

Rudd's proposal for an 'Asia Pacific Community' Responses and Criticisms

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Structure of Presentation

- **Rudd's Initiative**
- **Responses from abroad and home**
- **Critiques**
 - **Institutional**
 - **Cultural**
 - **Power Politics**
- **Conclusion**

Rudd's Initiative

- an 'Asia Pacific Community' by the year 2020
- common with the visions of his Labor Party predecessors
- The division with the labour between schools of Pacific Asia and East Asian community
- Motivations: minimal one is to secure a seat at the table", maximal incentive is to bring China and the US into alliance with one another.

Mixed response from Asia

- Richard Woolcott' findings: broad agreement for a discussion, the APC would provide an effective single forum, but no appetite for additional institutions
- Heseltine: “predictably polite and non-committal.”
- Theo Sambuaga, chairman of House Commission, in Indonesia argued that APC would be ineffective.
- Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang welcomed all proposals
- Back June 20th, 2008 external Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said that he knew little of the APC proposal

Criticisms at Home

- Heseltine: the “remarkably vague” details of the APC; declaring it doomed from the beginning.
- Hugh White: the APC is a **distraction** from the most urgent problems in the region
- Peter Drysdale: the APC “idea needs to **relate to** APEC and East Asian structures.

Institutional Critique

- current passive, weak and fragmented regional institutes
- Carlyle A. Thayer: Rudd addresses a lack in existing regional organisations to effectively deal with security issues
- Rudd is not clear on what his “mental map of the Asia Pacific region looks like”(Jia Qinguo from Beijing University)
- Thayer weighs up the pros and cons of each regional institution in Asia and concludes that expanding the East Asian Summit (EAS) is a better option than the creation of a new body.
- Heseltine believes that the most practical and simplest solution is to restructure the EAS.

Why Pacific Asia Community?

- The idea of Pacific-centric regionalism was invented and promoted by the USA and adopted by Australia.
- Defining the region in Pacific terms has a dual effect: whilst the United States remains engaged, the Asian economies are taken advantage of.
- form a large community and rule out the difficult question of having to choose between Asia and the USA.

Fundamental flaws of the APC

- It violates the first order of a region which is a physical law.
- accommodate the USA but it does not deal with the tough issue concerning the role of the USA.
- help Australia gain benefits from both Asia and the USA, but does not resolve the persistent question of Australia's identity in the Asian community.

East Asian Community Alternative

- In the early 19th century, Japan, India and China developed different versions of Pan-Asianism
- In the 1980s and 1990s, Mahathir's East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC)
- Hatoyama's new proposal of East Asian community in 2009
- Gareth Evans thought of Australia as an East Asian *hemisphere* nation;
- In 1998, Stephen FitzGerald and Michael Wesley proposed the creation of an Asian Community in North and Southeast Asia and Australasia

The role of culture in Asian Regionalism

- Favourable cultural conditions for a greater role of Australia in Asia
- Economically and geographically, Australia is part of the East Asian region. But, culturally, it is not regarded as a part of Asia. Mahathir once remarked that Australia is not a part of Asia.
- Australians in general do not think that Australia should be, or is, a part of Asia. With the sense of superiority of Western culture, some members of Australian society even feel insulted if it is deemed a part of Asia;

Australia's problems with its own identity and with Asian identity.

- In 2006, 3.1% of Australia's population was born in South-East Asia, 2.3% in North-East Asia, and 1.6% in Southern and Central Asia.
- 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
- By contrast, the Straits Times survey of a 1000 residents of the ASEAN region in 2005 found 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 10 of those surveyed were willing to invest in another country

Australia's dilemma

- 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. As Mahathir said, 'If you want to become Asian, you should say we are Asian because we have an Asian culture, an Asian mentality'
- 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.

Power Critique

- Hugh White: a new set of relations between major powers needs to be established before Rudd's APC can be achieved;
- Anderson: the similar strategy of US and China: “just say no to institutions”;
- Heseltine: China “will be wary of any new structure that it fears might be designed to diffuse its influence in the region”;
- South Korea and India have no clear reasons to oppose the APC; nor do they have any great reason to support it.

Concluding remark

- In 1995 Sheridan called the Asianization of Australia as a 'revolution'
- It is not clear whether Rudd wants to speed up this process
- Rudd only imagines that, "for the next generation of Australians, Asia must no longer be regarded as foreign but, instead, familiar" (**note he does not use the word 'family'**)
- FitzGerald may offer a better alternative as he calls for a total re-imagining of Australia; declaring it the capital of Tang Dynasty China.
- If such a vision were to be accepted and achieved, Australia indeed would indeed lead, promote and facilitate the development of a truly East Asian Community.