

Strategic regionalism in East Asia

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Abstract. The US, China and Japan are often portrayed as three giant states dominating the region of East Asia in perpetual potential conflict. This article proposes that such assessments should be tempered in the light of changing regional and global dynamics and, in particular, in view of the growing centrality of the region of East Asia itself for foreign policy agendas. Adopting a framework underpinned by the concept of strategic regionalism, this article focuses upon the developing collective identification of region, and assesses the possibility for joint leadership in East Asia.

Introduction

Do the challenges posed by a rising economic and political China present the biggest contemporary threat to the relative positions of Japan and the US within East Asia? Will the alleged rivalry between China and Japan come to dominate regional affairs and threaten the military role of the US there? Or is there an emerging 'deadly triangle' among these three dominant regional states?¹ The Japanese government not only anticipates new threats from China, but also continues to struggle with the consequences of a detrimental historical legacy in its relations with Beijing and other parts of East Asia.² For a number of years, the Japanese administration has sought to consolidate relations with its neighbourhood, but the onset of domestic economic recession in the early 1990s generated a spate of essays juxtaposing the growing Chinese economic giant with an apparently fading Japan, and expressing an emphatic post-Cold War pessimism over Sino-Japanese relations in East Asia.³ In addition, many commentators witness the spread of negative Sino-Japanese competition into relations with and among the states of Southeast

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¹ Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Richard H. Solomon and William Drennan, 'The United States and Asia in 2001: Forward to the Past?', *Asian Survey*, 41 (2001), pp. 1–11; Suelo Sudo, *The International Relations of Japan and South East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002); Kent E. Calder, *Asia's Deadly Triangle: How Arms, Energy and Growth Threaten to Destabilize Asia-Pacific* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 1997).

² Glenn D. Hook, Julie Gilson, Christopher W. Hughes and Hugo Dobson, *Japan's International Relations*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2005).

³ Akio Watanabe, 'The PRC-Japan Relationship: Heading for a Collision?', in Hung-mao Tien and Tun-jen Cheng (eds.), *The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), p. 64; Donald Kang, 'Getting Asia Wrong', *International Security*, 27(2003), p. 61.

Asia.⁴ For its part, the Chinese government has to contend with the domestic and external economic and political pressures of greater participation in the institutional structures of a global market economy, particularly since its entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001.⁵ Several critics focus on the links between China's economic potential and its shortcomings in the areas of human rights and democracy, whilst others continue to advise caution in interpreting a thawing of Sino-US relations and testify instead to enduring tensions.⁶ As the other major regional power, the US continues to play a significant role in East Asia and the current administration seeks to determine how, more broadly, to address the unprecedented change it is witnessing in the region as a whole, whilst repairing damage done to its relations with Muslim communities in East Asia during the Iraq war and over Middle East policy in general.⁷ These perspectives typify a prevailing view that the key states of East Asia are set on a course towards competition and conflict, and evoke an almost inexorable logic according to which great-power rivalry is certain to intensify.⁸ In contrast, this article contends that changing conditions within East Asia, a growing regional dimension in foreign policy choices and an apparent rebalancing of trilateral relations render such interpretations less credible. It asserts that all three major powers share a dissatisfaction with the *status quo* and face similar regional and global challenges: from economic fluctuations and currency crises; to the proliferation of long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction and the fight against terrorism; to climate change and environmental degradation.⁹ Within the region itself, immediate concerns over the need for continued cross-Strait dialogue and the search for a concerted response to the dangers posed by North Korea involve China, Japan and the US in a number of collective projects aimed at securing mutually acceptable solutions towards ensuring peace in East Asia.

This article posits that a growing realisation by policymakers of the regional context for interaction facilitates a more strategically cooperative arrangement in East Asia. It proposes that this strategic cooperation should not be disregarded and seeks to counterbalance those judgements determined to locate the US, Japan and China within an inevitably hostile triangular rivalry. Whilst the development of collective regional behaviour does not supersede individual state policies towards and within East Asia, or negate the potential for rivalry, it does signal a growing

⁴ Calder, *Asia's Deadly Triangle*, p. 137; Douglas Webber, 'Two Funerals and a Wedding? The Ups and Downs of Regionalism in East Asia and Asia-Pacific after the Asian Crisis', *The Pacific Review*, 14 (2001), p. 362; Solomon and Drennan, 'The United States and Asia in 2001', p. 1; Michael Yahuda, 'Chinese Dilemmas in Thinking about Regional Security Architecture', *The Pacific Review*, 16 (2003), p. 195.

⁵ Bernstein and Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China*; Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

⁶ Ralph A. Cossa, 'The US Asia-Pacific Security Strategy for the Twenty-First Century', in Tien and Cheng, *The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific*, p. 37; Michael G. Cox, John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi (eds.), *American Democracy Promotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 275; Dennis Roy, 'China's Reaction to American Presence', *Survival*, 45 (2003), p. 57. See also Adam Ward, 'China and America: Trouble Ahead', *Survival*, 45 (2003), pp. 35–56.

⁷ Mitchell B. Reiss, Remarks to the Asia Foundation, Washington DC, on 14 May 2004. Available on www.state.gov/s/p/rem/32492.htm, accessed on 28 June 2004.

⁸ Ming Zhang and Ronald N. Montaperto, *A Triad of Another Kind* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 3.

⁹ Muthiah Alagappa, 'Constructing Security Order in Asia', in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 92.

propensity towards a more significant regional dimension in foreign policy. The expanding use of the regional background also derives from subtle foreign policy changes within the US, Japan and China, towards more comprehensive agendas. The first part of this article examines how the concept of strategic regionalism may be explained and how it differs from alternative models for understanding great-power regional behaviour. In particular, it emphasises how the growing application of the concept of region may influence traditional concerns with power balancing among the key states. The second part applies this framework to the contemporary regional approaches adopted by the US, Japan and China, examining some of the recent policy changes by each power towards the region and the ways in which ASEAN has encouraged their reorientation. In particular, it examines whether policymakers within the three states are consciously working within this regionalist framework to balance political, economic and security relations, as well as to shape a particular image of the region. The concluding section assesses the extent to which strategic regionalism is taking root, as new regional dynamics impose themselves on the existing forms of triadic engagement.

Strategic regionalism

The framework in this article emphasises the interlinkages between the understanding of regionalism itself and the transformation of trilateral balancing into joint or cooperative leadership as a means of managing collective responses to regional concerns.

Defining the region

There is a wealth of literature on regionalism, which describes an array of activities: from state-led efforts to develop an economic, political or security region; to the organic creation of regional cooperation through intensified economic or political interdependence.¹⁰ Tay usefully divides regions into three different types: functional regions reflect the development of political and economic interdependence; identity-based regions refer to an underlying consciousness of region; and geopolitical weight accounts for the global position of the region in question.¹¹ The most common approaches to regionalism reflect a functional concern with geographical area or levels of economic activity, which may acknowledge a (re-) assertion of ethnic or administrative interests, shared historical narratives, and the political expediency behind regionally based collaboration.¹² From this perspective, any expansion of

¹⁰ Julie Gilson, *Asia Meets Europe* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002), pp. 3–4.

¹¹ Simon Tay, 'ASEAN Plus 3: Challenges and Cautions about a New Regionalism', in Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Stephen Leong and Vincent Lim (eds.), *Asia Pacific Security: Challenges and Opportunities in the Twenty-First Century* (Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 2002), pp. 104–5.

¹² Michael Keating and John Loughlin (eds.), *The Political Economy of Regionalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 5–7; Björn Hettne, Andras Inotai and Osvaldo Sunkel (eds.), *Globalism and the New Regionalism* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. xxi.

membership or remit also issues from the intentional collaboration of self-maximising member states, whilst the establishment of loose institutional structures, such as the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) process in East Asia, may accompany these goals and lead to greater integration.¹³ Reflecting Tay's third category, the collective political, military or economic strength of a regional grouping may garner geopolitical weight for the constituent member states in the face of what are often perceived to be conditions of dwindling hegemonic stability.¹⁴ In this case, external forces are key to the emergence of a region as a possible consequence of, stepping stone towards, or site of resistance against, the multifaceted phenomenon of globalisation within a changed post-Cold War environment.¹⁵ In this approach, too, institutions may provide the vehicle for responding to new global concerns, as well as strengthening intra-regional collaboration; for example, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is regarded by some observers as a means of engaging the burgeoning power of China. In this context, moreover, the specific territoriality of regions is also highlighted by Buzan and Wæver, whose work in *Regions and Powers* highlights the relevance of the region as a level of international engagement. They combine a broadly neorealist concern with material structures and a constructivist interest in the political processes that engender securitisation, so that their Regional Security Complexes are perceived to develop from 'durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of subglobal, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence'. For them, proximity is key and the social construction of the region in question issues from the 'security practices of the actors', not from discursive encounters. In adopting this approach, they explicitly reject Sheldon's notion of the US as a 'normal' member of the region and posit the development of an 'integrated, Asia-wide set of inter-regional security dynamics focused on China'.¹⁶ This article reinserts the discursive elements of the region and regards the US as a formative actor within the region.

Some of the literature on regions recognises that shared behavioural patterns may develop and that a 'geopsychological' dimension may precipitate the creation of different kinds of regions. 'New regionalism' also highlights the ideological aspects of social relations within a geographical area: for Hettne et al., as a social system a region implies different types of cross-cutting relations, as well as the convergence of values among state and non-state actors.¹⁷ The region itself therefore becomes the focal point for specific actions: it may be seen to provide a possible discursive 'vehicle for cooperation', not uniquely or necessarily associated with a specific institution or

¹³ T. J. Pempel, 'Introduction', in T. J. Pempel (ed.), *Remapping East Asia: The Construction of a Region* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 3 and 26; Paul Evans, 'Between Regionalism and Regionalization: Policy Networks and the Nascent East Asian Institutional Identity', in Pempel, *Remapping East Asia*, p. 199; Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 157.

¹⁴ Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne (eds.), *Regionalism and World Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 3–6; Gilson, *Asia Meets Europe*, pp. 2–11; Walter Mattli, *The Logic of Regional Integration: Europe and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), passim.

¹⁵ Jean Grugel and Wil Hout (1998), *Regionalism Across the North/South Divide: State Strategies and Globalization* (London: Routledge), p. 10; Hettne et al., *Globalism and the New Regionalism*, p. xxi.

¹⁶ Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, pp. 41–9 and 165.

¹⁷ Pempel, *Remapping East Asia*, p. 3; Hettne et al., *Globalism and the New Regionalism*, pp. xv and 1.

set of rule-based arrangements.¹⁸ This reflectivist approach allows the concept of a region to be seen as the ongoing development of a collective articulation of space; a social process, whose structures are (re)produced by the actions of agents.¹⁹ The impact of the perception of the region itself and of the very notion of neighbourhood are thus located at the centre of regional dynamics, to the extent that the region may provide an arena for influence and even for the development of 'a widely shared normative framework'.²⁰ In this way, a region becomes a discursive terrain underpinned by the role of norms and identity able to engender a 'more collective than particularistic' sense of community.²¹ Acharya's work is especially important in emphasising a concern with the 'regional normative structures, including regional contextualisation of international norms and questions about *regional identity*' and can usefully be applied beyond the case of ASEAN to examine possibilities for nonbinding collaboration among strategic peers.²² The region, then, is both a site of interaction and a locus for the very (re)-definition of leadership in the collective management of a given space.

Joint leadership

Set against a given regional canvas, this section addresses the type of collective interaction that may emerge. An extensive literature on power balancing examines a range of objectives for which great powers may be bound to cooperate: driven by ideology, or by the notion that common societal interests have priority over national interests, based on common goals.²³ Whether or not major powers constitute the sole 'defining members' of such groupings, they are certainly viewed as playing a prominent role in balancing a specified set of relations.²⁴ Literature on trilateralism dating back to the relations among the US, USSR and China in the 1970s more specifically locates this power balancing within a two-versus-one context and assesses how triangular tensions inform the context for regional

¹⁸ Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal, 'Why States Act Through Formal International Organizations', in Paul F. Diehl (ed.), *The Politics of Global Governance: International Organizations in an Interdependent World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), p. 10. See also Stephen Gill, 'Global Structural Change and Multilateralism', in Stephen Gill (ed.), *Globalization, Democratization and Multilateralism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 7.

¹⁹ Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 17; John Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 99.

²⁰ Muthiah Alagappa, 'Managing Asian Security', in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, p. 572; Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall, 'Institutions and International Order', in Ernst O. Czempiel and J. N. Rosenau (eds.), *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), p. 60; Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity*, p. 56.

²¹ Muthiah Alagappa, 'The Study of International Order', in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 37 and 51; Amitav Acharya, 'Regional Institutions and Asian Security Order', in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, p. 212.

²² Acharya, 'Regional Institutions', pp. 216 and 219, italics added.

²³ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 181 and 218; Alagappa, 'The Study of International Order', pp. 55 and 57.

²⁴ David B. Dewitt, 'Common, Comprehensive, and Cooperative Security', *The Pacific Review*, 7 (1994), p. 7.

behaviour.²⁵ This triadic structure gives prominence to the effects of the distribution of material (economic and military) power capabilities and is still applied, albeit in a considerably revised form, to examine relations among the US, Japan and China today. Dittmer's recent work emphasises threat rather than power, and today he himself doubts whether Japan, China and the US can constitute a new strategic triangle, whilst Zhang and Montaperto propose the application of the trilateral framework as an additional channel for multilateral cooperation.²⁶ The concept of joint leadership is useful for removing the emphasis on power balancing behaviour – particularly in its trilateral form – and for demonstrating how common alignment can issue from joint responses to perceived mutual threats.²⁷ It hinges on a relational rather than absolute notion of power and draws upon more recent literature examining how a plurality of actors may take a leadership role collectively and create the possibility for cooperative balancing. For Rapkin, this joint approach may also facilitate 'entrepreneurial' leadership, involving a number of skills such as negotiating and coalition building.²⁸ By addressing the role of perceptions, moreover, it becomes possible to ascertain the relative 'intensity of concern' held by those responsible for foreign policy decision-making and the 'background level of possible insecurity' they possess. This may in turn elicit a growing convergence in the perceptions of key threats within a region.²⁹ Joint leadership may also be seen to provide the conditions for the 'low probability of damage to acquired values', whilst it can provide – even among competing trilateral participants – a 'mutual enmeshment' of concerns in a specific locale and generate mutual trust and the anticipation of reciprocal patterns of behaviour.³⁰

The context of the region in strategic balancing is emphasised by several authors, who focus on the significance of the neighbourhood in which key actors are engaged. Most aptly, the works of Watanabe and Alagappa illustrate how 'concerted diplomacy' and a 'strategic condominium' respectively balance the particular roles of key players, with the potential for '(re)structuring a 'region's strategic architecture.'³¹ For Mastanduno, this shift of approach towards identifying those actors with a key

²⁵ Lowell Dittmer, 'The Strategic Triangle', *World Politics*, 33 (1981), pp. 491–8. See also Lowell Dittmer, 'The Emerging Northeast Asian Regional Order', in Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *The International Relations of Northeast Asia* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), p. 345; Zhang and Montaperto, *A Triad of Another Kind?*

²⁶ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 265; Dittmer, 'The Emerging Northeast Asian Regional Order', p. 346; Zhang and Montaperto, *A Triad of Another Kind?*, p. 125.

²⁷ Holly Sklar (ed.), *Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1980), p. 534; Chris Brown, *Understanding International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 87; Donald P. Rapkin, 'The United States, Japan, and the Power to Block: The APEC and AMF Cases', *The Pacific Review*, 14 (2001), pp. 377–8; See Seng Tan, with Ralph A. Cossa, 'Rescuing Realism from the Realists', in Sheldon Simon (ed.), *The Many Faces of Asian Security* (Boston, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 31.

²⁸ Rapkin, 'The United States, Japan, and the Power to Block', pp. 377–8. See also Oran Young, 'Political Leadership and Regime Formation: On the Development of Institutions in International Society', *International Organization*, 45 (1991), pp. 281–308.

²⁹ Robert W. Cox and Harold K. Jacobson (eds.), *The Anatomy of Influence: Decision Making in International Organization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 3–4; Brown, *Understanding International Relations*, p. 99; Alexander Wendt, 'Constructing International Politics', *International Security*, 20 (1995), p. 73.

³⁰ David A. Baldwin, 'The Concept of Security', *Review of International Studies*, 23 (1997), p. 13.

³¹ Watanabe, 'The PRC-Japan Relationship: Heading for a Collision?', p. 70; Dittmer, 'The Emerging Northeast Asian Regional Order', p. 346; Alagappa, 'Constructing Security Order', p. 75; Tan with Cossa, 'Rescuing Realism from the Realists', p. 31.

influence in a specified regional context offers a Deutschian pathway towards a pluralistic security community, in which constituent participants seek to settle differences and pre-empt possible tensions through peaceful means. This development may also enhance shared values and may even elicit a growing identification with the collectivity itself.³² This approach highlights the element of process and the level of concern, based upon mutual perceptions set within a definable ideational boundary, leading to the possibility of cooperative balancing in specific locales and with regard to particular issue areas. It also raises the prospect of engaging relations beyond Dittmer's 'quasi-ménage à trois', to fill in spaces where hegemonic leadership is perceived to be lacking and to increase the propensity for cooperative strategies.³³ In the case of East Asia, such joint leadership is increasingly visible among states which have no choice but to take seriously one another's actions.³⁴ The emphasis on trilateralism, moreover, is giving way to a focus on 'competitive coexistence', instigated by changing international conditions and a dramatically altered response to one another as part of a collective response to international terrorism since 2001.³⁵

Strategic regionalism

In summary, strategic regionalism represents collective or converging approaches to joint leadership over certain foreign policy actions within a specific regional context. This approach not only allows the observer to examine reductions in costs of interaction and to analyse how collective action interests might be resolved; it also permits a closer scrutiny of the very idea of the collective in question. Therefore, strategic regionalism, far from being the two-versus-one triadic dividing strategy of the Cold War, offers a potential trilateral balancing solution to a range of contemporary issues, in the context of a flexible region that is in the very process of defining itself. Within East Asia, and in light of what is seen by Acharya to be the 'nonhegemonic construction of Asian security regionalism', and Mastanduno's 'incomplete' order, such collective responses provide not only a means for weaker states to bind stronger ones, but also gives stronger states the means of binding their regional peers.³⁶ In response to these changing conditions, moreover, the foreign policies of the key regional powers are beginning to make adjustments, to include the region as a means of taking action as part of a more comprehensive set of strategies within a framework of growing 'strategic trust'.³⁷ The following section assesses the evidence for the emergence of strategic regionalism among the US, Japan and China in recent years.

³² Michael Mastanduno, 'Incomplete Hegemony: The United States and Security Order in Asia', in Alagappa, *Asian Security Order*, pp. 165–6.

³³ Dittmer, 'The Emerging Northeast Asian Regional Order', p. 349.

³⁴ Hideo Sato, *Japan's China Perceptions and its Policies in the Alliance with the United States* (Stanford, CA: Asia Pacific Research Center, 1998), p. 21.

³⁵ Dittmer, 'The Emerging Northeast Asian Regional Order', p. 349.

³⁶ Acharya, 'Regional Institutions', p. 222; Mastanduno, 'Incomplete Hegemony', p. 143.

³⁷ Jürgen Haacke, 'Seeking Influence: China's Diplomacy Toward ASEAN After the Asian Crisis', *Asian Perspective*, 26 (2002), p. 27.

Regional management

The growing regional dimension in the foreign policy of each of the three major powers is examined here, in order to measure the potential willingness to seek a regional balance of interests among the three major powers.³⁸ Whether or not there is in fact emerging a 'collective East Asian identity' or a 'starting point' for community,³⁹ the US, Japan and China are beginning to share a greater interest in shaping regional dynamics.

The US

During the past decade, the US has begun to formalise its recognition of East Asia, notably underpinned by the *East Asia Strategy Report* of 1998 and the concept of the US presence as a 'stabilizing role' within the region.⁴⁰ This formulation was built upon extensive discussions during the late 1990s about the US approach towards developing forms of multilateralism. Following the events of 11 September 2001 and the start of the campaign against global terrorism, the US administration has increasingly come to embrace the idea of the region of East Asia in its foreign policy, and since the New York terrorist attacks in particular has been actively pursuing greater democratisation and the rejection of radical Islam.⁴¹ In October 2002, following their first meeting since 1984, the US and ASEAN announced the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) in a move designed to enhance the US level of regional engagement and act, according to the United States Trade Representative (USTR) that formulated it, as a stabilising regional force. US interest in developing free trade agreements (FTAs) with East Asian partners, since its first FTA with Singapore in November 2002, may also be seen in the context of deepening ties with and among regional states and a means of intensifying anti-terrorist activities.⁴² This positive view regards regional integration as a way of promoting free trade and has been encouraged by Japan and China's own decisions to look again at bilateral FTAs.⁴³ At the same time, the effects of the war against terrorism also prompted a new approach to China, which was no longer to be regarded as the key threat in the region.⁴⁴

There is a greater sense both within the US and in East Asia itself that Washington cannot manage the region alone and that the US presence cannot and should not be a unilateral one. Today, the image of the US as a cap in the bottle of regional tensions is tempered by the reality of an over-stretched US forward deployment by a government with an impatient electorate and other issues on the agenda, not least the

³⁸ Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Regionalism and Asia', *New Political Economy*, 5 (2000), p. 357.

³⁹ Markus Hund, 'ASEAN Plus Three: Towards a New Age of Pan-East Asian Regionalism? A Skeptic's Appraisal', *The Pacific Review*, 16 (2003), pp. 384 and 394.

⁴⁰ Solomon and Drennan, 'The United States and Asia in 2001', p. 2.

⁴¹ William W. Tow, *Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations: Seeking Convergent Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. vii.

⁴² *International Herald Tribune*, 4 November 2002.

⁴³ See 'The US-Japan-China Triangle: Who's the Odd Man Out?' Available on wwics.si.edu/topics/pubs/asia_rpt113.pdf, accessed on 13 July 2006.

⁴⁴ Morton Abramowitz and Stephen Bosworth, 'Adjusting to the New Asia', *Foreign Affairs*, 82 (2003), p. 126.

war in Iraq and the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. Indeed, the war on terrorism has shifted the strategic environment and lessened complaints about unipolar tendencies and missile defence which previously characterised the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation meetings. Concurrently, there remains within Japan and China a wariness over the US inclusion of North Korea within its 'axis of evil' and over the prospect that the US could negatively affect the security of the region. For this reason, too, previous Chinese fears that the removal of US bases from Japan and South Korea would lead to Japanese remilitarisation and Sino-Japanese confrontation have been muted to a large extent, and the desire for greater collaboration becomes more evident through a process of 'wary but creeping reconciliation'.⁴⁵

If the 20th century was marked by the struggles among the powers, we now have an opportunity to define a new pattern of cooperation in Northeast Asia, while addressing common challenges *as a group*.⁴⁶

The US approach to the region has focused on a number of forums, notably the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. Since the anti-terrorism campaign began in earnest in Southeast Asia, the US has seen an opportunity to use regional forums to further its own ends and has, for example, initiated workshops on anti-terrorism within the ARF.⁴⁷ These, and support for the APT, offer not only a 'means of integrating the Chinese into the norms of international society', but also one channel for socialisation.⁴⁸ However, these institutional structures offer only a loose framework for interaction and reside more broadly within a generic, but growing rhetoric of region as part of a 'growing pattern of security pluralism', enshrined in the agenda of the Department of State's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.⁴⁹ This rhetorical underpinning is most prominent in US attempts to balance relations with Japan and China; thus, assurances that the US relationship with Japan remains central to Washington's interests in East Asia are now complemented by US claims that the relationship with China is increasingly complex and should not be encapsulated by simple terms of rivalry or misunderstanding.⁵⁰ This complex trilateral interaction is visible in the thorny issue of the Taiwan Straits, which concerns all three states.

Mutual concern over Taiwan increased US–Japan defence cooperation, eliciting initial fears in China of resurgent Japanese militarism and an extension of Japan's military responsibilities to new geographical areas.⁵¹ It also raised the suspicion in China that Japan would ultimately side with the US in the protection of Taiwan, were China to take any actions towards Taipei. The Japanese government has made it clear that it does not want to become embroiled in such a conflict, but it would be

⁴⁵ Solomon and Drennan, 'The United States and Asia in 2001', p. 11; Abramowitz and Bosworth, 'Adjusting to the New Asia', p. 121.

⁴⁶ Reiss, 'Remarks to the Asia Foundation', italics added.

⁴⁷ Matt McDonald, 'US Hegemony, the War on Terror and Security in the Asia-Pacific', in Anthony Burke and Matt McDonald (eds.), *Critical Security in the Asia-Pacific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2007).

⁴⁸ Yahuda, 'Chinese Dilemmas', p. 201.

⁴⁹ See (<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/easr98>), accessed on 1 July 2006.

⁵⁰ R. G. Schriver, Statement before the Congressional Executive Commission on China, Washington DC, 3 June 2004. Available on (www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2004/33126.htm), accessed on 28 June 2004. See also Cossa, 'The US Asia-Pacific Security Strategy', p. 242; cf. Reiss, Remarks to the Asia Foundation.

⁵¹ Hook et al., *Japan's International Relations*, pp. 138–41.

implicitly, if not explicitly, implicated, so long as it retains its current Security Treaty ties with the US.⁵² For the Japanese government, the Taiwan issue has been viewed as a means of leverage for China to improve relations with the US. At the same time, however, both Japan and China tacitly regard the US presence in the region as a means of reducing tension over Taiwan and are keen to maintain this delicate triadic balancing, which is also increasingly evident with regard to the case of North Korea. The Six Party Talks saw all of North Korea's neighbours take their seats at the same table, in order to present both opportunities and demands to Pyongyang. The then US Secretary of State Colin Powell defined the issue as 'primarily a regional problem for the North Pacific community of which we are a part' and noted that the US and key East Asian partners 'speak with a common voice.'⁵³ When North Korea renewed its test firing of missiles on 4 July 2006, the US supported Japan's initial calls for economic sanctions, but was also careful to work closely with the Chinese in backing China's bid for informal six-party talks.⁵⁴ President Bush, who had previously asserted that the US would keep open the military option when it came to North Korea, refrained from repeating the phrase when asked about it during an hour-long news conference.⁵⁵ Indeed, the 2006 response was quite different from that following the 1997 crisis, when, on the one hand, the US contemplated action to shoot down North Korean missiles and, on the other, was highly critical of the non-binding UN censure of 1998.⁵⁶ Since then, moreover, Japan and China have shared a mutual concern over the belligerent US stance towards North Korea and for this reason the 2006 negotiations represent a significant step towards cooperation. In July 2006, US envoy Christopher Hill worked closely with his Japanese and Chinese counterparts to broker a common strategy and urge Pyongyang to drop a boycott of six-party negotiations.⁵⁷ As a result, the newspapers were awash with declarations of Washington's diplomatic approach to the North Korean issue.⁵⁸ Following a meeting in South Korea, Hill noted:

My mission here is not to get sanctions. My mission here is to make sure that we can all speak with one voice to deal with this real provocative action by the North Koreans.⁵⁹

At a press conference in Germany en route to the G8 in Russia, President Bush reiterated the need for a common solution to the crisis, whilst Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters that North Korea would have no choice in the face of 'international unity'.⁶⁰ After severe initial differences between Japan and China, the compromise UN resolution issued from eagerness by the US and its two principal allies in Asia to find a common solution. This reflects Mastanduno's 'concerted response', which, as he notes, removes the US further away from its former strategy to 'keep potential rivals at bay'.⁶¹ In these ways, then, the growing

⁵² Kang, 'Getting Asia Wrong', p. 78.

⁵³ Reiss, Remarks to the Asia Foundation.

⁵⁴ *International Herald Tribune*, 9 July 2006.

⁵⁵ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2006-07/09/content_636921.htm, accessed on 10 July 2006.

⁵⁶ <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13361343>, accessed on 10 July 2006.

⁵⁷ *International Herald Tribune*, 10 July 2006.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 July 2006.

⁵⁹ http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/nst/Friday/Columns/20060707075249/Article/index_html, accessed on 10 July 2006.

⁶⁰ *Financial Times*, 16 July 2006.

⁶¹ Mastanduno, 'Incomplete Hegemony', pp. 153 and 155.

pattern of security pluralism appears to offer a platform for greater regional cooperation and signals both an increased interest by the US in working with its regional partners in East Asia, and an additional channel through which to effect a pluralist agenda.

Japan

Given Japan's difficult historical relations with the rest of East Asia and the postwar isolation from its neighbours as a result of its close bilateral ties to the US, it is no surprise that a *rapprochement* with the rest of the region occurred only from the 1970s.⁶² Following a loosening of US ties, expanding economic dominance and proliferation of regional multilateralism, more recently the Japanese government, particularly under Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, has made concerted attempts to re-engage ASEAN.⁶³ At the beginning of 2002 Koizumi set out on a major tour of Southeast Asia, where he appealed to his regional counterparts to develop a 'community that acts together [and] advances together'. Similarly, the August 2002 proposal for an Initiative for Development in East Asia (IDEA) derived from a Japanese desire to strengthen regional cooperation, whilst ASEAN leaders observed that it would be a useful means for enhancing Japan's own commitment to what it regards as its regional responsibilities.⁶⁴ In part, this change responds to the outcomes of the Asian financial crisis from 1997, which thrust the very nature of regionalism into the limelight and forced Japan to consider its responsibilities towards the rest of East Asia. As a result, Japan launched its plan for an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) in 1997 that was rejected by both the US and China, largely because they did not wish Japan to garner greater leadership credentials.⁶⁵ Since that time, however, there has been considerable East Asian support for Tokyo to develop alternative AMF-type proposals, which include the Miyazawa Initiative of October 1998, pledging a US\$30 bn loan package for Asia, and the May 2000 Chiang Mai Initiative, to expand ASEAN's Swap Arrangement and establish a network of bilateral swap arrangements among China, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN. From a Japanese perspective, these events led the Japanese government to realise that 'Japan cannot escape from the convergence of Asian nations'.⁶⁶ FTAs have also offered new opportunities for Japan in the region and the Japanese government has been careful to observe that they represent a strategic significance for the region as a whole.

Japan's regional strategy, too, is based upon coordinating its relations with its trilateral partners and the government has been very careful to include China in any discussions with Southeast Asia, whilst balancing Chinese influence in that part of Asia and actions within the region. Whether or not it channels its relations through

⁶² Hook et al., *Japan's International Relations*, passim.

⁶³ Sudo, *The International Relations of Japan and South East Asia*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Julie Gilson, 'Complex Regional Multilateralism: Strategising Japan's Response to Southeast Asia', *The Pacific Review*, 17 (2004), pp. 71–94.

⁶⁵ Christopher W. Hughes, 'Japanese Policy and the East Asian Currency Crisis: Abject Defeat or Quiet Victory', *Review of International Political Economy*, 7 (2000), pp. 219–53; Ming Wan, *Japan Between Asia and the West* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), p. 89; Hook et al., *Japan's International Relations*, pp. 226–7.

⁶⁶ *The Financial Times*, 26 June 2002.

formal institutions, the Japanese state now adopts a consciously collective leadership posture in order to engage Beijing in a framework of strategic trust and in close collaboration with the US, in a manner that is resonant of the security pluralism sought by the US.⁶⁷ This loose, nonbinding form of collective responsibility also forestalls the need for closer institutionalisation of which Japan, like the US and China, is wary, and explains, for example, Tokyo's welcoming response to the East Asian Summit in its very limited institutionalised form.⁶⁸ Despite eschewing institutionalised forms of regional integration, the Japanese government, nevertheless, actively promotes its regional credentials, and the very idea of East Asia looms large in policy speeches and documents. Prime Minister Koizumi himself frequently noted that Sino-Japanese relations must be advanced in parallel to relations with other parts of the region, as part of a broader scheme of cooperation. And at their 'Sayonara Summit' in June 2006, Koizumi and Bush celebrated a 'new US-Japan Alliance of Global Cooperation for the 21st Century', designed to promote peace and stability within the region as a whole.⁶⁹ This rhetorical regionalism, moreover, facilitates Japan's 'passive leadership' role within East Asia and enables Japan to move towards joint leadership through its growing, loosely constituted networks centred around the roles of the US and China.⁷⁰ When the *tsunami* occurred in December 2004, Prime Minister Koizumi stated:

Japan has, as a fellow Asian partner, fostered partnership and solidarity with other Asian countries. The pains felt by Asian countries are our own pains. Disaster in Asia is nothing but ours as well.⁷¹

Indeed, Koizumi used Japan's response to the crisis as a means of demonstrating in tangible terms how Japan wanted to play a role 'commensurate with its responsibilities as a fellow Asia partner'.⁷² Although still wary of China and conscious of growing US-China ties, more and more frequently Japan participates alongside both of them in addressing specific regional concerns:

To the extent that Japan is concerned, if not preoccupied, with these other kinds of threats, they will be reflected in Tokyo's overall policies toward Beijing, thereby inevitably affecting US-Japan interactions over China.⁷³

When the North Koreans test-fired missiles over the Sea of Japan in July 2006, Japan immediately called for sanctions and imposed limited economic sanctions against

⁶⁷ Hund, 'ASEAN Plus Three', p. 394; Webber, 'Two Funerals and a Wedding?', p. 359.

⁶⁸ 'Press Conference by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi following the ASEAN+3, Japan-ASEAN and EAS Summit Meetings.' Available at (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/eas/press0512.html>), accessed on 25 July 2006.

⁶⁹ 'Japan-US Summit Meeting: The Japan-US Alliance of the New Century'. Available at (www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/summit0606.html), accessed on 10 July 2006.

⁷⁰ *The Japan Times*, 4 April 2002; Wan, *Japan Between Asia and the West*, p. 94; Sudo, *The International Relations of Japan and South East Asia*, p. 117.

⁷¹ 'Address by Junichiro Koizumi Prime Minister of Japan at the Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on the Aftermath of Earthquake and Tsunami, Jakarta, Indonesia, 6 January 2005. Available at (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/pmv0501/address.html>), accessed on 10 August 2006.

⁷² *The Herald Sun*, 1 January 2005. The input of the US was also central to Japan's own response. Not only did the Japanese agree immediately to join the US-led relief effort rather than focus uniquely on the UN, but it also raised its own pledge from US\$30 m to US\$500 m as emergency assistance when the US raised its commitment to US\$350 m. See (<http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/01/01/japan.relief.pledge>), accessed on 12 August 2006.

⁷³ Sato, *Japan's China Perceptions*, p. 14.

Pyongyang, including a measure prohibiting its officials, ship crews and chartered flights from entering Japan.⁷⁴ It proposed a draft UN resolution to require states to prevent the transfer of money, material or technology that could contribute to Pyongyang's ballistic missile programme or advance its capacity to develop nuclear explosives or other weapons of mass destruction, whilst pushing for the resumption of the Six Party Talks. Despite this firm position, however, Tokyo later agreed to the compromise brokered with China over the UN resolution, in contrast to the unilateral Japanese decision following the 1998 test-firing to suspend its participation in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development (KEDO) programme.⁷⁵ In July 2006, Defence Agency chief Fukushima Nukaga emphasised the centrality of regional stability in the resolution of the crisis and the government's desire to achieve a binding resolution.⁷⁶ Thus, the Japanese government, even in the face of immediate threat such as that posed by North Korea, is more actively seeking a concerted response with its key regional allies. Strategic regionalism serves Japanese foreign policy in two important ways: it facilitates a benign regional focus that permits Japan to assume the economic and security roles increasingly demanded of it by still wary neighbours; and it offers the means of countering both tensions with China and concerns over growing US–China dialogue.

China

For its part, China has changed many of its approaches to the other states of East Asia in recent years. In particular, although its relations with Japan continue to be dogged by historical animosities, trade with Tokyo has increased considerably; for example, in the first half of 2002, total Japan–China trade rose 3.4 per cent to a record US\$45.12 bn, with about 17.8 per cent of Japan's imported goods coming from China, compared to 18.2 per cent from the US. For the first time since the ending of the war, moreover, imports from China to Japan exceeded those from the US, making China the largest import country to Japan.⁷⁷ The ending of the Cold War has also reduced many of the constraints on Sino-Japanese relations and there has even been a growth in defence cooperation, whilst their respective engagement with the regional US presence continues to influence Sino-Japanese relations. Regarding security matters, Yahuda observes that Japan and China still feel 'more comfortable in discussing these issues with Washington', whilst the sometimes difficult relationship between the US and China may occasionally be more easily couched within the context of regional concerns, particularly in light of growing US pressure in the

⁷⁴ *New York Times*, 5 July 2006. Available at (<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/05/world/asia/05missile.html?hp&ex=1152072000&en=fa54ce789c81c127&ei=5094&partner=homepage>), accessed on 10 August 2006.

⁷⁵ 'Announcement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary on Japan's immediate response to North Korea's missile launch', 1 September 1998. Available at (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1998/9/901-2.html>), accessed on 10 July 2006.

⁷⁶ *The Japan Times*, 6 July 2006; see also 'State Department Says North Korea Diplomatic Effort Moving to UN', at (<http://www.voanews.com/english/2006-07-13-voa60.cfm>), accessed on 10 July 2006.

⁷⁷ JETRO, Press Release 11 and 20 August 2003. Available on (www.jetro.go.jp/re/e/asia-di), accessed on 12 December 2005.

region since 2001.⁷⁸ Moreover, despite the fact that the 1997 revision of defence guidelines between Japan and the US elicited Chinese concerns that Japan could be aiming to play a greater military role, the Chinese attempted a new strategy of 'smile diplomacy' towards Japan in 1999–2000, and a new approach from China after 2001 served to attenuate concerns over Japan's support for the US and fears of renewed Japanese militarism.⁷⁹ In these ways, China and Japan have found a new level of accommodation, which has 'evolved within tolerable boundaries', to permit them to work on the relationship as a whole, rather than to become enmeshed in particularly difficult issues, such as the textbook controversies, which saw a resurgence at the start of the twenty-first century.⁸⁰ China has also been seeking to improve its relations with the US and in a meeting with then US National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing observed that the two sides have developed a momentum in their dialogue.⁸¹ For China in particular, closer linkages with the US also derive from a reduced perception of threat between China and the US, and from a reduction in China's hostility to US involvement in the region.⁸² More broadly, Chinese agreement to sign the Amity Treaty with ASEAN was intended to reassure China's Southeast Asian neighbourhood over its economic, political and security ambitions.⁸³ To date ASEAN has been cautiously amenable to such overtures and China has been responding positively to many of ASEAN's multilateral proposals, including the East Asian Summit. Indeed, in a speech in July 2004, entitled 'Multilateralism, the Way to Respond to Threats and Challenges', former Vice Premier Qian Qichen declared the need to address contemporary issues in a comprehensive and collective manner.⁸⁴ Simultaneously, China's changing cultural agenda now witnesses an increased number of Chinese students preferring to pursue degrees in Southeast Asia rather than in the US. For the states of ASEAN themselves, there is a sense that cooperation is the only way forward in dealing with China, and as a result such projects are strongly encouraged.⁸⁵ Similarly, Beijing's response to the financial crisis of 1997 was welcomed by other states in the region and represented the start of a Chinese approach that was more open to multilateral cooperation.⁸⁶ In the aftermath of these warmer responses, China has been a strong supporter of new regional agreements, such as the Chiang Mai Initiative, the APT and FTAs, and in November 2002 even proposed the study of a possible joint FTA with Japan and South Korea, whilst the deal formally to implement the China-

⁷⁸ Yahuda, 'Chinese Dilemmas', p. 195.

⁷⁹ Hook et al., *Japan's International Relations*, passim; *Straits Times*, 27 September 2003.

⁸⁰ 'The US–Japan–China Triangle: Who's the Odd Man Out?'

⁸¹ Miyado Daigo, 'Responding to Southeast Asia', in Wolf Mendl (ed.), *Japan and Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 269; 'Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing Holds Talks with Rice', 9 July 2004. Available at <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zjzg/bmdyzs/gjlb/3432/3433/t142528.htm>>, accessed on 10 August 2006.

⁸² Harvey J. Feldman, 'The United States-PRC Relationship', in Tien and Cheng, *The Security Environment*, p. 29; Yahuda, 'Chinese Dilemmas', p. 202.

⁸³ *The Straits Times*, 27 September 2003.

⁸⁴ Qian Qichen, 'Multilateralism, the Way to Respond to Threats and Challenges', 2 July 2004. Available at <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zjzg/gjs/gjxw/t142393.htm>>, accessed on 13 July 2004.

⁸⁵ *Business Weekly*, 26 October 2004; 'Sino-ASEAN FTA Nears Final Stage', 26 October 2004. Available at <www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/26/content386386.htm>, accessed on 10 August 2006.

⁸⁶ Haacke, 'Seeking Influence', p. 27.

ASEAN free trade area (FTA) starting from 2005 was signed in Vientiane at the APT summit in November 2004.⁸⁷

In terms of regional concerns, China shares the limited, but growing interests of the US and Japan in wanting to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula and to expand links with the states of ASEAN. Like its triadic neighbours, it supports multilateral forums in the region with cautious approval, and seeks community projects with a small c.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, gatherings such as APEC provide China with a channel for dialogue with, *inter alia*, the US and Japan.⁸⁹ Moreover, China's changing stance towards regional monetary integration more generally has become more positive, and as it seeks new markets, trade and investment for its growing economy, Prime Minister Wen has even advocated the development of an EU-style union in East Asia. Such overtures are motivated in part by the need to secure raw materials and markets, as well as to engage more fully in multilateral regional affairs and enhancing collaboration with the other key states in the region.⁹⁰ In response to the *tsunami* of 2004, the *LA Times* observed China's actions as illustrating an eagerness 'to recast itself as a kinder and gentler neighbor', and a number of China watchers concluded that China's cooperative stance represents an attempt to enhance its regional stature, to assume the mantle of East Asian great power, and to transform its rhetoric of regional participation into meaningful contributions.⁹¹ For China, its participation in the response to this regional crisis was seen to hinge on its comparative response to that of Japan and the US and its presentation in terms of regional cooperation. Similarly, Chinese responses to the North Korean test-firing of missiles in July 2006 aimed at securing a binding and common solution. Countering Japan's initial position, China proposed an informal gathering which could allow the North technically to stand by its boycott, but simultaneously to meet with the other five parties. Importantly, however, Chinese propositions were carefully aired in a way to pledge 'constructive efforts' to resolve the crisis, whilst the lack of response to Chinese overtures from Pyongyang also convinced the Beijing administration to maintain a united front with its key regional allies.⁹² Thus, although the nature of Chinese engagement with the rest of the region is still under construction, the growth in regionally based dialogue is gaining momentum.⁹³ What is more, China is able to utilise the regional context, both to balance its bilateral relations with Japan and the US, and to serve as a foundation for its international status.⁹⁴ Still wary of the actions of Washington and Tokyo at times, the Chinese government has begun to show a willingness to promote joint leadership, more akin to the explicit form of joint management foreseen by its 1998 plans for a new security concept.⁹⁵ This approach

⁸⁷ 'The US–Japan–China Triangle: Who's the Odd Man Out?', *Business Weekly*, 26 October 2004. If realised, the agreement would create a free trade area of 1.7 bn people, generating a regional GDP of about US\$2 tn per year.

⁸⁸ Evans, 'Between Regionalism and Regionalization', pp. 214–15.

⁸⁹ Tow, *Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations*, p. 41.

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, 4 January 2005. Evans, 'Between Regionalism and Regionalization', p. 213; Alastair Johnston, 'China's International Relations: The Political and Security Dimensions', in Kim, *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, p. 90.

⁹¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 January 2005; *New York Times*, 4 January 2005.

⁹² *China Daily*, 10 July 2006. Available at (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-07/10/content_637520.htm), accessed on 15 July 2006.

⁹³ Sato, *Japan's China Perceptions*, p. 7.

⁹⁴ *China Daily*, 9 August 2003.

⁹⁵ Alagappa, 'Constructing Security Order', pp. 75–6.

mirrors the pluralist, multi-level strategies that have now been adopted by Japan and the US. Similarly, as China continues to search for 'comprehensive national power' to defend state interests, and adjusts to its position within international forums such as the WTO, it has also made concerted attempts towards association with the wider East Asian region.⁹⁶ For Haacke, this is part of a strategy to prevent collective containment against China, and it is clear that China can usefully consolidate its still 'fragile interdependence' through enhanced regional cooperation and socialisation.⁹⁷ In these ways, China has been moving towards limited but increased cooperation in multilateral forums within the region as part of a policy to engage with its neighbours in a broader context, as well as intensifying closer contact with Japan and the US directly. As the APT may be regarded as a stepping stone towards strategic trust between Japan and China, growing trilateral interaction may engender such limited trust to take root within the region more broadly.⁹⁸ It offers China a means to develop its brokering skills and presents a space for limited integration and socialisation.

ASEAN

The role of ASEAN is important in delimiting the contours of the region in which the three key states are active, and in acting as a balancer for trilateral activity.⁹⁹ ASEAN's relations with the three states are mixed, although it is most concerned about China's regional role, the potential for Sino-Japanese rivalry and uncertainty over the long-term commitment of the US to the region. Keen to engage China as a principal target of their security interests, ASEAN states are, nevertheless, also concerned at the lack of transparency in Beijing's behaviour, but cognisant of the fact that they cannot counterbalance any rise in Chinese strength without the cooperation of Japan and the US.¹⁰⁰ ASEAN states also share a concern over the future of relations with Japan and the possible decline of US–Japan ties and its consequences.¹⁰¹ Indeed, it is clear to many in ASEAN that any competition for influence within the region, and in Southeast Asia in particular, would be among the three triadic players.¹⁰²

It is for these reasons that ASEAN has an important role in a changing regional context that 'increasingly embeds interstate rivalries in more complex forms of interdependence and mutual vulnerability.'¹⁰³ Its member states recognise the value of redefining threat perceptions and developing new levels of mutual expectation through greater Japan–US–China engagement within the region, as well as through

⁹⁶ Tow, *Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations*, pp. 18–20.

⁹⁷ Calder, *Asia's Deadly Triangle*, pp. 112 and 124; Haacke, 'Seeking Influence', p. 27.

⁹⁸ Haacke, 'Seeking Influence', p. 67.

⁹⁹ Sudo, *The International Relations of Japan and South East Asia*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Hund, 'ASEAN Plus Three', p. 386; Buzan, 'Security Architecture in Asia', p. 153; David Wurfel (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the New World Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 294.

¹⁰¹ Peter J. Katzenstein and Martin Rouse, 'Japan as a Regional Power in Asia', in Mendl, *Japan and Southeast Asia*, p. 196.

¹⁰² Buzan, 'Security Architecture in Asia', p. 150; Yahuda, 'Chinese Dilemmas', p. 202.

¹⁰³ Greg Felker, 'ASEAN Regionalism and Southeast Asia', in Hsuing, *Twenty-First Century World Order*, p. 244.

a more conscious application of the region itself.¹⁰⁴ Since its 1992 summit, ASEAN has emphasised economic integration and the search for a greater voice as a grouping, and has become an important focal point for regional concerns, both at the state and sub-state level.¹⁰⁵ Its increased 'interconnectedness' during this period has not only enhanced its own renewed regional position, but also assisted in defining the terms of the region itself, by locating issues related to, for example, financial cooperation, trade, investment, or the Korean nuclear threat, in ways that are distinctly 'East Asian'.¹⁰⁶ Frameworks such as the ARF and the APT serve to enhance this regionalisation of issues.¹⁰⁷ Despite an ASEAN interest in growing institutional frameworks for the region, however, it is the normative underpinnings established by ASEAN which have gained greater acceptance in the regional context, and which have provided the bases for greater regional socialisation and for the very redefinition of the region itself.¹⁰⁸ It is clear, then, that ASEAN provides an important discursive and permissive force for collective action: it has developed a particular approach towards the idea of 'region', and at the same time has encouraged greater participation from the big three players in forums such as the ARF and in supporting the idea of an East Asian community.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

This article has sought to counter those commentators who forecast an inevitable, and inevitably hostile, tussle for hegemonic power in East Asia. Rather, it has argued that an increased significance of the region *per se* in the foreign policy agendas of the US, Japan and China now combines with a new form of triadic balancing that enables a contemporary form of regional joint leadership. On the one hand, it has emphasised the changing dynamics of regional identity and its growing relevance for individual foreign policies; on the other, it has examined the possibilities for changes to trilateral management. In terms of regional economic cooperation, regional leadership, regional rivalry and regional security management, it is clear that in many instances the region itself is becoming a central dimension of foreign policy considerations. This is not to suggest that the regional dimension supplants other foreign policy activities, but simply to note that it has become an increasingly important component in the foreign policy of these key three states in East Asia. This understanding of regionalism is not premised upon a recognition of institutional maturity and integration, but rather highlights the discourse of the region itself within the foreign policy lexicon of the key states it involves most centrally. The nature of the particular discourse may emanate from loosely constructed institutional parameters (in this case, ASEAN and, by extension, the APT), but they are not seen to constitute the central bases for the construction of region itself. Similarly, what is being witnessed is not so much a growth in regional consciousness, but the growing

¹⁰⁴ Michael R. Vatikiotis, 'Catching the Dragon's Tail: China and Southeast Asia in the 21st Century', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 25 (2003), pp. 65–78.

¹⁰⁵ Sudo, *The International Relations of Japan and South East Asia*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁶ T. J. Pempel, 'Conclusion', in Pempel (ed.), *Remapping East Asia*, pp. 272–3.

¹⁰⁷ Eero Palmujoki, *Regionalism and Globalism in Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 179.

¹⁰⁸ Acharya, 'Regional Institutions', p. 229.

¹⁰⁹ Palmujoki, *Regionalism and Globalism*, p. 180.

consciousness of a region and its value for policymakers in key states. As a result, the very notion of the region of East Asia is now widely accepted to exist in economic, political and, increasingly, security domains. The US, Japan and China now frequently adopt the discourse of region that derives from a growing mutual commitment for peace and security by the key players in particular areas of joint interest. Sudo summarises these conditions as a 'post-hegemonic era, punctuated by a surge of the new spirit of regionalism'.¹¹⁰

At the same time, the pursuit of trilateral interests among these three states may serve increasingly to solidify the very boundaries of the region itself. It is possible that this overlap of the triad and the region could localise the perception of threats and opportunities for the collective, and thereby set new parameters for understanding and joint leadership. Thus, whilst many analysts continue to draw conclusions about regional rivalry based on traditional trilateral interpretations, it is worth considering how the interplay of economic, political and security forces necessitates a diverse response to a regional agenda. As the exchanges among triadic powers are being revised, joint leadership in regional affairs remains a weak, but nascent concept. This growing regional focus and attention to mutual interests has yet to be formulated into a coherent trilateral strategy for regional leadership. Nevertheless, as the cases of post-financial crisis agreements and responses to the North Korean test-firing of missiles in July 2006 testify, the three-way competition among these states is increasingly redirected at the common goal of regional stability. Against this changing background, then, strategic regionalism may be a signal of developing reciprocal relations amongst the three major regional states and offer joint leadership as an extra layer of ownership to the stability of the region for which all key players are jointly responsible.¹¹¹ This structure facilitates a means of achieving mutual assurances and offers a supplementary way for balancing power interests within an explicitly regional context.¹¹² It is not focused on rules-based interaction, nor on institutions; rather, it issues from the realisation of the need for the joint management of the regional canvas and the peculiarities of trilateral interaction. For all three key states, the role of the region in their foreign policies has become more important: the US decision to focus on collective responses to significant issues, in a period in which its own strategy towards East Asia remains unclear, offers the space for Japan and China to carve out a role as joint managers of the region and to develop the brokering skills associated with entrepreneurial leadership.¹¹³ For the US, the regional dimension provides a multilateral setting for the pursuit of an increasingly varied and complex agenda, which incorporates new factors in a post-2001 environment. For China, the regional context offers a viable channel for limited integration and socialisation. The regional context similarly offers Japan the ability to balance closer moves towards a regional economic bloc that could alienate the US, with its ongoing bilateral relations with Washington.¹¹⁴ All three, through this mechanism for strategic cooperation, are able to define a comprehensive security agenda, comprising

¹¹⁰ Sudo, *The International Relations of Japan and South East Asia*, p. 117.

¹¹¹ Zhang and Montaperto, *A Triad of Another Kind*, p. 8.

¹¹² Gilson, 'Complex Regional Multilateralism', p. 75.

¹¹³ Rapkin, 'The United States, Japan, and the Power to Block', pp. 377–8; Haacke, 'Seeking Influence', p. 15.

¹¹⁴ Elliss E. Krauss, 'The US, Japan, and Trade Liberalization: From Bilateralism to Regional Multilateralism to Regionalism+', *The Pacific Review*, 16 (2003), p. 321.

economic, social and politico-military dimensions within a stable forum.¹¹⁵ In summary, set against a growing regional dynamic, the new triad of interaction allows China to be contained, the US to be retained and Japan to be restrained, within a mutually reinforcing network. Japan has been courting regional approbation, China has been seeking international recognition and the US has been looking for allies in its war on terror and for ways to repair damaged relations in the region. Austin and Harris observed in 2001 that 'the cold reality of a strategic triangle has been warmed somewhat by an emerging sense of trilateralism on certain issues'.¹¹⁶ Today, against a more clearly defined regional backdrop and with a greater mutual intensity of concern, the triad is slowly emerging as a more significant framework for regional stability. Facing an uncertain future, their collective management may indeed bring greater stability to the region of East Asia, particularly if the three continue to develop a joint understanding of the parameters of the region of East Asia and frame their strategies accordingly. But what that means for the other states of the region, especially ASEAN, and how that serves to address the economic, political and security concerns of each player has yet to be studied. It is by no means clear that the purported aim of regional security can be realised through these new approaches. For this reason, too, the very notion of triadic relations among the three states needs to be reconsidered, from the points of view of the identification of the region and the concept of joint leadership. Moreover, such joint actions may, in the medium to long term, have an important 'announcement effect' for the individual foreign policy choices of all three major powers within the region, as well as for the other states of the region.¹¹⁷ As the US, Japan and China navigate their respective pathways through complex and overlapping bilateral and international agenda, as resources become ever more stretched and demand infinite, a growing joint leadership approach in East Asia may not only be desirable but also increasingly necessary.

¹¹⁵ Katzenstein and Rouse, 'Japan as a Regional Power', p. 216.

¹¹⁶ Greg Austin and Stuart Harris, *Japan and Greater China* (London: Hurst and Co., 2001), p. 311.

¹¹⁷ Sato, *Japan's China Perceptions*, p. 22.