

Comparing Regional Integration in East Asia/Southeast Asia and Central Asia

Chinara Esengul

“Cognition comes through comparison.”

A Russian proverb

Abstract

Central Asia?! For many scholars, policy-makers and the general public in different parts of the world, Central Asia remains an unknown region. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Central Asia emerged as a separate region comprising five newly independent states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.¹ This study aims to present regional integration efforts in Central Asia by comparing them with integration processes and schemes in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Such a comparative analysis allows for insightful reflections on the cases of Asian regional integration, and shows there is much to learn about and from regional integration experiences in Asia. The first part of the paper compares regional trends and features and the second part discusses key factors to explain differences and similarities between the regions and their regional integration efforts. The study is a descriptive analysis comparing the internal dynamics and external forces that drive the integrative realities and potentials in these two regions.

1. Introduction

There are many academic works on trends and characteristics of regionalism and various aspects of regional integration efforts in different parts of the world. After the successful European integration, regionalism has become an important topic of discussion among academics and policy-makers around the world. Regional processes and projects in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia are widely discussed and comprehensively analyzed. The topic of Central Asian regionalism emerged with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Yet, regional processes and integration efforts in this part of the world remain under-researched, especially when compared with other regions of the world.²

Central Asia presents many challenging questions and issues for integration studies. For instance, as far as the identity dimension of regional integration is concerned, there are such questions as: where does Central Asia belong? Is it part of Asia? If yes, what are the indicators? Generally, what can we call Asia? Where does it start and where does it end? Some believe that norms, values and politics—not geography—differentiate West from East, Europe from Asia. “The West is about values and politics, not about geography.”³ At the same time, most Central Asians look like typical Asians. Does that imply that the commonality of appearance is a result of the common historical and geographical realities and challenges? Perhaps appearance may be misleading, and the historical experience of being a part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union has impacted Central Asia in a very unique and profound way.

This paper does not attempt to engage in the identity or history discourse; the preceding

lines are included only to highlight the importance of identity, i.e., to have a clear picture of the criteria which define the borders between Asia and non-Asia, especially when it comes to models of regionalism.

Central Asia needs to develop a model of regional integration. At the global level, European integration is perceived to be *the* model. However, the regional integration practices in East Asia and Southeast Asia have presented a different form of regional integration. The East Asian/Southeast Asian experience and practices could be instructive for Central Asia. This is not to say that Central Asia is a part of Asia and has to orient itself eastwards, nor is it to imply that “asianization of Central Asia” is taking place or should take place. However, there are no reasons to deny that possibility, either.

The purpose of the present study is to identify differences and similarities in the variety of patterns of regionalism in Central, East, and Southeast Asia. The European integration scheme is often called “institution-driven,” while East Asian regionalism is generally described as “market-driven.” Regionalism in Southeast Asia and East Asia shows that “it is possible to have high levels of cooperation with low levels of institutionalization.”⁴ There are some other significant features of Asian regionalism which make it different from other cases of regionalism.

Within this paper regional cooperation, regional integration and regionalism are used as interchangeable concepts,⁵ defined generally as a “set of policies whereby state and non-state actors cooperate and coordinate strategies within a given region.”⁶ As for the concept of “regionalization,” this analysis employs the definition given by Paul Evans as an “expression of increased commercial and human transactions in a defined geographical space.”⁷ The concept of “region” is also a very loose notion. This study takes the view that regions can be constructed and reconstructed. The notion of “region” is meant to outline a certain group of countries which are united by common interests, threats or vision. The fundamental point to note about regions is the logic of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. That is, the concept of “region” creates “outsiders” and “insiders,” and as such, it may not be helpful or “suitable as dominant membership criterion”⁸ for a regional institution. Today, the geographical understanding of regions does not necessarily correspond with their political margins; certain political and economic considerations may draw up different memberships irrespective of geographical borders.

The present study is organized around two case studies: Central Asia and the broader post-Soviet space, and East Asia including the sub-region of Southeast Asia. The case selection for a comparison is based on several important assumptions. First, the regions under consideration are regions from a geographic viewpoint but also enjoy a considerable degree of socio-cultural, economic and political cohesion. Secondly, all regions in one way or another face common challenges, parallel issues and similar problems, although they find themselves in different stages of state and market development. Moreover, the Central Asian and the East Asian cases examined here are both about “Asian” regional integration.

Obviously, Central Asian regional integration can be compared with what has been taking place in other parts of the world. A comparison could be made with the regionalism experience in the Americas, Africa, Middle East, South Asia, Europe, East Asia, or any other region. The primary difference of Central Asian states and the region as such is that Central Asia finds itself in its early formative years, unlike most of the other regions. Having said this, it is important to note that this comparative study will have meaning when it is possible to disregard, to a certain extent, the time factor, and look at the contextual factors and realities of the regions in order to identify differences and similarities. It should not be forgotten that this paper does not aim to compare parallel processes in the two regions.

More specifically, the present study will examine the Southeast Asian regional integration experience and integration processes in the broader region of East Asia and compare it with the emerging efforts at integration in Central Asia. For this purpose, available official, academic and

scholarly materials were reviewed. Several insightful interviews with leading experts and scholars on regional integration were conducted; interviews on East Asian and Southeast Asian regionalism were conducted among scholars residing in Japan, and interviews relating to Central Asian regionalism were conducted among scholars residing in Kyrgyzstan.

Theoretically, the study is conducted within the framework of the dominant approaches in International Relations: realist, liberalist, constructivist and “domestic structure” (domestic power relationships and state-society relations). It shares the view presented by proponents of analytical eclecticism that there is a “need to build bridges between multiple analytical perspectives.” The complexity of the post-Soviet realities of Central Asia and the need to understand and explain these realities in the most efficient way does not allow presuming the superiority of one particular theoretical tradition. Central Asian countries at the same time need to focus on building their nation-states and have to find their niche in the rapidly regionalizing and globalizing neoliberal world. Moreover, it is important for them to improve their governance system and state-society relations, especially taking into account that these new, smaller countries of Central Asia had never experienced independent nationhood and statehood before. They need to construct their nation-states, to engage in social engineering to certain extent. These imperatives and the developments resulting from them in this region lend themselves to an analytical framework that is flexible enough to incorporate both state- and civil society-oriented factors, both traditional national security and nontraditional security interests and concerns, and both domestically and externally driven processes; hence the eclectic approach of this analysis. The primary levels of analysis are sub-regional and regional; national and global levels are employed throughout the discussion of external and internal factors affecting regionalism. The paper consists of two parts. In the first and principal part of the paper, regional trends and features will be outlined and compared, and the second part will discuss key factors to explain the differences and similarities between the regions and their regional integration efforts.

2. Locating and Defining Regions

(1) Post-Soviet Space/Central Asia

The post-Soviet space or region refers to the 15 former Soviet republics. Generally, the space can be divided into five groupings. Each grouping is characterized by the commonality of geographical, socio-cultural and historical factors and specific relations with Russia. They include:

- Baltic (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania);
- Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine);
- Transcaucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia);
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan);
- Eurasia (Russia).

This structuring of the post-Soviet space is helpful for analysis of post-Soviet regional cooperation and integration processes; however, interestingly enough, there is not even one regional organization which strictly corresponds to the groupings' makeup as such.

Central Asia is located in the heart of the Eurasian continent, and is widely recognized as a region at the crossroads of civilizations (Western/Christian, Islamic, Chinese, etc.). As mentioned above, since 1993, Central Asia has been defined as a group of five states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Previously, during the Soviet period, the region was called Middle Asia and Kazakhstan (*Srednaya Azia i Kazakhstan*). Some basic information about the five states is provided in Table 1 of Appendix I.

(2) East Asia/Southeast Asia

East Asia is a vast region, and when it comes to analyzing regional cooperation in East Asia, it is necessary to differentiate between such areas as Northeast Asia (China, Japan, the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, Mongolia and the Russian Far East), Southeast Asia (the ten ASEAN member-states), and East Asia (ASEAN+3 and some countries of Northeast Asia or Asia Pacific).¹⁰

The combination of political and geographical definitions of Southeast Asia results in a total of 11 states, 10 of which are member-states of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). The eleven states are Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and East Timor (not a member of ASEAN). Basic information on East Asian and Southeast Asian states is provided in Table 2 of Appendix II.

3. Overview of Regional Integration in East Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia

(1) A Success Story

Southeast Asian regionalism is a case of sub-regionalism in relation to East Asian regionalism. The role of Northeast Asian states—especially Japan in the early stages of cooperation and China later on—has been critical to the development of Southeast Asian regionalism. The regional processes in Southeast Asia and generally in East Asia are closely interrelated. Nowadays, when East Asian regionalism concentrates on the ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit (ASEAN+6) formats, the role of ASEAN seems to be as one of the decisive factors shaping East Asian cooperation.

ASEAN was established in 1967, when five of the pro-western states in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) decided to create an intergovernmental organization. Back then, they did not have much in common beyond problems and threats. Similar to the current states of Central Asia, the founding states of ASEAN “disputed territorial and ethnic issues with each other, and there were no common factors promoting regional cooperation, other than their mutually shared anti-communist stance.”¹¹ In this view, two important features of ASEAN must be highlighted: the principle of non-intervention, and the arrangement for a dialogue with any and all external powers. Mutual respect of each other’s sovereignty and the ability to create a dialogue platform with external powers have made it possible to talk about the success of regional cooperation efforts in Southeast Asia. “As ASEAN developed a habit of dialogue that led to an evolution of healthy intra-regional diplomatic ties in the next stage of development, ASEAN also started to strengthen ties by establishing regular dialogues with external partners such as the US, the EEC, Japan, etc.”¹² It is conceivable that the latecomers to ASEAN would not have joined the grouping, and the number of ASEAN states would not have reached ten in 1999 if it had not been for the first-order criterion providing for the non-intervention into the internal affairs of each other.¹³ The second condition was also critical for the success of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. The “ASEAN way” is often mentioned as a ready answer for explaining ASEAN achievements. Relevant to the context of Central Asia, the magic of the “ASEAN way” appears to be in the ability of ASEAN states to take “a collective negotiation approach aligning member states’ requirements.”¹⁴ The result of the dialogue platform and ASEAN conferences is evident in the proliferation of regional integration organizations with ASEAN as the *core actor*. These organizations include the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC, established in 1989), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF, 1994), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM, 1996), ASEAN+3 (1997) and the East Asia Summit (EAS, 2005). Figure 1 lists the ASEAN States and Dialogue Partners, and displays the scheme of regional integration frameworks in East Asia (see Appendix III).

(2) Not Yet a Success Story

With the collapse of the Soviet state, a number of regional organizations have emerged in the post-Soviet space aimed at providing different formats for inter-state cooperation, which are quite compelling for the land-locked countries of Central Asia. The first organization was the Commonwealth of Independent States established in 1991, which signified above all the collapse of the Soviet Union and the need for facilitating the disintegration of the former Soviet republics and their re-integration into newly defined bases. The case of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) clearly shows the post-Soviet realities—the parallel processes of disintegration and integration. This reshaping is a fundamental, specific characteristic of the post-Soviet regional process.

Another important point to make about regionalism in Central Asia is the absence of a regional institution that unites only the Central Asian states. There have been several attempts to create a Central Asian Union or Central Asian Cooperation Organization, but one has yet to be successful. If we follow the logic that “the first reaction usually appears to be the right one,” Central Asian states reacted naturally (in terms of identity and survival) in the very beginning—immediately after the collapse of the USSR—when on December 8, 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved and the Commonwealth of Independent States was established by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus with the signing of the Belavezha Accords. The five leaders of the Central Asian states met in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, on December 13, 1991, and discussed the new political situation and their collective approach to the newly created CIS. The decision was to create an ad hoc Central Asian Commonwealth and negotiate with the Slavic states of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus on behalf of the Central Asian states to join CIS as equal and founding member states. Later, Central Asian regional cooperation continued as a series of summits in the early to mid-1990s. “These included the January 1993 Tashkent Summit with a Protocol of Five Central Asian States on a Common Market, in which the decision was made on naming the region as Central Asia; the January 1994 Tashkent Summit, with the creation of the Central Asian Common Economic Space (CES); the April 1994 Cholpon-Ata summit, with agreements on cooperation in various fields; the July 1994 Almaty meeting aimed at building a comprehensive economic and defense union; the creation of a Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development (CABCD) in Bishkek in August 1994; and the approval of a five-year integration plan during the April 1995 Bishkek summit.”¹⁵

When Tajikistan re-joined the Central Asian Economic Union in 1998,¹⁶ the “Central Asian Union” was renamed “Central Asian Economic Cooperation” as it recognized the inability to reach the ambitious goal of a Union. In 2002, the organization was renamed once again the “Central Asian Cooperation Organization” (CACO). In 2004 Russia decided to join CACO, and in 2005 CACO merged with the Russia-dominated Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), signifying the suspension of the Central Asian integration idea. After that, President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan tried to revive the idea of re-establishing the Central Asian Union in April 2007, but only Kyrgyzstan expressed its support while the other states of Central Asia remained skeptical. How can we understand such skepticism? Some scholars argue that this skepticism is a result of these factors:

- Escalating intra-regional disputes over non-demarcated inter-state borders and transnational water resources management;
- Ethnic tensions rooted in pre-Soviet and Soviet periods, such as those that led to the violent clash between Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010;
- The disruptive geopolitical impact of major external powers such as Russia, China and the USA;
- The inability to share a common history, as in the case of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in its dispute over the Samarkand and Bukhara, and the absence of direct flights between Tash-

kent and Dushanbe;

- Regional leadership competition between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan;
- Perhaps the most important limiting factor, the divergent political-economic paths and strategies adopted by each of the regional states, leading them into different directions and destinations.¹⁷

Kazakhstan is becoming positively different from the other Central Asian states in terms of its economic performance. In Table 1, the GDP per capita of Kazakhstan is at least 5-6 times higher than that of the other Central Asian states. The large territory of Kazakhstan enjoys a vast store of hydrocarbon and other natural resources, is effectively managed by proper internal economic reforms, and within the past decade, balanced foreign economic policies have resulted in obvious economic success. The country's outstanding economic performance has led them into the position of regional leader in Central Asia, and most of the external powers recognize Kazakhstan's leading role. Evidence of this acknowledgment is shown in Kazakhstan's ascendancy to chairmanship in Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010.

Uzbekistan perceives all integration initiatives with suspicion even though it realizes economic benefits and gains that cooperation bring. Without Uzbekistan all regional projects fail since Uzbekistan's location is strategic and central to the region. It seems that Uzbekistan is not yet ready to accept Kazakhstan's regional leadership role, although it is becoming an objective reality.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have similar economic problems and resources. Both countries are upstream countries and share a similar position on the regional water resources management question. Tajikistan has experienced civil war, while Kyrgyzstan has experienced two political upheavals during the last 10 years. In terms of foreign policy—especially concerning integration—Kyrgyzstan has always been supportive and pro-integrationist. Tajikistan wishes to integrate more with Iran and Afghanistan as it is the only Persian speaking nation in Central Asia.

Turkmenistan is a self-sufficient state economically, and has been acting in accordance with the declared 'positive neutrality,'¹⁸ which "prevented any meaningful cooperation by Turkmenistan within regional and supra-regional arrangements."¹⁹

Thus, the situation in Central Asia is quite complicated. Central Asian regionalism is underdeveloped to the extent that it is not realistic to talk about the existence of regionalism; there are only the efforts to create regionalism. Yet, one has to avoid an oversimplification of the regional integration processes in Central Asia that simply states that regionalism in Central Asia has failed. Regionalism is not only about regional politics and policies but also about internal and external dynamics which evolve and change.

4. The Role of External Powers

(1) Story of a Not-Yet Benign External Power

A prominent feature of post-Soviet integration is the issue of regional leadership or hegemony by Russia. Due to the historical domination of Russia over Central Asian lands for more than a century (since the middle of the 19th century until 1991) and the civilizational importance of the Russians and the Russian language in the development of Central Asian societies and states, the interrelationship of Russia and the Central Asian states is extraordinarily important and complicated. Russia still feels responsible for the region, especially in view of the numerous ethnic Russians living in the region. Russia's leading role in such regional organizations as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) and even the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),

where Russia's leadership is balanced with China, is unquestionable.

The post-Soviet states, which were not happy with Russia's politics and policies within the post-Soviet realities, considered them "neo-imperialistic" when they established the regional organization GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova) in 1997. The reasons behind the establishment of GUAM involved the territorial and economic disputes with Russia, and allegedly the unofficial support of the United States in establishing an anti-Russian regional institution.²⁰ Uzbekistan, noticeably the most "nationalistic" state in Central Asia, which had a special and close relationship with the United States until the tragic Andijan event in May 2005, also joined GUAM in the period of 1999-2005, renaming it GUUAM. Uzbekistan's anti-Russian sentiment was evident throughout its history at both the elite and public levels. Independent Uzbekistan was straightforward in its interest in "pushing Russia out of the region" and President Karimov of Uzbekistan accused his Central Asian colleagues (except Niyazov of Turkmenistan) of being unjustifiably close to Russia.²¹ At the same time, the smaller states of Central Asia such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan consider the partnership with Russia as strategic and primary, especially in security issues. The April 2010 political overthrow of the Bakiev regime in Kyrgyzstan and the resulting political and social instability in the country showed the dependence of Kyrgyzstan on Russia both in terms of its mental orientation and for material support. Some claim that Russia played a role in the April events in Kyrgyzstan.²² The bloody ethnic conflict in June 2010 in the south of the country resulting from the extremely unstable and uncertain political situation pushed the interim government of Kyrgyzstan to seek Russia's military assistance for the management of its conflict in the south.²³ Finally, Russia decided to act through CSTO by providing technical assistance but offered neither military involvement with the CSTO peacekeeping troops nor a supply of weapons, since according to the CSTO statute it has no right to be involved in the internal conflicts of the member states.²⁴

The above cases show that Russia is viewed by some Central Asian states as the only "security manager" in the region, and Russia in turn gives strong incentives to be viewed as such. The positive and negative meanings of Russia's being the "security manager" in the region have certain implications for regional cooperation in Central Asia and its impact will depend on the leaders and leadership policies of Russia. As rightly argued by Robert Keohane, "hegemony is less important for the continuation of cooperation, once begun, than for its creation."²⁵ The scheme of multilayered structures within the regional institutions of the post-Soviet arena shown in Appendix IV indicates that Russia is present in all regional organizations, along with the participation of the Central Asian states, excepting the Economic Cooperation Organization. If scholars and politicians state that regional cooperation in Central Asia is unsuccessful and underdeveloped, it has something to do not only with the limited political will and capacity for cooperation of the regional states but also with the leading actor's political will (or lack thereof) to push for meaningful cooperation.

(2) Story of a Benign External Power

Japan is perceived very differently in Southeast Asia and East Asia. From one side, Japan's role in the economic success of most Southeast Asian and Northeast Asian states is undeniable. The Japanese origin of MNCs' (multinational corporations) activities as well as FDI (foreign direct investment), and ODA (official development assistance), as well as the technology transfer to these regions were crucial for the development of Southeast Asia and East Asia.²⁶ At the same time, the historical memories of the militarist Japan are still alive in China, in the Korean peninsula and in some countries of Southeast Asia. These memories add "complexity to the discussion of Japan as a future initiator of policy change and as a dominant actor in its regional organization."²⁷

When discussing the regional leadership role of Japan in East Asia, one also has to consider

the politics and policies of the United States, the super power with long-lasting interests and leverage in the region. The close security, political and economic relations between Japan and the United States created conditions for effective regional cooperation. On the other hand, as Katzenstein argues, the attitude of the United States towards regional integration in Asia was not supportive of multilateralism. "After 1945 the United States enshrined the principle of bilateralism in its dealings with Japan and other Asian states."²⁸ At the same time, this firmly established bilateral approach with regard to the security alliance between the United States and Japan allowed Tokyo to concentrate on economic development rather than worry about its security.²⁹

Normative and institutional approaches indicate the leading contribution of Japan to East Asian regionalism. Terada convincingly argues that Japan is "responsible for three normative transformations"³⁰ in the process of evolution of Asian regionalism. First, the gradual involvement of the Japanese government with regard to the bottom-up logic of regional economic cooperation in East Asia makes it different from regionalism in Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa and even Southeast Asia. The governmental institutions were not involved in the initial stages of establishing regional economic institutions. The non-governmental approach through activities of PAFTAD (Pacific Trade and Development) and PBEC (Pacific Basin Economic Council) and then of PECC (Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, a quasi-governmental regional institution), worked well enough "in building the sense of shared interests and mutual trust necessary for establishing an intergovernmental regional body such as APEC."³¹ Thus, one can observe a different-Asian-approach in preparing a regional institution (APEC) that later functioned in a non-binding manner, unlike typical western regional institutions. The interests of ASEAN and other Asian states and of the developed member states of APEC were properly facilitated by Japan.

Second, there was a gradual shift of purpose from economic cooperation to trade liberalization, in which Japan played an important, if not always a leading role. More developed members of APEC were pushing forward trade liberalization initiatives, while ASEAN countries were interested in developing cooperation. Here, the broadminded and progressive position of Japan was significant. APEC was able to follow its non-discriminatory approach in trading as desired by most of the ASEAN and APEC countries. Japan shifted its approach toward establishing a multilayered trade policy through FTAs in a timely and balanced manner, which resulted in the ASEAN+3 becoming the primary format for advancing Japan-ASEAN and East Asian FTAs and encouraging competition in FTA strategies between Japan and China.

Third, open membership was then considered. After the Asian financial crisis, Japan re-evaluated its position towards East Asian cooperation. When Japan proposed in 1997 to establish an Asian Monetary Fund, the United States vigorously opposed this initiative since it was clearly downplaying the role of the IMF. The skillful policies of Japan developed to balance the interests of the United States through APEC and at the same time to advance East Asian regionalism through the visions of the East Asia Summit and East Asian Community are worthy of admiration.

Japan was able to make all of these transformations not only owing to its progressive leaders' ability to suggest non-governmental and governmental approaches as needed in order to encourage proper focus on 'regionalization,' but also because of Japan's recognition and accommodation of the unmistakable influence of the United States. The United States wanted to see China's growing power in Asia adequately balanced by strong Japanese leadership in both Southeast Asia and East Asia, while observing that ASEAN leaders make right conclusions/preferences when the timing was right.³² Japan shared the concern over China's growing power and influence in regional political and economic affairs. Japan's adept approach to regional affairs is also evident in its promotion of ASEAN+6, which includes the ASEAN+3 countries and India, Australia and New Zealand, which would have the effect of defusing China's influence in these regional

frameworks. Most recently, Tokyo has expressed its interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).³³

5. Key Factors Accounting for Regional Similarities and Differences

This part of the paper identifies factors which explain the differences and similarities in the regional cooperation/integration patterns in East Asia/Southeast Asia and Central Asia. It is an absolute truism that these regions are different; clearly there is no need to compare identical entities. The question to start with is then: why should we compare these regions? What good reasons exist for these comparisons? First of all, there are claims by Asian leaders, in referring to the regionalism in Southeast Asia and the wider region of Asia-Pacific, that they have developed a distinctive model of cooperation that is different from the European model.³⁴ In this view, it would be instructive to see whether there are practices and policies in East Asian/Southeast Asian regionalism schemes that can be emulated in Central Asia. Another reason for regional comparison is to see whether there are objective historical and civilizational grounds to adapt certain features of the Asian regionalism model to the case of Central Asian regionalism.

(1) Differences: Contextual Conditions

The geographic location and the demographic potential of the regions are different. Central Asia is a landlocked region, while most of the Southeast Asian states have access to the sea. The scale of population and hence capacities of each state and their markets are also different.

Another visible factor for the difference between the regions is historical, that is, their “pre-independence experiences.” For Central Asia, their pre-independence experience is the “Soviet experience”; for East Asia, the experience is of being on the periphery of a capitalistic world. Central Asia was an integral part of the Soviet Union— “the great integration project”—that eventually failed. Central Asia was integrated into the USSR by force and was finally disintegrated by “chance” (meaning that Central Asia did not fight for its independence and independence came to them unexpectedly). Hence, the logic of the relationship in post-Soviet Central Asia is as follows: integration during Soviet times and disintegration/re-integration within post-Soviet times. East Asian nations, on the other hand, never experienced integration within a joint state and started building their nations and states in the post-colonial context. The post-Soviet reality is partially post-colonial at least from the perspectives of Central Asia since it contained the center-periphery relations. But it also concerned the collapse of the single state—the Soviet Union—while most other colonizing countries such as Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands continued to exist. Japan, too, was a colonizer and an imperial power before and during the Second World War vis-à-vis its Asian neighbors, but it never absorbed them into one state system, nor did it collapse as a state after its defeat in the war.

Another obvious difference is the extent of marketization in the two regions. East Asian countries developed in the context of colonial capitalism and a post-colonial capitalist economy, while Central Asian countries started discovering the market economy and democracy only after 1991. In addition, not all of the Central Asian countries quickly embraced the opportunities of the newly discovered liberal political economy. They continued and still continue to live under the deep ideological and structural effects of communism and the planned economy system forced upon them during the Soviet period. The point here is not so much a time factor but the structural and contextual conditions that existed when the marketization process began in these two regions.

(2) Differences: Geopolitics

The geopolitics of regionalism is an external factor, i.e., an independent variable in the formulation of regionalism, and cannot be shaped by the will and capacity of the regional states. The geopolitical situations in these regions show significant differences.

First, Russian-US relations in Central Asia are dramatically different from Japanese-US relations in East Asia. In contrast to the robust and evolving Japan-US alliance, the long-lasting antagonism between Russia and the United States has become a kind of political truism. Nowadays, it is hopeless to wait for a partnership between Russia and the United States which would encourage development and prosperity in the Central Asian region, taking into account disagreements between these states that exist at the global level in all possible aspects, political, economic, military, energy, etc. In the long run, the substance and logic of US-Russian relations may change because of the radical changes we see in the positions of the Islamic world and the rapidly developing China.

Second, the United States does not really support regionalism in Central Asia since almost all of the regional institutions operating in the post-Soviet space (except perhaps the Economic Cooperation Organization and OSCE) have either an alleged pro-Russian or anti-American character, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In the beginning of the post-Cold War era, the United States knew very little about Central Asia even to have a position towards emerging regional integration initiatives. In the early stages of discovering Central Asia, the United States preferred a bilateral approach. Later in 2005-2006, Washington proposed the idea of a "Greater Central Asia,"³⁵ which was associated with another project initiated in 2004 by the United States—the "Greater Middle East" project. The idea was to provide an alternative to Central Asian states and turn their foreign policy vectors towards the southern horizon by considering the five Central Asian states and Afghanistan as one political/military and economic region.

Third, China identifies itself as a clearly East Asian nation and state, although theoretical and conceptual speculation abounds that China has ambitions to serve as a bridge between Southeast Asia/East Asia and Central Asia. This bridge would act to propagate Asian regionalism at the continental level where China would play a central role. At present, however, the role and place of China in Southeast Asia/East Asia and Central Asia seems to be different. In East and Southeast Asia, China has been competing with Japan for regional leadership. China is considered an internal regional state in East Asia, while for Central Asians China remains an alien and unknown power that is gradually engaging itself into the region—most notably in economic terms. China and Russia, through activities within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, pursue their regional and global interests in the post-Soviet space, which in most parts appear to be anti-Western or anti-American. At the same time, China's power in Southeast Asia and East Asia is being counterbalanced by the individual or concerted actions of Japan and the United States.

Fourth, as mentioned above, the role of major external powers and their intentions towards a region are critical to encourage or limit regionalism in the region. Japan's decision to cooperate with ASEAN with huge economic resources was a very important factor for the success of ASEAN. Japan was genuinely interested in Southeast Asia for diplomatic and economic reasons. Southeast Asian countries needed Japan's economic assistance. In Manila in 1977 Prime Minister of Japan Fukuda announced that "Japan was ready to help promote peaceful coexistence of the ASEAN and Indochinese countries, and Official Development Assistance (ODA) money would be used to induce cooperation."³⁶ The same kind of positive initiative could be proposed by Russia in Central Asia, since there are similar kinds of preconditions and expectations. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Russia was weak while undergoing difficulties and challenges of the Soviet disintegration similar to other former Soviet republics. Within the last decade Russia has been gaining its economic and political strength, and today Russia positions itself as one of the major powers not only in the post-Soviet region but worldwide. Mos-

cow's July 2008 Foreign Policy Concept resounds with Russia's perceived resurgence in both global aspirations and responsibilities near and abroad. The FPC asserts a "real capacity to play a well-deserved role globally" as one of the "influential centers in the modern world." One of Russia's chief foreign policy objectives, per the FPC, is "to promote good neighborly relations with bordering States, to assist in eliminating the existing hotbeds of tension and conflicts in the regions adjacent to the Russian Federation . . . and to prevent emergence of the new ones."³⁷ At the same time, for Russia the former Soviet Union's space is much more important than other world regions, not only because there is a growing interest and presence of other major powers in the region, but because, first and foremost, Russia shares many historical, security, economic and social ties with Central Asian countries and societies. These ties can be a good ground for the mutual development and cooperation on projects with the leading role of Russia manifested through bilateral relations, as well as multilateralism of existing regional institutions. Moscow's will and ability is yet to be tested.

(3) A Puzzling Factor

The main difference between Central Asia and Southeast Asia is the existence of ASEAN in Southeast Asia and the absence of such a purely regional organization in Central Asia. There is no regional institution which includes only Central Asian states even though there have been attempts to create one. Such attempts have not been successful, nor are they likely to be successful in the foreseeable future, mainly because of the difficulties between the states, accompanied by disruptive external impacts. In other words, Central Asia does not act as a distinct actor in the world and in the region's international relations, while Southeast Asia through ASEAN enjoys just such a representation. There is a view that the current Central Asian region is an object of world politics, rather than a subject. The lack of success despite efforts made to create a purely Central Asian regional cooperation framework is truly a puzzling reality.

There are challenges, risks, and problems in the region which have a transnational character, and it requires a consolidated regional approach to address them. On April 9, 2007, in his attempt to revive the idea of Central Asian integration, President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan stated that "he fails to understand why there is no Central Asian Union, because it is beneficial not only in terms of economic benefits but first of all in terms of providing security."³⁸ Indeed, it is puzzling why a territory of 60 million people, with complementary economies, a common language, a reasonably efficient transport and transit infrastructure, sufficient energy resources, and common historical and cultural traits cannot integrate within a single regional framework.

(4) Further Differences: Institutionalization

The number and the nature of existing regional institutions in the post-Soviet space result mainly from the European model-oriented regional processes. The logic is top-down, where governments play the leading role. In Southeast and East Asia, as argued earlier, regionalism has been primarily market-driven. The government policies that created favorable conditions for the development of intraregional economic trade and cooperation have been a necessary but not sufficient action in the development of regionalism in Southeast and East Asia. The Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan which began functioning in January 2010 definitely can be considered a step towards Eurasian Economic Community integration. It signifies a European type of economic cooperation rather than an Asian type; the latter relies mainly on bilateral and multilateral FTAs. At the same time, the establishment of the Customs Union which is designed to integrate the most developed economies in the post-Soviet space clearly shows the tendency to under-appreciate the interests of the less-developed states in the region. In the case of ASEAN, the principle to proceed at the pace of the slowest of its members has been an effective instrument in the region-building process. At that, it should not be forgotten that ASEAN has suc-

ceeded economically, but politically remains weak in terms of institutionalization and normative formal integration.

It is fair to argue that everything has an opposite, i.e., the other side of the coin. The key factors identified above which explain existing differences between the two regional cases at the same time allow for contrasting conclusions. The remaining sections help to explain the existing similarities in the logic and trends of the two regional cases.

(5) Similarities: Nation-Building Rather than Region-Building

The important similarity which is rooted in the context of regional integration processes is the pre-occupation with nation-building processes rather than region-building, unlike the case of Europe in the early stages of its regionalism. As noted by Yeo Lay Hwee, “sovereignty in several of these Southeast Asian states was hard-earned and the internal diversities within each of the member states made nation-building and not region-building the most important task for the post-colonial leaders.”³⁹ Similar processes have been taking place in Central Asia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly created states of Central Asia have started exploring independence in the post-Soviet realities, and have been preoccupied with the state and nation building process. As known from the theory and practice of nation-building and state-building, these processes are highly influenced and constrained by the ethnic diversity of a state.⁴⁰ All Central Asian countries have been ethnically heterogeneous for centuries—a factor which was largely irrelevant during the Soviet Union but has grown in significance in the post-Soviet period. As rightly summarized by John Glenn, “nation-building during the soviet era can be characterized by the following concepts ‘flourishing (*ratsvet*), coming together (*sblizhenie*) and final fusion (*sliyanie*) of the nations into a new historical community of Soviet people (*Sovetskii narod*)’ along with the idea of building a single soviet socialist state.”⁴¹ Such social engineering projects were supposed to be accomplished through the realization of “national delimitation” policy in the mid-1930s and resulted in the “creation of titular ethno-national republics with their ‘artificial’ borders including nontitular minority peoples.”⁴² Thus, the issue of ethnic minorities emerged in Central Asia and remained a latent social problem with a high conflict potential. The latent inter-ethnic tensions have become acute and visible already, as in the conflict in Osh of Kyrgyzstan in 1990, and manifested again in the bloody June 2010 event in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

A similar ethnically diverse situation was present in Southeast Asia since independence and even during the period of ASEAN formation through today. In the earlier years, “the newly independent member states were new political entities with ‘weak’ state structures” that lacked a close congruence between ethnic groups and territorial boundaries, and sustained, also, “an equally problematic lack of strong regime legitimacy.”⁴³

(6) Similarities: Authoritarian Regimes

As the ‘puzzling factor’ mentioned above suggests, the absence of an ASEAN type organization for Central Asia and the nature of regimes in both regions are similar at least in their early stages of regionalism development. As Amitav Acharya suggests, “ASEAN’s primary concern has been with regime survival,”⁴⁴ and ASEAN continues to play a role in maintaining “strong authoritarian states.”⁴⁵ This similarity is indicated not to suggest that Central Asian leaders must develop a genuine Central Asian regional institution for protecting their own regimes, but to stress that the impetus for integration should come from within the country, and the motivation of leaders is decisive especially within the realities of their authoritarian states. The Akaev and Bakiev regimes of Kyrgyzstan showed that leaders might pursue regime or personal interests that support neither national nor regional interests.

(7) Similarities: The Multilayered Structure of Regional Institutions

Another similarity between the two regions as shown in the appendices is the existence of a multilayered structure of regional institutions. This similarity is important as an indicator of the tendency to have a variety of regional organizations for accommodating differences in the priorities and interests of the regional states and external powers. The study conducted by the Asian Development Bank on Asian regionalism finds that “cooperation is likely to evolve gradually, with different groups of countries progressing at varying speeds, using several frameworks and forums to address subsets of policy interests.”⁴⁶ Indeed, the emergence of some regional institutions in the post-Soviet space is explained by the necessity to have a narrow group of countries which are interested in stronger security or economic cooperation. Evidence to this is the appearance of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) out of the member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Those countries interested in closer security cooperation joined the CSTO while those interested in closer economic relations became members of the EEC. However, the absence of an exclusively regional organization in Central Asia, similar to ASEAN in Southeast Asia, downplays the importance of the multilayered structure in the post-Soviet space for Central Asian states, since they remain vulnerable “to internal threats aggravated by external predators taking advantage of a conflict-ridden regional environment.”⁴⁷ There is a strong and urgent need for Central Asian countries to negotiate between each other and adopt and specify a set of norms for intra-regional relations.

(8) Similarities: Strategic Imperatives vis-à-vis External Powers

There are some parallels in the historical evolution of Southeast Asia and Central Asia. By the 19th century, the Western colonial powers had come to dominate Southeast Asia and their influence became a barrier to the development of any kind of regional identification or sentiment. The Russian Empire came to Central Asia in the mid-19th century to dominate the region, important for its strategic location and available resources in the context of the “Great Game” between the British and Russian Empires. During the Cold War period, after gaining independence, Southeast Asia remained an unstable and volatile region in the context of rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union “as well as a battlefield in the conflict between China and the Soviet Union.”⁴⁸ The lessons from colonial oppression informed the way Southeast Asian states viewed the regional environment and so they decided to form a united front against external forces politically and ideologically. As Narine argues, the suspicions of the Southeast Asian states in the field of international relations, as well as the perception of external threat, have played a critical role in the shaping of regionalism in Southeast Asia since the colonial period.⁴⁹ Similar to the case of Southeast Asian countries, which succeeded in managing their relations with the United States, Japan and China, Central Asian countries need to learn how to negotiate their relations with the major external powers such as China, the United States and Russia.

6. Conclusion: Lessons for Central Asian Regionalism

Briefly summarizing the above discussion, one can say that the comparison between the two regions has highlighted some commonalities and differences. Some observable commonalities relate to common challenges, while differences relate to how these challenges are being addressed, irrespective of the objective, especially given the differences in geography and demography.

The preliminary findings of the study imply that the experience of Southeast Asian regionalism can have relevance to the emerging Central Asian regionalism. It could be instructive in developing a Central Asian model of integration especially taking into account the common grounds in the starting conditions—the priority of nation-building over region-building, the au-

thoritarian nature of the regimes in question, and the availability of various regional institutions for negotiating relations with external powers.

One of the important virtues that can be learned from Southeast Asian regionalism is a kind of “pragmatism in the ASEAN way.” It is the ability to be practical and functional, even though not always in a formal and institutionalized way, and remaining so even when displeased with others. It is very important to be aware of and to visualize the necessity to cooperate, and to realize the benefits such cooperation can bring. Early in Southeast Asia’s development, as well as later in Central Asia, the sovereignty issue was fundamental; both regions had been preoccupied by the task of nation-building and were often led by authoritarian leaders. But authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia were able to arrive at a common ground and find ways for cooperation for the sake of remaining in the office and maintaining legitimacy by means of good governance targeted at economic development. Most of the Central Asian regimes are willing to retain power at the expense of creating a “client” society and a corrupt system of governance, both of which seriously hinder the development of each and all member states in the region.

In East Asia and in the post-Soviet arena, multilayered structures of regional integration have already been constructed: in East Asia these are the Mekong Delta, ASEAN, ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, the East Asia Summit, and APEC; and in Central Asia, the Eurasian Economic Community-Customs Union, CSTO, OEC, SCO and CIS. To make the regional architecture work in Southeast Asia and East Asia, the role of Japan was essential; for the integration projects in the post-Soviet arena, a leadership role is yet to be played by Russia.

During the Soviet Union era, Central Asia was oriented towards the north and the west while the southern and eastern directions remained closed. With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new states of Central Asia have received a historical chance to reach independence, to define their future with regard to international relations, and to exercise their own sovereignty. Today, there is no ‘iron wall,’ and no Cold War; the world of today is one of globalization and open borders, including the formerly closed areas to the east (China and East Asia) and south (South Asia). New options are now open, and new dimensions for cooperation are available. But included in these options is the possibility that without strong cooperation among the Central Asian states, the formerly closed countries of China and India may wish to force their ways into this new Central Asian region. Central Asia has been given an opportunity to return to itself and act according to its nature, if done with a sense of urgency. But, in order to do this, it must unite, for only through regional cooperation can Central Asia finalize the post-Soviet disintegration and further advance its regional re-integration. Petty differences need to be set aside, for small, independent countries with valuable resources but too little security will likely not last long in the neighboring yards of increasingly powerful, heavily populated countries looking for space.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I:

Table 1: Basic Information on Central Asian States

Country	Territory (sq km)	Population (July 2010 est.)	Government type	GDP per capita (2009 est, in US dollars)
Kazakhstan	2,724,900	15,460,484	Authoritarian presidential rule	11,800
Kyrgyzstan	199,951	5,508,626	Fledgling parliamentary republic	2,100
Uzbekistan	447,400	27,865,738	Authoritarian presidential rule	2,800
Tajikistan	143,100	7,487,489	Republic	1,800
Turkmenistan	488,100	4,940,916	Authoritarian presidential rule	6,900
Total	2,935,637	61,263,253	Authoritarian presidential rule	Average GDP per capita: 5,080

Source: CIA Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (accessed July 12, 2010)

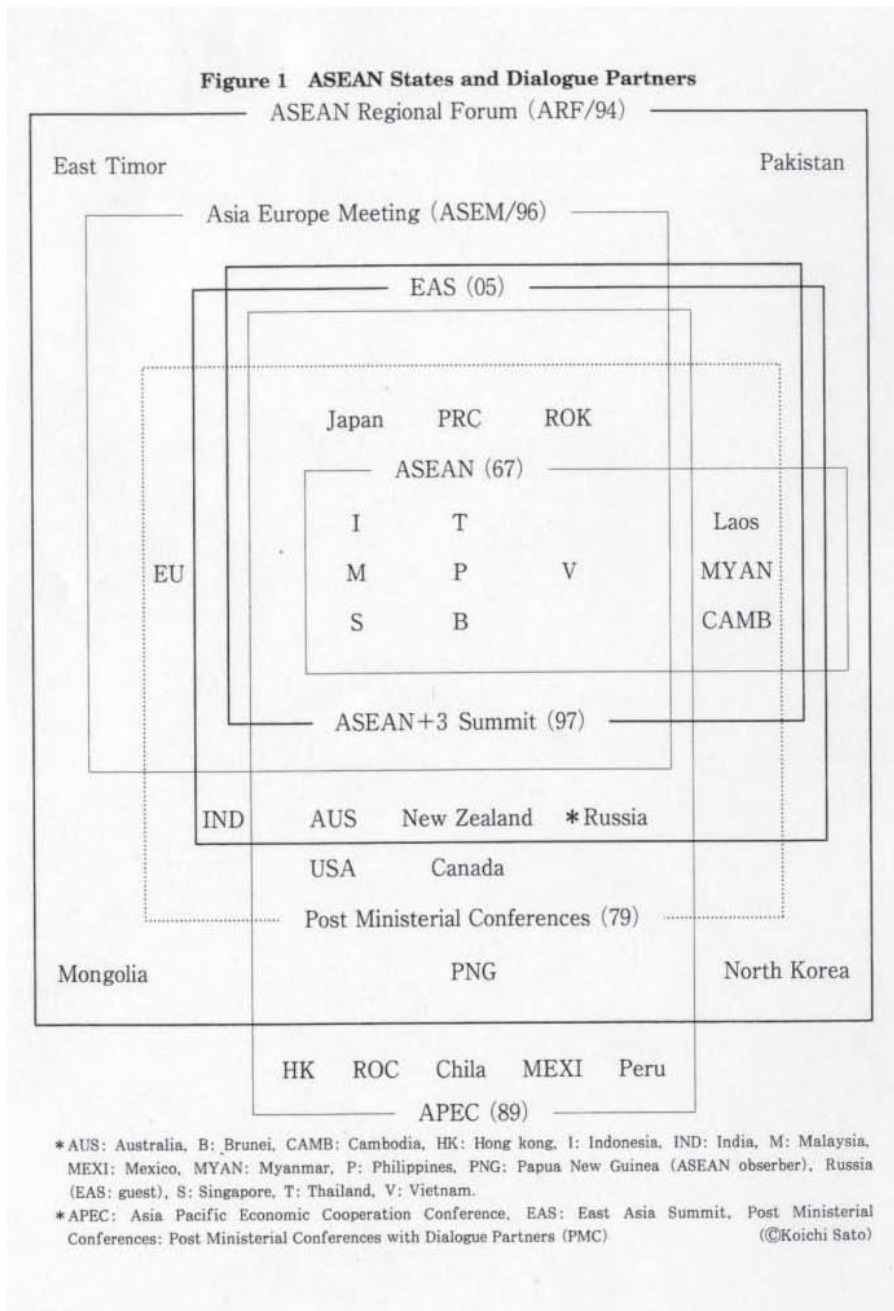
Appendix II:

Table 2: Basic Information on Southeast Asian and East Asian States

Country	Territory (sq km)	Population (July 2010 est.)	Government type	GDP per capita (2009 est, in US dollars)
ASEAN states				
Thailand	513,120	66,404,688	Constitutional monarchy	8,100
Burma	676,578	53,414,374	Military regime	1,100
Brunei	5,765	395,027	Constitutional sultanate	50,100
Cambodia	181,035	14,753,320	Multiparty democracy under a constitutional monarchy	1,900
Indonesia	1,904,569	242,968,342	Republic	4,000
Laos	236,800	6,993,767	Communist state	2,100
Malaysia	329,847	26,160,256	Constitutional monarchy	14,800
Philippines	300,000	99,900,177	Republic	3,300
Singapore	697	4,701,069	Parliamentary republic	50,300
Vietnam	331,210	89,571,130	Communist state	2,900
Sub-total for ASEAN	4,479,621	605,262,150		Average: 13,860
East Asian States				
Japan	377,915	126,804,433	Parliamentary government with a constitutional monarchy	32,600
South Korea	99,720	48,636,068	Republic	28,000
China	9,596,961	1,330,141,295	Communist state	6,600
Sub-total:	10,074,596	1,505,581,796		Average: 22,400
Total for APT	14,554,217	2,110,843,946		Average: 18,130

Source: CIA Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (accessed July 12, 2010)

Appendix III: ASEAN States and Dialogue Partners

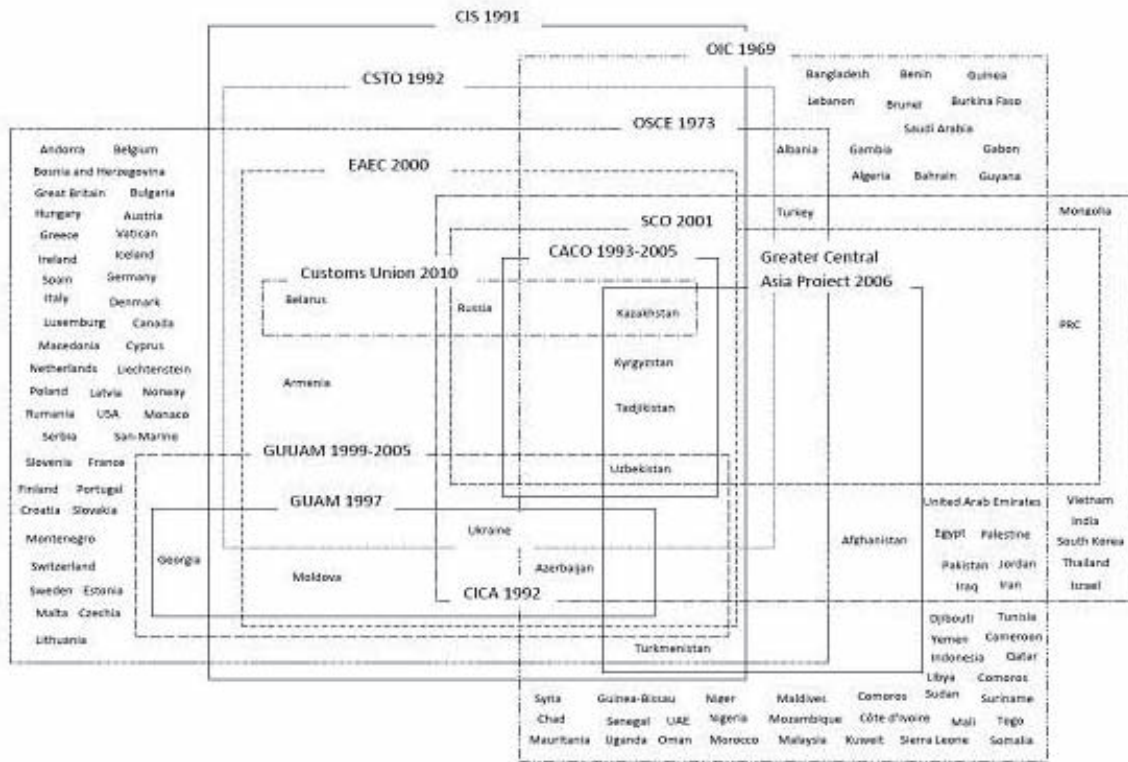


Source: Koichi Sato, "The ASEAN Regime: Its Implications for East Asia Cooperation—A Japanese View," in Tamio Nakamura, ed., *The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective*, Institute of Social Science Research Series, No. 24, University of Tokyo, 2007, p. 22. (Reproduced by permission of Dr. Koichi Sato)

Updates to Figure 1 as of November 1, 2010:

- ASEM includes Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia, India, Pakistan, ASEAN Secretariat, Australia, New Zealand and Russia.
- EAS expects Russia and the United States to become regular members in 2011 (decided at the Summit held in Hanoi on October 30, 2010).
- ARF includes Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Appendix IV: The Multilayered Structure of Regional Institutions in the Post-Soviet Space



Note: Uzbekistan suspended its membership at the Eurasian Economic Community in November 2008.

Source: Author

Notes

- 1 The term “Central Asia” was introduced into the political discourse in 1993 at the Tashkent Summit of five states.
- 2 Only few academic works are dedicated to the issue of Central Asian regionalism. These are Marta Brill Olcott, Anders Aslund and Sherman W. Garnett, *Getting It Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999; Robert M. Cutler, “Integration within and without the CIS,” *Association for the Study of Nationalities Monthly. Analysis of Current Events*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1997); Irina Kobrinskaya, “The CIS in Russian Foreign Policy: Causes and Effects,” in Hanna Smith, ed., *Russia and Its Foreign Policy Influences, Interests and Issues*, Helsinki: Alexantri Institute Helsinki, 2005; Mark Webber, *CIS Integration Trends: Russia and the Former Soviet South*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1997; and Mark Webber and Richard Sakwa, “The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991-1998: Stagnation and Survival,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (1999), pp. 379-415.
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- 5 While acknowledging the differences between these concepts, this paper emphasizes the common root of regional cooperation and integration as parts of regionalism where the most important points are the cooperation and integration spirit, trends, acts and vision, i.e., the cooperative and integrative nature of regional processes irrespective of the extent of their development.
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- 11 Koichi Sato, “The ASEAN Regime: Its Implications for East Asia Cooperation: A Japanese View,” in Tamio Nakamura, ed., *The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism in Comparative Perspective*, Institute of Social Science Research Series, No. 24, University of Tokyo, 2007, p. 21.
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- 14 Sato, p. 21.
- 15 Timur Dadabaev, “Central Asian Regional Integration: Between Reality and Myth,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, May 2, 2007, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4604> (accessed July 10, 2010).
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- 17 Stina Torjesen, *Understanding Regional Cooperation in Central Asia, 1991–2004*, University of Oxford Department of Politics and International Relations, July 2007; available at <http://english.nupi.no/Publications/Books-and-reports/2008/Understanding-regional-co-operation-in-Central-Asia-1991-2004> (accessed May 25, 2010).
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- ⁴⁶ Chapter 1 of the ADB study “Why Asian Regionalism?” p. 19, http://aric.adb.org/emergingasianregionalism/pdfs/Final_ear_chapters/chapter%201.pdf (accessed October 1, 2010).
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