

ASEAN, Regional Integration, and State Sovereignty

Author(s): Hiro Katsumata, David Martin Jones and Michael L. R. Smith

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Correspondence

ASEAN, Regional Integration,
and State Sovereignty

Hiro Katsumata
David Martin Jones
and
Michael L.R. Smith

To the Editors:

David Martin Jones and Michael Smith argue that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is only “making process, not progress.”¹ In their view, ASEAN scholars and regional scholars who have faith in the development of an ASEAN community should nonetheless acknowledge that the association has not achieved much in three important areas: economic integration, antiterrorism cooperation, and relations with China. Jones and Smith’s critical article deserves credit for revisiting these issues; the authors, however, have an incomplete understanding of ASEAN.

With regard to economic integration and antiterrorism cooperation, Jones and Smith are making issues out of nonissues. In other words, most ASEAN scholars and regional scholars would probably not object to the claim that ASEAN diplomacy has not borne fruit in these two areas, but this is not surprising given that they are new areas of cooperation for its members. Nor does this lack of progress necessarily lead to the conclusion that ASEAN is insignificant. More likely, the scholars’ main focus is on the activities of the Southeast Asian countries in the security field, for example, intraregional confidence building and the management of ASEAN’s relations with external powers.

In this respect, I have two main concerns regarding Jones and Smith’s claim that ASEAN’s attempt to promote its norms has been manipulated by China. First, the authors do not acknowledge ASEAN’s success in socializing Beijing into its cooperative security norm. Second, this oversight has profound implications for determining the most serious security threat in Southeast Asia—the human security threat—and for understanding the complexity of this threat.

ASEAN-CHINA RELATIONS

Jones and Smith do not recognize ASEAN’s remarkable achievement in improving its relations with China. Moreover, their view that ASEAN’s promotion of Asia-Pacific multilateralism has been manipulated by Beijing is inaccurate. ASEAN and China have collaborated on developing a win-win approach by establishing a set of common interests to enhance peace in the region. The former has guided the latter to pursue cooperative security within frameworks such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) by

Hiro Katsumata is Research Associate at the Centre for Governance and International Affairs in the Department of Politics in the University of Bristol.

David Martin Jones is Senior Lecturer in the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland. Michael L.R. Smith is Professor of Strategic Theory in the Department of War Studies, King’s College, University of London.

1. David Martin Jones and Michael L.R. Smith, “Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2007), pp. 148–184.

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demonstrating the value of its approach to regional cooperation. Thus, instead of being manipulated by China, ASEAN has been engaged in socializing Beijing into its cooperative security norm.

In their article Jones and Smith do not consider the process of mutual understanding that has been developing between ASEAN and Beijing. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, ASEAN was wary of China, and vice versa. Nevertheless, ASEAN invited China to participate in forums such as the ARF in 1994 and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific in 1996. Since then, their perceptions of each other have improved. The pursuit by the minor powers in Southeast Asia of the 2003 Declaration on Strategic Partnership with Beijing is only one manifestation of their growing ease in dealing with the mainland. A key item on the agenda includes finding ways to strengthen military relations in such areas as high-level bilateral visits and personnel training.²

Jones and Smith should have considered two other factors that also reflect the process of growing socialization between ASEAN and China. First, Beijing's attitude toward multilateralism gradually began to change a few years after the start of the ARF process in 1994.³ In the first half of the 1990s, China was highly skeptical of multilateral cooperation. In the second half of the decade, however, it began to show a willingness to address the Spratly Islands dispute in the ARF process, which involves other major powers such as the United States. Beijing demonstrated its strong commitment to this process by signing documents such as the declaration on a code of conduct in the South China Sea in 2002 and ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2003. These developments suggest that the Chinese had begun to learn the value of multilateralism after interacting with their Southeast Asian counterparts early in the ARF's history, and that they have increasingly been socialized into ASEAN's norm since then.

Second, China's pursuit of multilateralism may constrain its own power politics behavior, but not that of its rivals, in particular, the United States. Many scholars argue that Beijing considers multilateralism a means to counter Washington's unilateralism or bilateralism.⁴ Remarkably, however, the Chinese have pursued multilateral cooperation even in areas where the United States has not been involved. China's decision to sign the 2002 South China Sea Declaration is a case in point. Although this declaration has no legal status, it is still a notable development, bearing in mind that what has been achieved among the ASEAN members is also a nonlegal declaration.⁵ Moreover, China

2. "Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity," Bali, Indonesia, October 8, 2003; and "Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity," Vientiane, Laos, November 4, 2004.

3. Jones and Smith correctly note that it was in 1998 that China began to display an increasing sympathy for ASEAN. Jones and Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress," pp. 177–178.

4. Ralf Emmers, *Cooperative Security and the Balance of Power in ASEAN and the ARF* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 124–125, 163; Hongying Wang, "Multilateralism in Chinese Foreign Policy: The Limits of Socialization," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (May–June 2000), pp. 483, 485; and Denny Roy, "China's Reaction to American Predominance," *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Autumn 2003), pp. 70–71.

5. "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea," Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 4, 2002; and "ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea," Manila, Philippines, July 22, 1992.

is now willing to start negotiations on a binding code of conduct.⁶ True, Beijing has not abandoned its sovereignty claim to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, but neither have any of the Southeast Asian claimants. In addition, Beijing's accession in 2003 to the TAC—regarded as a nonaggression pact—is notable, given that the TAC is a legal agreement and that Washington has indicated no intention of acceding to it.

THE MOST SERIOUS SECURITY THREAT

ASEAN's improved relations with China, then, should not be underestimated. To do so would be to obscure the complexity of what ought to be regarded as the most serious security threat in Southeast Asia—that is, the lack of human security/human rights. The human security threat in this region is serious precisely because ASEAN's Asia-Pacific security initiative has borne fruit. The ASEAN-China concord is prolonging this threat by making it difficult for the Western powers to compel ASEAN to change its human rights practices. On the basis of the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of member states, ASEAN does little to address human rights abuses in these states. The North American and European countries are critical of this practice, but they have not been able to exercise much influence over ASEAN, despite their political and economic weight. ASEAN has felt little need to address their criticisms because it can now turn to China as an alternative partner. Unlike the Western powers, China does not challenge ASEAN for its noninterference approach.

From Jones and Smith's perspective, human security can only be seen as one of the many issues that underline the limitations of ASEAN diplomacy. Yet the human security issue also highlights an important achievement—that is, the concord between ASEAN and China. If ASEAN were being manipulated by Beijing, as the authors claim, its members would feel the need to rely on the Western powers and thus take their concerns more seriously. If there were no ASEAN-China concord, the Western countries should have had little difficulty in compelling ASEAN to change its policy.

The issue of Myanmar epitomizes the complexity of the human security threat in Southeast Asia. The United States and the European Union have repeatedly urged ASEAN to take punitive action against the Myanmar government. In response, in the ARF and the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the association has included in the chairperson's statements and the joint communiqués clauses encouraging the Myanmar government to change its human rights practices. Thus far the Western powers have taken punitive action only against Myanmar, and not against the association. The Western powers have not been able to exercise influence over ASEAN because it has created an environment that makes it difficult for them to do so. While the Western powers were raising concerns over Myanmar, ASEAN was strengthening its relations with its new partner, China. The two parties issued the Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership in 2003. Moreover, since the two parties agreed to establish a free trade area in 2002, their volume of trade with each other has increased dramatically.

6. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, *Developing ASEAN-China Relations: Realities and Prospects* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), pp. 36–37. See also "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China," Manila, Philippines, January 16, 2007, <http://www.fmcopecr.gov.hk/eng/zgwjsw/t290186>.

CONCLUSION

Jones and Smith express skepticism over the ability of minor powers to enhance their interests vis-à-vis major powers. For them, the norms advanced by the former can only be what the latter make of them (pp. 182–184). The case of ASEAN, however, demonstrates that minor powers can at times take advantage of their stronger partners. The association is taking advantage of all of its partners, including China and the Western powers. ASEAN's approach is to avoid relying on a single external power, allowing it to maintain its autonomy and enhancing its interests with all of its partners. Such an approach is regarded as ASEAN's "hedging" or "double-binding" strategy. Rather than balancing the power of China or bandwagoning with a rising China, ASEAN is avoiding the need to choose sides, and enmeshing both Beijing and the United States in regional institutions.⁷

This is a satisfactory result from the perspective of the governments of ASEAN's members. In light of their national interests and regime security, ASEAN diplomacy has been successful. However, the interests of the people of Southeast Asia, some of whom have been subject to political oppression, remain unaddressed. ASEAN is making progress in terms of the interests of the governments of its member states, but not in terms of the interests of their people. The complexity of the human security threat in this region can be understood only within the context of ASEAN's achievement in its relations with Beijing.

—Hiro Katsumata
Bristol, United Kingdom

David Martin Jones and Michael L.R. Smith Reply:

Hiro Katsumata has three main criticisms of our article.¹ First, he asserts that we exaggerate the importance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN's) weak economic integration and limited antiterrorism cooperation. His commentary, however, does not undermine our central claim that ASEAN's norm of noninterference has done little to advance the establishment of an integrated community among ASEAN members or in the wider region. In this context, the limitations of ASEAN security cooperation to combat transnational terrorism do not seem irrelevant. A recent concern it may be, but the fact that the effective prosecution of groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah re-

7. On the concept of "hedging," see Chien-Peng Chung, "Southeast Asia's 'Hedging' Relationship with Major Powers of the Asia-Pacific," in Andrew Tan, Michael Smith, and Khoo Kay Kim, eds., *Seeking Alternative Perspectives of Southeast Asia* (Ipoh, Malaysia: Perak Academy, 2004), pp. 287–317; Evelyn Goh, *Meeting the China Challenge: The U.S. in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2005); and International Institute for Strategic Studies, "China, America and Southeast Asia: Hedge and Track," *IISS Strategic Comments*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (February 2005). On the concept of "double binding," see Amitav Acharya, "Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?" *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Winter 2003/04), p. 153.

1. David Martin Jones and Michael L.R. Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2007), pp. 148–184.

quires bilateral cooperation with states outside the region reinforces our perception that a pattern of communitarian rhetoric in official declarations disguises ASEAN's state-driven reality. That ASEAN remains an essentially state sovereignty-reinforcing organization becomes even more evident when we explore the lack of intraregional economic integration, which is neither a peripheral nor a recent focus of ASEAN concern or ASEAN commentary.

ASEAN came to international prominence primarily as a consequence of the high performance of its "tiger" economies from 1987 to 1997. Since the Asian 1997 financial crisis, ASEAN has paid sedulous attention to promoting intra- and interregional growth, extending its economic processes into an East Asian Community. As a recent study shows, however, ASEAN states continue to trade more with the rest of the world than they do with each other. Furthermore, the tendency of richer and more market-friendly economies such as Singapore and Thailand to form bilateral agreements with countries outside the region creates "variation" rather than integration.²

Since 1997, moreover, China has exploited this lack of market integration to attract foreign direct investment away from ASEAN.³ And although ASEAN-China trade has grown, the relationship is asymmetrical. Thus while the wealthier ASEAN states invest heavily in China, China invests little in ASEAN. Where it does, it invests in the poorer northern crescent of ASEAN, composed of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV)—countries that abut China's south.

This trading relationship evidently reflects China's comfort with ASEAN's regional cooperation norm. This leads us to Katsumata's second criticism, namely, that we misrepresent ASEAN's success in socializing China to this norm. Yet the relationship is by no means "win-win," as Katsumata contends. Rather, it suits Chinese economic and geopolitical interests by drawing the CLMV states into China's economic orbit at the expense of greater intra-ASEAN market integration.

An analogous pattern, as we argued in our article, may be discerned in China's alleged comfort with the practice of regional security cooperation conducted via the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Since 1998 China's diplomatic style has changed, but its strategic interests have not. ASEAN norms have proved surprisingly accommodating to China's revived interest in its precolonial, tributary sphere, rather than those norms having socialized China. Indeed, as Katsumata somewhat contradictorily infers, China's attraction to multilateralism has cost it nothing. Thus in the case of the 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea, the declaration is not legally binding and does not require China to relinquish any aspect of its purported sovereignty over the sea.

Nor is it surprising that China finds the ASEAN Way congenial to its interests. ASEAN's capstone Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, which, as Katsumata notes, effec-

2. See Dennis Hew, ed., *Brick by Brick: The Building of the ASEAN Economic Community* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 2007), pp. 2–3; and Lorrell C. de Dios, "Nontariff Barriers to Trade in the ASEAN Priority Goods Sector," and Sen Rahul and Das Sanchita Basu, "ASEAN's FTA Negotiations with Dialogue Partners," in Hew, *Brick by Brick*, pp. 86–115 and 175–208, respectively.

3. See United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *World Investment Report* (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2003), p. 41.

tively excludes the United States from the region, serves China's strategic interest. Significantly, ASEAN's norm of noninterference in the internal affairs of member states is indistinguishable from the principles of peaceful coexistence outlined by China's foreign minister, Zhou Enlai, at the 1955 Bandung conference. The Bandung commitment to "mutual nonaggression and noninterference in each other's internal affairs" influenced the phraseology of the ASEAN treaty.⁴ Socializing its foreign relations to norms that China devised represents a notable diplomatic achievement.

ASEAN may therefore claim that its ARF and ASEAN Plus 3 meetings inure China to ASEAN's norms. In reality, however, China uses ASEAN's forums to advance its worldview. Take, for example, ASEAN's response to the question of Taiwan's status. When China joined the ARF, it was implicitly understood that the status of Taiwan would not be discussed. Indeed, China did not participate in the 1993 and 1994 track-two Conference on Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific because of its continuing anxiety about Taiwan's status within the organization. In December 1996 ASEAN reached an agreement that accommodated China's concern. Eventually, at its 2004 summit with China, ASEAN endorsed the one-China policy.⁵ As the Taiwanese case shows, China appeals to the form of East Asian regionalism to advance the substance of its growing regional hegemony.

This becomes even more apparent when we consider Katsumata's third concern: our supposed obfuscation of the "human security/human rights" issue in Southeast Asia. The only obscurity here, however, is Katsumata's reasoning, which seems to vindicate the success of ASEAN's cooperative security norm on the grounds that it causes its peoples misery.

Yet the support of authoritarian regimes and the abuse of human rights are inevitable consequences of ASEAN norms. For example, the ruling junta of Myanmar's violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations in September 2007, coupled with its insouciant response to the cyclone that devastated the Irawaddy Delta in February 2008, highlight the role that regional organizations such as ASEAN and the East Asian Community fail to play in confronting regimes that systematically violate human rights.

The ASEAN process, as we showed, studiously avoids a rule-based approach to matters of common concern and inhibits any supranational pooling of sovereignty. The process was much in evidence during the negotiations that ASEAN undertook to establish, as Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo explained, "a mechanism so that aid can flow into Myanmar" under ASEAN auspices in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. Yeo added, "It doesn't make sense for us to . . . force aid on Myanmar."⁶ Two weeks after the cyclone, ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan claimed that ASEAN had "worked 24/7 to raise a level of trust with the junta."⁷

Sensitivity to the junta's insecurity, however, might not have been the immediate

4. "Text of Final Communiqué of African-Asian Parley," *New York Times*, April 25, 1955.

5. See "Deepening ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership," Chairman's Statement of the 8th ASEAN-China Summit, Vientian, Laos, November 29, 2004, <http://www.aseansec.org/16749.htm>.

6. Quoted in Lee Siew Hua, "Myanmar to Accept Global Aid via ASEAN," *Straits Times*, May 20, 2008.

7. *Ibid.*

concern of the starving masses of the Irawaddy Delta. All that the ASEAN Way achieved, via its face-saving policy of constructive engagement, was to succor Burmese autocracy.

Any pressure that has been brought to bear on the military junta comes from China, which has displayed a studied disinterest in both human rights and democracy. In other words, the intractability of the Myanmar question has further exemplified China's growing regional hegemony since the financial crisis of 1997 and its realpolitik approach, which astutely exploits the ASEAN Way. Outmoded as the ASEAN Way might appear, China's fourth-generation leadership thus finds it inordinately useful to emphasize its policy of "good neighborliness." For the people of Myanmar or for any prospect of a liberal regional order, such neighborliness offers little prospect of open government, political accountability, or attention to humanitarian concerns. This evolution is neither complex nor obscure, but we would agree with Katsumata that it is a serious concern.

—*David Martin Jones*
Queensland, Australia

—*Michael L.R. Smith*
London, United Kingdom