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**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
IDENTITY AND REGIONAL
COOPERATION IN ASIA**

What are the prospects for the development of an Asian regional community? How might identity influence the formation of that community? Will this emerging community include or exclude the United States? In May 2010, a group of preeminent scholars from the United States, Japan, China, South Korea and India gathered in Beijing at a conference organized by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies and China Foreign Affairs University to discuss the influence of identity on the foreign policy of Japan, China, South Korea and India, as well as the impact of identity on regional cooperation.

Asia is one of the most diverse regions on Earth. It contains countries with a broad spectrum of ethnicities, languages, religions, economic and political systems. Yet there continues to be discussion on the notion of Asian community or regionalism at the popular, academic and policy levels in Asia. Two important components of identity are values and world views. This ASIA REPORT will explore some commonalities and differences between the values and world views of Japan, China, South Korea and India, and the implications of those values and world views on potential regional cooperation. It will also examine the potential impact of these values and world views on the United States' involvement in

the region.

Shared Values?

One potential ingredient for regional cooperation is shared values between countries in the region. The following sections highlight some of the values that are relevant in the Asian context. These values include trade; order, stability and unity; peace; liberal democracy; and ethnic identity.

Trading States

When considering Japan, China, South Korea and India, one significant shared value is the importance of free trade and open economies. All of these states share the identity of trading states. Although China may still claim to be a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics, it has a vested interest in economic cooperation and trade with the rest of Asia and the world. From an Asian regional cooperation standpoint, the shared identity of trading states should provide robust opportunities and incentives for Asian regional economic cooperation. This value of the importance of free trade is also shared with the United States. The focus of China, Japan, South Korea and India on trade increases the likelihood that the United States will be included in the emerging regional order.

MAIN PARTICIPANTS

Gregg BRAZINSKY, The George Washington University (GW)

Charles GLASER, GW

Isao MIYAOKA, Keio University

Mike MOCHIZUKI, GW

Henry NAU, GW

Deepa OLLAPALLY, GW

QIN Yaqing, China Foreign Affairs University

RONG Ying, China Institute of International Studies

David SHAMBAUGH, GW

Jong-dae SHIN, University of North Korean Studies

SONG Wei, Peking University

SU Hao, China Foreign Affairs University

YANG Bojiang, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations

ZHU Liqun, China Foreign Affairs University

Order, Stability, Unity, and Sovereignty

Outside of the importance of trade, other values and identities are not necessarily shared by Japan, China, India and South Korea. Order, stability, and internal unity are an important focus for both China and India. As a result, these two states also place a heavy emphasis on sovereignty and the non-interference in the domestic politics of other countries. Japan and South Korea in current times do not appear to emphasize order, stability, internal unity, and sovereignty as strongly as China and India.

These shared values may lead to cooperation between China and India, but could result in friction with Japan and South Korea as well as an exclusion of the United States from an emerging community. For example, although India is a liberal democracy, in 2007 it was not receptive to the idea proposed by Japan of a concert of democracies between India, Japan, Australia, Singapore, and the United States.

Peace States

Japan and India could both be labeled as “peace states” as a result of their intense focus on non-aggression towards other states. Indeed Japan’s identity as a peace state is probably the most salient factor in its foreign policy. Although the identity of peace state could promote cooperation, other countries within Asia would need to believe that Japan and India have peaceful intentions. Despite Japan’s self perception, China, as well as many other Asian countries, do not recognize Japan as a peace state. In light of this mistrust of Japan’s intentions, it appears unlikely that this value will promote Asian regional cooperation.

Liberal Democracy

Japan, South Korea, and India are liberal democratic states. This shared identity could facilitate cooperation between these countries, but would not necessarily help their relations with China. The

shared value of liberal democracy could lead to a desire by Japan, South Korea and India to have the United States involved in an emerging Asian regional community. That said, due to the fact that community building based on this value would result in an exclusion of China, it is unlikely to be a core value of an Asian regional community.

Ethnic Identity

China, Japan and South Korea all have a strong ethnic component of identity. In contrast, India’s identity is driven by a need for tolerance of diversity due to its own domestic ethnic composition. One important point is that South Korea arguably has both a national identity and a state identity that are not congruous, and may contain conflicting values. South Korea national identity sees itself as part of the Korean nation and strongly emphasizes reunification with North Korea. South Korea’s state identity emphasizes South Korea as an independent, democratic state which has a great deal in common with other democratic states.

Although China, Japan, and South Korea share a focus on ethnicity, they do not share an ethnicity, so this value is unlikely to result in regional cooperation.

Shared World Views?

In addition to shared values, orientation within the international system and the resulting world views of these countries influences identity and potential for regional cooperation. It also impacts the degree to which the United States will be included in the developing regional community.

China and India

China and India are both rising powers and developing countries. In addition, these two countries are civilizations as well as states. They also both see an emerging multi-polarity in the international system. These commonalities

could result in shared priorities between China and India in the formation of a regional community. On the other hand, Japan, South Korea and the United States do not share these traits, so China and India’s stances resulting from these world views could cause friction with those states.

Colonial Subjugation

One important shared world view among China, India and South Korea is a bitter history of colonial subjugation. Although this shared world view may enhance cooperation between these countries, it could also be detrimental to regional cooperation due to Japan’s past history as a colonizer. This shared world view will likely lead to tensions with Japan, the United States and the West in general. It would point towards an exclusion of the United States from an Asian regional community.

Orientation towards the West

Finally, orientation towards the West could impact regional cooperation. Japan and South Korea are both formal allies of the United States. Japan considers itself to be a member of the West. Japan, South Korea, and India all consider their relations with the United States to be their most important international relationship. China may consider the United States to be its most important bilateral relationship, but it does not consider itself a member of the West and does not have a formal alliance with the United States. This orientation of Japan, South Korea and India towards the West could cause conflict with China due to China’s resentment arising from its history of colonial subjugation. Although this orientation towards the West could lead to a desire by Japan, South Korea and India to include the United States in the regional order, it could also alienate China.

Conclusion

As discussed above, there are a plethora of values and world views within Asia. The only values shared by Japan, China, South Korea and India is the desirability of free trade. Other values and world views discussed are only held by a subset of these countries. India and China share an intense desire for order, stability, unity and respect for sovereignty. Japan and India see themselves as peace states, even if other countries may not be convinced. Japan and South Korea are liberal democratic states. China, Japan, and South Korea have a strong focus on ethnic identity. China and India are both rising powers and developing countries and see themselves as not just states but also civilizations. China, India, and South Korea share bitterness over past colonial domination. South Korea and Japan are allies with the United States and have a strong affiliation with the West.

From an identity standpoint, in order to form an Asian regional community, shared values and world views will need to be developed within Asia. They do not currently exist among all of the four countries examined in this brief: China, Japan, South Korea and India. In addition, strong anti-Western world views in the region persisting from colonial

experience could become a barrier to inclusion of the United States in a future Asian regional community.

This REPORT addresses identity issues using sovereign states as the unit of analysis, examining what tend to be the dominant perspectives and values at the national level. On each of those issues, internal debates and divides tend to exist in each of the countries covered by the REPORT. The macro level analysis in this REPORT does not, therefore, exhaust the relevant links between identity and regional cooperation in Asia. Also, further work is required in order to address problems of causal over-determination in examining those links. For example, signing a free trade agreement may be a consequence of a commitment to a laissez-faire ideology or it may be a means of seeking to solidify a political relationship with the trading partner. Pursuing these questions further will require sharper definitions of identity and a careful examination of the relevant evidence. This REPORT is a part of a larger three-year Power and Identity in Asia Project that undertakes such work in more detail.

RISING POWERS INITIATIVE

Under the **Rising Powers Initiative's Power and Identity in Asia Project** a conference was held in Beijing, China on May 19th that examined the prospects for regional cooperation in Asia. The Project is made possible thanks to the generous support of the **MacArthur Foundation**. The conference was co-organized by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies and the China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU).

The Sigur Center's **Rising Powers Initiative** examines how domestic political debates and identity issues affect international relations in Asia. This ASIA REPORT is sponsored by the **MacArthur Foundation's Asia Security Initiative**.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.gwu.edu/risingpowers>



THE SIGUR CENTER FOR ASIAN STUDIES

Sigur Center for Asian Studies
1957 E Street, N.W., Suite 503
Washington, D.C. 20052

Phone: (202) 994-5886
Fax: (202) 994-6096

ON THE WEB

[HTTP://WWW.GWU.EDU/~SIGUR/](http://www.gwu.edu/~sigur/)

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Report prepared by Dawn Murphy, PhD Candidate, Department of Political Science, The George Washington University