

The Awkwardness of Australian Engagement with Asia: The Dilemmas of Australian Idea of Regionalism

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Abstract

Australia has experienced difficulties engaging with Asia-Pacific regional integration. Despite Australian attempts to punch above its weight in regional forums and to be a regional leader, it is still not regarded as a full member or as quite fitting into the region. It is an ‘awkward partner’ in the Asian context, and has experienced the ‘liminality’ of being neither here nor there. The former Rudd government’s proposal for an ‘Asia Pacific Community’ (APC) by the year 2020 was a substantive initiative in Australia’s ongoing engagement with Asia. It has, however, attracted a high level of criticism both at home and abroad. The main critical analysis of the proposal has focused on institutional building or architecture, or its relationship with existing regional institutions, but overlooks a host of often fraught questions about culture, norms, identities, and international power relations. The APC concept needs to be scrutinized in terms of these questions with a critical eye. This paper examines the cultural, cognitive, and normative dimensions of Rudd’s proposal. It analyses four dilemmas or awkward problems that the APC faces.

1. Historical introduction

Australian ideas of the Asia Pacific region are historically deep-rooted. The first attempts to see Australia in the regional context can be traced back to around the time of the First World War. In 1917, a Pacific Branch within the Prime Minister’s Department was established. The ‘Pacific’ was the favoured terminology in the 1930s largely because the United States was part of the Pacific and this made Australia appear less vulnerable to Asia. The idea of the Pacific did not aim to promote Asian regional integration but rather offered protection from Asia (Walker, 1999).

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Australia has been a part of the English-speaking world and has developed and maintained relations mainly with the United Kingdom. Yet those ties have diminished within the last two decades. The end of the Cold War 'marked the emergence of a more fluid environment in the Asia-Pacific' (Mediansky, 1997), and thus 'a gradual shift in the orientation of Australia's external policy, from a global to a regional approach' (Thayer, 1997).

In the early 1970s, Gough Whitlam raised the idea of a comprehensive regional organization. In January 1989, Bob Hawke proposed an Asia Pacific economic grouping. Australian commitment to engagement with Asia has been reflected in the Fitzgerald (1988) Report on immigration, the Garnaut (1989) Report on Australian relations with Northeast Asia, and the Foreign Minister's Statement on Australia's Regional Security in 1989. In the 1980s, Australia inaugurated the process that led to the formation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization (APEC) in 1989.

The 1990s witnessed great effort by Australia to engage with the Asian region. Paul Keating (2000) made ground-breaking inroads in developing, promoting, and building an Asian Pacific Community in the 1990s. He devoted one whole book chapter to the idea of an Asian Pacific Community. According to Greg Sheridan's interpretation, Keating made a never previously matched comprehensive commitment to 'the Asianization of Australian life' (Milner, 1997). In 1995, Gareth Evans urged Australians to begin to think of themselves as living in 'an East Asian hemisphere nation'. In 1998, Stephen FitzGerald, the former ambassador to China, and Michael Wesley, now the director of the Lowy Institute think tank, proposed the creation of an Asian Community in North and Southeast Asia and Australasia. They envisioned a political association of East Asian nations by the 2020s, with Australia playing an active role. FitzGerald and Wesley (1998) suggested the creation of an 'Energy and Environment Community' in the region.

Australia has been a facilitator and driver of regional integration. Australia has played a key role in moving APEC towards the creative formula that allowed for the inclusion of the three Chinese entities (China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) in the organization from 1991. APEC has come to symbolize Australia's regional vision. It is an Australian initiative based on trade and investment liberalization, business facilitation, and economic and technical cooperation. Apart from being the originator of APEC, Australia has had a reputation as an honest broker, bringing together broad coalitions (e.g. APEC and the Cairns Group). Australia has been a promoter and supporter of peace-building in the region (e.g. in East Timor and the Solomon Islands) and an active participant in the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit (EAS).

Despite Australia's attempts to punch above its weight in regional forums and to become more entrenched in its region in terms of its trade and investment links, it is still not regarded as a full member or as quite fitting into the region. Australia has experienced difficulties with engaging in Asia-Pacific regional integration. Using Stephen George's term (1990), Australia is an 'awkward partner' in the Asian context, and, in the words of Higgott and Nossal (1997), has experienced the 'liminality' of being neither here nor there.

Kevin Rudd, the former Australian Prime Minister, called for the establishment of an Asia Pacific Community (APC) in his speech to the Asia Society, AustralAsia Centre on 4 June 2008 (Rudd, 2008a). His proposal for an APC by the year 2020 is a substantive initiative in Australia's ongoing engagement with Asia. Rudd's APC proposal reflects a long-standing Australian preference for the Pacific idea over the Asian idea of regionalism. It is Pacific-centric, holding a broad view of a geographic Asian region. Rudd's concept of Pacificism closely follows and expands the core idea of APEC. It can be seen as a deliberative design to serve the historical function of reassuring Australians that they are not alone in an Asian world, and as a wise strategy to avoid dealing with the question of whether or not Australia is an Asian country.

The APC proposal has, however, attracted a high level of criticism both at home and abroad. The main critical analysis of the proposal has focused on institutional building or architecture, or its relationship with existing regional institutions, but overlooks a host of often fraught questions about culture, norms, identities, and international power relations. The APC concept needs to be scrutinized in terms of these questions. This paper takes the Rudd initiative as a case study within a larger, long-standing and path-dependent Australian regionalist idea and approach. It examines the cultural, cognitive, and normative dimensions of Rudd's proposal. It analyses four dilemmas or awkward problems that the APC faces. These dilemmas are critical issues for Australian engagement with Asia, and must be dealt with if any attempt to revive or revise the idea of the APC is to be successful.

2. Rudd's proposal for an Asia Pacific Community

Key ideas of APC

APC is a grand, long-term vision for regional architecture. It embraces the concept of a regional institution spanning the entire Asia-Pacific region – including the United States, Japan, China, India, Indonesia, and the other states of the region. This regional institution, according to Rudd, is able to 'engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security' (Rudd, 2008a). In particular, the APC proposal includes the idea of a security community. Rudd argued that 'Australia would welcome the evolution of the Six Party Talks into a wider regional body to discuss confidence and security building measures in North East Asia and beyond' (Rudd, 2008a).

Rudd proposed a single regional institution to bring together discussions of economic, security, and social issues when he addressed a group of APEC CEOs in Singapore on 14 November 2009. In a December 2009 conference, Rudd softened the APC into an Asia Pacific community (APC), with a lower-case 'community'. But his main ideas remained the same (Murray, 2010).

Motivations

In his public speech, Rudd mentioned several motivational factors. First, Australia needs to develop comprehensive engagement with Asia. This is ‘a matter of historical recognition of the requirements of geographical proximity’ and ‘engaging with a region of global significance in its own right’. Second, Rudd claimed that we need strong and effective regional institutions that will underpin an open, peaceful, stable, prosperous, and sustainable region. The APC is needed to meet four challenges: enhancing a sense of a security community; developing a capacity to deal with terrorism, natural disasters and disease; enhancing non-discriminatory and open trading regimes across the region; and providing long-term energy, resource, and food security. Third, for Rudd, none of the existing regional mechanisms is capable of dealing with the above challenges. That is why Rudd (2008a) argues that ‘we should now begin the regional debate about where we want to be in 2020’.

One could take a cynical view of this however. APEC has been marginalized or overshadowed by the building of an East Asia Community. Because Australia is seen as an Asian outsider, Rudd’s initiative is merely to ‘secure a seat at the table’ (Heseltine, 2009). In Rudd’s terms, ‘we believe that we need to anticipate the historic changes in our region and seek to shape them; rather than simply reacting to them’ (Rudd, 2008a).

The pros and cons of APC

A number of arguments support Rudd’s proposal. Current regional institutions are seen to be too passive, weak, and fragmented. The general level of satisfaction with existing cooperative mechanisms in the Asian region is low. There is currently no regional body to cover what Rudd (2008a) calls ‘the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation, and action on economic and political matters and future challenges to security’. Thayer (2009) notes that the APC is aimed at overcoming the compartmentalization of existing regional institutions.

Criticisms of the proposal can be easily made. Jia Qingguo (2009) outlines major problems that will make it a hard sell. Rudd is not clear on what the Asia Pacific region looks like and on the relationship between the APC and existing bilateral and multilateral arrangements in the region. Thayer (2009) notes military alliances will be a major problem. It will be difficult to build a viable APC dealing with security matters when some members are allies and others not. If it is to be a multilateral security community, then the US military alliances may need to be disbanded (Thayer, 1997).

The mixed reaction from Asia

Rudd’s proposal received a mixed response from Asia. Rudd’s special envoy, Richard Woolcott (2009), noted that there was broad agreement for a discussion on the issue and that most believed the APC would provide an effective single forum for leaders to discuss political, economic, and security matters. However, there was no appetite for additional institutions. Reception to the original proposal was polite and non-committal, but reaction to the 2009 Sydney meeting was less than polite. Initially,

Rudd offended Singapore by leaving them off the list of core ASEAN member countries (Heseltine, 2009). Singapore expressed strong criticism, venting their disapproval (Koh, 2009).

Theo Sambuaga, chairman of House Commission, who oversees defense and foreign affairs in Indonesia, argued that an APC would be ineffective. Primo Alui Joelianto, the director general for Asia-Pacific and African Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, said that instituting an APC would be tremendously difficult (Hotland, 2008). On 20 June 2008, Pranab Mukherjee, the Indian External Affairs Minister, said that he knew little of the APC proposal. A few days later, he said he would 'watch with interest', but remained non-committal on the APC (*The Times of India*, 24 June 2008).

Some Australian commentators have been quite scathing in their assessment of Rudd's proposal. Heseltine expressed dismay at what he calls the 'remarkably vague' details of the APC, declaring it doomed from the beginning. In light of Singapore's response, Rudd started off on the wrong foot with his 'hasty announcement' of the initiative in 2008 (Heseltine, 2009). Likewise, White (2009) argues that the APC is a distraction from the most urgent problems in the region, suggesting that it is easier to float forums than to promote a new Asian order.

Failure

Despite the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's claim that the inclusion of the US and India in the East Asia Summit is a sign of the practical success of the idea of the APC, Rudd's APC has failed. In talking with George Yeo, Singapore's Foreign Minister in June 2010, Rudd said he was now 'quite happy to leave ASEAN to discuss how the original configuration should evolve'. He conceded that the region is not interested in his proposal of an APC (Callick, 2010). The failure of the APC is largely due to the fact that the idea was a fundamental challenge to the ASEAN-centric approach to Asia-Pacific regionalism. It would have caused offence in many ASEAN states, regardless of how it had been put forward. Nevertheless, Rudd failed to consult with Asian leaders before his announcement of the APC. Rudd's unilateral announcement of the APC seems to violate the ASEAN norm of 'talk quietly, consultation first' or 'seeking consensus first'. The failure is also due to its flawed presuppositions, or from a broader perspective, a number of awkward dilemmas associated with it, which will be examined below.

3. The Dilemma in Power relations

Asian regionalism has thus far been middle-power driven. ASEAN has centred upon the small and medium powers and drawn the great powers into a framework of voluntary restraint. ASEAN creatively used the tension between China and Japan to develop the ASEAN plus Three model later on, by inviting India, Australia, and New Zealand to balance the influence of China. Acharya argues that weaker actors acquire a voice through regionalism that they would otherwise lack if they were unilateral or aligned with major powers (Acharya, 2005).

The regional context, in which smaller and middle powers have been more suspicious of the big powers' agendas, provided a golden opportunity for Australia to put forward new ideas for the region. Despite this, the Australian idea of regionalism has been constrained by Australia's position in relation to the great powers in the region. Australia lacks resources and capacity to shape regional norms. In the context of a balance between great powers being a precondition of effective regionalism, Australia is caught between greater powers in the region. It favours Pacificism, which is a concept that includes the US in the region, but in doing so it creates a problem for developing closer relations with China. In short, the structure of international relations, regional hierarchy, and power relations in Asia impacted the way in which the APC proposal was initiated and received. As White (2009) points out, a new set of relations between the major powers needs to be established before Rudd's APC can be achieved.

US factor

Regionalization has a dual function: it both constrains and enhances power. Great powers often resist deepening regionalization for fear that it will constrain their power. In this context, the US is reluctant to develop genuine regionalism in the Asia-Pacific (Boutin, 2011).

The lack of open and strong support from the US for the APC is one key factor that contributed to its failure. Historically, the success of APEC was due to the active support the proposal received from the Clinton government. Originally, Hawke's idea of APEC excluded the US, but he quickly added it. In contrast, it was only in 2010 that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton openly acknowledged that she was 'influenced by Kevin Rudd's very strong argument on behalf of an Asia-Pacific community' (Sheridan, 2010). The leaked US embassy cables revealed that it was Woolcott who undermined the APC in the eyes of the US by candidly telling the US Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick, how little preparation had gone into it (Dorling, 2010).

The US is a global power that makes regionalism workable if only indirectly. US power has penetrated into East Asia for centuries, contributing to both regional peace and the division of East Asia. Asians must achieve regionalism under the condition that it will not undermine US domination. Asian regionalism must 'supplement' the US position, not go against it. Ralph A. Cossa has said: 'Any effort that is perceived at undermining US bilateral dealings and especially those that seek to diminish or replace America's key bilateral security alliances, are sure to be rejected by Washington both today and by any future administration' (Cossa *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, the US has given unflinching support to APEC but rejected Mahathir's East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) agenda. The EAEC, former Secretary of State James Becker warned, 'would disrupt the Pacific linkage that APEC seeks to build.' Japan was subsequently cautioned not to cooperate with the group (*Japan Times*, 12 and 13 November 1991).

Australia's ties with the United States have persisted and withstood critical tests over time. Australia has continued to rely on the US for regional security. Australia's unwillingness to choose between identification with Asia and engagement with the

United States has negative repercussions: 'leaning strongly towards the US . . . Australia could disqualify itself from participating in some of the developing East Asian consultations' (FitzGerald *et al.*, 1997: 22). This may be quite damaging for Australian relations with the region. Australia certainly appears to be trying to get the best of both worlds. Its unwillingness to fully identify with Asia deprives its push for ASEAN membership of credibility. The continued ambivalence of some Australians, and some Australian policy makers, towards close relations with Asia *vis-à-vis* those with the US, only reinforces existing cultural barriers.

China factor

The real test of the APC is how to engage and integrate with China. Rudd's proposal for the formation of an Asia-Pacific Community is an important part of his attempts to accommodate China's rise in the region in a way that is as smooth and free from tension as possible. For Rudd, one of the keys to engaging with China is 'to encourage China's active participation in efforts to maintain, develop and become integrally engaged in global and regional institutions, structures and norms' (Rudd, 2008b). The APC proposal aims to build a framework for multilateral regional cooperation where security, economic, and political issues can all be discussed in the same institutional context (Rudd, 2008a).

Australia hopes that the US will lead Asia Pacific regionalism to balance the power of China. There are fears that the rise of China and its influence on regional affairs will reduce not only America's influence, but Japan's. When regionalism is designed to socialize China, to counter-balance China's influence, and to prevent it from becoming the dominant power, it is likely to meet subtle opposition from China. China, as Heseltine (2009: 5) asserts, 'will be wary of any new structure that it fears might be designed to diffuse its influence in the region, especially as the existing arrangements, which limit the role of other big powers such as the United States and India, place China in an advantageous position'.

Beijing did not voice its support for the APC, despite Woolcott's vigorous lobbying. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said diplomatically that China welcomed all proposals that would promote regional cooperation without specifying any concrete response (*The Jakarta Post*, 5 June 2008). China's cautious attitude can be understood in the context of earlier regional events. In 2005, Australia's involvement in the East Asian Summit was supported by the US in an effort to balance China's influence. China was disillusioned with the EAS in 2005 because it was too 'pan-Asian'. One scholar-official said that Beijing found it is difficult to develop pragmatic collaboration projects in broader frameworks like ASEAN plus Six and the EAS.

In short, Australia faces the dilemma of being caught up in the power rivalry between the US and China. Australia is put in an awkward position in which an Asian version of regionalism favours China but disadvantages the US, while a Pacific version of regionalism favours the US but disadvantages China. In the past, Australian advocacy of APEC faced strong resistance from Malaysia. Any future regional proposal by Australia

must win support from China. This can be achieved easily if China and the US develop a win-win strategy, but Canberra is likely to face an awkward situation if the two powers compete to promote different visions of regional order.

Japan and ASEAN

The APC also encountered a challenge from Japan. In 2009, the then prime minister, Yukio Hatoyama, proposed an East Asian Community based on the European Union model that rivalled the APC. This rivalry between Australia and Japan reminds us of an old rivalry between Malaysia and Australia in the 1990s when both nations put forward different proposals for Asian regionalism. Finally, the APC faces another challenge from ASEAN. The view of some ASEAN countries that the APC would undermine and reduce their power and influence led them to reject the APC.

4. The dilemma of pacificism

The above regional hierarchy of power relations is a geopolitical condition under which Australia has always preferred a broad, ocean-centered conception of the Asia-Pacific region. Pacificism acknowledges the important role of the US, but avoids the sensitive question of Australia's identity in the region. This gives rise to another awkward situation in which Australia prefers to promote Pacificism, despite being geographically part of Asia, and therefore inevitably confronts the question of how to deal with the various persistent indigenous ideas of Asianism.

'Asia-Pacific' and 'East Asia' are the two core terms around which different regional identities are constructed. Conceptualized as 'Pacificism' and 'Asianism', they offer different ideas of regional order and vary in scope, boundaries, and directions (Wesley, 2009). The idea of Pacific-centric regionalism was invented and promoted by the US and adopted by Australia. Originally, the idea of the Pacific Rim was geological, and then began to be used in the security context in the 1960s. Pacific-centric regionalism came into being in the mid-1970s driven by US capitalism and was adopted in Australia and New Zealand in the later 1970s (Leon, 1995; Connery, 1995). It was later materialized in the form of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Australia is geographically located both in the Asia and the Pacific. It has to build regional groups with Asia and the US. This is the fate of Australia. It is the reason why the Rudd government favours the idea of an Asia-Pacific community that engages both America and Oceania. Defining the region in Pacific terms has a dual effect: whilst the United States remains engaged, the Asian economies are taken advantage of. Its aim to form a large community rules out the difficult question of having to choose between Asia and the US because all are a part of an Asia-Pacific community.

Different versions of Pacificism have been held by many leaders and scholars in Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Singapore. Nevertheless, most Asians implicitly hold a continental notion of regionalism. In the early nineteenth century, Japan, India, and China developed different versions of Pan-Asianism (He, 2004). In the 1980s and 1990s, Mahathir's EAEC offered an Asian version of the regional

project, excluding the United States (Hook, 1996). In 1997, Kim Dae-jung proposed and established the East Asia Vision Group and built a foundation for the ASEAN plus Three (Hundt and Kim, 2011). Hatoyama's proposal of an East Asian Community in 2009 was geographically narrowed to include Japan, China, South Korea, and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In all cases, Asia is defined as a continental, geographic vicinity and cultural specificity. For most Asians, this notion of an East Asian Community is indigenous, growing from Asia and advocated by Asians. It has historical origins and is supported by some contemporary cultural and economic dynamism.

Pacificism and Asianism are at odds, especially where Asianism is perceived as 'Asian for Asia and by Asians' (He, 2004). They do overlap, however, with many countries belonging in both categories. This is where regionalism is a dramatic departure from the more exclusive nature of nationalism. Herein lies a great opportunity for Australia to be part of an inclusive East Asian community. FitzGerald has long advocated for an East Asian community. It has considerably more merit than the model Rudd has in mind, for it promotes closer regional cooperation and linkages without asserting the empty idea of 'Pacific'. No doubt, promoting particular visions of regionalism involves ideational battles; the challenging question is how to combine Pacificism and Asianism successfully. Maybe a watered-down version of Pacificism – that is, Pacific Asia, not Asia-Pacific – can be developed further (Wesley, 2009). To do so, we must examine the flaws of the APC critically. (Of course Asianism is also seriously flawed, see He, 2004.)

First, although a geographical determinism is problematic (Katzenstein, 2000), a region must be a group of states in geographical proximity to each other. Territorial proximity enhances the likelihood that states will have common security concerns or have a common interest in reducing perceptions of threat from their neighbours. Cultural interaction, shared history, tourism, and migration between countries are more likely when states are geographically close. Neighbouring states will have deeper trade ties or more shared concerns over natural resources, environmental problems, access to fisheries etc. Of course, there are many exceptions where geographically distant states still share these kinds of concerns, but geographical proximity increases the chances of these factors bringing states together. A tangible territory is a physical basis for any region. The European Union (EU) is still territorially bounded, not based on any kind of notion of an ocean. We have never heard of a concept of a European Atlantic Community. The short physical distance between Perth and any capital city in Southeast Asia renders Australia a part of Asia geographically. By contrast, we can hardly claim that the US is geographically a part of Asia.

Of course, regionalism does not rely on geography alone. Regions and regionalism are products of collective political imagination. There are non-territorial organizations like NATO and the Commonwealth of Nations. But strictly speaking they are not regional organizations, but international ones. To conceptualize them as a sort of regionalism is in fact to stretch the concept of region.

Australia has succeeded in its efforts to initiate and institutionalize APEC. Modern technology, communication and transport systems, and the interaction of geo-politics and economic integration have made an ocean-based concept of regionalism possible and acceptable. However, APEC has experienced difficulties in deepening free trade and suffered relative decay in recent year when its membership has expanded. Moreover, the APC is about a *political community*; this is the heart of the problem. A political community is more sensible if it involves a group of countries in geographical proximity to each other. It is more difficult to build an Asia-Pacific political community on the basis of an ocean. Heseltine (2009) has rightly observed that the APC lacks geographical consistency, which inevitably erodes the sense of community.

Two, the APC attempts to accommodate the US by pointing to a broader notion of Pacificism, but it does not deal with the tough issue concerning the role of the US. The US has played and ought to play a significant role in building Asian regionalism. The essential question for Asian regionalism, however, is whether the US should be excluded from definitions of the region. The US has played a critical role in establishing and maintaining the security community of NATO, but has accepted the reality that the US is not a part of the European Union. The same logic applies to the role of the US in East Asia. The US must accept the same reality that it is not a part of the Asian region (Hawke, 2009). The US ought to play a critical and even a dominant role in maintaining security in Asia through bilateral alliances and/or multilateral arrangements. Any Australia idea of regionalism should deal with this question and persuade American realists to accept such a fate, and, at the same time, convince China to openly accept that the US should play a dominant role in regional security.

It is important for the US to recognize and accommodate the legitimate interests of Asian regionalism and to envisage a future in which the US is not a member of the Asian regional community. Simon Tay argued the same point in 2005 when he said that US must accept and understand its exclusion from the first EAS. It should neither ignore nor seek to 'veto' the EAS and the underlying sense of East Asian regionalism (Cossa *et al.*, 2005).

The US occupies a critical position in relation to Asian regionalism and its future. History shows that the exclusion of the US from the Asian groupings actually benefits the US in a number of ways. Since ASEAN displaced the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (of which the USA, UK, and Australia were members), order has been maintained and conflicts avoided between member states. This has saved the US greatly in terms of dedicating energy and resources to issues of a potentially volatile nature. If a South Asia community had been built to maintain order and deal with security and terrorism effectively, it would have saved the US a great deal of trouble in Afghanistan and Pakistan today.

Third, although the APC will help Australia gain benefits from both Asia and the US, it will not help to resolve the persistent question of Australia's identity in the Asian community. While Rudd says that all Asian countries including Australia belong to the Asia-Pacific community, it avoids the tough question of whether Australia is a part

of Asia. FitzGerald sees the notion of Asia-Pacific as 'a Clayton's Asia', pointing out the problem associated with the term: 'we have done too little to belong in human terms or to make the necessary cultural and intellectual adjustment' (FitzGerald, 1997). He sharply points out: 'APEC provided a comfort, an escape into the idea that the world had not changed, need not change . . . We had Asia-Pacific, not Asia. For Asia-Pacific, you might not have to change at all' (FitzGerald, 1997). The above remark made by FitzGerald was made a long time ago, but is still applicable to a major flaw in Rudd's idea: namely, that it is too broad and too ambiguous. It is bound to repeat many of the problems of existing regional institutions in Asia. In addition, the idea of the APC deflects the most-needed attention away from what has already occurred in 'regulative regionalism' (Jayasuriya, 2009). Too much debate on an Asia-Pacific community will only slow down the process of substantive regionalism in Asia.

5. Cultural and identity awkwardness

One of the merits of the APC is to point out the possibility of the co-existence of dual Asian and Pacific identities. It does not address the tough question of whether Australia is a part of Asia, however. Australia is in an awkward position in that when it moves towards Asia it faces a cultural identity problem. The APC, however, attempts to avoid this problem rather than tackling it.

There is no need for Australia to change its cultural tradition and adopt cultural features common to Asia for the sake of promoting regionalism. Australians don't need to be a part of Asia culturally in order to remain engaged with Asia. There are sufficient reasons for Australia to maintain its allegiance to Western culture. First, higher education in Australia has earned billions of dollars from Asian students. It was the maintenance of Western culture, not the dilution of it, that made the export of Australian education successful. Australia, as a part of and product of Western culture, is often seen to reflect better conditions of civilization.

Second, some Asian leaders tend to deemphasize their own culture and identity in the process of regional identity formation. In doing so, great powers like Japan and China have developed a complex attitude toward Asia. Japan has been both a part of Asia and the West, and Beijing likes to think that China is seen as a part of the world and that China should be more global than Asian. An overemphasis on Asian identity undermines China's global ambition.

Third, Asianism itself is not based on a clearly defined regional identity, as Asia is inherently multicultural and experiences its own cultural and identity problems. Asian identities are problematic. As Anwar argues, 'Asia has not a settled identity at present. It is in the process of coming into being' (cited in Milner and Johnson, 1997: 16). Interestingly, weak regional identities are beneficial for regional cooperation in reducing suspicion and opposition from outsiders. A strong identity is suspicious to outsiders. In drafting statements for Asia, for example, scholars have hesitated to

even mention the term 'Asian identity'.¹ Asia has its own serious problem with Asian identification (He and Inoguchi, 2011).

Fourth, when Paul Keating termed Australia an 'Asian' country, emphasizing the double identities of Australia, it invited backlash from Australian society, evidenced by the rise of the One Nation Party. The Asianization of Australia is dangerous and divisive, but it is politically safe to emphasize the need for an increase in Asian literacy levels in Australia and to phrase it as a 'national skill' issue, not an identity issue (Rudd, 1995). Keating lost the argument when he stressed that Australia must become a part of Asia. One fundamental flaw of the Asianization of Australia is that it fails to deal with normative issues. In the process of any Asianization, Australia definitely does not want to sacrifice its democracy. Australians would reject Asianization completely if it brings more crime, the various forms of corruption, and the increased house price pushed by Asian business immigrants. Asianization is to be accepted if Asia is to a certain degree 'Australianized', that is if Australian democracy and clean government spread to Asia.

Learning lesson from Keating, Rudd has avoided the question of Australian identity and adopted a strategy of silence on this sensitive issue. Rudd's APC proposal failed to discuss the fundamental issue of Australian identity at home and abroad.

The above strong reasons seem to make Australians more complacent about their culture and identity. Australia is not seen as needing an Asian identity to fully participate in the region. Still, however, the APC proposal experienced cultural resistance from Asia. Australia is not perceived as an Asian country, but a White country, belonging to an English-speaking world and a middle power player within the global North. Australia was largely seen as a branch office of the British Empire in the past and is now seen as a deputy-sheriff of the US Empire in Asia (Higgott, 1994). Indeed, the strongest force that has shaped the idea of an Asian region, Asian identity, and Asian unity was Western imperialism. Through the British Empire, Australia historically established a colonial connection with Asia; that is, Australia represents a colonial power from an Asian perspective.

This results in an awkward situation. Australia is viewed by some Asians as behaving like a strange outsider: how can Australia lack a sense of being part of an Asian community but advocate strongly for an Asia Pacific Community? Australia is part of Asia in some ways but does not really belong to Asia. Australia acknowledges some of its Asian culture, but its interest is more in economic interaction rather than in Asian values. It is more Pacific, but less Asian. Mahathir once remarked that Australia is not a part of Asia. While many Asian leaders and intellectuals do not say this openly, they do take this for granted. Australia is not a part of the popular culture phenomenon in Asian society. With its own sports codes like AFL and cricket taking precedence, Australia does not participate in the Asian Games, although the Australian soccer team

¹ This author was invited by the Japan Science Foundation to join a group of international scholars to draft the statement on Asian regionalism in September 2005.

is now part of the Asian Football Federation and competes in the Asian Cup soccer tournament.

The APC avoids cultural identity issue. In contrast, the idea of Asianism is supported by Asian affinitive cultures. Asian religions and cultures underline their perceptions of an Asia region. Confucian civilization underlines the narrowly defined Northeast Asian region. Buddhism has heavily influenced both Southeast and Northeast Asia. Islam is another defining culture in Southeast and South Asia. Indeed, as Leifer (1996: 11–12) says, cultural heritage is the basis of both regional interactions and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Despite the fact that the Australian younger generation of voters are moderately supportive of Australia's engagement with Asia (He *et al.*, 2010), Australia has serious problems with Asian cultures and languages. Only a few Australians acquire Asian languages. Of the more than 66,000 year 12 students in New South Wales, only 250 studied Indonesian. That is only about a third of 1% of all graduates. In New South Wales, only one in 52, or 2%, of year 12 students studied Chinese (Roberts, 2006). According to the Business Alliance for Asia Literacy, half of this country's schools teach very little about Asia, and while just 6% of year 12 students study an Asian language, the proportion drops to just 3% in universities (Colvin, 2009). By contrast, the *Straits Times* survey of a 1,000 residents of the ASEAN region in 2005 found that regional identities had been enhanced. More than half of those polled believed they shared a common identity and wanted the pace of integration speeded up. Just over half said they could speak the language of another ASEAN country. Five in ten of those surveyed were willing to invest in another country (Fernandez and Rekhi, 2006).

Asian regional identity has been and is still being constructed. In the ideational battle over different versions of regionalism, culture and identity are often used against Australia. Some Asian countries do not see the design of a new regional architecture as a cooperative venture, rather simply a competitive one. Some view Australia as a potential rival and not an ally. In this regard, as Mahathir said, 'If you want to become Asian, you should say we are Asian because we have an Asian culture, an Asian mentality' (cited in Milner, 1997: 39). In this context, Australian efforts to join the Asian region face cultural barriers abroad just like Turkey did when it faced resistance from EU member countries and people (Wesley, 1997). Indeed, Rudd's proposal for the APC is seen by some as if Turkey was proposing a grand vision for the European Union. While just how many Asian countries and people hold such a view needs to be investigated empirically, the question itself highlights the importance of the cognitive and normative elements of regionalism.

It is also problematic that Australians in general do not think that Australia should be, or is, a part of Asia. Some members of Australian society even feel insulted if it is deemed a part of Asia; they are proud of being identified with British descendents and as a part of Western culture generally. In 1993, Graeme Campbell, Member of Parliament for Kalgoorlie, asserted: 'it needs to be stressed again and again that Australia is not a part of Asia. It is a separate and distinct nation-continent. We are unique and should

be proud of our uniqueness.’² Geoffrey Blainey’s immigration debate and the rejection of Japan’s Multi-Function Polis, for fear that Australia will become ‘a colony of Japan’ (a term coined by Blainey) posed difficulties in developing fully regional integration between Australia and Asia. Another example is the different attitude towards the Dalai Lama. South Korea rejected the Dalai Lama’s visa three times, while Australia issued a visa to both the Dalai Lama and Rebiya Kadeer. While power relations are main factors, cultural norms and practices certainly play different roles. It is imperative for Australia to maintain and defend a free society and tradition by allowing the Dalai Lama and Kadeer to visit and speak out in Australia. By contrast, the South Korean decision was not only based on political and security considerations, but also its cultural awareness and shared history between China and South Korea.

In summary, Australia faces a dilemma in being able to develop a fully integrated approach toward Asian regionalism. It is difficult for Australia to become a part of Asia in cultural terms. If it fails to engage Asia in substantive cultural terms, it lacks *cultural* legitimacy for a greater role in Asia. If Australia moves away from the West and toward Asia, this alienates Australians as well as the US. The Australian public is not ready to accept the necessity of identity change for a greater role in the process of Asian regionalism. Australian nation-building now must take on a regional outlook, and it must successfully integrate its national identity into a broader regional identity.

6. The awkward role of democracy

Australia faces another awkward condition that hampers Canberra’s ability to develop a pragmatic approach towards regional development in Asia. On the one hand, Australia must not let the issue of democracy hijack efforts to enhance regionalism, but on the other hand it cannot get around the issue of democracy and human rights when dealing with China. Here we come to the challenge of China, the most powerful authoritarian state in the world. China has adopted unorthodox policy-making strategies in developing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The exclusion of China in any economic regionalism is impossible; and the place of China must be considered in any regional architecture. However, region building will be unsuccessful if China stresses the advantages of its political system and Australia insists on promoting democracy.

With regards to the role of democracy in the process of regionalization, Paul Keating, John Howard, and Kevin Rudd have been cautious. Rudd’s idea of the APC plays down democracy, but likely faces criticism from the US for failing to mention democracy and strong criticism at home when it seemed to be weak in defending human rights in dealing with China. In contrast, FitzGerald sees democracy as an important feature of Australian society and as a basis for regional organization (FitzGerald and Wesley, 1998).

² See ‘Resistance to Asianisation’, <http://www.ironbarkresources.com/asia/asia114.htm> (accessed on 8 November 2009).

Democracy is a precondition for EU membership. The expansion of the EU has been a process of spreading democracy in Europe. Turkey's entry into the EU has been delayed largely due to its regime style and to some degree its Islamic culture. When it comes to the expansion of ASEAN, Western commentators expect that ASEAN will treat democracy as a precondition. Many have criticized the inclusion of Myanmar by ASEAN without greater pressure being put on its military regime. Despite strong opposition and criticism, ASEAN admitted a military-dominated Myanmar as a member in 1997. ASEAN was formed when most states in the region were authoritarian; and it has developed close regional cooperation with the authoritarian state of China.

Operative norms in Asia are not necessarily liberal. The norm of pragmatism prevails in the development of regionalism in Asia, while human rights and democracy have been downplayed. The reality is that there are a diversity of political systems, including both democracy and authoritarianism in Asia. China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Myanmar have not democratized. Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia only have an electoral form of democracy. This uneven political development has ruled out a democracy requirement for East Asian regionalism.

If democracy was imposed as a necessary condition, such a normative requirement would inhibit the development of East Asian regionalism. The issue of democracy and human rights has caused a schism between Australia and China, which does not promote a favourable condition for regional integration. In the eyes of Beijing, Rudd's proposal of the APC to accommodate the rise of China in 2008 was undermined by his government's decision to issue a visa to Rebiya Kadeer in 2009. The controversy over the screening of *The Ten Conditions of Love* at the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF), along with Rebiya Kadeer's visit to Australia, showed an example of how different conceptions of governance and human rights put Australia in an awkward position in developing and promoting its vision of regionalism. At home, the Howard government in the wake of the 1996 election shifted slightly in emphasis on Asia (Shi, 1997). When a portion of voters did not like the idea of 'Asianization of Australian life', the Howard government slowed down the process of engagement with Asia. Moreover, Japan and South Korea are both democracies, but their conflict over history textbooks inhibits the development of regionalism in northeast Asia (He and Hundt, 2011).

The above analysis does not suggest that democracy is incompatible with Asian regionalism. Kim (2006: 10) argues strongly that 'Without strengthening democracy and eradicating poverty, we cannot expect to have peace.' Increasingly, East Asian regionalism has incorporated the idea of democracy and human rights to a certain degree. The year 2005 was a watershed in the history of East Asian regionalism. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Charter embodies the first written requirement for the promotion of democracy, of human rights, for transparency and good governance, and for strengthening democratic institutions. In addition, under pressure of threats to boycott any regional meeting to be chaired by Myanmar, the military regime in Myanmar decided to relinquish its turn at ASEAN's

chairmanship in 2006. In 2009, a regional human rights court was established in ASEAN.

If Asia continues to be democratized, a more democratic Asia may indeed praise Australian democratic institutions that provide a basis for regional cooperation. This is the future Australia would like to see, but it is far from the current reality.

7. Conclusion

The paper has discussed several awkward dilemmas that Australia faces in its efforts to promote regionalism. On reflection, it seems awkward too for this author, a Chinese immigrant but a strong defender of liberal democracy (He, 1996, 1997), to launch such a critique. The fact that this author does not have any fear in expressing his sharp criticism demonstrates the beauty of Australian democracy. And such a critique, hopefully, can help fellow Australian citizens to become more aware of these deeply awkward problems, and to act to reduce their impact on the processes by which regionalism is strengthened. No doubt, one day Australian leaders are likely to revisit and revise the APC or a similar proposal; this is made more probable by the way in which China's assertive foreign policy in 2010 forced Japan and Korea to move towards US-led regionalism. Australia will be much smarter in learning lessons from the failure of the APC, in reducing the level of awkwardness, and in promoting a much more indigenous Asian version of regionalism so as to gain wider support from Asia and to become a true leader in Asian regionalism.

Australia is capable of contributing to the process of defining 'Asia' (Milner and Johnson, 1997: 16). Rudd's APC was an attempt to construct and cultivate both regional and Australian identities. Through the institutional building of the APC, Rudd asked Asian leaders and people to imagine themselves as part of a distinctive Asia-Pacific region. Nevertheless, most Asians were unlikely to endorse such an imagined community. Rudd's proposal faced a dilemma. Without Australian identity being adequately linked to the Asian region, Asian leaders and peoples were unlikely to fully accept a greater role for Australia in Asian regionalism. To push for the Asianization of Australia was political suicide at home and would inevitably conflict with the interests of the US in the region.

Writing in 1995, Sheridan called the Asianization of Australia a 'revolution', but one doubts whether such a revolution has ever taken place. If there was one, it is still incomplete and the basic order remains the same. It was not clear whether Rudd wanted to speed up this process of 'epoch-making historical transformation' (Sheridan, 1995). He only imagined that, 'for the next generation of Australians, Asia must no longer be regarded as foreign but, instead, familiar' (Rudd, 1995). The use the word 'familiar', not 'family', demonstrated the limit of Rudd's political imagination. Perhaps, the proposal for a political association of East Asian nations put forward by his former colleague, FitzGerald, may offer a better alternative, as he called for the total re-imagining of Australia as the modern-day equivalent of Tang Dynasty China – open to and integrated in the region while also acting as a cultural centre of influence (FitzGerald, 1997). If

such a vision were to be accepted and achieved, Australia would indeed lead, promote, and facilitate the development of a truly East Asian Community.

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