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Asia Is Not One

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ASIA IS NOT "one," and there is no singular idea of Asia. Asia is of multiple (although not always mutually exclusive) conceptions, some drawing on material forces, such as economic growth, interdependence, and physical power, and others having ideational foundations, such as civilizational linkages and normative aspirations. Some of these varied conceptions of Asia have shaped in meaningful ways the destinies of its states and peoples. Moreover, they have underpinned different forms of regionalism, which, in turn, has ensured that Asia, despite its fuzziness and incoherence, has remained a durable, if essentially contested, notion.

Before proceeding further, let me briefly comment on the concepts of region, regionalization, and regionalism, the three central pillars of any meaningful discussion of the contemporary idea of Asia. First, our understanding of what makes a *region* has undergone a major change. There is a growing agreement in the literature that (1) regions are not just material constructs but also ideational ones; (2) regions are not a given or fixed, but are socially constructed—they are made and remade through political, economic, social, and cultural interactions; and (3) just like nations states, regions may rise and wither.[1]

Prasenjit Duara distinguishes between "region" and "regionalization," taking the former to mean "the relatively unplanned or evolutionary emergence of an area of interaction and interdependence," and the latter as "the more active, often ideologically driven political process of creating a region." While this is a valid distinction, it obscures (although it is subsumed under "regionalization") the concept and practice of regionalism. Indeed, regionalization and regionalism

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[1]I have argued elsewhere that regions should be understood in terms of (1) material and ideational—regionalist ideas and regional identity that move the study of regions beyond purely materialist understandings; (2) whole and parts—a regional (as opposed to mainly country-specific) perspective based on a marriage between disciplinary and area studies approaches; (3) past and present—historical understanding of regions, going beyond contemporary policy issues; (4) inside and outside—internal construction of regions, stressing the role of local agency, as opposed to external stimuli or the naming of regions by external powers; and (5) permanence and transience—the fluidity, "porosity." and transience of regions. See Amitav Acharya, The Making of Southeast Asia: International Relations of a Region (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, forthcoming).

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can be separated analytically. The former is normally understood in the political economy literature as market-driven, as opposed to state-led, advance of transnational economic linkages, including trade, investment, and production. Hence, a relevant term here is the "regionalization of production" in East Asia, which was spurred by the southward movement of Japanese companies and capital following the reevaluation of the yen after the Plaza Accord of 1985, which brought South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian countries under its ambit and created a de facto East Asian economic region.[2] Regionalism, as it is understood in the political science and international relations literature, implies the deliberate act of forging a common platform, including new intergovernmental organizations and transnational civil society networks, to deal with common challenges, realize common objectives, and articulate and advance a common identity. While much of this can be subsumed under regionalization in the sense that Duara speaks of, regionalization can proceed in the absence "the more active, often ideologically driven political process of creating a region," especially when the latter entails formal regional institutions. Asia was far into the process of economic interdependence and transnational production networks before the first formal intergovernmental regional economic grouping, APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), was created in 1989. But it is regionalism that brings the notion of Asia alive.

Moreover, in his discussion of the pre–World War II period, Duara sets "imperial regionalism" against the "anti-imperialist regionalization project in Asia." While I agree with this dichotomy, I argue that the anti-imperialist project, which persisted well into the postwar period, was not singular as a source of Asian regionalism. The trajectory of Asian regionalism had varied underpinnings that need to be recognized. While Duara focuses on Rabindranath Tagore, Okakura Tenshin, and Zhang Taiyan, I bring in Aung San, Ho Chi Minh, and José Rizal. The richness and diversity of Asian regionalism cannot be fully captured without looking these Southeast Asian proponents, for it was in Southeast Asia, especially with the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967, that regionalism in Asia found its first truly viable expression.

Contested Visions

While "Asia" has not lacked protagonists for the past century and half, these protagonists have differed widely in terms of their ideational underpinnings and political goals. Looking at the champions of Asia and their ideas, at least four different conceptions of Asia can be identified in the early post–World War II period. These may be termed *imperialist Asia*, *nationalist Asia*, *universalist*

[2]Mitchell Bernard and John Ravenhill, "Beyond Product Cycles and Flying Geese: Regionalization, Hierarchy, and the Industrialization of East Asia," *World Politics* 47, no. 2 (January 1995): 171–209.

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Asia, and *regionalist Asia.* A fifth conception, *exceptionalist Asia*, though already incipient, would emerge later as a major political force.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, elements and impulses within these categories may be present to different degrees in a single proponent of Asia. Thus, while Jawaharlal Nehru of India belonged primarily to nationalist Asia, he also identified with universalist Asia (or at least an internationalist) and regionalist Asia. Moreover, these impulses can shift during the course of a political career, and a lifetime.

The first conception, *imperialist Asia* (similar to Duara's "imperial regionalism"), is tied to the hegemonic purpose of great powers, both Western and Asian. While the term "Asia" did not originate with it, Western colonial rule, even though it severely disrupted existing intraregional commercial traffic and helped divide Asia into different spheres of influence, did contribute to the reification of the concept, thereby furthering the cultural and political dichotomy that had developed between Europe and Asia through the centuries, well before the "consciousness of an Asian identity originated [within Asia] largely in reaction to the colonial system and in the common denominator of anti-Western sentiment."[3]

But it was in the hands of an Asian power, Japan, that the imperialist notion of Asia assumed a peculiar prominence, as imperial Japan and its apologists sought to invoke a discourse of pan-Asianism to legitimize its dominance in a way that Western powers in the region had not and other Asian powers such as China and India would not. The dual role of Japan as Asia's savior and its hegemonic leader was clearly illustrated in the Japanese notion of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Encompassing Japan (including the territories of Korea, Taiwan, and Sakhalin), China, Manchukuo, French Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies, this was, of course, not all of Asia, but the "the concept built on Pan-Asian notions of an 'Asian community' that had earlier developed in Japan, and which would be extended to Southeast Asian and South Asian if not on the basis of race, then on the basis of a 'common interest.'"[4] Indeed, representatives from all over Asia were invited to the Greater East Asia Conference held in November 1943.

Although it was but one element among Japanese pan-Asianism, it had the most serious impact on the destinies of the Asian states and the lives of their peoples. This was a concept of hegemonic region and regionalism. While it offered a platform for organizing the unity of those incorporated into it, it was not always on a voluntary basis, but coerced. The Japanese imperialist region was marked by a high degree of trade interdependence, and it certainly inspired freedom struggles all over Asia. But in political terms, it degenerated into another form of foreign dominance, no less oppressive than that of the Western colonial

[3]John M. Steadman, *The Myth of Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 32–33.
[4]Peter Duus, "The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere: Dream and Reality," *Journal of Northeast Asian History* 5, no. 1 (June 2008): 146–47.

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powers. Burma's Aung San, who had earlier endorsed the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and even envisioned "a common defence policy in East Asia as the best guarantee for the maintenance of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere" (Silverstein 1972:21), now insisted that "a new Asian order … will not and must not be one like the Co-prosperity Sphere of militarist Japan, nor should it be another Asiatic Monroe doctrine, nor imperial preference or currency bloc."[5]

The legacy of imperialist Asia would have a long-term effect, shaping regional perceptions of the superpower rivalry during the Cold War. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, although not outright imperial, was perceived as an attempt at neocolonial domination by some sections in Asia, including India's Nehru and Indonesia's Sukarno. It did not last very long, but helped polarize Asia along the Cold War divide, probably disrupting the socialization of China (along with other issues, including the Korean War, the Taiwan issue, and China's own support for communist movements in the region).

Even before Japanese imperialism could sweep through Asia, there emerged another conception of Asia that may be termed *universalist Asia.* Its most eloquent proponent was Rabindranath Tagore, who combined a visceral distaste for nationalism with a passionate belief in the "common bond of spiritualism" among Asia's peoples.[6] Although Tagore did not specifically advocate a political regionalism of states—this might have been premature given that Asia was still firmly under colonial rule—his recognition and intellectual promotion of the spiritual and civilizational affinities among Asia's peoples constituted an alternative conception of Asian regionalism in which societies rather than states take the center stage and that thrives as much as on ideational and cultural flows as on economic links or political purpose.

Tagore was not alone in articulating a conception of Asia that was not premised on a narrow state-centric nationalism; Rebecca Karl has analyzed an alternative form of regionalism, much more politically oriented than Tagore's, among Chinese intellectuals "rooted in non-state centered practices and non-national-chauvinist culturalism," that could be contrasted with Sun Yat-sen's "state-based, anti-imperialist vision of Asia."[7] This alternative regionalism that Karl speaks of was centered around the ideas and associates of Chinese intellectual Liang Qichao, and the activities of a little-known organization called the Asian Solidarity Society, which was set up in Tokyo in 1907 by Chinese intellectuals, Japanese socialists, and Indian, Vietnamese, and Filipino exiles. An interesting aspect of this regionalism was the recognition accorded to the "first

[5]Josef Silverstein, *The Political Legacy of Aung San* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Department of Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Program Cornell University, 1972), 101.
[6]Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1918).
[7]Rebecca Karl, "Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of Twentieth Century," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (October 1998): 1096–97.

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Filipino," José Rizal, as "the quintessential Asian patriot, from which China and other Asian must learn."[8] Although Rizal is better known as a champion of the unity of the Malay race, his message was appropriated by the non-state-centric variety of Asian regionalism.

Tagore's innate universalism put him at odds with the powerful currents of nationalism sweeping Asia, including in the very places the poet visited in his voyages through Asia, and which he imagined as being integral to his conception of Asia. This is not to say that the proponents of a third conception of Asia, which I call *nationalist Asia*, were untouched by universalist values and instincts. Leaders such as Nehru, Aung San, and Sukarno saw little contradiction between nationalism and international cooperation. As Aung San put it, "I recognise both the virtues and limitations of pure nationalism, I love its virtues, I don't allow myself to be blinded by its limitations, though I knew that it is not easy for the great majority of any nation to get over these limitations."[9] Aung San's nationalism, like those of Nehru and Sukarno, could support both nationalism and internationalism, but these figures from Asia's new power elite did not empathize with universalist Asia at the expense of nationalism.

This third vision of Asia, championed by Asia's nationalist leaders such as China's Sun Yat-sen, India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Burma's Aung San, and Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, was geared toward harnessing Asia's rejuvenation to further the retreat of Western colonialism. Before World War II, especially around the time of the 1927 Congress of the Oppressed Nationalities, a number of leaders within the Indian National Congress (a group that was believed to include Mohandas Gandhi, C. R. Das, and later Nehru) supported the idea of an "Asian federation" to organize joint struggle against Western colonialism.[10] Regionalism in this sense was not only compatible with, but also a bulwark for, Asia's restoration and rejuvenation.[11] Certainly Ho Chi Minh was keen to use regional cooperation to further the cause of Vietnamese independence.[12] In a speech to welcome Sarat Chandra Bose, brother of Subhas Chandra Bose at the city hall of Rangoon on July 24, 1946, Aung San stated that Burma would "stand for an Asiatic Federation in a not very, very remote future, we stand for immediate mutual understanding and joint action, wherever and whenever possible, from now for our mutual interests and for the freedom of India, Burma and indeed all Asia."[13]

[8]Ibid., 1106.
[9]Aung San, *Burma's Challenge* (South Okklapa, Myanmar: U Aung Gyi, 1974), 193.
[10]T. A. Keenleyside, "Nationalist Indian Attitude towards Asia: A Troublesome Legacy," *Pacific Affairs* 55, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 216.
[11]Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[12]Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 244.
[13]Aung San, *Bogyoke Aung San Maint-Khun-Myar (1945–1947): General Aung San's Speeches* (Rangoon: Sarpay Bait Man Press, 1971), 86.

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In September 1945, Ho Chi Minh spoke of his interest in the creation of a "pan-Asiatic community" comprising Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaya, Burma, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines (China, Japan, and Korea were not included in Ho's vision of an Asiatic community).[14] His ostensible goal at this stage was to foster political and economic cooperation among these countries while maintaining good relations with the United States, France, and Great Britain. This was a time when Ho still hoped that the colonial powers, exhausted by war, would voluntarily speed up the process of decolonization. But when this proved to be a false hope, Ho and other Southeast Asian nationalist leaders began considering the use of regional cooperation to oppose the return of European colonialism. This was clearly evident in Ho's letter to the Indonesian prime minister, Sutan Sjahrir, in November 1946 urging cooperation between the two countries to advance their common struggle for freedom. In his letter, Ho asked Indonesia to join him in getting India, Burma, and Malaya to develop initiatives toward a "Federation of Free Peoples of Southern Asia." But Indonesian leaders responded coolly to this idea, apparently worried that cooperating with the Vietnamese communists would give the Dutch an opportunity to use the fear of communism to delay Indonesia's own independence.

Advancing decolonization was a principal theme at the 1947 Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, the first conference of Asian nations in the postwar period. It was even more central to the Second Asian Relations Conference, also known as the Conference on Indonesia, which was directly and specifically geared toward supporting Indonesian freedom fighters after the second Dutch police action in 1948. Yet, despite all the talk about pan-Asian unity, its proponents were willing to offer only political, rather than material, support for the region's independence movements. For example, India's aid to Indonesian freedom fighters, an exception, was not extended to Ho Chi Minh, much to the disappointment of Ho's supporters.

And these early stirrings of pan-Asianism did not translate into concrete and durable forms of cooperation and institutionalization. There was an uncomfortable sense that the pan-Asianists of India, Japan, and China "were primarily concerned with their own countries," and their "exhortations … largely as an extension of their own distinctive cultures."[15] Moreover, Southeast Asians saw in a pan-Asian community potential for Chinese or Indian domination. As one Burmese put it, "It was terrible to be ruled by a Western power, but it was even more so to be ruled by an Asian power."[16] And the pan-Asian sentiments of India's leaders were stymied by limited contacts with nationalist leaders in other parts of Asia, misgivings toward the

[14]Goscha, *Thailand and Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 244.
[15]Steadman, *The Myth of Asia*, 33.
[16]Henderson, "The Development of Regionalism in Southeast Asia."

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Nationalist government in China, and the rise of anti-Indian sentiments in Burma and other parts of Asia.[17]

While Nationalist Asia sought to channel regionalism as an instrument of anticolonialism and national liberation, the fourth vision, *regionalist Asia*, inspired those who wished to use the combined platform of the region's newly independent nation states to seek a collective voice on the world stage. There was considerable overlap between nationalist and regionalist Asia, with Nehru, Aung San, Ho Chi Minh belonging to both. But the regionalists (or the regionalist side of the nationalists) went a step beyond merely securing independence from colonial rule. The logical next step to follow in the pursuit of Asianism was to seek a role in the management of regional and international affairs. As Aung San of Burma put it, "Asia has been rejuvenated and is progressively coming into world politics. Asia can no longer be ignored in international councils. Its voice grows louder and louder. You can hear it in Indonesia, you can hear it in Indo-China, you can harken to it in Burma and India and elsewhere."[18] One major example of this shift was the differences in the agendas of the Asian Relations Conferences of 1947 and 1949, and that of the Asia-Africa Conference in 1955, which, despite its hybrid name, was thoroughly dominated by the Asians. While the Asian Relations Conferences fretted over support for decolonization, the twenty-nine participants at Bandung, as its secretary-general would put it, set out "to determine … the standards and procedures of present-day international relations," including "the formulation and establishment of certain norms for the conduct of present-day international relations and the instruments for the practical application of these norms."[19] In other words, while the Asian Relations Conferences were about independence (from colonial rule), Bandung was about intervention (security from great power or superpower intervention).

The regionalists also saw the possibility of restoring the historical linkages among Asian societies disrupted by European colonialism to forge a regional association. Nehru described the first Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi as an "expression of the deeper urge of the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination."[20] We have seen Ho Chi Minh's interest in a "Pan-Asiatic Community." Immediately after World War II, Nehru would advocate a regional association: "a closer union between India and South-East Asia on the one side, and Afghanistan, Iran, and the Arab world on the West."[21]

[17]Keenleyside, "Nationalist Indian Attitude towards Asia."
[18]Silverstein, *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, 101
[19]Roselan Abdulghani, *The Bandung Spirit* (Jakarta: Prapantja, 1964), 72, 103.
[20]Jawaharlal Nehru, "Inaugural Address," in *Asian Relations: Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947* (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1948), 23.
[21]Keenleyside, "Nationalist Indian Attitude towards Asia," 216–17.

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But Southeast Asians were unnerved by the prospects for a larger Asian federation or even association. Even professing deep friendship with India, Aung San recognized that "[w]hile India should be one entity and China another, Southeast Asia as a whole should form an entity—then, finally, we should come together in a bigger union with the participation of other parts of Asia as well."[22] Southeast Asia would find subregional unity more practical and palatable. Bear in mind that José Rizal had advocated the unity of the Malay race, although he was appropriated by pan-Asianists. Frustrated by the failure of his efforts to secure material aid from fellow Asian countries for his struggle against the French, Ho Chi Minh would turn to the idea of an Indochinese federation. "Because of the close geography and extricable relationship in military and politics between Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the success or failure of revolutionary liberation of one country will have a direct impact on that of the others. Our task is to help the revolutionary movements in Cambodia and Laos."[23]

This Southeast Asian concern was evident at the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, where Abu Hanifa, one of the Indonesian representatives to the 1947 conference, wrote later that the idea of a wholly Southeast Asian grouping was conceived at the conference in response to the belief among the Southeast Asian delegates that the larger states, India and China, could not be expected to support their nationalist cause. At the meeting, delegates from Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaya "debated, talked, [and] planned a Southeast Asian Association closely cooperating first in cultural and economic matters. Later, there could perhaps be a more closely knit political cooperation. Some of us even dreamt of a Greater Southeast Asia, a federation."[24]

And the legacy of Nationalist Asia was too strong and enduring to permit any quick and easy fulfillment of these early efforts at Regionalist Asia, even at the subregional level. These efforts were at best intended to strengthen, not weaken the autonomy of the nation-state. ASEAN, as Singapore's Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam would put it, was intended to serve and strengthen the national interest, not to dilute or compromise it.

Asia between Universalism and Exceptionalism

After the failure of early Asian regionalism, post-Bandung, the next stage in Asia's nationalist-regionalist construction came in the 1960s. It was a region imagined from one of its subregions, Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia took the helm

[22]Amry Vandenbosch and Richard Butwell, *The Changing Face of Southeast Asia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1966), 341.
[23]Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh Talks about History*, trans. Houng Nguyen (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Đại Học Sư Phạm, 1995).
[24]Goscha, *Thailand and Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 255.

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after the leadership of India and China ended—India's because of internal distractions and rivalry with Pakistan (ironically, a member of the Colombo Powers fraternity), and China's because of its violation of its own pledge of noninterference given at the Bandung Conference (one of the ten principles of the Bandung Declaration). Most important, the Sino-Indian War undermined the claims of both to jointly lead Asia. In the meantime, Japan remained mired in the legacy of its imperial record, hesitant to launch new regional initiatives, especially with a political and security purpose. Moreover, Southeast Asia was itself divided and prone to conflict, both domestic and interstate (*Konfrontasi*). The first attempt to create a regional body, the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), founded in 1960, failed because it did not include Southeast Asia's biggest player, Indonesia. A second body, Maphilindo, (Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia), premised on the notion of the unity of the Malay race, and thus recalling José Rizal's identification of the Philippines as a Malay nation, also collapsed over escalating tensions between Indonesia and Malaysia, as Sukarno called into question, with military force, the legitimacy of the Malaysian federation.

Yet even the subregional efforts were held by an underlying conception of Asianness. Thus, despite being an association of Southeast Asia, the ASA's proponents saw themselves as part of a larger Asian cultural, political, and economic context. For Thanat Khoman, the Thai foreign minister and a key architect of the ASA, the association was rooted in "Asian culture and traditions." Describing the ASA as an example of "Asian mutual co-operation," he argued, "For Asian solidarity must be and will be forged by Asian hands and the fact that our three countries: the Federation of Malaya, the Philippines, and Thailand, have joined hands in accomplishing this far-reaching task cannot be a mere coincidence."[25]

After these false starts, one segment of Southeast Asia comprising Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore finally held together to create Asia's first viable multipurpose regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). But even by then, a more powerful force of regionalization, in the sense defined earlier, was emerging in parallel with Southeast Asia's search for unity and identity. This was the idea of a Pacific (later Asia-Pacific) community. Proposed by Japanese and Australian academics and driven by the high economic growth and interdependence among the industrial economies of the Pacific Rim, the idea of a Pacific community finally gave Japan a platform to enter the fray of regionalist Asia, albeit at first through epistemic communities and semiofficial groupings such as the Pacific Basin Economic Council (founded 1967), the Pacific Trade and Development Conference (1968), and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (1980).

[25]Association of Southeast Asia, Report of the Special Session of Foreign Ministers of ASA (Kuala Lumpur/Cameron Highlands: Federation of Malaya, 1962), 33.

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Initially, this was an Asia-Pacific construct, not Asia. Key roles in developing it belonged to individuals, think tanks, and governments, not just from Japan but also from outside Asia, especially from Australia and the United States. But the Pacific community idea gradually morphed into the Asia-Pacific (or Asia Pacific) idea, largely because of the need to involve ASEAN members who were deeply suspicious of the project as a move to marginalize the developing nations, and with an eye to China's future incorporation. ASEAN's consent and endorsement was necessary to make it work.

The Asia-Pacific idea would lead in 1989 to the first regionwide intergovernmental institution (outside the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Asian Development Bank), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Its purpose was not to develop a European Union–like supranational body. But neither was it geared, à la nationalist Asia, to anticolonial or anti-Western objectives. By now, those objectives had receded into the historical background. The new agenda of regionalism was interdependence, not independence. The driver was not anticolonial sentiments, but the quest for growth and dynamism. Although no direct evidence can be provided linking regionalism of the Pacific or Asia-Pacific variety with the region's economic growth (it would be the other way around), there was little question that the idea behind it reflected economic performance and optimism for the future. Moreover, what started as an effort defined mainly in Pacific terms became one in which the Asian element would grow to be the more prominent one.

As regionalist Asia continued to compete with nationalist Asia for the support of Asia's new political elite—undercut, but not permanently extinguished, by the latter—there would emerge a fifth conception of Asia, which might be termed *exceptionalist Asia.* It was the product of the phenomenal economic growth enjoyed by some of Asia's economies. Claims about Asia's distinctiveness had always been around, but they were largely the product of Western Orientalism, which imagined Asia to be exotic, romantic, and subservient. A new form of exceptionalism, constructed by Asia's own power elite, came to the fore in the 1990s, this time based on claims and assertions about how Asian culture underpinned the success of its economies. Exceptionalist Asia proponents were, of course, averse to globalization. They actually thrived on its economic benefits, although they were uncomfortable with the globalization of human rights and democracy.

The term "Asian values" emerged in the 1990s in parallel with the high growth of East Asian economies, such as Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. This led some commentators, such as Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, to associate economic performance with cultural traits and habit. While Lee initially spoke of "Confucian values," this later morphed into Asian values. The list of Asian values varies, but generally includes hard work, thrift (high savings rates), an emphasis on education, consensus, the rejection of extreme individualism, national teamwork, and respect for authority.

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The term acquired a political connotation when critics viewed some elements of it, such as respect for authority, as a justification for authoritarian rule.[26] Critics argued that what passed as Asian values were in no way special or unique to Asian societies, and that the sheer political and cultural diversity of Asia could permit no such generalization about a set of commonly held values across the region. How can one speak of a coherent set of values that can be uniquely "Asian," and ignore the differences between Confucian, Muslim, and Hindu cultural norms? The Asian financial crisis of 1997 dealt a blow to the Asian values concept, when its proponents, Lee Kuan Yew included, admitted that there could be "bad" Asian values, such as corruption and a lack of transparency and accountability.

Coinciding with exceptionalist Asia, and partly deriving from it, a new form of East Asian regionalism challenged the hitherto Asia-Pacific movement of "open regionalism," setting up a contest of sorts between APEC and Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohammed's East Asian Economic Grouping (renamed the East Asia Economic Caucus).[27] Following the 1997 Asian crisis, the idea of an East Asian community gained momentum. Its advocates saw East Asia as a "crucial and distinctive region in the world," economically more integrated and politically and culturally more coherent than unwieldy Asia-Pacific forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and APEC that include the United States, Canada, and Australia. At 54 percent of the region's total trade, compared to 35 percent in 1980, intra–East Asian trade was higher than that in the North American free trade region (46 percent), and "very much comparable to intra-regional trade in the European Union before the 1992 Maastricht treaty."[28] It is thus East Asia that offers the best hopes for a "bona fide regional community with shared challenges, common aspirations and a parallel destiny" and for the development of a "strong sense of regional identity and … consciousness."[29]

So far, East Asian regionalism has turned out to be less exclusivist than initially anticipated, thanks partly to persisting transpacific trade and security dependence with the United States and concern for a rising China dominating such an East Asia–only construct. The inaugural East Asian Summit in 2005 took a functional rather than a geographic view of East Asia by giving a seat at the table to India, Australia, and New Zealand. Now it seems the United

[26]Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Asian Values: What Kee Kuan Yew and Le Peng Don't Understand about Asia," *The New Republic* 217, nos. 2–3 (1997); and *The Economist*, May 18, 1994, 13–14.

[27]Richard Higgott and Richard Stubbs, "Competing Conceptions of Economic Regionalism: APEC versus EAEC in the Asia Pacific," *Review of International Political Economy* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 516–35.

[28]Haruhiko Kuroda, "Towards a Borderless Asia: A Perspective on Asian Economic Integration," speech at the Emerging Markets Forum, December 10, 2005, http://www.adb.org/Documents/Speeches/2005/ms2005088.asp#_ftn3.

[29]East Asia Vision Group Report, "Towards and East Asian Community: Region of Peace, Prosperity and Progress," 2001, 2, 6, 24, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/report2001.pdf.

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States and Russia will be invited as well. But whether the non–East Asians will be assured of equal status within the East Asian community, or will be part of the core group driving the community-building process, remains to be seen. Should the "purist" (Han 2005:147) view of East Asia prevail, these nations would have good reason to be unhappy over their "second-class" status. And while the broadening of the East Asia Summit might have dispelled fears of Chinese dominance, this could engender Chinese disinterest in the summit process. The key challenge for East Asian visionaries and leaders is to find the balance between Chinese dominance and Chinese disinterest.

In the meantime, echoes of exceptionalist Asia can be seen in the "Rising Asia" discourse inspired by the massive economic growth, military buildup, and attendant political clout of China and, to a lesser extent, India. While nationalist Asia spoke of Asia's emancipation and reemergence from Western dominance, often in spiritual and moral terms, Rising Asia proponents speak to the possibility of Asia displacing the West from its perch of global leadership. How the Asian powers might cooperate to create a common Asian home, much less an Asian powerhouse, remains unclear in the Rising Asia discourse.[30]

The exceptionalists, out of sheer dependence on economic globalization, are likely to keep their regionalism relatively open. Moreover, civil society in Asia seems more firmly wedded to the universalist values of human rights, democracy, and, increasingly, the environment, which could check the exceptionalists, who would otherwise "Asianize" or truncate these values in support of their regime survival concerns. Hence, the Asia that we see in the coming decades may well be shaped by the contestations and compromises between universalist Asia and exceptionalist Asia. In the meantime, some fear that before the contest is settled, imperialist Asia, with support and sustenance from exceptionalist Asia, especially from within China, might take over and fundamentally reshape the Asian order in the twenty-first century. This will happen if China continues with its relentless rise and imposes a Monroe Doctrine–like sphere over its neighbors. The best hope against this would be the strengthening of regionalist Asia. But as yet, limitations of regionalist Asia abound. Asian regional institutions are still sovereignty bound, unwilling and unable to undertake any major role in conflict resolution. The doctrine of noninterference still remains sacred. It will take time to change these underpinnings of nationalist Asia for a truly regionalist Asia to take over.

To conclude, as a scholar of international relations, I am in general agreement with Duara that a prominent place in the construction of Asia has to be given to regionalism and regionalization. It is heartening to see regionalism and regionalization, which are sometimes thought of as a preserve of political scientists, being viewed as seriously helpful tools in analyzing the concept of Asia by scholars from

[30]Amitav Acharya, "The Idea of Asia," *Asia Policy* 9 (January 2010): 32–39.

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other fields in the social sciences and humanities. Without regionalism, I argue, there might not even be any idea of Asia for us to talk about. Speaking of the idea of Asia, Rebecca Karl shows that "far from always meaning the same thing or even including the same configurations of peoples and states, it has been mobilized for very different purposes at different times."[31] Similarly, regionalism in Asia has not been a singular or coherent set of beliefs. Nor has it been an unchanging phenomenon. It has incorporated and contributed to different conceptions of the region in different times, sustaining Asia's diversity and pointing to alternative futures.

[31]Karl, "Creating Asia," 1118.

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