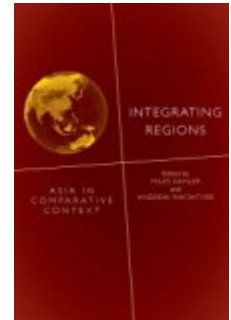




Miles Kahler, Andrew MacIntyre, eds.. *Integrating Regions: Asia in Comparative Context*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013. 336 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-8364-4.



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In their comprehensive edited volume *Integrating Regions: Asia in Comparative Context*, Miles Kahler and Andrew MacIntyre bring together a number of leading international scholars to evaluate and explain “the new Asian regionalism and its institutions in the context of other regions and their international architecture” (p. 4). This is both a timely and an ambitious project. The work is divided into three parts: the first discusses the design of regional institutions; the second explores regional comparisons with Latin America and Europe; and the third examines whether Asia is experiencing the epiphany of regional convergence. Kahler provides a thoughtful introduction to the volume, while MacIntyre and John Ravenhill conclude, somewhat provisionally, about the possible future of Asian regional institutions. As Kahler notes and most of the scholars in the volume acknowledge, institutional design varies across regional arrangements in Europe, Latin America, and East and Southeast Asia. As Kahler further observes, “contemporary Europe has too

often served as a benchmark for Asian institutions” (p. 9).

Importantly, then, this volume acknowledges that despite superficial similarities, the character of regional institutions differ enormously, and it is important not to assume, as many scholars have, that regional arrangements in Asia will necessarily follow a Eurocentric developmental trajectory. A number of contingent factors account for these variations, including historical experience; economic and political complementarities; the role of external hegemon, particularly the United States; and the nature and sequencing of regional crises. Randall C. Henning, notably, explores the often productive causal links between economic crises and regional institution building, while Kevin O’Rourke draws attention to the contingent play of political and historical factors that led to the European Union (EU) model, ultimately triumphing over the looser and economically more open European Free Trade Association (EFTA) from 1960 to 1972.

More particularly, the nature of decision rules, commitment devices like legalization and enfranchisement, and membership rules profoundly affects the practice of these regional institutions. Indeed, to a large extent, Kahler and a number of other contributors to the volume, notably, Judith G. Kelley, Stephen Haggard, and Jorge I. Dominguez, argue that institutional design explains the very different constitutional and economic structures that have evolved and currently prevail in Latin America, Europe, and East and Southeast Asia. Thus, Kelley demonstrates how membership rules, namely, whether organizations function as “convoys or clubs,” influence the organizations’ “ability to accommodate heterogeneity and forge successful regional integration” (p. 79). Kelley contends that the EU, over time, emphasized club membership rules. This gave it more tools to leverage members, offer various levels of inclusiveness, and reduce heterogeneity in the interests of common political and economic union. By contrast, convoy arrangements, like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the East Asian Summit (EAS) mechanism, that offer nonbinding consensus based on supposedly shared norms, “cannot use the tools that clubs can,” basically because they set very low standards for joining and have little ability to enforce their agreements (p. 96). Thus while club arrangements can use the tools of convoys, like granting associational status or permitting different speeds of economic and political integration or a variable geometry, the soft law, convoy arrangement cannot deploy the hard rules of clubs. As a consequence, clubs like the EU have a capacity to reduce heterogeneity between member states. By contrast, Haggard, following a new institutionalist perspective, argues that the “most general constraint on institutionalization is the heterogeneity of the countries of the Pacific Rim” (p. 198). Such heterogeneity, and the drive to widen institutions, has had a negative impact on institutional deepening. Moreover, a soft law

regime within the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and across APEC and the EAS, as Haggard notes, “weakens both precision and the binding nature of commitments” (p. 214). Indeed, as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry warned, “less can be more [because] while ASEAN, APT, APEC, ARF [ASEAN Regional Forum] and the EAS are all potentially useful regional bodies, their mutual existence has the real potential to result in duplication of effort and dilute outcomes for both businesses and countries in our region” (p. 98).

In a similar vein, Eric Voeten notes that Asia significantly differs from other regions in the absence of “regional judicial institutions” and this constitutes a striking anomaly in East and Southeast Asian attempts at economic integration when compared with regional groupings elsewhere (p. 58). Voeten, in a dense and detailed study, observes that ASEAN states are not necessarily averse to using international courts to settle territorial disputes. However, they have demonstrated little enthusiasm for establishing regional dispute resolution mechanisms. Voeten concludes that “simply put, the demand for an Asian judicial institution will remain weak until Asian states adopt legally binding treaties that create rights and obligations for private persons” (p. 73).

Somewhat differently, Dominguez, in his insightful survey of seven South American regional institutions, finds that three factors have an impact on their sustainability. Firstly, domestic politics matter, notably, the part played by inter-presidential agreements in securing institutional stability. Secondly, business responds to opportunities offered by trade liberalization. Thirdly, and perhaps most interestingly, “where inter-state peace had been established before creating a regional economic arrangement (North American Free Trade Association NAFTA), or where such an association was an outcome simultaneous with peace building (Southern Common Market MERCOSUR) the resulting economic arrangements

proved more effective at both peace and trade” (p. 108). By contrast, Dominguez found that “regime homogeneity or heterogeneity and various structural asymmetries did not account for variation between the cases” (p. 110). Indeed, what ultimately counts for Dominguez in terms of growth, peace, and integration are “the rules that ever worked, namely trade liberalization and central bank payment clearing” (p. 123). In the most successful South American case, MERCOSUR, comprising the southern cone of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Venezuela, Dominguez contends that the organization has been light on institutionalization and depended on relations between presidents, not on supranational organization. Ultimately, South America’s “most successful economic agreement emerged from a multi-year, multi-faceted self reinforcing process of confidence and peace building in the southern cone” (p. 129). Yet as Dominguez warns, “Readers Beware! There is much in the Latin American story that should not be emulated. Domestic politics and policy errors may trump gains from regional economic integration” (p. 110). Certainly, there is much in the Latin American cases, particularly the influence exercised by domestic coalitions to deflect liberalization initiatives, that has relevance to ASEAN’s attempts to forge an integrated economic community.

There is, one suspects, much less for ASEAN to learn from European attempts at union. As Kevin O’Rourke explains, Franco-German rapprochement, dating from the mid-1950s, drove Europe’s supranational approach to integration and reflected three key variables: the historical experience of the western European states, particularly, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom after 1815; the geopolitical and economic interests of post-1945 national governments; and the role of chance and contingency in this distinctively European pattern of development. “There was nothing inevitable about the development of supranational institutions in Europe” (p. 164). Indeed, O’Rourke, who is a historian rather than a politi-

cal scientist, pays conspicuous attention to the role that chance and political actors like Robert Schumann, Jean Monet, Konrad Adenauer, Charles De Gaulle, and Harold Macmillan, as well as external pressure from successive U.S. administrations, played in forging the EU at the expense of an open and more market driven European Free Trade Area, the initial preference of the UK Conservative Party in 1960. As O’Rourke shows, the deepened and widened union after 1972 succeeded as a direct consequence of British diplomatic incompetence adumbrated by Harold Macmillan’s, the British prime minister, remarkable volte-face in applying for European Economic Community (EEC) membership in 1961. As O’Rourke prudently concludes, “historians are more comfortable inhabiting a world in which multiple motivations may matter at different levels of the political process” (p. 168). Given the role chance played in European developments, O’Rourke sees little utility in applying or even comparing the European process with Asian regionalism. Asia is a geographically larger and far more politically and economically diverse region than Europe, and the “historical context is completely different.” In particular, “Asia is not a declining giant which feels the need to unite against rising threats from the rest of the world” (ibid.). Host to the “rising giants” of the twenty-first century, China and India, it is hard to see either of these countries ceding sovereignty to a regional supranational arrangement or even accepting the decisional framework of a multilateral body.

These historical, geopolitical, and social facts notwithstanding, a number of authors in this collection attempt to make the case that regionalism could transform the political and economic conduct of Southeast and East Asian states. Amitav Acharaya and Simon Hix make the case that shared norms and regional institutions may socialize states into less self-interested modes of behavior and create conditions for a shared sense of regional identity. Hix recognizes that “a particular and potentially unique set of factors came togeth-

er in the mid 1980s in Western Europe to create the environment” for regional economic integration, nevertheless he speculates that “although the level of political, economic and ideological convergence” is lower in Asia, something analogous could occur (pp. 18, 56). To demonstrate this, Hix argues that East Asian states could converge on deeper economic integration and agree to “delegate certain agenda-setting powers to an independent agent” (p. 46). In this context, Hix further contends that East Asia might “learn a lot from the experience of the design of representation in the EU” and posits a somewhat fanciful scheme of qualified majority voting that might apply to a putative East Asian Economic Union (p. 48). He concludes, somewhat optimistically, that “if a group of states in East Asia could start the ball rolling, economic integration beyond a free trade area could be a genuine prospect for the region” (p. 57).

Meanwhile, Acharaya, adopting a constructivist methodology, which has become something of an orthodoxy among scholars of international relations in Asia and Australia, asserts that “regions are social constructs” whose effectiveness depends on a “socially constructed identity.” Consequently, regions are not “preordained, permanent or changeless” (p. 223). The problem here is that such statements are worryingly unfalsifiable. Everything is possibly a region if members believe they belong to one, ergo, nothing is plausibly a region. We are further informed that “normative convergence” is the key to the success of regional institutions (p. 224). Consequently, the success of Asian institutions should be measured in “ideational, social and normative terms” rather than anything structural or empirically testable, like, for instance, regional trade and market integration, common defense arrangements, open borders, movement toward currency union, or the acceptance of legally binding supranational institutions (p. 224). Given that no such developments have occurred within ASEAN or in the wider APT, it is hardly surprising that construc-

tivists prefer ideational factors in Asian regional development. Acharaya further contends that the distinctive feature of regionalism in East and Southeast Asia is its “contingent socialization” (p. 231). In contrast, constructivists generally argue that the process of socialization moves, over time, from a calculation of instrumental benefits gained or received by a member to an internalization of “values, roles and understandings.”[1] Acharaya argues that Asia disports a third type of socialization where “agents act both instrumentally and normatively, concurrently and on a more or less permanent basis” (p. 230). This lumps together rather than splits or differentiates the practices whereby new states engage with regional arrangements like ASEAN, the APT, and the EAS. Acharaya’s case studies of Vietnam, India, and China, where newcomers to regional arrangements neither backtrack nor fully commit, adds little to our understanding of such “contingent socialization,” which sounds like special pleading rather than analytic insight. Moreover, given that the norms that influence Asia’s socialization are those of “domestic non-interference and regional autonomy,” this obfuscates rather than clarifies the status of Asian norm convergence (p. 234). If member states share only the belief in noninterference in the domestic political, economic, or legal affairs of member states, this renders the prospect of regionalism somewhat redundant. No wonder constructivists place such emphasis on shared ideas as there is little else to show for almost fifty years of ASEAN inspired regionalism.

In their conclusion, by contrast, Ravenhill and MacIntyre demonstrate that Asian regionalism possesses a largely protean character. Despite the proliferation of regional bodies, meetings, and agreements since the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (AFC), integration remains curiously inchoate. Thus, “conventional indicators of trade and financial interdependence provide no support for arguments that increasing economic integration has driven the new Asian regionalism” (p. 250). Moreover, the proliferation of Preferential Trade

Agreements between various states in the region and with trading partners outside the region reflects political-strategic considerations rather than economic or business ones. This, in turn, reflects the close and often opaque business-government relations at the state level that prevail across the region. Meanwhile, “the relatively low levels of intra-regional trade in Asia generate few pressures for monetary integration” (p. 256). MacIntyre and Ravenhill ultimately maintain, therefore, that the “central dynamic shaping the evolution of Asian regional institutions” are “international political and security rivalries” (p. 263). In this context, Barack Obama’s much vaunted pivot to Asia and the United States’ recent proposal of a Trans-Pacific Partnership, which directly conflicts with the APT-sponsored Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, not only reflects the competing Chinese and U.S. visions of the region, but also intimates the fragmented nature of Asian regionalism that will affect all attempts at integration for some time to come.

This volume then offers much upon which to ponder about the distinctive character of regional institutions that currently affect global politics. Moreover, given the diversity of the regional arrangements discussed in this volume, it is probably more accurate to speak of regionalisms rather than any uniform pattern of regionalism. Two facts, however, emerge strongly. Firstly, states matter and secondly domestic interests, as well as architectural design, structurally determine the regional arrangements that emerge. This then is an original work and its various chapters open a potentially interesting debate about the complex and paradoxical character of Asian regionalism. In this context, it is somewhat surprising that there is no mention of the China-sponsored Shanghai Cooperation and little attention to the problematic impact of China’s rise on Asian security. The volume could also have been enhanced by a glossary of acronyms in such an acronym rich environment. Finally, O’Rourke’s biographical details do not appear in the volume and the

work would have benefited generally from more attentive proof reading.

Note

[1]. Alistair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Relations 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 21.

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