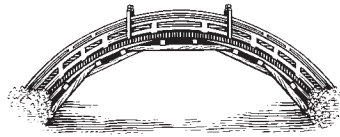


REVIEW ESSAY

Asian Regionalism

Edward J. Lincoln



Ellen L. Frost

Asia's New Regionalism

Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2008 ≈ 293pp.

Michael J. Green and Bates Gill, eds.

Asia's New Multilateralism:

Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community

New York: Columbia University Press, 2009 ≈ 400pp.

Kent E. Calder and Francis Fukuyama, eds.

East Asian Multilateralism: Prospects for Regional Stability

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008 ≈ 296pp.

Naoko Munakata

Transforming East Asia:

The Evolution of Regional Economic Integration

Washington: The Brookings Institution Press, 2006 ≈ 258pp.

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Something institutional is stirring in East Asia. But what? How? Involving which countries? With what impact on regional and global security and economic issues? Analysts have been wrestling with these questions for some time, and the list of publications is growing. This review considers four of the more recent entries in this field of endeavor.

The starting point is Ellen Frost's excellent book, *Asia's New Regionalism*. Frost has wide experience in global economic issues and would be the first to acknowledge that she is not an Asia specialist (although she certainly knew a great deal about the region before beginning this book). This generalist background is what makes this book particularly useful. She approaches the region as a newcomer and takes a very comprehensive approach encompassing economics, politics, and security. The book includes an instructive historical background covering the past several centuries. All too often, analysts (myself included) deal solely with what has happened since the 1980s, with scant reference to how the long history of the region has shaped more recent developments.

Frost also provides a useful conceptual division of Asia into "maritime Asia" (those geographical portions of Asia with access to the ocean and navigable rivers) and "Asia major" (the nation-states in the region). This division fits into her other major conceptual separation: regionalization and regionalism. Regionalization consists of the thickening web of trade and investment ties that has affected mainly maritime Asia. Regionalism refers to the process of building regional institutions, a process that involves the governments of Asia major. For the record, her list of the governments that make up Asia major includes the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand (with Taiwan as a de facto presence). The rest of the book explores both the regionalization that has been occurring and the efforts to build regionalism.

In assessing what is happening on regionalism, Frost is positive but cautious. She is positive by repeatedly saying that even small steps and weak processes should not be dismissed as trivial. For example, on security she notes that "however feeble intra-Asian security cooperation appears

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to be at present, and however much both traditional and non-traditional security depends on U.S. forces, fledgling security cooperation should not be dismissed” (p. 198). But she is also cautious, providing an entire chapter dealing with obstacles and potential threats to further regionalism. Her conclusion, though, is fundamentally optimistic, and she provides a number of useful recommendations for U.S. policy toward the region, including the need to pay attention to this vital region of the world, not overreact to regional institutions that exclude the United States, and revitalize APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation).

Asia's New Multilateralism, edited by Michael Green and Bates Gill, grew out of a conference held in 2006. Reflecting the small world of Asia policy analysts, Ellen Frost was a participant at that conference but is not one of the paper writers. Since this volume is a collection of individual papers, it is difficult in a review of this sort to address each contribution in detail.

One of the strongest contributions to this volume is the opening overview chapter written by Green and Gill. They successfully tie all of the contributions together, and reach some overall conclusions. Along the way, they wrestle, as did Frost, with questions such as the geographical scope of the region, the nature of the agenda (and who will set it, Japan or China), the nature of economic integration (closed or open), and the critical security question of who will provide the necessary “public goods.” Like Frost, though, Green and Gill’s overall conclusion is fundamentally optimistic. As they put it, “on balance the emerging architecture is shaping state behavior for the better” (p. 19).

The logical structure Green and Gill adopted for the selection of authors and papers in this project is that of a matrix: a combination of national perspectives toward multilateralism (the x-axis) and the transnational challenges to which the national participants must react (the y-axis). Looking at the overall list of participants in this project, there is an overwhelming preponderance of expertise on security issues (with Amy Searight being the only author with a specialty on economic issues).

Following this matrix, the first part of the book includes papers by authors discussing the national approach of the United States (Ralph Cossa), China (Xu Xinbo), Korea (Lim Wonhyuk), Japan (Akiko Fukushima), India (C. Raja Mohan), Australia (Greg Sheridan), and Southeast Asia (Amitav Acharya). These chapters provide generally straightforward accounts of the history and range of views and policies toward Asian regionalism in a particular country or region. That is, the authors show an admirable ability to step back somewhat from their own personal positions in order to discuss the various points of view in their own countries. The only slight disappointment here

is that the chapter on India included only attitudes toward regional security cooperation, with nothing on economic issues.

The second part of the volume takes up the functional challenges, with chapters on economic integration (Amy Searight), governance and democracy (William Cole and Erik G. Jensen), military security (with separate chapters by Michael E. O'Hanlon and by Brendan Taylor and William T. Tow), and nontraditional security (Mely Caballero-Anthony). The inclusion of three chapters on security issues reflects the overall nature of this conference. I was particularly pleased, though, to see the inclusion of the chapter on nontraditional security issues (by which Caballero-Anthony means climate change, infectious disease, natural disasters, irregular human migration, food shortages, drug trafficking, and other forms of transnational crime), which are often given short-shrift by security analysts. As is often the case at conferences, however, not all participants reach the same conclusions. In particular, the chapter by Taylor and Tow on security architecture was much more pessimistic than the chapter by either O'Hanlon or Green and Gill. Taylor and Tow are skeptical of the efficacy of existing regional institutions and much more worried about the ability of the region to move in a more effective cooperative direction. As they put it, "the challenges to realizing this [more optimistic cooperative structure] remain formidable and that, on balance, the more pessimistic scenario [of zero-sum competitive geometries] is likely to prevail" (p. 341). Though all the participants provide cautions and discuss negative possibilities, this is a considerably more pessimistic conclusion than the other security chapters provide. Such disparity of views is quite common in edited volumes, and in general this volume is much more coherent than most, with the Taylor and Tow chapter being the only one that seems at odds with the general effort.

Next on the list is Kent E. Calder and Francis Fukuyama's *East Asian Multilateralism*. This book is also an edited conference volume, based on a meeting that took place in 2005. Rather than explaining the rationale for the conference or linking together the various papers, the introductory chapter by Calder and Fukuyama instead provides the editors' own view of what is happening in the region, with just a brief statement in the final paragraph that the rest of the volume will take up the various issues that the introduction has identified. To be sure, there is a concluding chapter by the two editors that provides a discussion of how the papers relate to one another, but that effort is rather cursory. This failure is particularly important given the fact that this volume illustrates the problem that Green and Gill generally avoided:

a wide disparity of views among the various authors that desperately needs to be discussed openly and perhaps resolved by the editors.

Even without a clear road map, the structure of *East Asian Multilateralism* is somewhat similar to the matrix approach of Green and Gill. The first section of the book covers transnational issues. This section includes a chapter on critical junctures in evolving regionalism (Kent Calder), a history of American unilateralism toward the region (Bruce Cummings), a review of economic integration (David Hale), and an assessment of bilateral trade agreements (John Ravenhill). This portion of the book has some odd features. The Calder chapter picks the Korean War and the 1997 Asian financial crisis as the two critical junctures that have shaped the evolution of regionalism, ignoring the many other significant events of the past. The Cummings chapter on American unilateralism is a strong criticism of the behavior of the United States—some of this criticism is justified and some of it not. The contrast between Cummings' view and that of conference co-organizer Calder is startling. Whereas Calder touts the 1997 financial crisis as one that sparked real progress in regional efforts, Cummings tells us that “as years pass in the new century, East Asia remains more divided than united, and American unilateralism continues to be the dominant tendency” (p. 49). Meanwhile, the Hale chapter on economic integration is misnamed, because it is really about the rise of China and the need for U.S. policy to accommodate that rise in a peaceful manner. By far the best chapter of this section is Ravenhill's careful analysis of bilateral preferential trade agreements. Ravenhill is quite skeptical of the quality of these agreements (as were Searight in the Green and Gill volume and Frost in her book).

The second half of this volume provides country perspectives, with two chapters on China (one by Cheng-Chwee Kuik and one by Daniel Rosen), a chapter on Japan (Kazuhiko Togo), and one on Korea (Sook-Jong Lee). This assemblage is disappointing. Why does China deserve two separate papers? What happened to Southeast Asia or India? The first China chapter, by a PhD candidate from the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University, provides a discussion of the interplay of domestic (*innenpolitik*) and international (*aussenpolitik*) factors in Chinese foreign policy since 1949 that reads too much like a dissertation. Rosen's chapter is a much more interesting analysis of China's economic interests and the institutional approaches that fit those interests. But whereas Calder touted strengthening regionalism as the outcome of the 1997 financial crisis, Rosen concludes that “China cannot hope to manage its economic interests within Asia-centric alternatives to multilateral institutions in the near to medium term” (p. 144).

The Japan chapter in this section of the book is also disappointing. Togo is a retired Japanese diplomat who provides a lengthy but somewhat tedious chronology of Japan's policy approaches to the region. The best one can say for this chapter is that it rather inadvertently supports Cummings' view of U.S. dominance and unilateralism, exemplified by the title of the chapter's conclusion—"What kind of Japan is the most credible security partner for the United States" (p. 186)—as though this is the most important question facing Japan. One would have preferred a conclusion summarizing Japan's interests rather than a subservient inquiry into whether Japan is sufficiently helpful to the United States.

The final chapter of this section deals with Korea and presents a straightforward chronology of South Korea's regional policies. Once again, however, an author contradicts the position of Calder's opening thesis of crisis-driven change, with Lee stating that "in the years since the financial crisis, regionalism has weakened as Asia's economies have recovered" (p. 202).

The final section of the book delves into policy implications, mostly concerning what should be done to alter the security architecture, with chapters by G. John Ikenberry, Fukuyama, and a concluding chapter written jointly by Fukuyama and Calder. Both Ikenberry and Fukuyama dwell on the dual developments of a resurgent China and an "isolated and vulnerable" Japan (p. 244). Fukuyama seems to exaggerate the problems of Japan and the critical necessity of the U.S.-Japan security pact because the United States is the only "reliable friend" of Japan (p. 247). Finally, despite all the contrary views presented by the various contributors, Calder and Fukuyama conclude the volume with a chapter that begins with the astonishing statement that "the deepening economic integration in East Asia over the past two decades has clearly been one of the epic developments of our time, with fateful implications for the future configuration of global affairs" (p. 255). I doubt that many of the other authors at this conference feel very comfortable with that sweeping statement.

The last of the books in this collection is Naoko Munakata's *Transforming East Asia*. Like Frost's book, this is a single-author study. The most important thing to understand about this book is that the author is an official of Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). The ministry has occasionally generated a designated intellectual who is permitted to write books and attend international conferences (an informal identification once attached to Naohiro Amaya). Munakata was one of the younger METI officials at the end of the 1990s involved in developing the intellectual rationale for shifting Japan's international trade policy from a focus on global

multilateralism through the World Trade Organization (WTO) to a new emphasis on bilateral free trade areas. This book emerged from a prolonged stay in the United States at the Brookings Institution and George Washington University from 2001 to 2004, where Munakata was able to broaden her view of the region rather than just present Japan's policies toward it. Readers should be aware, however, that unlike the other books in this review, this one is only about the economic side of East Asian regionalism (and, like the Calder and Fukuyama book, has little to say about India).

Much of *Transforming East Asia* involves a detailed and competent history of how various regional economic forums came into existence and have performed in the past two decades. Indeed, this historical review takes up roughly half of the book (especially chapters 4 through 7). Some of this is similar to the discussion in Frost's book. However, the reader must always be aware of Munakata's position as a Japanese government official when reading her history and analysis. This is both a benefit and a liability. It is a benefit in the sense that the book offers insights into the viewpoint of METI, or at least the viewpoint that METI officials would like the rest of the world to see. To be sure, Munakata can claim that the book is her personal viewpoint and has not been officially cleared or approved by her ministry. Nonetheless, it is inconceivable that she would stray very far from the official line intended for foreign consumption. With that caveat in mind, this book does represent the work of someone who is arguably the best and brightest intellectual at METI.

Munakata's ministry attachment is a liability in the sense that the official line can lead to obvious gaps in the analysis. The most serious gap comes when writing about Japan's free trade area policy. Since 2000, the Japanese government has negotiated several bilateral free trade agreements (beginning with Singapore). Both Frost and Ravenhill (in the Calder and Fukuyama book) are able to criticize the quality of Japan's free trade agreements (as well as those of other East Asian governments), but Munakata is unable to do this for obvious reasons. For her, it is the proliferation of these agreements that is exciting, not the poor quality that is disappointing.

The most useful material in the book is in chapter 3 ("The State of Regionalism"), which provides some detail on the behavior of Japanese corporations in Southeast Asia. Although her view may be exaggerated, Munakata provides an interesting discussion of how Japanese manufacturers building networks of production across Southeast Asia were involved in the process of encouraging or lobbying host governments to dismantle trade barriers within ASEAN.

Of all the books in this group, Munakata's is by far the most optimistic. Her vision for the region also sounds remarkably similar to recent statements by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. She states:

I see East Asian regionalism as a dynamic process of transformation. Over time, the region will evolve from a group of countries separated by residual protectionism and bureaucratic inefficiency into an open and integrated market. As domestic demand increases, the region will become less dependent on U.S. markets, and trade with the United States will become more balanced. Now handicapped by weak market institutions and vulnerable to economic shocks, the region's economies will develop solid institutions conducive to competition and innovation. Instead of being divided by political rivalries and historical animosities, East Asia will become a regional community bound by common interests and aspirations. (p. 3)

This quotation provides a good point at which to tie these books together. To some extent all of these books acknowledge that the region is in flux, that the boundaries of the region are unclear (especially the extent to which the United States is in or out), that regional institutions developed so far are relatively weak, and that the speed and direction of future change remain very much unclear. There are major differences, however. Munakata represents the optimistic end of the spectrum of opinion about where the region might be headed. Granted, she does not deal very explicitly with security issues but rather sees those tensions easing as the economic integration continues. The Calder and Fukuyama book is at the other end of the spectrum—full of worries about dangers and problems in the region that could get worse if we fail to strengthen regional mechanisms in the manner the editors suggest. The Frost and the Green and Gill books fall in between—cognizant of the many weaknesses in regionalism but more optimistic than the Calder and Fukuyama book that existing and evolving mechanisms can contain dangerous security issues.

If the reader is looking for a good overall assessment of the region, I would turn to Frost. She provides a single-author voice and coherent analysis of all aspects of what is happening and puts this analysis in a useful long historical perspective. Her independence as a scholar also gives her a freedom of analysis and criticism that is missing from Munakata. Of the two edited volumes, the Green and Gill effort is by far the superior choice. Their effort is nicely coordinated, with a minimum of confusing contradictions among the various papers. The Calder and Fukuyama volume, in contrast, is a curiously disjointed product, with the two editors outlining a view of the region at odds with much of the analysis presented in the papers commissioned for the conference. ♦