

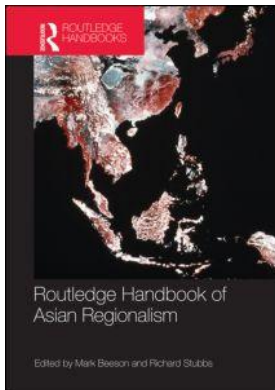
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# The East Asia Summit

## Pan-Asian multilateralism rather than intra-Asian regionalism

*David Camroux*

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Asia, perhaps, but which 'Asia' is being referred to when? Other chapters in this volume indicate that the answers to this seemingly easy question are not at all self-evident. Southeast Asia as a way of referring to the ten ASEAN countries is a notion going back in common parlance only to the Second World War, and Northeast Asia, itself a default category in relation to the south, is of fairly recent lineage dating from the 1970s. As I have suggested elsewhere, in the period beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the high age of Western imperialism, and the related rise of movements for national independence, a much larger Sino-Indic conceptualization of 'Asia' was much more to the fore amongst Asians themselves (Camroux 2007). This notion of Asia reached its apex at the Afro-Asian summit at Bandung in 1955, an event, as Acharya (2009) has argued, that determined many of the norms of multilateral behaviour in Asia. With India's withdrawal inwards, so to speak, following independence and within the context of the Cold War this notion fell into abeyance until the 1990s and the 'Look East' policy of the then Indian Finance Minister and later Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. At this point India can be said, at least rhetorically, to have entered into the Asian developmental state schema that in various nuances is a common characteristic of developing Asia (Devare 2006).

Describing Asian regional integration has always posed a challenge for scholars, especially in terms of trying to differentiate it from forms of regional integration elsewhere, especially in relation to the European Union, which remains, for better or worse, a reference point in terms of institutionalization (Breslin and Higgott 2000). Thus a plethora of adjectives to qualify Asian regionalism have emerged, starting with the term 'open regionalism' associated with APEC and the Japanese approach (Terada 1998, 2003) and moving more recently to concepts of 'regulatory regionalism' (Jayasuriya 2009), 'networked regionalism' (Jetschke 2009; Yeo 2010), 'mandalic regionalism' (Dellios 2008) and even 'frustrated regionalism' (Nair 2009). Yet suppose we have been searching for the wrong political animal?

This chapter, like others in this volume, is concerned with examining a process of regional integration. However, such processes may involve not only forms of intraregional cooperation and ostensible community-building, but also forms of bilateralism and, above all, multilateralism. Yet, what if the processes involved were only limited to the latter? Or, in other words, what if 'region' and 'regionalism' were merely misleading labels to indicate multilateral behaviour within a geographically defined area? This is essentially the argument teased out below.

The East Asia Summit, with a rhetorical slip, is generally conceptualized as a putative East Asian Community with a capital ‘c’ or, at least, a ‘community’ (lower-case ‘c’). Yet to examine the empirical evidence it is indeed just a summit, or as expressed prosaically by an eminent American scholar ‘a dinner followed by sixteen speeches’ (Emmerson 2010: 2). The summit is an annual half-day meeting tacked on to the annual ASEAN summit, the ASEAN Plus Three meeting plus a series of bilateral summits with ASEAN countries involving China, Japan and – rather significantly since 2009 – the United States. At the conclusion of the summit, a largely pre-prepared chairman’s statement is read out. Unlike ASEAN summits, which are the culmination of literally hundreds of meetings between ASEAN policymakers supported by a permanent secretariat in Jakarta, the East Asia Summit is a one-off event in which the photo-op is the message. While there are the usual meetings of ‘sherpas’ (senior officials) before the event, there is no permanent secretariat or even permanent institutional arrangements – the ASEAN secretariat acting as a letter box.

These initial remarks are not meant to diminish the symbolism of such a meeting. On the contrary, in justifying the Obama administration’s self-proclaimed re-engagement with Asia (Choi 2009), US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton declared that ‘half of diplomacy is getting there’ (Clinton 2010). The term ‘talkfest’ that is often used derogatively to describe such meetings is perhaps more a compliment as they are an exercise in pursuing, in Arnold Wolfers’s (1962) classic distinction ‘milieu goals’ – i.e. framing the rules of international-relations behaviour – than in pursuing ‘possession goals’, that is, tangible policy objectives.

### The first phase

‘One Vision, One Identity, One Community’: the banners adorning the streets of Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 revealed the grandiose ambitions of the Malaysian hosts for the first East Asia Summit (EAS). They also revealed a great many of the ambiguities in defining Asian regional integration alluded to by other authors in this volume (see Rozman, Beeson and Stubbs, this volume). The key question in the context of the EAS was whether the intergovernmental meeting being promoted was that of the ten ASEAN governments or one that extended into ASEAN Plus Three (with China, Japan and South Korea). These issues were highlighted – and not entirely resolved – at the inaugural meeting of an East Asia Summit held on 14 December, an ‘ASEAN +3 +1 +2’ with the invitation to India, Australia and New Zealand, as had been envisaged for several years (East Asian Vision Group 2001; East Asian Study Group 2002). Behind the tedious international-relations mathematics lie three questions of importance: 1) Southeast Asia’s cohesiveness and centrality in the construction of a putative (East) Asian Community; 2) coping with an increasingly economically powerful and diplomatically assertive China; and 3) the ‘return’ of India to Asia.

The first two days of the ASEAN summit in 2005 saw the Association having fully recovered from the economic crisis of 1997 to return to being concerned with its own internal consolidation. By expressing demands for tangible political reforms in Burma/Myanmar the Association broke with its sacrosanct principle of non-interference. Moreover, the appointment of an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to draft an ASEAN Charter demonstrated that the Association had finally come to grips with establishing rules for club membership. Perhaps the greatest success for the summit chair, the Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, was to ensure ASEAN’s centrality in the process of regional construction, at least rhetorically. To use the shorthand language of the summit, ASEAN would remain in the ‘driver’s seat’, and future annual East Asian Summits would be held in ASEAN countries ‘back-to-back’ with the Association’s annual meetings. Given Sino-Japanese rivalry, and the unwillingness of the governments of either country to accept the leadership of the other, by default, ASEAN remained the least unacceptable alternative as regional

coordinator, a view ostensibly also held by the new invitees, India, Australia and New Zealand. In the diplomatic formula decided upon at the summit, a compromise was reached with the East Asian Community being defined in terms of ASEAN Plus Three (APT), with the three new partners seen as sharing common interests. However, at the same time, in the jargon of ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘openness’ the Asian Community could extend to embrace them as well as Russia. Regions, as Katzenstein (2005) has suggested, are porous entities indeed.

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

Developments in the year following the Kuala Lumpur summit and in the second summit just over a year later underlined the tensions already present there. The annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) held in Hyderabad in early May 2006 was revealing in this regard. For the first time, a multilateral body was called upon by some participants, including the Chinese representative Jin Renqing, to encourage Asian regional integration through developing, for example, local bond markets, and to ‘help Asia find its voice’. Manmohan Singh in particular sought ADB aid in creating a Pan-Asian free trade area (FTA) (Singh 2006). In developing an Asian currency unit, based on a basket of hard and soft East Asian currencies, the ADB is building on the monetary regionalization that involves swap agreements and cooperation between Asian central banks (Dieter and Higgott 2003). The negotiation of an India-ASEAN FTA, like that between China and ASEAN that came into force in January 2010, would seem to be an element in a larger Pan-Asian FTA, but it is juxtaposed with the bilateral FTAs signed with individual ASEAN countries such as Singapore and Thailand. While the Chinese negotiated for an ASEAN-China FTA by offering early harvest advantages to all of their partners, the Japanese, through the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry, remained favourable to cooperation among the 13 participants in Kuala Lumpur, *taken individually*. In practice this involved concentrating on bilateral agreements, for example with the Philippines, and down-playing ASEAN as an interlocutor.

By the time of the second summit, there had been two contingent developments. The first, it would appear, was an acknowledgement by the Chinese leadership that it would need to accept the virtual enlargement of an ‘Asian community’ to include India (as well as Australia and New Zealand) and, therefore, in order to limit its impact, to complete the negotiations for an East Asian inner circle (i.e. ASEAN Plus Three), in which China would be the main player through the signing of a China-ASEAN FTA (Ash 2005; Huang 2005). The second was to relegate this intra-regional level compact to being subordinate to a number of bilateral initiatives, for example, in securing energy supplies in Africa or Australia and in reinforcing relations in Central Asia. At the same time, on the multilateral level, the Chinese leadership, albeit with a deal of reluctance, demonstrated a willingness to slightly readjust the value of the renminbi and thus to contribute to a readjustment of global trade balances.

The second summit held in the Filipino city of Cebu was postponed from the original December 2006 date to mid-January 2007, ostensibly because of the weather but also – or because

of— concerns with terrorist threats. The Cebu summit was dominated by a further step towards the promulgation of an ASEAN Charter and specific bilateral initiatives with both China and India. Yet in its very low-key banality, Cebu and the following summits confirmed that the Sino-Indic conceptualization of an Asian community of Bandung had re-established itself as another acceptable imagining of a twenty-first century Asia. However this summit and the following three confirmed that the creation of the East Asian Summit was a superficial addition to Asia's complex regional architecture. In the words of the late Hadi Soesastro (2006), the creation of 'new clubs' did not necessarily mean progress. Moreover its creation had not diminished the search for bilateral solutions, especially the pursuit of bilateral free trade agreements (Dent 2006), on the contrary, the five years following the first summit saw an acceleration in this process in the Asia Pacific. This growth in numbers has occurred despite, or rather because of the fact that FTAs are neither essentially 'free' nor indeed essentially about 'trade' and, furthermore, given asymmetrical power relations, cannot ultimately be considered as 'agreements' between equals.

### **Enlargement: widening trumps deepening**

During the five years following the first two summits, differing conceptualizations of an Asian region continued to compete. With the ratification of the ASEAN Charter in 2007, the Association not only made a small step towards institutionalization but also became a recognized legal entity in international law. The ASEAN secretariat found representation both as an invitée to the G20 but also within the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM). The latter itself experienced two enlargements, firstly with India and Mongolia, and then in 2010 Australia, New Zealand and Russia at their first summit held in Brussels (see Gilson, this volume). These enlargements further challenged a purely East Asian conceptualization of the Asian region while raising questions about the efficacy of a body now comprising some 47 members (Lenihan 2011). Be that as it may, in my view ASEM enlargement demonstrated, for those who desired such an outcome, that 'widening' could effectively undermine 'deepening'.

Whether this will be the case for another development in Asia-Pacific regional integration needs to be observed closely in the future. When it first took effect in 2006, the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPP) involved only four of the smallest economies in Asia-Pacific, namely Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore. However, in the first half of 2010 five other countries – Australia, Malaysia, Peru, Vietnam and of most importance, the United States – began entry negotiations, with three other countries (Canada, the Philippines and Japan) expressing interest in joining (Hayashi 2010b). In proposing membership of the TPP the newly appointed Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan would appear to be the first Japanese political leader prepared to confront powerful farmers and agricultural organizations in Japan. Such an outcome is symptomatic of the impact of the present global crises on the domestic political economies in Asia and ensuing conceptualizations of an Asian region.

As for the EAS the proposal to extend membership to the United States and Russia first presented at the ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in July in Hanoi and then confirmed at the ASEAN summit and East Asia summit of December 2010, despite receiving little media attention, is a crucial development. When this becomes effective in 2011 it will effectively confirm that any pretence that its membership is exclusively East Asian, is irreversible. Given previous Chinese hostility to such an enlargement, US reticence to engage regionally, and Japan's notorious difficulties when it comes to exercising regional leadership, this development represents a watershed in Asia-Pacific relations. Such an enlargement is worthy of explanation. Paradoxically it occurs against the background of the ousting of the two political leaders in Asia and the Pacific who had been most vocal in articulating a vision of an Asian community in the first

two years of their shortened terms: Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and his Japanese counterpart Hatoyama Yukio. While Rudd had agitated for an Asia-Pacific community involving the United States, Hatoyama had been less than forthright about potential US membership, reflecting disagreements on the subject amongst Japanese political leaders and their ministries (Terada 2010).

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

Writing on China's rise and the marshalling of its soft power for this purpose has become a growth industry. It is not our purpose to assess this (at times) polemical literature, but rather draw out several essential points from these analyses: China has become a normal status-quo power whose foreign relations are subservient to domestic political objectives. If China is not yet a hegemonic power in Asia (Foot 2005, 2006), it is clear that US dominance is not as assured or unchallenged as it once was (Beeson 2009; Pempel 2010). Prior to the international economic crisis, China was already a global power with global ambitions, if only by dint of the search for raw materials, energy sources and markets in Africa and Latin America. But the crisis has seen a rapid acceleration of this trend, with China becoming the lender of last resort in Europe and in the United States, while at the same time bankrolling infrastructure development amongst its southern neighbours. China's regional initiatives are secondary to its global role (Kavalski 2009), one that perhaps is being reluctantly forced upon it (Wan 2010). From this perspective, within the Beijing policy community the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) – as both a Chinese initiative, and one in which, Beijing controls the agenda (and the secretariat) – is probably of greater importance than other organizations in which it is merely a participant (Yuan 2010). Most importantly the SCO deals with issues crucial for China domestically (separate movements in its borderlands) as well as its global power (access to energy sources to fuel its export-oriented economy). In Southeast Asia, only in the case of Burma/Myanmar is there a direct internal security concern, namely a concern with an influx of refugees into Yunan in the event of a Burmese implosion. However, China with its massive investment in that country and its provision of support to the military junta, deals with this potential problem in a bilateral, not regional context.

Since the first summit of 2005 the Chinese view of multilateralism has evolved to the extent that some observers in China are no longer preoccupied with trying to exclude the United States from the region. Indeed, if China is a global actor then many analysts in China recognize that an international order requires multilateral norms and must be inclusive (Zhang 2010; Zhao 2011). There is, of course, an increasingly wide spectrum of views in China about foreign policy generally (Sutter 2010; Shambaugh 2011), and about regional policy in particular, which is much more nuanced than the dichotomy between so called 'panda huggers' and 'dragon bashers' (Beeson and Li forthcoming).

In the five years following the summit, the Chinese policymaking community undertook a re-evaluation of its policies in relation to Southeast Asia to discover that the concept of 'peaceful rise' was not always welcomed without reservations (Zhang and Tok 2008; Sun 2010). Allen Carlson

(2011) has highlighted the re-emergence of the concept of *tianxia* (all under heaven) in Chinese foreign relations discourse as a reflection at the multilateral level of the ideal of a harmonious society, applied in the Chinese domestic context. This is not to suggest that the objective of a sino-centric regional order (Breslin 2008) or a new form of tributary system (Kang 2007) has fallen into abeyance. Rather, these objectives have been subsumed into one, or several, global projects involving a more committed approach to multilateralism within the international environment. The consequence is a reformulation of Chinese foreign policy in terms of multiple levels of multilateralism in which the Pan-Asian, Asia-Pacific and Eurasian are placed in an evolving hierarchy.

I would argue that, because ‘playing of the India card’ (Richardson 2002) to balance China in the East Asian Summit had proven to be ineffectual in the first five years of the EAS, there was, for some Chinese policymakers, no reason to be apprehensive about an enlargement to include the United States. Even if there was a risk, by bringing in Russia at the same time, China could play the same hedging game *vis-à-vis* the US. Moreover, given the predominantly realist views that pervade Chinese foreign relations, by extending membership at the expense of a strengthened agenda, the EAS could be reduced to even less significance. In other words, given the EAS’s largely symbolic function, as with ASEM, issues of membership are of minor consequence. Finally, acceptance of enlargement would reassure the countries of the Asia-Pacific of China’s inclusive peaceful intentions.

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

This rapprochement with the United States is taking place within the context of potential divisions within ASEAN. Thailand’s former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had previously proposed his own regional concept – as it would appear any ambitious Asian political leader needed to at the turn of the millenium – that of BIMSTEC, involving Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, which would see two ASEAN members joined with three South Asian countries. This project seems to have been largely forgotten after Thaksin’s ousting in a military coup in September 2006. However, looking north, forms of *de facto* economic regionalization could potentially have the effect of dividing ASEAN between its mainland members and its island members. Propelled by the Chinese government, and with the support of the (Japanese led and partly Western financed) Asian Development, the Greater Mekong Subregion has become the most dynamic part of Southeast Asia. Nominally its membership includes Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar as well as the two southern Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi. The ADB alone has contributed a third of the approximately US\$11 billion of

infrastructure investment since 2000, the lion's share of the remainder coming from China. In Myanmar alone, in 2010 the Chinese invested some US\$8 billion in oil, gas and hydropower and had agreed to US\$80 billion in investment projects in Cambodia. These forms of economic integration on the ground will see mainland Southeast Asia, along with Yunnan and Guangxi, served by a Chinese-sponsored, integrated network of high-speed rail and highways by 2020 (Wade 2011). Following the China-ASEAN FTA that came into force on 1 January 2010 – which in reality involves individual FTAs with individual ASEAN members – it is not unreasonable to see these developments, related to China's rise, as harbingers of future divisions within ASEAN. Yet can a divided ASEAN – especially one in which its largest member, Indonesia, is now a global player in its own right – remain central and in the 'driver's seat' of Asian regional integration?

Be that as it may, while the incidents discussed above provided a more enthusiastic renewed welcome for an American presence in Southeast Asia, the US re-engagement with Asia can be traced to the election of the Honolulu-born Barack Obama as the first self-proclaimed Pacific president of the US. In relation to thinking in Washington and the Beltway on the East Asian Summit (Cook 2008), one useful indicator is a comparison of two documents from the Congressional Research Service, one dating from the time of its inception (Vaughn 2005) and the second five years later (Nanto 2010). In the former, the EAS is considered mildly inimical to US interests, in the latter it is a body to perhaps be embraced. Hilary Clinton, in taking office as secretary of state, began a campaign to demilitarize American foreign relations and to put greater emphasis on diplomatic means. The first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) published in late 2010 saw the first priority in adapting to the new international environment as 'building our capacity to organize ourselves regionally and work through regional organizations' (US Department of State 2010: 52). As for the Chinese and Japanese political leaderships, this new approach on the part of the US is not seen as necessarily undermining either unilateralism (Cumings 2008) or hub and spokes bilateralism (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002), but rather as a potentially useful adjunct. It is also a reactive approach prompted by concerns with China's increasing global activism (Saunders 2006) and the interdependence between the US and China strengthened by the global economic crisis. Paradoxically the rise of China's military power in Asia, and its increasing assertiveness, is seeing a related increase in American influence, one to which the political and economic elites of the smaller Asian and Australasian countries – even keen to balance and hedge against China – are quite receptive (Sutter 2010).

Between the United States and China, the point of convergence would appear to be around the position advocated for some time by the Japanese. The Japanese provided much of the intellectual input prior to the first summit (Council on East Asian Community 2001, Japan Forum on International Relations 2003; Kohara 2005) as they had previously on the ASEAN Plus Three concept (Terada 2003). Yet till the appointment of Kan Naoto as prime minister in June 2010 the internal disagreement about building an Asia-Pacific regional body (one usually associated with the Japanese Foreign Ministry) and that of an exclusively East Asian body (usually associated with the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry) remain unresolved. Former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro (2002), like his successor Hatoyama Yukio, were most favourably disposed toward the ASEAN Plus Three project of regional cooperation, while still continuing to pay lip service to APEC. The Japanese were also the strongest advocates of Indian (and Australian and New Zealand) membership of the East Asian Summit as a balancing measure in relation to China (Terada 2010). Yet two factors militated for the extension of the EAS to include the United States, albeit at the price of membership of Russia with whom the Japanese have a long-standing territorial dispute. On the one hand, in pursuing the logic of balancing China, whose economic (and military) potency seem even more threatening in 2010 than in 2005, a US presence seemed



increasingly desirable (Sohn 2010; Sudo 2010). On the other, the global economic crisis saw a revival of the concept of ‘open regionalism’ central to APEC (Oga 2009). Like their counterparts in China and the United States, the Japanese political and economic elites saw their regional ‘actress’ as subsidiary to Japan’s global role. From this perspective an enlarged East Asian Summit would be a useful, if minor, adjunct to a G20 in which Asian countries have at last found a place commensurate with their economic weight.

## Conclusions

While clearly it would be very premature to make any conclusive judgments about the direction of Asian regionalism, it is important to stress that this is still very much a work in progress. Following the initial membership of Australia and New Zealand, the enlargement of the East Asian Summit to include the United States and Russia can be interpreted as a revival of Asia-Pacific regionalism of the type envisaged in APEC. In this regard, the enlargement of the EAS has not occurred in isolation. On the one hand, an exclusively ‘specifically Asian’ form of regional integration has been weakened by the signing of bilateral free trade agreements between Asian countries, such as Singapore and Korea, with non-Asian partners such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand, as previously mentioned, the global economic crisis of 2009–10 would appear to have provided a boost to the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPP) negotiations (Hirata 2010). At a meeting of the 21 APEC trade ministers in Montana in May 2011, 8 of the group (representatives from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Chile and Peru) agreed on a joint statement to push for ‘the broad outlines of an agreement by November’ of that year (Reuters 2011). Other than the involvement of the United States, the other signatory of significance was Malaysia, for Malaysian governments had previously been the defenders of a purely East Asian regional construct. The APEC Leaders summit planned in Hawaii in November 2011 could potentially be the most significant since the Bogor Summit of 1994. It will demonstrate both the level of US recommitment in Asia under the Obama Administration and a possible return to the Asia-Pacific conceptualization of region very much to the fore in the mid-1990s (Higgott and Stubbs 1995).

At the end of the first decade of the new millennium, conceptions of region in Asia thus still remain in a state of both competition and complementarity. Ultimately finding a conception of an Asian region that reconciles economic imperatives with underlying geopolitical concerns, while still being able to generate a sense of adhesion/identification, continues to be an elusive task (He 2004). Yet it may well be a task that may not in fact preoccupy many political leaders in Asia and the Pacific. As one Thai scholar has aptly phrased the question: ‘Who wants an East Asian Community (and who doesn’t)?’ (Phongpaichit 2006). Perhaps Asian regional integration is a little like Saint Augustine’s chastity, something to be prayed for... but not quite yet. The economic crisis that has accelerated a number of developments already *en train* (Wolf 2011), the most important being the emergence of a ‘G2’ of China and the United States, although both parties would vehemently deny its existence. The result has been, at least potentially, a new lease of life to the Asia-Pacific multilateral project that had been seen as being potentially superseded by specifically East Asian entities (Ravenhill 2001). However, it would be premature to ascertain whether this will mean a revival of APEC or the creation or strengthening of another structure (such as the East Asia Summit).

The implication of the preceding arguments is that ‘region’, ‘regionalism’ and the concomitant notions of ‘community’ – with a lower case or capital ‘c’ – are discursive subterfuges for promoting multilateral relations within a porous Asia. The dilemma of ‘widening’ versus ‘deepening’, that is

the fundamental ongoing challenge in European integration would appear to be much less a problem in Asia. Why is this the case? Part of the answer lies in the particularly Asian notion of concentric circles of 'regions' with ASEAN at the centre. However, it has been suggested in this chapter that regional integration is not indeed an objective *per se*, but rather the overriding search of the major actors is for new mechanisms of Pan-Asian (and Asia-Pacific) multilateralism and cooperation (Webber 2010). The East Asian Summit is merely one of a number of these.