PROSPECT OF NORTHEAST ASIAN REGIONALISM:

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF SOUTHEAST
ASIA AND NORTHEAST ASIA

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Regionalism, as Edward Mansfield describes, usually involves policy coordination through formal institutions within a region. [1] Although there are conceptual debates surrounding what a region is and what regionalism is, empirically speaking one would say that there is a solid regionalism in Southeast Asia under the name of Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN. Northeast Asia, on the other hand, lacks a definite regional organization, although there are multilateral alliances that involve nations of Northeast Asia, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Keeping these two regions in mind, the puzzle is, why is there a solid regional multilateral organization in Southeast Asia whereas bilateral relations dominate Northeast Asia? What is the main mechanism by which a region is able to form a regional alliance and what is the main hindrance?

This question could be assessed from two angles, a realist perspective or a culturalist/constructivist perspective, which focuses on the importance of cultural norms and ideas. The realists who view the international system as a self-help system are likely to argue that the reason for the presence of a multilateral cooperation organization in Southeast Asia is that there is no severe asymmetry of power and therefore the Southeast Asian nations are

less likely to perceive threat from one another. Northeast Asia, in contrast, has an element of asymmetrical power. In particular, China is rising as one of the two major global powers alongside the US, and Japan wants to maintain its status as a great power in Northeast Asia. The culturalist argument would be that Northeast Asia is historically ridden with intra-regional colonialism. That is, Japanese colonial history of Taiwan and Korea, Chinese historical influence over the Korean peninsula, and Taiwan's ambiguous status relative to China. The history of Southeast Asia, in contrast, is somewhat different in that the colonial powers in the region were extra-regional: Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch, Philippines by the Spanish, Burma, Malaya and Singapore by the English, and Indochina by the French. That is to say, from a culturalist standpoint, because the source of colonialism came from within the region in Northeast Asia, the region still maintains the hierarchal order, whereas in the case of Southeast Asia, although the same fate of colonialism had been shared, once the Western powers had left, they were geographically distant and thus no intra-regional hierarchy was present.

I examine the issue of the formation of multilateralism in Southeast Asia with the abovementioned debate around the question. My

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argument sides with the realist perspective of power politics. As for Southeast Asia, a regional multilateral regime was able to form successfully in the region due to the existence of an external threat from outside. They were therefore able to form a regional coalition to balance against the external threat—not only from communist China but also Russia, Japan and the US. On the other hand, a multilateral regime is not able to form in Northeast Asia because the threat to the balance of power is within the region—China—which is geographically, politically and economically prominent—a prominence that has historical roots. Therefore, the countries of Northeast Asia chose to balance against the power of China with their bilateral alliance with the United States. In sum, my argument is that the crucial mechanism determining the presence, or the lack thereof, of a regional multilateral organization in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia is the element of threat perception that formed an insider-outsider approach to political stability for Southeast Asia and in Northeast Asia formed a competitive power dynamic within the region.

CASE STUDY 1: SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

The first case is ASEAN, a multilateral

regime that was successfully formed in Southeast Asia as a regional coalition between the countries in the region. At the time of formation in 1967, Southeast Asia was facing a turbulent political situation. A period of “Confrontation” (*Konfrontasi*) that went on from 1962-1966 was launched by Indonesia against the union of states of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and the North Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak. Britain and the Commonwealth countries, in fear that *Konfrontasi* would escalate into a hot war, were forced to maintain and even increase their military presence in the region. British and other Commonwealth forces conducted a series of low-visibility penetrations of the Indonesian border of Borneo. Their purpose was to conduct preemptive, offensive combat operations against the Indonesian bases.

Given these internal and external political situations, the negotiated solution to stabilize the region was the multilateral regional organization of ASEAN in 1967. In the 1967 ASEAN Declaration, one of the major reasons for forming ASEAN was that they were “determined to ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form or manifestation in order to preserve their national identities in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their peoples.” The aims and purposes of ASEAN were to promote economic

growth and political stability.

There are two institutions within ASEAN that show its efforts to bring about the two major goals of economic growth and political stability: ASEAN FTA (AFTA, 1992) and ASEAN Regional Forum. [2] The idea of AFTA has been initiated at the ASEAN Economic Summit in 1991, and quickly formalized to establish itself as an agreement in 1993. Bowles and MacLean analyze that the quick formation of AFTA is based on: first, the changes in political economy during the 1980s; second, rise in business influence in the region; and third, ASEAN's desire to establish itself as an important regional organization. [3] ARF came about through a combination of pressure from the outside powers including the US and Japan to form a forum, with their mounting concerns over North Korea, and of the threat posed by Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) that existed since 1990 as an alternative forum. ASEAN saw the challenge of APEC to ASEAN influence and channeled the momentum to initially launching Senior Officials Meeting on Regional Security (1992) and a year later, ARF, with the support of the US and Japan. [4] Examination of the AFTA Agreement of 1992 seems to indicate that an agreement on preferential treatment had already been made in 1977, and that AFTA is a further step to the 1977 agreement. These two institutions are important for flushing out the determinants for success and failure of the multilateral regime.

First, the area of security cooperation within ASEAN was based on the idea "Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. There was first the need to "mitigate latent tensions between its members left over from *Konfrontasi* period"; second, to bring economic development to member states, which would contribute to "political stability by helping to alleviate domestic social conditions" from communist insurgencies; last, to promote "internal security" so that ASEAN would be "less vulnerable to the machinations of outside powers. [5] Although ZOPFAN as a concept did not carry itself out fully

empirically, as seen in ASEAN interventions in Cambodia, Burma, and Philippines, the fact that ZOPFAN was established is significant. It shows the extent to which Southeast Asian nations feel the need to cast out foreign interference.

ASEAN'S REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION

Southeast Asia was infested with uncertainties due to political instability in the region, including tensions between Indonesia and Malaysia during three years of *Konfrontasi* and tensions between Philippines and Malaysia over territorial dispute. Therefore once ASEAN had been established, there was a need to drive towards security cooperation in order to firstly, "mitigate latent tensions between its members left over from *Konfrontasi* period"; secondly, to benefit the member states' economic development which would contribute to 'political stability by helping to alleviate domestic social conditions' from communist insurgencies, and lastly, by promoting "internal security, ASEAN would make its members less vulnerable to the machinations of outside powers". [6] The last point, I believe, is the most important objective, and is reiterated in the Bangkok Declaration of 1967: "...security from external interference in any form or manifestation in order to preserve their national identities in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their peoples". [7]

This objective of ASEAN has three implications: firstly, it illustrates that "outside powers" constitute the main concern for ASEAN countries. This seems to make the basis for their agreement for regional cooperation. Secondly, the common standing against the foreign powers' intervention illustrates a sense of regional identity: the member states of ASEAN all realize that they are vulnerable to such intervention, which fosters a sense of commonality between them. Lastly, it illustrates one of the defining characteristics of ASEAN: the doctrine of non- interference. This doctrine is one of the "ASEAN Way" that the

scholars talk about, which includes “equality in sovereignty, non-interference in domestic affairs, consensus-based decision making, and informalism”. [8] The doctrines of Non-Interference and Informalism explain the reason why ASEAN considered it unbecoming to adopt the second one of the two proposals discussed about in the article: the proposal to “develop ASEAN’s role in addressing transnational problems”. [9] This doctrine of keeping out from external intervention and non-interference between member states resulted firstly in Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) which is considered as a mere “reiteration of ASEAN’s desire to be free of the influence of external powers, already expressed in the Bangkok Declaration”. [10]

Second security cooperation of ASEAN was ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the only region-wide security forum of the Asia-Pacific, now comprising 25 states including China, Japan and the US. [11] ARF is considered by various scholars like Yuzawa [12], as unsuccessful in bringing about security cooperation in Asia-Pacific area. The main intention of formation of ARF is to play a role in Preventive Diplomacy and the inefficiency arising from the debates amongst ARF members around the topic of Preventive Diplomacy: the concept and principles of Preventive Diplomacy, specific

measures of Preventive Diplomacy, and structural reform of the ARF. These areas are addressed by Yuzawa’s paper on evolution of preventive diplomacy in ARF.

There are two divergent views on concept and principles of Preventive Diplomacy in the ARF: “Activist” view of Japan that is shared by the US, Canada and Australia, and “Reluctant” view of China which is shared by ASEAN. The Activist view argues that concepts and principles of PD should be expanded to cover interstate and domestic issues, and that such expansion would not affect state sovereignty. This view argues that the obsessions with the non-interference/sovereignty principle of China and ASEAN are the main obstacles to ARF’s intervention in any regional dispute and conflict. [13] This ‘Activist’ view can be backed up by empirical evidence: firstly, when China was threatening China, ASEAN and ARF remained as mute spectators although ASEAN was considered a potential regional counterweight to China; also, ARF had virtually no role to play on the Korean question when there were two navy incidents involving North Korean ships, chased and sunk by Japanese and South Korean navies respectively. [14] The “Reluctant view,” on the other hand, argues that ARF should remain merely a venue for security dialogue not a path through which outsiders may intervene

in security problems involving their sovereignty and internal affairs. [15]

The debate concerning the limitation of multilateralism of ARF shows that there are conflicting views between the countries with greater power and those with relatively less power in the multilateral Forum. It could be argued that the great powers in the Forum—the US, Japan, Canada and Australia—advocated for expansion of scope to interstate and domestic issues because they considered ARF as a method through which they could expand their control over the region of Asia. Considering that Western powers were the main supporters of the Activist view also emphasizes this point, which could be summed up as divergent interests of individual states in defining their own regional interests. [16] More importantly, the fact that the stronger states were balanced by the weaker states of ASEAN in the issue of coverage expansion is important: although the result was ineffectiveness of ARF, ASEAN countries plus China served to counteract threat to balance of power, which suggests realism prevails in multilateral agreement as countries with substantial power disparities have come into the coalition.

The debate between the activist countries and the reluctant countries is continued to the topic of measures of ARF, namely Structural Reform. The Non-ASEAN nations complained that ARF agendas were limited, due to ASEAN's central role in the Forum, to Southeast Asian issues and "legitimized the Asian Way of institution-building into the operational rules of the ARF". [17] ASEAN Way, as the activist countries believed, were not suitable in promoting practical security cooperation in the ARF, therefore structural reform of the ARF was needed: firstly, to minimize the degree of institutionalization around ASEAN and secondly to share the ARF chairmanship with non-ASEAN members in order to expand the scope of agenda to non-ASEAN regions. The response of ASEAN countries, however, was the rejection of such

structural reform. ASEAN was 'neither ready to relinquish its leadership role' nor did it want to 'support further institutionalization of the forum.' This rejection of the proposal for structural adjustment and continuation of ASEAN's leadership role was ardently supported by China, for China saw this as a 'counterweigh to U.S. and Japanese influence over the forum'. [18] Important to note here is that China saw ASEAN's leadership as a balancing tool to US and Japan: power struggle, despite the nature of multilateral cooperation, was prevalent in ARF that led to its inability to reach a consensus on any major issues. From these two debates, it can be concluded that for a multilateral coalition to be successful, the countries need to be in similar standing in terms of power so that there would not be the incentive to use the security coalition to pursue the country's power expansion. It is also important to note that involvement of multiple great powers in a multilateral coalition results in extreme inefficiency and inability to reach any consensus. ASEAN itself had an incentive to cooperate because of the member countries' status as weak states in an inhospitable environment but ARF had many powerful states and the members were not unified the perception of common external threat [19], therefore another crucial element in forming a multilateral security cooperation is a common threat that is recognized by all member countries so that they agree to form a security coalition to balance that threat.

ASEAN'S ECONOMIC COOPERATION: ASEAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (AFTA)

ASEAN entered a new stage of cooperation when AFTA was established in 1992 with the aim of increasing the cooperative power of ASEAN. Choi explains that AFTA was intended especially as a safety tool to prepare for uncertainty in world economy following Uruguay Round and to follow the global trend of formations of trade blocs in world economy

such as North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and European Economic Area (EEA). [20] Bowles explains that there are three factors in explaining ASEAN formation of AFTA: firstly, changes in the international political economy; secondly, change in internal power dynamics/structures within ASEAN, and lastly ASEAN identity. Although Bowles argues that there are three explanations for AFTA's formation, I argue that this can be boiled down under the third reason (ASEAN identity), for if it weren't for ASEAN's regional identity, the countries could have joined the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which involved countries that were more economically developed than the members of ASEAN and thus would have aided their economic development.

First, I wish to define ASEAN identity, not in the cultural or social sense as has been argued with regional identity of East Asia ("shared Confucian heritage") [21], but instead as an identity based not on a shared ideology or culture but shared political concern. In that sense, the word identity may be misleading; however, because Southeast Asia is a highly heterogeneous region with no single explicable cultural identity as coherent as Confucianism in East Asia, this political concern binds the nations together on state-level. Some scholars argue that there is a fundamental Southeast Asian identity and preexisting norms particular to the region, most of which are cultural—cockfighting and tattooing, and sociocultural—charismatic leadership, bilateral kinship, and female prestige. [22] In more systematic analyses like Acharya's discussion of norm localization, he seems to suggest a preexisting set of Southeast Asian norms and identity, which transnational norms would be judged against. However, this frame of analyzing norm localization is in itself acknowledging that an insider-outsider dynamic exists and that although Acharya would not argue that such dynamic is built on *threat perception*, there are still regional political interests associated with norm localization. [23]

This factor of threat perception that binds

together Southeast Asia as a region is evident in ASEAN's attitude toward APEC: a fear that they would become "marginalized by this new organization with power being vested in the largest players, Japan and the US" [24], partially offset by a "regionalistic" sentiment advocating a coalition to avoid being overpowered by larger nations. Evidence of such perception of threat is the passive of ASEAN towards the development of APEC despite agreeing to participate in APEC. [25] ASEAN nations have shown the tendency to hinder APEC's progress towards practical cooperative organization; for example, ASEAN's general viewpoint was expressed by the refusal of Matihar of Malaysia to attend the 4th APEC General Assembly. [26]

From considering the two areas of the Association's achievements, namely regional security cooperation and free trade agreement (economic cooperation), ASEAN seems to be a good model that fits Katzenstein's list of conditions that lead to successful multilateralism. [27] In terms of great power status, there was one great power (Indonesia) that could serve as the center of cooperation, there was a common perception of threat due to the member states' relative weakness to the rest of the world, and lastly there was regional solidarity based on this perception of threat thereby allowing economic cooperation. What needs to be taken into account, however, is that the ARF was largely unsuccessful and is considered ineffective because even though it was initiated by ASEAN, it was firstly and foremost not regional: it involved Asia, Oceania, North America and Europe which led most importantly to lack of regional identity and lack of common threat that would serve as the basis for cooperation. Also important is the presence of competing power structure in ARF: Realist point of view on balance of power and security dilemma prevails to hinder cooperation.

CASE STUDY 2: EAST ASIA

*ASEAN IDENTITY ... IS AN
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There are four aspects to be compared between the US and China: economy, military, foreign relations, and strategies. In all the above aspects the US is ahead of China; however, there have been forecasts from major international organizations predicting that China will overtake US economy in the near future. [28] In terms of military, US national defense expenditure is 7 times that of China; however the percentage increase in defense expenditure from 1999 to 2008 for the US was 66% whereas China increased by 194%, according to Chinese government reports. The gap in military capacity of the two countries is predicted to decrease dramatically in the near future. [29] Especially China has equipped itself with nuclear facility to increase the effect of nuclear deterrence and thereby strengthening its ability to keep its interests in the midst of regional conflict. [30] In East Asia, the US has formed alliances with Korea and Japan—the two of the three most influential countries of the region—that act as the central axes of East Asian politics. China, on the other hand, is trying to establish strategic cooperative relationships and mutual development, but it has been unsuccessful in establishing alliances (except in the case of the DPRK) and cooperative relationships—the factors that are most important conditions for powerful nations. [31] Nonetheless, despite the

fact that US-Korea and US-Japan relationship largely defines the political agenda of East Asia, China is permeating into the power axes through China-ASEAN FTA, and exercising its importance in the issue of North Korea. The latter point needs to be highlighted: increasing threats from North Korea on the Korean Peninsula is leading the politicians in the US and Korea to recognize the crucial role of China in dealing with North Korea. [32] The logic is that China can act as a deterrence to North Korea's coercive actions towards its neighboring countries. Yet, China refuses to take on that role because firstly, China wants to ensure stability in the peninsula and the last thing China wants to do is provoke North Korea and cause instability in the region. Also, China gains from its economic ties with North Korea as North Korea's biggest trade partner. China also has the interest of maximizing PRC power through North Korea, by using North Korea as leverage in Asia and in talks like the Six-Party Talks. [33] This conflictive state of affairs in the region could be compared to Southeast Asia's conflict-infested situation right before the formation of ASEAN. Could East Asia, then, form a regional cooperative bloc to bring about the stability in politics as well as economics, just as ASEAN did?

In regards to perception of common threat that Katzenstein argued was one of the main components of multilateralism, I would argue that as far as the US remains as a global hegemon and North Korea and China remain major, nondemocratic powers, US-Korea and US-Japan alliances will not be breached. US-Korea relationship has been strongly maintained since 1950s and the evidence in current affairs can be seen firstly from Korea's regular joint military exercises with the US, and the naval exercise in November 2010 as a reaction to North Korea's artillery attack on the island of Yeonpyeong. Despite China's anger which led them to "warn against any military act in its exclusive economic zone without permission" [34], Korea's decision to go ahead with the military exercise with the US shows that Korea's concern for its security is greater than the historic hierarchic system that Kang is arguing for, and is greater than the projected economic benefits that Korea would gain from aligning with China. Further, the recent threats of military conflict posed by North Korea led international community, including US senators, to urge China to take action and led US and Korea to conduct ongoing joint military exercises. Yet, China has remained reluctant to take action, and Korea has not been pushing China to do so, either. This shows Korea's greater reliance on its long-standing ally, the US, rather than China.

The majority of Korea's foreign policy strategy researchers conclude that Korea should align keep strong bonds with the US: they argue that the disruption in US-Korea relations would not be limited to security area but also economy and trade, therefore the US-Korea security alliance needs to be maintained and strengthened. The alliance is also important because the US-Korea alliance does not only concern the Korean peninsula but the security issues of the Asia-Pacific, and will extend

to become the basis for multilateral security cooperation. [35] The US-Korea relations seems to have almost absolute priority over any other bilateral relations for Korea, even though a Korea-China-Japan FTA is being discussed which, when is signed, is estimated to bring about a 1.45% increase in Korea's GDP. [36]

Japan's perception of threat or alliance is similar to that of Korea: Japan places emphasis on its alliance with the US, as seen in Japan's annual Diplomatic Bluebooks. [37] US-Japan relationship has been strengthening in 21st century, and Kim argues that this is due to an increasing perception of threat of China in the region. [38] Kim argues that after the Pacific War, Japan's diplomatic strategies have developed to escape from US pressure in order to have independent international position, but at the same time, through strengthening the alliance between US and Japan has pursued realistic foreign policies. [39] As for Japan's policies towards China, it can be seen as balancing against it in political and military aspects. China's economic and military ascension serves as a great challenge to Japan. [40] This idea of balancing against China is resonant in Japan's shifting military strategy to: providing its first military aid overseas since the end of WWII, approving a \$2 million package for its military engineers to train troops in Cambodia and east Timor, and amending of the Atomic Energy Basic Law to allow the use of nuclear power for "national security." [41] The driving force behind Japan's shift in security strategy has been argued to be the dispute with China over the uninhabited islands in the East China Sea, and the financial struggles of the United States, which are leaving Japan vulnerable. [42]

North Korea, in contrast to the previous two countries' tendency to prioritize alliance with the US over China, is pursuing anti-imperialist strategies against the US. It has been strengthening relations with China and Russia as a "balancing strategy" against the US. [43] From this one can clearly see that the perception of threat of the main East Asian countries all differ,

YEONPYEONG ISLAND:
ON THE 23RD OF
DECEMBER 2010 NORTH
KOREA BOMBARDED
SOUTH KOREAN
TROOPS STATIONED
ON THE ISLAND WITH
ARTILLERY SHELLS AND
ROCKETS

and because there are disparities in interests and the perceptions of threat, the result is a lack of sense of regional coordination. Because there are low hopes for effective coordination within region, the East Asian countries tend to look outside the region. For example, China looks to Africa and the BRICS form new alliances. [44] That is not to say that China ignores Southeast Asia – the China –ASEAN FTA is a testament to that. Intra-regional cooperation has recently been attempted, an example of which is the aforementioned China-Japan South Korea FTA proposal, but the negotiations are being hampered by ongoing territorial disputes. [45] An example of a Northeast Asian multilateral cooperation that has had some progress is the Six-Party Talks, although it is not “regional” in its strictest sense. The relative success of the Six-Party Talks in dealing with North Korea’s nuclear issues seems to lie on the fact that there had been a clear threat to the stability of the international system, although the specific interests of the nations differed—the US is hard on denuclearization; China less so, although it does want stability on the peninsula, hence has the role of providing the venue for forum and acting as the mediator between North Korea and the US, Russia and South Korea. [46] Some scholars are positive about the prospects of the Six-Party Talks developing into a wider Asia-

Pacific regional security mechanism. [47] The institutionalization of Six-Party Talks could be possible, given the persisting threat to peace and security of the region from North Korea. However, there is also an equal chance that the formalization may be difficult, mainly because there are salient issues such as territorial disputes that are as important to parties like China and Japan that need to be taken into consideration when forming such security mechanism. Further hurdles to such coordination come from the fact that the two powers—US and China—would need to come to terms in forming a *security* treaty. From this, one can see that the prospect of regionalism in East Asia is fairly bleak.

CONCLUSION

The multipolarity in the region plus bipolarity of great powers that are invested in East Asian region seem to overpower the historical hierarchic system that Kang has argued for. Why then, were the three factors of Katzenstein’s successful multilateralism relevant to Southeast Asian region but not East Asia? Firstly, Southeast Asian countries were in the beginning stages of economic development. They had no strong affiliations with one particular hegemon, nor did they have any strong political ties with the hegemon.

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*ANTI-JAPAN DEMONSTRATION BY CHINESE CITIZENS IN SHENYANG
ON THE 18TH OF SEPTEMBER 2012*

What this means is that regionalism was one of the strongest appeals to them than any other alliance system, for they could mutually benefit in economic and political terms without having to subject themselves to a great power. Considering that almost all of the Southeast Asian nations have been under colonial rule, such as of Netherlands for Indonesia, their distaste for another infringement in state sovereignty was only natural. As for East Asia, on the other hand, Cold War politics have led East Asian countries like Korea and Japan to become dependant on the US to counterbalance against communist China after 1949.

The major problem of East Asia was that the 'external' threat was actually within the region of East Asia, therefore there was no possibility of forming East Asian regional security bloc as ASEAN did against their external threat. The prospect of regionalism which would ensure stability and cooperation within East Asian region is not completely impossible: although political coalition seems to be out of consideration, if China were to rise above the US in economy substantially, because, as Organski argues with his 'power transition' theory, international order is hierarchically managed and driven by 'potential net gains that could be accrued from conflict or cooperation' [48], as opposed to the realists' claim that they

are driven to maximize power. When East Asian nations—Korea and Japan in particular—see that net gain from aligning with China outweighs maintaining alliance with the US, regionalism will prevail.