to transfer theories of intergovernmentalism to East Asia is the emphasis on the way in which the distribution of power within a region shapes negotiated outcomes. Indeed, this emphasis on power derives from the neo-realist and neo-liberalist international relations theories which form the basis of the theory of intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1998). What is particularly interesting about the way in which ASEAN has been so influential in shaping East Asian regionalism is how little power, in the conventional neo-realist’s or neo-liberalist sense of the ability to coerce or dominate, ASEAN possesses. Hence, intergovernmentalism’s applicability to the ASEAN conundrum is severely limited.

A more recent addition to the arsenal of theories of European integration is that of multi-level governance (Hooge and Marks 2001). However, it is premised on a set of levels of policy-making that is unique to Europe. Certainly, East Asia has nothing comparable in terms of the many levels of governance across the European Union to which national authority over decision-making can be ‘dispersed’. The multi-level governance approach is helpful, however, in pointing out that students of East Asian regionalism should be mindful of the importance of non-governmental agencies and other non-state actors in the development of regional cooperation.
But this does not necessarily help with the concern of this paper to explore the impact that ASEAN has had on regional cooperation.

Another ‘theory’ of regionalism which also emphasises, among other factors, the importance of non-state actors is the ‘new regionalism’ approach which emerged out of UNU/WIDER research project on regionalism and has since been developed by a number of scholars interested in regionalism outside of the European Union (Hettne, Inotai and Sunkel 1999; 2001; Hettne 2005; Soderbaum 2005; Boås, Marchand and Shaw 2005) The authors who employ the ‘new regionalism’ approach concentrate on the multi-dimensional nature of regionalism. They focus their attention on the need to examine the political, economic, security, cultural and social aspects of the myriad interactions on the part of the many actors that take place across boundaries and which serve to promote regional consciousness and regional linkages that advance regional cooperation. Yet it is important to note that the analyses which employ a ‘new regionalism’ approach tend to be explorations of regionalism in places like Latin America and Africa. Here the institutional states are relatively weak giving opportunities to non-state actors to champion and work for a regional project. Certainly, in parts of Africa the state appears ill-equipped to advance the cause of regionalism.

In East Asia by contrast few analysts have adopted the ‘new regionalism’ approach. This is largely because the institutional state is strong and in many of the major regional players the state leaves little room for any initiative on the part of non-state actors. The reason for the lack of a strong ‘bottom up’ approach to East Asian regionalism lies in the historical, Cold War context that played such a major part in the region’s political and economic development (Stubbs 2005). The Cold War left a legacy of strong institutional states that for security reasons allowed little or no space for non-state actors. This interpretation of the limited role for non-state actors in East Asia’s regional development is widely shared among those who have analysed East Asian regionalism. For example, in an introduction to a collection of analyses of various regions Morten Boås, Marianne E. Marchand and Timothy M. Shaw (2005: 5) note that, ‘In the (South-) East Asian and Asia Pacific context, all authors - Mark Berger and Mark Beeson, Kristen Nordhaug and Ramses Amer - argue and agree that regional projects are still primarily state-led’. They go on to point out that, ‘Berger and Beeson even challenge the notion that we can speak of a new regionalism in the Asia Pacific region. Instead they assert that regional projects are still embedded in Cold War history and structures.’ This point also underscores Frederik Söderbaum’s (2005: 223) assessment of the need to pay special attention ‘to historical context’ and ‘the particular position of states and regions within the global political economy from which distinctive processes and patterns of regionalism arise.’ In other words it needs to be recognized that each region has different characteristics and, therefore, it may be difficult to transport theories that help in understanding the evolution and current configuration of one region over to an analysis of another region.

The point here in not to argue that approaches to regionalism that are commonly found in analyses of regions of region’s such as Europe or Africa are of no value whatsoever in assessing East Asian regionalism. Certainly, aspects of neo-functionalism such as some analysts interest in the socialization of civil servants to EU ideas as part of the ‘spill-over effect’ or new regionalism’s emphasis on multi-dimensional nature of regionalism have considerable resonance
for analysts of East Asian regionalism. The point rather is that the specific characteristics of East Asian regional development may make the transfer of theories that are particularly appropriate to one region problematic when used in evaluations of East Asian regionalism.

Given the limitations of the approaches to regionalism that have been reviewed so far what, then, is the best way to analyse ASEAN’s role in East Asian regionalism? It is the contention of this paper that the most effective way to explore ASEAN’s role in the East Asian regional project is through a combination of historical/sociological institutionalism and constructivism. Of course, these approaches have been employed in analysing other regions of the world most notably Western Europe (eg.Bulmer 1998; Checkel 2005 and other authors in this issue of *International Organization*). However, it is important to be careful in making use of these analyses of Western Europe for there is a rationalist tinge to some of the institutionalist and constructivist writings on Western Europe that leads them in the direction of assuming that material power matters. Certainly, norms can be more easily propagated if those behind them have material power - the US government’s attempts to proselytize the virtues of neo-liberalism provide an excellent example - but this need not necessarily be the case. The way in which ASEAN has shaped the regional cooperative endeavour, it will be argued here, is evidence of this. Moreover, some constructivists assume that a choice needs to be made between ideas/norms and interests as explanatory variables. But a more instructive approach is to view ideas, and therefore norms, as capable of transforming interests and, therefore, that they are ‘intricately interconnected’ (Helleiner 2005: 231).

The new institutionalism is useful in assessing the role of ASEAN in East Asian regionalism because of its emphasis on history, path dependency, feedback, and timing and sequencing (Hall and Taylor 1996; Pierson 2000a, 2000b; Thelen 1999). These features of the new institutionalism certainly help in evaluating ASEAN’s pivotal regional role. From its inauguration in 1967 ASEAN’s steady development as Southeast Asia’s key regional organization and the fact that it became the sole regional state-level organization of any standing in East and Southeast Asia gave it considerable leverage in regional relations. Similarly, constructivism with its focus ideas, agency and socialisation provides a framework which allows us to evaluate the way in which ASEAN has been able to develop and then propagate particular norms both about the way in which regional relations should be conducted and about what is important in the development of the regional political economy (Acharya 2001, 2004; Ba 2006; Johnston 2001).

**ASEAN’s Central Role**

*Institutional Development*

Why is it that ASEAN has been able to play such a central role in East Asian regionalism? There would appear to be two distinct factors at work here. First, the institutional development of ASEAN has been key. From its inception in 1967 to the first heads of government meeting in 1976 ASEAN slowly emerged as a reasonable effective institution. It provided a framework for negotiations over regional conflicts, it allowed for the coordination of
bargaining positions at international forums such as the GATT as well as negotiations with the EEC, Japan and Australia over trade and aid issues, and it was the forum in which member states agreed to attempt to dissuade the major powers from involving non-communist Southeast Asia as proxies in the Cold War through the 1971 Kuala Lumpur Declaration which sought to establish ‘Southeast Asia as a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality’ (ZOPFAN).

From 1976 to the end of the Cold War in 1989 ASEAN consolidated its role in the region and started to develop regular links to major powers around the world. After Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 ASEAN coordinated efforts to isolate the Hanoi government in the United Nations and to make it impossible for Vietnam to gain access to international capital and aid from key donors and international agencies. ASEAN was also instrumental in forming the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea which included all the parties opposed to Vietnam’s puppet government. In 1989 Vietnam left Cambodia signalling an end to the Cold War in the region. As a result of their common perception of Vietnam as a threat to the security and stability of the region, therefore, ASEAN members had consolidated their political links and confirmed their commitment to ASEAN as a regional institution. As one analyst noted in 1986, Vietnam’s actions have induced the members of ASEAN "to draw together and achieve a degree of solidarity in words and deeds which could not have been predicted even by the most optimistic of observers in 1967 or indeed in 1979" (Paribatra 1986:5). In addition, by its actions in the face of the Cambodian crisis ASEAN gained a stature in the wider international community which served its members well. Collectively, the members of ASEAN were increasingly viewed as a group that carried weight in debates in international forums.

ASEAN’s influence on the wider world stage came to fore in the establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. Formed at a ministerial meeting in Canberra, Australia in 1989, APEC brought together economies from around the Pacific Rim including the United States and Japan as well as countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. In advance of the inaugural meeting a number of ASEAN governments had expressed the concern that APEC might overshadow ASEAN. As a consequence, and in order to ensure that the ASEAN members joined APEC, it was agreed that the next meeting of APEC would be held in Singapore in 1990 and that an ASEAN member would host APEC every second year. With APEC’s agenda driven each year by the host country this arrangement has given the ASEAN members considerable leverage over the development of APEC and ensured that members’ interests are not overridden by the larger economic powers.

ASEAN’s institutional credibility, allied to the economic prosperity that had swept through the region in the wake a wave of foreign direct investment that flowed into Southeast Asian from Japan, led the members of the European Union to seek a formal linkage. The fact that ASEAN had developed a central institutional role in East Asia was the key to the EU’s interest in developing ties to the Association. The idea for an Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was approved by ASEAN in 1995. In order to fill out the Asian side of the ASEM the ASEAN members decided to invite China, Japan and South Korea to join them at the Bangkok summit held in 1996. Over the next couple of years there were a number of meetings of representatives of the ASEAN members and China, Japan and South Korea as they prepared a common Asian
position on different ASEM issues for various conferences. These meetings culminated in the first informal summit of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) leaders at the ASEAN summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1997.

At the same time as the APT was starting to emerge as a framework for regional cooperation the Asian Financial Crisis swept through the region. Resentment at the way in which the IMF and the US government had misdiagnosed the problem and imposed inappropriate solutions on Thailand and Indonesia that only exacerbated the situation spurred regional leaders to seek a regional solution to their collective vulnerabilities to the forces of globalization. (Higgott 1998; Bowles 2002). As the crisis subsided there was a growing interest in a regional approach to any future crisis that was able to take into consideration the unique characteristics of the region's economies. Subsequently, meetings of the APT heads of government took place at each of the following annual ASEAN summits. This allowed ASEAN to maintain control of the APT process. In addition, various APT ministers, including finance, economic and labour ministers, as well as officials from a number of ministries began meeting regularly.

This brief review of ASEAN’s development highlights the way in which its emerging role as a central regional organization can be analysed in terms of key features of institutionalism: feedback, path dependency, and timing and sequencing. Originally established in a rather tentative effort to “accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development”, “promote regional peace and stability” as well as cooperation in the “economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields” (Thanat 1992; www.aseansec.org), ASEAN grew into a credible regional organization. Indeed, in each phase of its development the Association was able to provide tangible benefits to its members. As a consequence of this positive feedback ASEAN solidified its position as a regional vehicle through which member states were, in key instances, able to coordinate their activities to their advantage (Kahler 2000; Stubbs 2004). Moreover, ASEAN established a pattern of regional inter-state interaction which, as the founders of APEC quickly discovered, made it difficult for new institutions to emerge which did not take into consideration the interests of the ASEAN members. Similarly, for the European Union members, who were seeking ties into the economically dynamic region of East Asia, the most obvious route to take was to link into the already well established institutional structure offered by ASEAN.

Timing and sequencing were crucial in helping ASEAN establish and maintain its central role in developing regional relations. ASEAN’s early years coincided with the economic benefits that accrued to the region as a result of US spending on the Vietnam War (Stubbs 2005, Ch.5). The generally regional prosperity that was created helped to ameliorate the many potential conflicts that plagued regional relations during the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Most importantly, the challenge from APEC came just as ASEAN was beginning a period of strong economic growth fuelled by the massive influx of Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) following the Plaza Accord of 1985. Following the well-worn path beaten by Japanese companies, their competitors from Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea as well as from the US and Europe also began to invest in the ASEAN region thereby producing a sustained level of
economic growth that was the envy of the world. The non-ASEAN members of APEC did not want to alienate ASEAN’s economically dynamic member countries and so were willing to accommodate ASEAN’s demands that they have a pivotal role in APEC’s institutional development. The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-8 which coincided with the initial meeting of the APT leaders proved to be a catalyst in institutionalising the new arrangement. The resentment felt by regional leaders towards the misdiagnosis and the inept actions of the IMF and the American government’s insistence that an Asian Monetary Fund would not be acceptable spurred them on to seek out greater regional cooperation (Higgott 1998). Moreover, the Crisis also produced a realization among business and political leaders in Northeast Asia that their economic fortunes were strongly linked to those of Southeast Asia and gave further impetus to the APT regionalism project (Cai 2001). Overall, the Crisis underscored the benefits that establishing formal intra-regional economic cooperation could bring to all corners of East Asia.

Although ASEAN has been criticised as weak and ineffective (Jones and Smith 2002; Narine 2002) it has become one of the most successful regional organizations in the world. It developed relatively slowly but at the same time was able to carve out a central position for itself in the wider Asia-Pacific and East Asian region. The very fact of its existence and the extent to which it has become a central feature of its members’ foreign policies has meant that any government wishing to embark on a regionalism project in East Asia or the Asia-Pacific has had to take account of the views and wishes of the ASEAN members. In other words, ASEAN as an institution has taken up a pivotal position in regional relations.

Norms

The second reason that ASEAN has played a such a central role in the development of East Asian regionalism is that the Association has been able to develop widely accepted regional norms around both a code of conduct for regional relations and the economic policies that are considered crucial to regional development. The regional code of conduct was formalised in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) which was originally signed at the first ASEAN summit in Bali in 1976. The TAC is considered one of ASEAN’s benchmark treaties and sets out principles by which those who accede to the Treaty deal with the wider world and especially with one another. These principles are, respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; the right of states to be free from external interference; non-interference in the affairs of one another; the renunciation of the threat of force; and the peaceful settlement of disputes (www.aseansec.org/). In addition to this formal code of conduct ASEAN members developed an informal code that tends to govern regional meetings and negotiations more generally. This is often referred to as the ‘ASEAN Way’ and involves ‘a high degree of discreetness, informality, pragmatism, expediency, consensus-building, and non-confrontational bargaining styles’ (Acharya 1997: 329; see also Capie and Evans 2003).

ASEAN’s norms, which serve to ‘define and regulate appropriate state behaviour and assign rights and responsibilities regarding’ particular issues (Berstein 2001: 5), have a distinctive lineage which helps to explain why they have been so readily adopted by other states within the region. Most notably the TAC principles and the ASEAN Way approach echo the principles enunciated at the Bandung Conference of 1955. The Bandung Conference brought together leaders from 29 Asian and African countries and eventually led to the founding of the
Non-Aligned Movement. The participants picked up on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence signed in 1954 by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Chinese Premier Chou En-lai as well as a number of the key features of the United Nations Charter. They also refined other long-standing principles governing international relations. The Final Communiqué from the Bandung Conference set out ten principles. These included an emphasis on non-intervention in the affairs of other countries; respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations; the equality of all races and nations, large and small; the right of all states to collective self-defence but not in order to further the interests of great powers; and the promotion of mutual interests and cooperation. Moreover, the Conference deliberations were conducted in a manner which later came to characterize ASEAN meetings. For example, contentious issues were avoided; informality was encouraged; and the importance of wide consultation, compromise, and consensus-building was stressed (Acharya 2005; Mackie 2005).

But both the Bandung Conference and ASEAN were also influenced by two major sets of events. First, the vast majority of leaders who met at Bandung represented countries that had experienced colonialism and had, therefore, been subjected to the imposition of what were seen as alien Western values and approaches to the conduct of relations. They, therefore, saw themselves as condemned to serve the interests of the major Western powers. Second, many of the leaders attending the Bandung Conference felt that their countries were pawns in the Cold War confrontation. There was a collective sense of the need to express their wish to be free of the pressures that the Cold War conflict visited on those countries that the United States and the Soviet Union sought as allies. Indeed, the Bandung principles underscored this point by stating that all countries should abstain from exerting pressure on other countries, that there should be a general respect for justice and international obligations, and that disputes should be settled by peaceful means (Mackie 2005). Overall, then, there was a sense among the Bandung participants that they had an opportunity to rethink international relations and to conduct international relations in a way that meshed with their values and interests (Widyatmadja 2005). These ideas about the conduct of international affairs was internalized and developed by ASEAN as it began to flesh out the way in which its members felt that regional and international negotiations and relations should be approached.

For example, ASEAN’s wish to develop a code of conduct for the region which was based on Southeast Asian rather than Western traditions and interests was reflected not only in the TAC but also in the 1971 ZOPFAN Declaration and the notion of regional resilience which ASEAN adopted from Indonesia in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration of 1977 (Acharya 2001: 54-6; Wanandi 2001: 26). ZOPFAN emerged from the Malaysia’s attempts to get the major powers to guarantee Southeast Asia’s neutrality in the Cold War. The Declaration of 1971 was a compromise that emphasised that ASEAN wanted the great powers to respect the Association’s regional autonomy. Similarly, the notion of regional resilience underscores ASEAN’s wish to deal with its own problems without necessarily resorting to external help or suffering from outside interference.

Significantly, the common experiences of the ASEAN members in terms of colonisation and the exercise of Cold War pressures is reflected in the way in which the ASEAN members
view power. Clearly ASEAN members recognize that the major powers have an important role to play in the region. For example, Singapore’s Minister Mentor, Lee Kuan Yew, has emphasized the value of having the United States as a partner in balancing a rising China (Hund 2003: 388). And Emmers is correct to note that ‘analysts should not underestimate the persistence of realist beliefs among political leaders’ in the region (2003: 6). Yet at the same time the realist/neo-realist formulation of power as the ability of an actor to get another to do what they otherwise would not have done or not to do what they would otherwise have done - or in other words, A gets B to do X which B might not have done, or not to do Y which she otherwise would have done (Dahl 1970) - is not very encouraging for ASEAN and its members. ASEAN members are essentially ‘B’ states in that they have traditionally been the object of domination, coercion, and pressure. For ASEAN, then, the question has been how to exercise power and shape their own world without the material capabilities that are normally associated with the exercise of power. One argument, of course, is that power should be seen as ‘the ability to resist change, to throw the costs of adaptation on others’ and that, ‘characteristically, the ability to resist change requires fewer resources to be placed on the line than the ability to bring about change’ (Brown 2001:92). But ASEAN and its members are not simply in the business of resisting change. Indeed, they seek to build East Asian regionalism not protect the status quo.

In seeking to understand how the relatively powerless ASEAN members have achieved their central role in building East Asian regionalism through the use of norms it is useful to turn to a analyst who deliberated on these issue well before constructivism became an important approach to the study of international relations. Berenice Carroll in an overview of the literature on power argues that the common, hierarchical, image of influence as flowing more or less exclusively from stronger to weaker states is in fact largely a distortion, and a distortion that is traceable to the now ubiquitous realist-based power/dominance equation. She is highly critical of what she terms ‘top-dogism’, which she defines as an untoward research focus on conflict between nation-states to the exclusion of the study of peaceful relations between groups of people (Carroll 1972: 593-597). Carroll concludes her argument with an identification of forms of power other than the ability to dominate which so-called ‘underdogs’ are likely to exert in the international system. Her list of the ‘powers of the powerless’ includes, among others, ‘integrative power’, ‘socializing power’ and ‘norm-creating power’ (Carroll 1972: 608-614). With respect to the last of these powers, underdogs are thought to originate the ‘most innovative demands and proposals, those that seem most extreme and unrealistic because they depart furthest from accepted norms’ precisely because they tend to be less invested in the status quo (Carroll 1972: 611). Obviously ASEAN members are very much Carroll’s ‘underdogs’ in the international system and indeed in regional relations yet as she predicts they have been able to employ their norm creating powers and their powers of socialization to drive the East Asian regionalism project forward.

However, it is not just in terms of norms that guide regional relations that ASEAN has been influential. In recent years ASEAN members have also developed a series of norms around substantive regional economic policies. During the first 25 years of its existence ASEAN was concerned primarily with political and security issues and showed little interest in developing economic cooperative arrangements. However, with the end of the Cold War and the need to
attend to economic issues thrown up by globalization, and especially by the growing economic
dynamism of China, ASEAN turned its attention to economic cooperation. In 1992 ASEAN members agreed on the basic framework of an ASEAN Free Trade Area (Nesadurai 2003). And with the advent of the APT ASEAN entered into a series of trading agreements with China, Japan and India.

As with the norms covering the regional code of conduct, norms and policies shaping the regional cooperation on economic issues have their roots in of historical experience. Essentially, they are the result of compromises that have been reached at the national and then the regional level. At the national level two main competing coalitions have emerged vying to determine the direction of economic policy including foreign economic policy (Stubbs 2000). First, there is what may best be called the development state coalition. It originated in the developmental state approach that emerged in many of the economies of East Asia and was forged in the crucible of the Cold War. It emphasises state intervention in order to protect key import-substitution industries and gives a comparative advantage to export-manufacturing sectors. The developmental approach has been embedded in an institutional continuity and reinforced by powerful actors, such as bureaucrats, politicians and business people, who benefit from import-substitution tariff protection or export subsidies and who gain a measure of legitimacy from their success. It is also buttressed by the wider community’s appreciation that it has provided social stability and an increasing levels of prosperity. Importantly, then, developmental institutions, and the policies that they are responsible for, are still very much part of the political economy of the region’s successful economies.

A second coalition of liberal reformers has developed as a result of the push for the liberalisation of the economy from the 1980s onwards. Members of this coalition emphasise the idea that the market, not the state, constitutes the most effective and productive way of organizing economic relations and that, therefore, policies should be followed that open up the economy to market forces through deregulation and privatization. Aspects of this approach were adopted by the governments of the successful economies. In addition, liberal reformers focus on the need to encourage the free flow of trade and capital so as to exploit the perceived mutual gains from participating in the global economy. This coalition is made up primarily of Western-trained technocrats, many of whom inhabit key economic planning agencies; economists in universities and policy think tanks; and those associated with export-dependent and multinational corporations - especially European and American-based companies - who fear that local, domestic protectionism may jeopardize their attempts to gain access to foreign markets.

In the wake of the Asian crisis those advocating these two approaches have tended to find compromises and ways of working together in an attempt to manage the forces of globalization as advantageously as possible. Etel Solingen (2004) refers to this as a ‘hybrid’ coalition of political interests. It has been the basis on which reforms have been undertaken to deal with the fallout from the crisis and to swing support behind the ASEAN Plus Three regional project (Beeson 2005; Hughes 2005; Stubbs 2002). The work of Eric Helleiner and his colleagues is particularly instructive here (Helleiner and Pickel 2005). They point out that ‘economic nationalism is best seen as a facet of national identity, rather than a variant of realism of a
“protectionist” ideology’. They also note that ‘although nationalism encourages non-liberal policies in some contexts, it embraces liberal policies in others.’ (Helleiner 2005: 221-2). In other words as long as the nation is strengthened - ie national sovereignty, the ‘horizontal comradeship’ of the nation’s members and so forth (Anderson 1983 quoted in Helleiner 2005: 222) are enhanced - then the actual policies that are adopted can be protectionist or liberal reformist or even some combination of the two.

Helleiner’s approach to economic nationalism helps to explain recent developments in Southeast Asia. Following the 1997-8 Asian Crisis Solingen’s hybrid coalition emerged made up of players from both the developmental state and the liberal reform coalitions. They could work together because the liberal reformists saw value in opening up the economy so as to take advantage of globalization, especially in terms of attracting foreign direct investment, while at the same time the developmental state coalition members could point to the need to maintain some state overview of the liberalization process, particularly in order to ensure some prudential supervisory capacity. Members of both groups could see that engaging in a managed way with the forces of globalization. As a result, aspects of the old development state survived alongside key provisions of the ‘new’ more liberal regulatory state (Beeson 2005; Underhill and Zhang 2005).

Hence, three political economy norms inform ASEAN members as they approach the task of developing regional economic linkages. First, is the continuing strong role for government. As a continuation of the role played by the government in the developmental state or in terms of the regulatory role that the state plays in the newly emerging more open economy there remains a strong sense in the region that there ought to be an allowance in any form of economic cooperation for the government to play a key part in developing the economy. Second, and in the same vein, there is also a recognition of the close ties between government and business and that this too should be allowed for in regional cooperation frameworks. Finally, there is an emphasis on opening up the economy so as to encourage as much FDI as possible. This in good part comes about because of the recognition of the value of opening up to the forces of globalization.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the reasons why ASEAN, despite its members lack of material power, has been a pivotal player in the emergence of East Asian regionalism. The argument has been twofold. First, ASEAN has gradually emerged as an indispensable institution within not just Southeast Asia but more generally in East Asia. As such it has given its members considerable leverage in terms of negotiating their role in any regionalism project. Second, ASEAN has promoted a set of norms covering both the rules of conduct for regional relations as well as the political economy of regional cooperation. These norms have been taken up around the region because of the common historical experiences of the peoples of East Asia and the diffusion of norms that has taken the place through the many meetings of the APT and APEC. Intriguingly, ASEAN norms have also been accepted by China and Japan in good part because
they need the ASEAN members as followers if they are to be regional and global leaders. In a sense Chinese and Japanese willingness to adopt ASEAN norms means that at time it is difficult to decide which countries are the leaders and which countries are the followers. Clearly ASEAN members have been able to barter their position as a potential followers for acceptance of some of their cherished norms. This is yet another example of their ability to turn weakness into strength.

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