

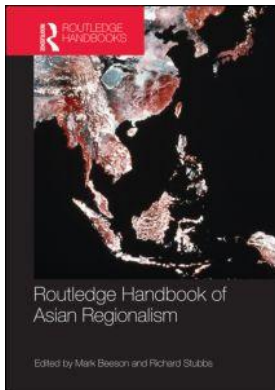
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Regional leadership in East Asia

Japan and China as contenders

Christopher M. Dent

Introduction

There are four fundamentally important reasons why we should be interested in the theory and practice of regional leadership in East Asia. The first is that East Asia is now one of the most important regions in the global system, geopolitically and geoeconomically. What happens in East Asia has increasingly global impact, with China especially the focus of much attention in this respect. Second, East Asia is gradually becoming a more coherent regional entity through the interplay of various integrative economic, political and sociocultural processes. This will provide more scope for regional leadership to be exercised by relevant actors. Third, it may be viewed as an important litmus test for China's approach to taking on international roles and responsibility, and exercising international leadership generally. Fourth, exercises of regional leadership in East Asia are likely to further strengthen the basis of a region-based multipolar world order, especially one where large developing nations are acting as 'regional powers', e.g. India in South Asia/Asia, Brazil in South America.

China and Japan possess the most significant 'regional leader actor' capacity in East Asia in terms of various criteria, including material, technocratic, ideational and agential. While the United States was once an active leader in the region, especially during the Cold War period, its most important role now in East Asia is arguably one of providing certain regional public goods, particularly how its military presence (e.g. the US Seventh Fleet) serves as a security umbrella for most East Asian nations, enabling them to maintain lower defence budgets and operations. However, the US has become relatively less important to the region economically, politically and socioculturally (Beeson 2008b). With strengthening regional coherence in East Asia there is a stronger sense of the region's own self-determination, this being strengthened by how the recent global financial crisis is largely perceived in East Asia as being a Western financial crisis, East Asia's economies only being indirectly affected for a period by falling Western demand for the region's exports. China is now the largest trading partner for most East Asian states, the US being relegated often to third or even fourth, behind Japan or the European Union.

We are thus left with China and Japan – that together account for 80 per cent of the East Asian economy's GDP – as the main contenders of regional leadership in East Asia. However, as we discuss, there are significant constraints and problems relating to any form of regional leadership

being exercised in the region. Despite strengthening regional coherence, East Asia is a highly diverse region in terms of its economic development asymmetry, mix of political regimes and socio-religious traditions and characteristics. It is also a region marked by historic animosities between rival nations, where conflicts still persist between old and new states alike, and where nationalism remains a potent force in many countries of the region. This applies as much to China, Japan and Sino-Japanese relations: their bilateral relationship is a highly complex one, beset by political tensions (e.g. from poisoned dumplings to maritime territorial disputes) on the one hand, but bound ever closer by deepening economic and environmental interdependencies on the other. Each nation has championed its own vision and project of East Asia community-building: Japan preferring a wider regional membership that includes counterbalancing nations such as India; China preferring a tighter grouping that reflects a more conventional understanding of the East Asia region. It is certainly inconceivable to many that China and Japan could agree to any kind of co-leadership arrangement. Rather we should expect the Japanese or Chinese government to neutralize the other's bids for regional leadership.

Furthermore, China is a fast emerging (if not already fully emerged) great power that has hauled itself level – and overtaken – Japan on various fronts (e.g. in economic terms of trade, foreign exchange reserves, GDP, manufacturing capacity, infrastructure development), and other countries are therefore making greater strategic investment in their relations with China accordingly. Notwithstanding the commonly held prediction that Japan will be further eclipsed by China in the foreseeable future, Japan is likely to retain substantial and sophisticated technocratic and economic capacities enabling it to perform many tasks of regional leadership where appropriate opportunities should arise in specific issue areas.

In the analysis that follows, we first examine East Asia's place in the emerging world order. We then critique conventional thinking and theories of international leadership, and the small emerging field of regional leadership studies. Given the inadequacies of the former, in particular, to analyse key issues and factors of regional leadership in East Asia, a different approach is presented based around a new framework of regional leadership analysis. Empirical material is integrated into this framework to study the prospects of Japan and China in exercising future regional leadership in East Asia.

East Asia and the emerging regional order

East Asia has become one of the world's most prominent regions, especially in terms of its economic, political, security and sociocultural impacts. For example, it accounts for around a quarter of global economic activity and has comparable economic weight to the European Union and the United States. At the micro-level, East Asia has become a more functionally integrated regional economy – second only to the European Union in this respect globally – as systemic trade, investment, production and infrastructural linkages have deepened over time, driven primarily by the sophisticated development of transnational business systems such as international production networks and other forms of supply chain formation. The term 'Factory Asia' is often used to describe this functional integration of the East Asia economy (see Carney, Chapter 8 of this volume). At the macro-level, East Asian governments are now cooperating more closely on a wide range of areas, in particular through new regional frameworks (most notably ASEAN Plus Three), existing regional organizations (e.g. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)) and new bilateral arrangements such as free trade agreements and economic partnership agreements.

The growing coherence of the East Asia region may be viewed from various perspectives: associative, organizational and integrational (Dent 2008a). Some generic aspects (e.g. economic

are more advanced than others (e.g. sociocultural), and East Asians own a sense of their 'regional identity'. Notwithstanding the asymmetric patterns of East Asia's regional coherence, it is being increasingly viewed as some kind of singular regional entity in a broader emerging world order of regions and regional powers. With this in mind, there has been a growing expectation and consideration regarding how East Asia will be 'governed' at the regional level, and be 'led' in the new world order of regions and emerging powers (Katzenstein 2005; O'Neill 2005; Cooper 2006). Many discourses of international relations (IR) centre on the idea of distinctive regions or regional communities as elemental parts of the multipolar world society of the twenty-first century. Regional groupings are now prevalent across the entire international system, helping define the sense of 'regionness' and 'regional neighbourhoods' within the world system.

All regions are in some way socioculturally or sociopolitically constructed, whereby peoples from different nations within a defined geographic space commonly associate around a shared sense of region (Hettne 2005). A region's geographic definition is therefore open to interpretation and contestation albeit within the bounds of basic geographic logic. Thus, one could make a case for India's eligibility for East Asia's regional membership, but not Brazil's. Like most other regions, definitions regarding what constitutes the East Asia region are subject to the principle of 'variable geography'. Just as the concept of 'variable geometry' explains how member states may enter into differentiated levels and arrangements of regional cooperation and integration (e.g. ASEAN and the implementation of the Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA)), so the concept of 'variable geography' applies where differentiated conceptions of which countries may or may not qualify for regional membership co-exist. This is relevant to the later debate on competing regional visions held by China and Japan. Although conceptions of region differ, and may be in a state of more or less constant flux, the current conventional view on East Asia's constituent regional membership has two subregional elements: *Southeast Asia* – Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam; *Northeast Asia* – Japan, China, South Korea, North Korea, Mongolia and Taiwan.

Theories and ideas on regional leadership

Functions, expectations and benefits of regional leadership

With regional leadership come certain expectations concerning behaviour and benefits. Generally speaking, we can categorize this into four different aspects. The first is the provision of regional public goods. For example, fostering a stable security environment and sustainable development in the region, as well as reducing the region's poverty levels and 'development asymmetry' among states. The provision of such goods through regional leadership benefits not only the leader actors but the regional community as a whole. The second concerns how regional leadership can resolve collective action problems, especially arising from decentralized bargaining among groups (i.e. region-based or otherwise) of states or other types of actors. In this case, members will 'delegate functions of agenda management, brokerage and mediation to more powerful countries' (Nabers 2008: 6). Third, regional leader actors are expected to lead the regional community-building process generally, through supporting the development of regional organizations, frameworks and other regional community-building mechanisms. Regional community-building, in turn, leads to the broader development of international or global society. Fourth, championing and representing the interests of the regional community in the wider global community is strongly associated with the exercise of regional leadership, especially demonstrated in global-multilateral fora such as the G8/G20, World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations and so on.

Mainstream thinking on international leadership

Much of the new literature on regional leadership has taken its cue and main reference points from the burgeoning scholarship on 'leadership' in the international system generally. This scholarship has in turn been dominated by the work of American scholars, and is thus somewhat preoccupied with the US superpower position and status in the contemporary world order. The current literature on leadership is still largely influenced by American scholarship, which continues to exhibit the following characteristics:

- US-oriented empirical studies
- A tendency to adopt a unitary state-centric approach of studying both the form and exercise of leadership
- A general fixation on hegemony, hierarchy and harder forms of power exercised by leading states
- AV overt focus on power-based analyses of leadership, with a strong emphasis on hegemonic dominance, and increasingly unipolar actions

Hence, in ontological terms, the mainstream scholarship on leadership has assumed that the nation state is almost exclusively the only real actor in the international system able to perform leadership functions, the corollary of this argument being that non-state actors (e.g. multilateral institutions, civil society organizations, multinational corporations) still essentially lack the capabilities to match the state in this respect. Moreover, much of this scholarship largely treats the state as a *unitary entity*, thus not deconstructed into composite elements (e.g. discrete actor constituencies that make up the 'state') – an approach often found in social constructivist analysis. In epistemological terms, the mainstream literature has been largely founded on positivist and empiricist principles, and grounded in rationalist methodological approaches (e.g. rational choice/public-choice theories), leading to an emphasis on deductive logic to seek out 'truths' (Smith 2002; Buzan 2004; Cohen 2007). In commenting generally on the nature of mainstream American scholarship on international relations, Smith argued that, 'The hegemonic discourse of US International Relations... omits by definition much of world politics, and competing notions of rationality, and other regimes of truth' (Smith 2002: 84–85). Furthermore, rationalist concepts of leadership posit that 'power capabilities' are the main determining factor of state choices (Morgenthau 1967; Waltz 1979). This line of analysis on 'leadership' has thus been generally embedded in discourses on hegemony, power geopolitics and, to a lesser degree, institutions – a prime focus being the material basis or sources of that power.

We may define 'power' as 'the production, in and through social relations, of effects on actors that shape their capacity to control their fate' (Barnett and Duvall 2005: 45). The material basis of leadership has mostly focused on the 'hard power' capabilities of leading states. For realists and neorealists, the most important is military power capability, which they contend has been the main foundation of US hegemony for many years. Other examples of hard power capabilities include those of an economic, technological, technocratic nature (Kennedy 1988). It is widely accepted that the material basis of China's recent rise to power, however conceived, primarily derives from economic development-related factors. At the same time, one could argue that China has possessed the political, diplomatic and other forms of capacity to exploit the advantages of ascendant economic power more effectively than Japan.

Barnett and Duvall (2005) have emphasized the importance of working with multiple conceptions of power, and extending beyond the disciplinary tendency in IR and international political economy (IPE) literature to associate power with realist and neorealist analysis. Power

has been closely associated with international leadership – for good empirical reason, as the capacity to exercise leadership derives, in turn, from various forms of power function. In specific conceptual contrast to ‘hard power’, Nye (1990, 2004) has championed the notion of ‘soft power’, which he contends in very general terms ‘rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others’ (Nye 2004: 5). This may be closely linked to ideas of how normative and ideational structures may provide the basis on which leadership may be founded (e.g. in terms of moral authority, ideas, intellectual leadership, etc.) and thus could be said to have symbolic, psychological and subjective dimensions. Nye highlights the influence of culture, norms, ideals and values, which may be important underlying or legitimizing features of the foreign policies of powerful states. This may be operationalized through various forms of ‘public diplomacy’, for example by exploiting a country’s cultural or ideological capital. Both Japan and China possess their own particular kind of soft power resources, be these based on popular culture (e.g. Japan’s *anime* and *manga* art forms), public diplomacy (e.g. as conducted through the Japan Foundation, and China’s Confucius Institutes of which there are now well over 4,000 in more than 60 countries), ideas and norms (e.g. Japan’s ‘developmentalist’ influence on East Asian economic policy, and China’s socialist market reform), or other means. While soft power analysis has offered a different perspective from traditional approaches to studying leadership – and others have applied it to other countries, such as Kurlantzick’s (2007) study on China’s so-called ‘charm offensive’ foreign policy strategy. Nye (2004) also makes the point that Japan’s past history places a constraint on its use of soft power, especially in its relations with other East Asian nations.

Hegemonic stability theory (HST) is another line of mainstream thinking on international leadership, also mostly influenced by US scholarship (Froelich, Oppenheimer and Young 1971; Krasner 1976; Kindleberger 1981, 1986; Keohane 1984; Lake 1993; Wohlfort 1999; Gilpin 2001; Ikenberry 2004). This is based principally on realist and neorealist assumptions on the primacy of the state, where the international system is anchored by a hegemonic state power that underwrites and underpins the system. Hegemonic states provide leadership through the provision of international public goods devised to maintain stability in the international system. The hegemon is motivated to undertake these tasks because it is the prime beneficiary of the consequent systemic outcomes, for example by shaping the rules and international environment in principal accordance with the hegemon’s interests. Leading states will continually weigh up the costs and benefits of performing hegemonic stability functions in terms of providing the infrastructural and transactional aspects of the public goods concerned. Any study of hegemonic stability has to take into account the changing nature and structure of the global system, as well as regional systems at the level of regional leadership analysis. Hence, exercises of hegemony arising in the twentieth century are likely to be ill-suited if applied both in principle and practice in the twenty-first century. Illustrative of the limits of military power in this regard are the US’s forays into Iraq and Afghanistan during the 2000s.

There is an important distinction to be made between the concepts of hegemony and leadership. The former is essentially one of power status (i.e. domination, control, supremacy). It thus follows that hegemonic actions may be construed as assertive or even coercive exercises of leadership. Yet hegemony is not the exclusive basis on which leadership may be formed or exercised. Leader actors may instead not exploit their ‘hegemonic’ power and supremacy through singular or independent acts but rather work more in conjunction or consensus with others, and hence more in keeping with the idea of partnership. As we later discuss, conventional understandings of the exercise of hegemony or leadership needs to be re-evaluated when studying China and Japan.

Another term or concept that is closely associated with leadership is that of ‘hierarchy’. This relates more to the structure of the international system and the distribution of power within it

rather than the exercises of leadership or power in a direct sense. Nevertheless, like hegemony, it is fixated with notions of dominance. According to Kang, hierarchy may be considered as 'a system of international relations organised around a central, dominant power that involves shared expectations of rights and responsibilities for both the dominant and secondary powers' (Kang 2004: 339). Here, the dominant power orders and maintains the hierarchical system in terms of organizing sets of rights and obligations among the regional collective, using its power judiciously. Like HST, the idea of hierarchy purports the benefits of having a dominant power at the apex of an international system in which such an unequal distribution of power is more stable than a system where an equal distribution of power prevails. Kang (2003, 2004) argues that hierarchy has been the historic tradition of East Asia's international relations, the archetypical example being China's tributary system with the 'Middle Kingdom' at the centre of orbiting 'vassal states'. Some comparison may also be made here to US 'hub-spoke' security relations with many states in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Kang more specifically comments that: 'Asian international relations conform more to a pattern of hierarchy than to a pattern of balancing. Hierarchy is more stable than realists have allowed, and in international relations it is often the absence of hierarchy that leads to conflict' (Kang 2004: 339). He further contends that: 'In contrast to balance of power, a hierarchic perspective see equality as most dangerous, because two roughly equal states may need to resort to war to determine which state is dominant' (Kang 2004: 344). This is a tacit reference to China and Japan, yet it is still based on realist assumptions that interstate competition and conflict are what prevail in the international system.

Emerging theories on regional leadership

Much of the sparse but fast-expanding literature on regional leadership centres on the premise of a world system populated by well-definable and increasingly influential 'regional powers' (Osterud 1992; Lake and Morgan 1997; Kupchan 1998; Buzan and Waever 2003; Hurrell 2006; Flemes 2007; Nabers 2008). In this respect, the core focus on 'power' has meant that this literature still largely takes its cue from mainstream theories on international leadership, resulting more generally in a strong emphasis being placed on the material basis or resources of regional leadership (e.g. in military, economic and technological power terms), as well as the notion of regional hegemonic states. Moreover, to some scholars 'regional powers' are more or less synonymous with 'great powers'.

In a similar vein, the term 'regional powers' has to some extent become synonymous with 'regional leaders', and consequently the idea of regional leadership (Nabers 2008). Most references to regional powers concern the dominant or hegemonic countries within a region, e.g. Japan/China in East Asia, Brazil in South America, India in South Asia, South Africa in Southern Africa. Flemes (2007) argues that regional powers may be distinguished by the following determinants: (i) claim to power; (ii) power resources; (iii) employment of foreign policy instruments; (iv) acceptance of leadership by regional neighbour states. Their principal roles are as stabilizer of regional security affairs and rulemaker in the regional economy, and thus this approach draws upon certain tenets of hegemonic stability theory. Other scholars have stressed both the internal cohesion and capacity of states to perform exercises of regional leadership, thus alluding to the importance of domestic political factors generally. For example, Schoeman (2003) has explained this in terms of how the internal dynamics of the state's political system and economy should allow it to play a stabilizing role in the region. Indonesia is a case in point, being East Asia's second largest country in terms of geographic size and population, and has in the past been the default regional leader of the Southeast Asian community. However, Indonesia has often lacked the essential internal cohesion and capacity to perform regional leadership functions even at this subregional level, especially in the aftermath of the 1997–8 financial crisis. Thus, internal capacity for leadership at the regional or wider

international level is critical. In sum, the existing literature on regional leadership has still not moved much beyond the premises or analytical perspectives of mainstream thinking on international leadership. In the following section, a new approach to thinking on regional leadership is presented, based on earlier work (Dent 2008b) and applied to East Asia.

Regional leadership in East Asia: a different analytical approach

Introduction

Given moves towards a regional multipolar world, it is surprising that regional leadership remains a somewhat underresearched and undertheorized subject. The multifaceted nature of regional leadership requires analytical approaches towards it to be inherently holistic – to seek out local thinking and ideas on issues of leadership directly from the region concerned. Certainly, policy-makers and scholars from Japan, China and other parts of East Asia are increasingly paying attention to the issues of regional leadership. Any new research agenda on regional leadership in East Asia should explore, where they exist, distinct ‘East Asian’ or any other ‘regional’ theoretical approaches to the subject matter. New thinking on regional leadership also requires us to move towards more original lines and questions of scholarly enquiry. Although strategically significant, the continued preoccupation with very US-centric questions concerning how China’s rising power is challenging the hegemonic position of the United States only serves to perpetuate mainstream thinking and ideas.

New studies and perspectives on regional leadership in East Asia could lead to a paradigm deviation from mainstream thinking on international leadership *per se*, or even a paradigm shift over the longer term. As Renwick (2008) contends, there is a sense that ‘East Asia is different’ with regard its structures, processes and culture of political governance, and hence does not often fit comfortably with mainstream Western thinking on such matters. As he further argues, ‘leadership’ in the region is conceived less in terms of assertive hegemony, and more in terms of ‘co-operation, mutuality, reciprocity and, increasingly, a commitment to multilateralism’ (Renwick 2008: 210). This section presents a thematic framework for understanding the core issues of regional leadership in East Asia. The analytical devices used offer different ways of looking at regional leadership as a field of IR and IPE study generally.

Multi-agency and multi-structural exercises of regional leadership

Many conventional studies on international leadership tend to assume a singular state actor – typically a national or central government – that exercises leadership through various instruments of foreign policy. However, ‘states’ are better understood as a composite of actors (or agencies), pressures and interests. This principle applies to the analysis of states generally but especially to Japan, China and other East Asian states where the definitional boundaries between state-representative actors (i.e. between state and society) can be blurred (Pempel 1999). A well-studied case of this is the so called ‘Iron Triangle’ relationship between Japan’s (economic) policymaking bureaucrats, Liberal Democratic Party politicians, and *keiretsu* big business corporations, where the formulation of ‘state’ interests and actions in both their domestic and international contexts can be notably complex. This complexity may thus involve what are conventionally conceived as ‘non-state’ actors performing certain forms of (regional) leadership, to some extent from within the state construct. For example, the Keidanren, Japan’s main business association, has at a particular level demonstrated some form of intellectual or advocatory leadership on the issue of free trade agreements in the East Asia region (Dent 2006).

It is important to address the composite nature of the state, and more generally the different agency-levels at which the exercise of leadership can be identified. This analytical framework comprises three broad types of 'agency function' regarding the exercise of regional leadership. The first concerns *regional leader actors* relating to the types and composites of agency that possess different forms and kinds of regional leader capacity. The basis of specific identifiable actors to undertake regional leadership tasks or initiatives will to a large degree rest on the aggregated material, ideational and agential-based resources of the state. Thus, government or other state-related actors or agencies from Japan or China are more likely to be successful in this respect than their counterparts in smaller nations. However, as we later discuss, charismatic or intellectually respected individuals from any part of the region concerned may possess significant capacity to exercise certain forms of regional leader actor-ness.

Second, *followership* concerns the willingness or otherwise of other actors in the region to defer to the exercise of regional leadership by others. This is a critical 'demand-side' agency function, as bottom-up resistance to leadership can obviously hinder its prospects and development. In East Asia's case, this mainly focuses on the proclivity of ASEAN states and South Korea to follow the lead taken by either China or Japan, or indeed China's 'followership' when Japan specifically takes the lead or vice versa. The essential capabilities of regional leader actors in some way elicits a followership response from other actors, yet the agential propensity for followership depends upon a range of relativity factors between the actors themselves (e.g. capacity dependencies; demand for regional public goods; sociocultural factors; power relations), and general contextual aspects of regional affairs (e.g. Japan's 'burden of history' impediment to other East Asian nations exercising followership).

Third, *intermediary actors* are those able to facilitate forms of regional leadership either by mediating between prospective regional leader actors, or by working in conjunction with others towards regional leadership ends. In one respect, intermediary actors may be considered as exercising some form of regional leadership by taking on initiatives and 'responsible' actions that can affect the whole region. At the same time, intermediary actors may be essentially followers for the most part, only activating their intermediary functions from time to time. In East Asia's case, intermediary actors have especially helped facilitate regional leadership through various new processes of regional-multilateral cooperation. South Korea, for example, has played an important role in acting as the middle power in trilateral Northeast Asian diplomacy, working alongside China and Japan. This arrangement, which has progressively developed in substance since the early 2000s, has played a key role in extending the scope of cooperation in Sino-Japanese relations. South Korea has been able to use its technocratic capabilities and middle-power weight to harness the institutionalized channels and mechanisms of regionalist frameworks to propose new cooperative or integrative projects at the regional level. Examples include the Kim Dae-jung administration's idea of creating an East Asian Community, and the little-reported fact that it was South Korea that initially proposed the idea to establish the Asian Bond Market Initiative through the channels of ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) diplomacy (but was willing to allow Japan and China the most credit for developing it). Also relevant is how instrumental ASEAN has been in facilitating the development of the APT and East Asia Summit (EAS) regional frameworks, through which (as we later discuss) various forms of regional leadership has been exercised. The APT, the more substantive of the two, may especially be considered an extension of ASEAN diplomacy: for example, ASEAN nations host APT summits and these meetings are held after their ASEAN equivalents. The 'taxi driver' analogy is often used to explain ASEAN intermediary function, in that it is in the driving seat of East Asian regional multilateralism, and facilitates the ride, but the taxi's Northeast Asian passengers have significant influence over the ultimate direction the vehicle takes.

It is also important to consider at which ‘actor-level’ leadership is being exercised, ranging from individuals to networks to large organizational forms of agency. The role played by individuals as leader actors in international relations is a well-established subject of study (Keller 2005; Walker 2006), and there are various examples from East Asia where individual leaders have exercised high-profile intellectual, moral or ideational leadership in the region, most notably Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia’s Mahathir Mohamad. It is often the case that an individual’s form or style of leadership may be transposed into organizational agency behaviour, for instance when the moral, intellectual or ideational leadership by individuals provides the doctrinal basis of foreign policy, e.g. Yoshida Doctrine and Deng Doctrine. However, it is extremely rare for an individual leader to have such a wide regional impact in East Asia or indeed in other regions, a recent exception being perhaps Nelson Mandela in Southern Africa.

From the organization (i.e. state and non-state forms) actor-level perspective, in addition to the leader states (e.g. Japan, China) exercising regional leadership, there is scope for regional organizations and frameworks to do the same as potential representative agencies of the regional collective and the potential to champion the region’s interests externally. However, East Asia’s longest-standing regional organization, ASEAN, lacks such representative and interlocutor capacity and, moreover, does not represent the whole region. Given the relative infancy of APT and EAS, it is also hard to predict with any certainty whether or not these wider regional groupings will develop substantial institutional or other mechanisms to exercise leadership in an endogenous sense. Moreover, the APT and EAS each are premised on different and somewhat competing visions of creating a regional community. This is later discussed under regional multilateralism.

Regional leadership may also be thought of as being structured along the following lines. First, with regard to *governance* – this being the different forms of domestic and international structures and mechanisms through which the exercise of regional leadership is operationalized – which necessarily requires a consideration of agency–function relationships, primarily how regional leader actors ‘govern’ their relationships with other actors, for example through rules-setting and by utilizing certain mechanisms of relational and structural power. This often relates to the establishment of new regional or international organizations, frameworks, agreements or initiatives. For example, Japan’s New Miyazawa Initiative (NMI) of 1998 – where it offered bilateral currency-swap arrangements and lines of credit to financial crisis-afflicted economies of the region – is a good example of regional leadership on financial governance. The NMI was to later pave the way for the region-wide and eventual multilateral Chiang Mai Initiative within the APT regional framework. Japan would not have been able to exercise this leadership without the internal governance capacity of its Ministry of Finance. At the time, this may have been the only domestic-level governance structure and resources with the ability to put together the initiative. More generally, we have to understand the nature of Japan and China’s domestic governance mechanisms and their approaches to managing or governing regional leadership projects, as well as the formulation of regional leadership strategies at the domestic political level. This can be a highly complex matter, involving the consideration of various kinds of agency.

Second, regional leadership may be performed in *issue-determined areas* concerning distinct empirical domains or sectors of analysis, such as environment, energy, finance, pandemics, labour, technology, humanitarian assistance and piracy. This may also arise in relation to specific issue ‘events’, such as the 1997–8 Asian Financial Crisis, the 2003–4 SARS outbreak and the 2004–5 Asian Tsunami Relief effort. Regional leader actors will play to certain strengths or competitive advantages on issue-determined areas, such as Japan and green-energy technology (a regional leader in this respect within APT’s various energy security fora), and China championing priority issues for developing countries, e.g. the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum’s ecotech programme.

Third, the *geospatial* dimension relates to the perceived links between the politico-geographic and social construction of regions (e.g. by regional organization membership) and the relevance of different geospatial scales of region, ranging from the micro subregional (e.g. South China Sea zone) to the macro-regional (conceptions of East Asia itself) or pan-regional (e.g. Asia-Pacific) that often overlap or coexist concentrically. The earlier discussion on 'variable geography' and the contested nature of regions is highly relevant here. Indeed, overlapping and concentric configurations of 'region' can add complexity to this multi-structure aspect of regional leadership. China, for example, is currently engaged in various 'regional neighbourhood' projects, with Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Southeast Asia and the ASEAN–China Framework Agreement on Cooperation and Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), the core East Asia group (APT and EAS), and the Asia-Pacific (APEC).

Alignments of identity and association

Regional leader actors invariably have many alignments of identity and association at the domestic, regional and wider international level. Moreover, it is only when they strongly identify and associate with the region in question that any form of regional leadership will be exercised. This will be difficult if such alignments are stronger with other elements of the international system. For these reasons, it is essential to examine the underlying normative structures that constitute actor identities and interests by exploring the regional leader society's core values and ideational foundations at various levels, i.e. elite decision-makers, and the general public. Thus, a key issue is the extent to which 'China' and 'Japan' identify themselves as being 'East Asian'. Many Japanese, for instance, consider their country to be detached in a number of ways from the Asian continent, and may in fact feel stronger bonds of association with Western nations such as the United States rather than with less-developed Asian ones. Similarly, China's aforementioned close ties with the rising global South and the developing world community, as well as its emerging global-power status generally, may often prove a distraction to cultivating its regional leadership role. Furthermore, both China and Japan are increasingly engaged with global governance issues in an expanding range of global-multilateral fora, hence connecting with the 'global-multilateralism' aspect of the analytical framework.

Styles and modes of regional leadership

Non-hegemonic explanations of leadership behaviour may better elucidate Japan's and China's approaches to regional leadership in East Asia. Where their leadership behaviour may be construed as hegemonic, it may differ from the 'overt hegemonic' approach of the United States, i.e. a more assertive exploitation of a dominant position. Leadership and hegemony are treated more or less as synonymous terms in the mainstream literature on international leadership, primarily because of the empirical bias towards the US. As has already been stated, however, a distinction should be made between the two concepts: hegemony is essentially one of power status (i.e. domination, control, supremacy). It thus follows that hegemonic actions may be generally interpreted as assertive or even coercive exercises of leadership. Yet hegemony is not the only basis on which leadership is exercised. Leader actors may be averse to exploiting their 'hegemonic' power and supremacy through singular or independent acts, instead working more in cooperation, conjunction or consensus with others, as a regional leading partner.

China's political leaders have advanced the notion of the country's 'peaceful rise' and 'peaceful development', which entails acting as a 'responsible' member of the regional and global community rather than as an explicit leader (Suzuki 2007). This may, though, be considered a diplomatic

strategy to mitigate fears of an assertive China (Zhao 2004; Lanteigne 2005; Sutter 2005; Tanaka 2006; Wang 2006; Yan 2006; Zheng 2005; Kurlantzick 2007; Qin 2007; Scott 2007; Wang and Zheng 2008). Japan's 'stealth' or 'quiet' leadership approach has arisen out of similar imperatives (Drifte 1996, 2003; Katada 2002; Ong 2004; Hook *et al.* 2005; Inoguchi 2007; Pyle 2007; Samuels 2007). Both countries must deal with historical legacies (e.g. memories of Japan's past aggressive imperialism, and fears of a reborn Chinese tributary system, or Tributary System 2.0), and their own strategies on 'ascendant threat' mitigation. However, their apparent common reluctance to pursue more explicit forms of regional leadership does not negate the de facto exercises of leadership associated with the various acts of a regional power behaving in a 'responsible' manner. Indeed, the idea of a regional power that is willing to take on responsibilities at the regional level may be considered as a communal approach to leadership. This is closely linked to the 'regional-multilateralism' aspect of the framework, as outlined below.

Regional-multilateralism and global-multilateralism

Regional-multilateralism is an important, if not the most important, means by which both China and Japan currently exercise regional leadership. The contributions of both countries to promoting new regional organizations and frameworks, and regional community-building processes, generally has provided Japan and China the opportunity to demonstrate their 'responsible' regional leadership credentials (Katada 2002; Wong and Chan 2003). There is an important and emerging inter-constitutive and co-determinant relationship between regional leadership and regional-multilateralism in East Asia. Deepening regional-multilateralism is creating new opportunities for the exercise of regional leadership generally, as viewed from all perspectives of *agency function*. The APT and EAS frameworks have augmented the *governance dimension* under which regional leadership may arise, as well as helped delineate the *issue-determined area* (through agenda-setting and programmatic action plans) and *geo-spatial dimensions* (through constituent membership), which in turn brings greater focus to the question of where regional leadership efforts should be directed.

Similarly, the exercise of regional leadership can make significant contributions to the development of regional-multilateralism, as well as the likely extent of *contested regional-multilateralism* between Japan and China, for example regarding their differences over core membership of an East Asian regional community (Zhao 2004). This is now a key aspect of the Sino-Japanese relationship (Wan 2006; Dent 2008b). Each country is developing leadership diplomacy in different regional groupings, especially China in a quasi-regional grouping with Southeast Asia (ASEAN) and with Central Asian states through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Japan has been slow to develop these kinds of links, although its micro-regional linkages at the sub-national level are relatively well developed (Hook 1999; Jain 2005, 2006).

Another area of contestation that requires examination comprises the ideas, values and norms, as well as alignments of identity and association, underpinning East Asia's emergent regional-multilateralism. This is particularly relevant to agenda-setting and discourse control within regional frameworks such as the APT and EAS. Concerning global-multilateralism, China and Japan may increasingly seek to champion and represent the interests of East Asia in the wider global community; such exercises of regional leadership could affect the nature and functioning of the chief mechanisms of global governance. Historically, Japan has to varying degrees exercised the former in G8 diplomacy (Dobson 2004). China's ascendancy within the global system has generated considerable interest, not least in relation to its implications for issues of global governance and the geopolitics of global-multilateralism generally. Conversely, China or Japan may challenge broadly supported multilateral endeavours on particular issues of global

governance, and thus have been widely perceived as undermining global-multilateralism. The US has often been accused of such actions – especially under the 2000–8 Bush administration (e.g. the Kyoto Protocol). Similarly, many vilified China's interventions at the December 2009 Copenhagen climate-change summit. In this particular incidence, China liaised with India, Brazil and other large developing countries rather than seeking to build a regional-based coalition to support its position. There is, more generally, a danger that the championing of regional interests on the international stage may either be equated with an extension or proxy for championing national interests on a broader platform (i.e. Japan or China using an East Asia community as a power base, similar to how France has used the EU on agricultural trade protection), or as subverting the interests of the global community *per se*.

Conclusion

Regional leadership remains a new and emerging field of study. Many may contend that empirically there remains scant evidence of regional leadership actually having been, or currently being performed. However, this view is often based on mainstream or conventional understandings of international leadership, which were critically evaluated at the start of this paper and its extant weaknesses exposed. New methods or approaches of analysis are required in order to understand how regional leadership is already being exercised by non-Western regional powers in the new geopolitical multipolar order of the twenty-first century. This paper has endeavoured to contribute to this process, focusing on the East Asia region and especially considering the forms of regional leadership conducted by Japan and China within the analytical framework presented here. Regional leadership may be exercised in ways that are different to our current understanding and expectations.

Both Japan and China certainly have strong regional leadership capabilities, and many expect China to become the dominant regional power in East Asia. But we should not underestimate Japan's future position in an emerging East Asian community: it will have a vital role to play especially in economic and technological issue-determined areas, and its technocratic capacities are likely to remain the strongest in the region in a number of fields. It is undeniably the case that various complex difficulties hinder the prospects of developing a Sino-Japanese partnership on regional community-building that is akin to the Franco-German partnership and the European integration project. The recent dispute over territorial waters between China and Japan is indicative of the thorny issues that often surface in their bilateral relationship. At the same time, deepening interdependences between both countries are creating stronger imperatives for bilateral cooperation and creating new 'testing grounds' for evaluating the potential for Sino-Japanese regional co-leadership. Energy and environment is perhaps the most important of these. In 2007, the China-Japan Forum on Energy Conservation and Environmental Protection was established to strengthen bilateral cooperation on green technology between private enterprises. China is aiming to source 15–20 per cent of its primary energy consumption from renewables by 2020, and has become a strong global competitor in the wind and solar energy sectors. Japan has developed world-leading technological capabilities in energy efficiency and conservation. In such cases (and there are others to consider, such as finance, maritime piracy, international migration, etc.), we will have to see whether the emphasis on partnership or competition will prevail, or whether regional leader actors from Japan or China will independently concentrate their regional leadership efforts in these issue-determined areas. Regional leadership is still in its formative stage in East Asia, and both China and Japan will find their own particular ways and means to practise it in the future – and which will most likely be distinctly different to other regional powers.