

# Why Is There No Non-Western Community of Nations? Editor's Introduction

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Why are we embarking on a new academic venture to revive the lethargic discourse of community-building in East Asia? When I proposed the *East Asian Community Review* as the title of a new journal, Barry Buzan, a seasoned scholar of international relations, replied in an email with a full set of grunts and curses: “I don’t much like the title of your journal. There is little or no ‘community’ in East Asia, and especially not in NEA.” He went on to say, “It seems to me that in IR generally and in your case as well, the use of the term ‘community’ simply sets things up for disappointment.”

I fully understood his concerns, but couldn’t change the title, since our journal project was already like an arrow that left the bow. The editors of Palgrave, our publisher, liked the title, since it gives a strong identity to the journal, compared with our rivals whose titles look almost undiscernible. Buzan is right that there is and will be no community in East Asia to nicely fit into the criteria of an international community presumed by IR scholars, one similar to the European Union. Given that Britain decided to leave the EU, however, community spirit even in Europe is all time low.

Since the European integration and expansion process hit a snag, it is timely to reflect on the notion of community and launch a new initiative to explore various possibilities of building an alternative form of community of nations and societies in East Asia from the lenses of various academic perspectives. Years ago, a special issue of the *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* (IRAP) has been entitled “Why is there no non-Western international

relations theory?” whose introduction was written by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan. In a similar way, we can ask, “Why is there no non-Western community of nations?”

The answer is simple: East Asia is not Europe. It has retained its own tradition, dynamic and aspiration for community. There is a Western belief or prejudice that a community of nations, such as the European Union, is possible only when the member states are democracies with a high level of economic interdependence and shared norms and institutions to resolve conflicts through dialogue. East Asia comprises a number of countries with different political, economic and social systems which exhibit the high levels of both economic interdependence and security tension. Under the current conditions, it is difficult to form a community like the EU, but not entirely impossible, if we relax the strict IR notion of community. Most of all, there has been no major war since the end of the Vietnam War and East Asia has been enjoying an unprecedented level of economic growth and prosperity.

There are many journals specializing in East Asian affairs, but the key focus of this new journal is the analysis of outstanding regional issues from the perspective of community-building, with special regard to the ASEAN-associated regional community-building initiatives, bilateral and multilateral FTAs, and other international and transnational societies in East Asia. In addition, it will deal with various challenges and obstacles preventing East Asia from forming an EU-style community and explore the alternative paths it could take. It will also examine the ways in which the region has been historically perceived as a hegemonic community, including examples like the Chinese World Order and the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere, and the contemporary implications of these constructs. This journal will also be open to articles

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that analyze military alliances and other forms of security communities, like the emerging US-Japan-South Korea “triangular alliance,” China’s various initiatives to expand its regional influences, or Japan’s initiative to build a network of democracies, comprising Australia, New Zealand, and India.

The “community” is an imagined unit of people, a human construct, and a way of organizing domestic, international and transnational societies. Communities constitute the fundamental unit of analyses in both humanities and social sciences. In this way, community-building comprises official region-making projects in East Asia, such as ASEAN Plus Three, as well as alternative, non-conventional ways of forming human congregates beyond national and regional boundaries.

The contributors to this journal will generate interest in studying and building international and transnational communities in East Asia and help the readership to gain greater insights into the multidisciplinary knowledge and analyses of multifaceted communities in today’s highly developed regional and global society.

Looking back, preparations for the journal launch started at the height of a security crisis gripping the Korea Peninsula and Northeast Asia in 2016 with North Korea testing medium- and long-range missiles as well as nuclear devices. After signing a contract with Palgrave in July 2017, the EACR editors requested many East Asia specialists to contribute their papers to our journal, even though President Trump was heightening tension in East Asia by threatening to respond to North Korea’s nuclear and missile tests with “fire and fury.” Many responded positively, even though they struggled to produce papers about whether community-building is possible in East Asia and, if possible, what path they should take. The authors proposed new visions for community-building in East Asia and explored a range of initiatives for cooperation and integration, such as the ASEAN Economic Community, China’s Community of Common Destiny, a free trade zone, China’s diasporic communities. Altogether, seven papers were published in this inaugural issue.

Professor Emilian Kavalski challenges the mainstream region-building concepts and theories based on the European experiences by introducing the Chinese efforts to build an alternative model for regionalism and regionalization. Indeed, this is an ambitious project to discover an alternative path to regionalism and community-building apart from the well-known EU model adopting a rule-based integration process. The Chinese model is based on relationality or *guanxi*, through which the member states move to form a “community of practice” in the absence of explicit rules for membership, whereas the European process is centered on the creation of a “community of values,” in which the member states need to comply with such

core rules as democracy, rule of law, and human rights. Therefore, a community of practices is one that is based on mutual recognition and volitional self-restraint rather than the overt pursuit of self-interest. In this way, Kavalski endeavors to decolonize our discourses, norms and practices and establish a practice of comparative regionalisms looking at various region-building processes from respective regional perspectives rather than through the Eurocentric prism.

Professor Ling Wei proposes a new type of regionalism with Chinese characteristics in line with Chinese President Xi Jinping’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Dubbed “developmental regionalism,” the idea embodies the key cultural traits of Chinese or East Asians, including pragmatism and flexibility. In particular, Wei illustrates why the standoff at South China Sea does not erupt into a conflict and what kinds of regionalist norms and institutions are at services. Reminiscent of the well-known notion of “developmental state,” Wei portrays a region in which a bunch of developmental states in East Asia are working to forge a community by pooling their cultural genes and norms represented by developmental regionalism. Lastly, Wei ingeniously extends the meaning of “development” to incorporate the security dimension, beyond the economic and social ones, to produce a recipe for a wholesome culinary experience in region-building.

In a similar context but from a different perspective, Professor Hong Liu debunks the myth of “developmental state” or “developmental region” and argues his notion of the networked state is better suited to illustrate the changing state identities and regional governance in East Asia as an increasingly transnational space. Liu first pays attention to the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century East Asia in which the shared threat of annihilation by Western imperialism among Asians contributed to the creation of Asia as a “radically politicized” regional space, followed by the Western-influenced rise of the nation states built on the “developmental state” model. But its days are numbered and Asians are seeking for new formulas for treating their own national and regional problems coinciding with the rise of what is dubbed “Transnational Asia.” Liu applies the network theory to probe that China, the rising economic superpower, is transforming into a network state with the rise of transnational networks manpowered predominantly by the transnational Chinese or returnees, both temporary and permanent. Furthermore, his case study of Singapore as one of the nodes of Greater China adds dynamism to his thesis of a networked region.

Professor Takashi Terada offers the reader with an in-depth information on what motivated the regional states to start building institutions, like a trilateral summit, a trilateral FTA, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and how the leadership competition



among the regional powers and the ASEAN affected the process. Terada embarks on his essay, portraying the almost barren soil for regionalism in Northeast Asia, given the trilateral disputes over history and territory. At one point, he opines that China, Japan and South Korea have no intention to construct a regional community, but only a “political foundation” for regional cooperation. Against this backdrop, Terada argues that Northeast Asian regionalism had proceeded through gradualism, informality, and lower-profile approaches in order to tide over an innumerable number of challenges and obstacles. Terada gives an added focus on one of the chronic problems of trilateralism, a 2:1 split, often making Japan the isolated one. Based on the author’s long-term research in this area of trilateral and regional East Asian cooperation, this essay offers a glimpse into interesting behind-the-scene diplomatic negotiations and deals, as well as a long journey made by the three countries for two decades to reach the current level of cooperation.

Professor Shujiro Urata expands the regional boundaries from Northeast Asia to East Asia, but focuses on the FTAs what had substantially contributed to regional economic integration. Focusing on the notion of “ASEAN Centrality” in regional cooperation and integration, Urata offers a historical evolution of East Asia’s FTA negotiations and identifies what has driven many East Asian states to embrace the once-alien idea of free trade in a region described once as a case of “failed regionalism.” Urata moves to discuss the debates on such mega FTAs, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and, most recently, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP); It is interesting to see what motivated the ASEAN to propose the RCEP in a leadership competition between China and Japan, which, respectively, pushed the East Asian FTA (EAFTA) and the Comprehensive Economic Partnership for East Asia (CEPEA). Like Terada’s paper, Urata highlighted the gradualist approaches typical to the East Asian region in the efforts to form FTAs. With the negotiations of the mega FTAs facing a stalemate over the level of tariff elimination, Urata proposes a combination of a high-level target and a transition period as the best way to produce a high-quality FTA with such regional powers as China and India included.

Professor Hyug Baeg Im reminds us of the two ancient prototype regionalist projects—the tributary system as a Chinese version of the hub-and-spokes system and the East Asian Mediterranean as a network of commerce—and explores the contemporary relevance of those systems in East Asia. Im illustrates various options in forming a regional security community but eventually opts for a US-led security community in East Asia reminiscent of Henry

Kissinger’s idea of “a Pacific Community.” With the USA breaking out of international agreements and treaties in favor of President Trump’s catchphrase of “America First,” it is questionable whether Washington would play a leading role pouring time and resources in building a security community in East Asia in the way it did in Europe after World War II. Nevertheless, keeping the superpower as a “guarantor” in the otherwise fragile security environment in East Asia could be an invaluable asset at least for a couple of decades to come.

Professor Quansheng Zhao’s work features three turning points of Japan’s foreign policy during the last 100-plus years: the Meiji Restoration and *fukoku kyohei* (rich country, strong military), the adoption of the Peace Constitution and the economy-first Yoshida Doctrine, and what he calls “the tilted middle way” at the turn of the twenty-first century. Zhao’s notion of a middle way could be seen as Japan’s floating and precarious status or balancing act between the five sets of extreme positions: the USA and East Asia, peace and rearmament, economic power and political power, leader/follower and partner, and traditional politics and open public policy. Zhao takes the controversy surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine as an example. Sandwiched between the positions of China and the USA critical of Japan’s posture and the rising nationalism in Japan, the Tokyo government had a little leeway and is muddling through, notably along the “titled middle way.” Zhao concludes his essay with some suggestions to Japan and China, especially regarding how to form an East Asian community in this highly contentious strategic environment.

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A journal launch was similar to a community-making process. We had a relatively strong base camp which is the 60-year-old ARI as the oldest university-affiliated research institute in Korea. ARI boasted of an international network of universities and academic institutions. This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2008-362-A00001).

As the ARI coordinator of the Campus Asia-EAUI program, I explored the possibility of using ARI’s overseas partners as collaborators for the launch of this new journal. When former ARI director Nae-Young Lee was in office, ARI joined the East Asian University Institute (EAUI) as a founding member, which comprised Korea University, Nanyang Technological University, Peking University, Thammasat University, and Waseda University. At first, the EAUI project started as one of the initiatives of Waseda’s Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies (GSAPS), which secured a massive funding from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. After the completion of a five-year project, the EAUI



program has been operated by pooling the funding and intellectual assets of each partner university.

In this way, we managed to form an editors' team and the editorial board by inviting the professors and researchers from the five partner universities. As the deans of their schools, Prof. Hong Liu of Nanyang and Prof. Shujiro Urata of Waseda even gave their papers to the inaugural issue. We really appreciate their leadership in making this journal project possible. Kei Koga (Nanyang), Xiaoming Zhang (Peking), Kitti Prasirtsuk (Thammasat), and Seio Nakajima (Waseda) also served their roles nicely as co-editors.

I also included in the editorial board some of my acquaintances: Barry Buzan (Professor Emeritus, London School of Economics), Sung-joo Han (Professor Emeritus, Korea University), Sebastian Harnisch (Professor, Heidelberg University), Glenn Hook (Professor Emeritus, University of Sheffield), Peter Katzenstein (Professor, Cornell University), Emilian Kavalski (Li Dak Sum Chair Professor, University of Nottingham Ningbo), Chung-in Moon (Professor Emeritus, Yonsei University), John Nilsson-Wright (Senior Lecturer, Cambridge University), Werner Pascha (Professor, University of Duisburg-Essen), T.J. Pempel (Professor, University of California, Berkeley), Asif Hasan Qureshi (Professor, Korea University), Matthew Shapiro (Associate Professor, Illinois Institute of Technology),

and Quansheng Zhao (Professor, American University). We strongly anticipate their future contributions in transforming the *Review* into a vibrant forum of East Asia-related discourses and policies.

Finally, Dahin Kim, a PhD candidate at Korea University joined the team as an editorial assistant. From Palgrave, Jessica Banning, Nick Philipson, Arun Santhosh, Volker Gotzmann, and Marta Kask were all essential in building this academic construct. Thanks to their efforts, the journal's website opened on December 22, 2017, the winter equinox. After the shortest day of the year, we wished that everything would turn out brighter.

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