

***Integrating Regions: Asia in Comparative Context.* Edited by Miles Kahler and Andrew McIntyre. Stanford University Press, 2013. Hardcover: 320pp.**

This volume is an important addition to a small but growing literature on comparative forms of regionalism. The principal focus here is Asia — primarily East Asia — but its distinctive features are thrown into sharp relief by contrasting them with the experiences of Latin American and Europe. Not all the chapters adopt an explicitly comparative framework. However, even the chapters that are not comparative, help to put the East Asian experience in a larger historical and geographical context. Given the impressive line-up of contributors, the book as a whole marks an important contribution to our understanding of East Asia in particular and regional dynamics more generally.

In addition to providing an introduction, Miles Kahler makes the important point that economics and security in East Asia have run on “distinct tracks” (p. 17). This is an under-appreciated aspect of East Asian institutionalization and provides a useful backdrop for Simon Hix’s discussion of institutional design. Hix provides some very illuminating comparative empirical detail which helps to explain some of the well known limitations of East Asian regionalism in comparison to Europe’s. Erik Voeten’s chapter on judicial institutions and regional cooperation analyses the equally distinctive nature of judicial institutions in East Asia and concludes that they will remain comparatively weak “until Asian states adopt legally binding treaties that create rights and obligations for private persons” (p. 74).

Judith Kelly assesses the potential that membership rules might have in promoting regional cooperation. Here East Asia’s famous heterogeneity is a major obstacle, but Kelly offers a range of possible policy options with which the region’s states might overcome collective action problems. Whether any of these will actually be taken up or not, students of regional policy will find the framework she develops illuminating and instructive. The explicitly comparative chapters are provided by Dominguez (Latin America) and O’Rourke (the European Union). Interestingly, Dominguez argues that the Latin American experience demonstrates the importance of institutional design: “the more automatic the rules, the more effective the agreement will be” (p. 140).

The EU comparative chapter usefully points out the historical circumstances that made the European experience so distinctive and deeply institutionalized, but it stops short of considering its current travails and capacity to respond to crisis. This is something to which the whole volume might have devoted more space given the EU's iconic status in debates about regionalism. C. Randall Henning does consider the EU currency crisis, but in the context of a more general discussion of crises that includes the earlier Asian and Latin American cases. Importantly, Henning identifies what he takes to be the factors that will lead to institutional development at times of crisis, which is precisely what happened in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis, of course.

Two of the most prominent contributors to debates about the development of East Asian regionalism — Stephan Haggard and Amitav Acharya — respectively provide discussions of the organizational architecture of the Asia Pacific and the impact of what Acharya calls “contingent socialization” on Asian regionalism. Given the potential importance of ideas and institutions in the evolution of regions everywhere, these contributions will be of particular interest to other scholars working in the area. It would have been useful if the editors had offered a view about the possible relative influence of such factors in an East Asian context, perhaps.

Such minor quibbles notwithstanding, the concluding chapter by Andrew McIntyre and John Ravenhill is actually one of the most interesting, despite self-consciously refusing to synthesize the preceding efforts. What they do offer is a very persuasive explanation for the flurry of trade agreements that has broken out in the region, which they argue is tied to geopolitics and regional rivalry, rather than the more obvious patterns of economic interdependence. On the contrary, as they point out, regional economic integration is often overstated and the claims of some of their fellow contributors, such as Acharya, about the emergence of regional identity look overstated as a consequence.

Overall, therefore, this is an interesting and important collection by an impressive group of contributors. The development of frameworks for comparative analysis is potentially an important part in expanding our collective understanding of regional development in East Asia. This book makes a significant contribution to debates about an East Asian region that continues to assume an ever greater economic importance — even if, as this book

implies, it is unlikely to develop an institutionalized presence and identity to match its material significance in the foreseeable future.

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