

Asian Integration's Low Visibility in the United States Elite Press: The Vicious Cycle of Rational Ignorance

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Abstract

Two recent concerns regarding United States foreign policy toward Asia are the lack of coordination between different types of policy and the lack of policy designed with an understanding of the region as one integrated entity. These concerns are indicative of a lack of perceived relevance of Asian integration to the United States. An examination of New York Times coverage of Asia shows that 1) Asian integration is not visible in the reporting of correspondents stationed at news bureaus in Asia, and 2) when Asian integration is covered, it is not portrayed as particularly relevant to the United States. It is argued that more external recognition of Asian integration (by the United States news media, etc.) would facilitate the region's goal of fostering an identity toward an Asian community by further legitimating regional integration to Asian citizens.

Introduction

The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 propelled Asian countries to establish formal institutions such as ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN+3) and the East Asian Summit (EAS) in order to better coordinate the deepening integration within the region and to channel existing rivalries among countries toward more constructive and cooperative ends. Although recognized as a long-term endeavor, one objective of these institutions is to facilitate the eventual growth of an Asian community (Han, Koh, and Mohan; 2008: 3). The United States has been notoriously ambivalent about the efficacy of such institutions,² an attitude that has been explained and/or justified by its indifference toward their stated goals, which are often defined loosely in terms of the very process of integration (Frost, 2008: 117). Moreover, the United States has been said to be indifferent toward Asian integration because of its current focus on the Middle East and its inability to contemplate a regional structure other than the system of bilateral alliances that have contributed to the region's peace and prosperity since the beginning of the post-war period.³

Nevertheless, the United States, though not an Asian country, remains by some accounts "the region's most prominent power" (Frost, 2008: 115),⁴ and "any discussion on how to solve global

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² As Han, Koh, and Mohan (2008: 3) argue, "The remarkable differences among Asian countries in history, culture, religious traditions, and levels of economic development contribute to American skepticism that creating an East Asian Community is not possible."

³ As Campbell, Patel, and Singh (2008: 5) argue, "The nations of Asia are integrating, innovating, and investing in ways remarkably different from what American statesmen and international relations theorists have grown to expect and understand."

⁴ As Han, Koh, and Mohan (2008: 2) argue, "From Japan to Afghanistan, the United States plays a crucial role in the security, political, and economic affairs of the region. The United States is either the first or second largest trading partner of almost every Asian nation in all three sub-regions [Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia]."

challenges – from energy security, environmental degradation, and transnational crime; to trade, investment, and finance – must include the United States” (Han, Koh, and Mohan; 2008: 4). For this reason, some policy analysts have recommended the United States put more effort into understanding and engaging the processes of Asian integration that are expanding the capacity of Asian countries to address these global challenges. Although the United States is already present in the region militarily, politically and economically, two major concerns of such analysts are the lack of coordination between different types of foreign policy directed toward Asia and the lack of foreign policy designed with an understanding of the region as one integrated entity.⁵ These concerns are indicative of a lack of perceived relevance of Asian integration to United States foreign policy makers. The latter suggests that foreign policy makers are unable to identify the United States as an essential element of Asian integration. The former suggests an inability to identify integration as an essential element of the peace and prosperity of the Asian region. This study argues that these *identification deficits* of United States foreign policy makers are too fundamental to be explained either by ambivalence or by a lack of resources due to the United States fighting two wars in the Middle East. Rather, they stem from a lack of perceived connections between Asian integration and the interests of the United States in Asia.

International Perception and Foreign Policy Making

How are the international interests of the United States in Asia formed? Weber once argued, “Not ideas but material and ideal interests directly govern men’s conduct; yet very frequently the ‘world images’ that have been created by ‘ideas’ have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest” (Gerth & Mills, 1946: 280). For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to understand what information is utilized to create world images inside the minds of United States foreign policy makers. Information upon which foreign policy is made comes from a variety of official and unofficial sources. The content of all such sources, from compilations written by intelligence analysts at the State Department and collected by Congressional staffers, to reports written by researchers at the Congressional Research Service, to policy papers written by scholars at think tanks, are worthy of close descriptive and analytical scrutiny. This study examines a ubiquitous source of information that foreign policy makers consume daily – international news stories from the elite press.⁶

⁵ Regarding the former concern, Frost (2008: 122-123) argues, “For at least the last ten years, United States policies toward Asia have been compartmentalized by issue and by country, with little attention paid to Asia’s new regionalism and even less interagency coordination. Region-wide economic and security policies are rarely discussed in the same room.” Campbell, Patel, and Singh (2008: 5) argue that “the sum of America’s tactical successes does not add up to a successful and comprehensive strategy.” Regarding the latter concern, Campbell, Patel, and Singh (2008: 80) argue that “failure to more fully interact in Asian institutions may undermine many gains America has made in the past 50 years. Asia is integrating at an unprecedented rate; America should respond by investing greater diplomatic capital and aligning focus toward the region.”

⁶ O’Heffernan (1991: xi) argues, “On a daily basis, the various levels of foreign policy makers in the United States government read, watch, and listen to the media for news of what is going on around the world before

Although content from the elite press alone cannot sufficiently represent world images existent in the minds of foreign policy makers, scholars of political communication view this daily source of information as “an atlas of places, personages, situations, and events; and to the extent that the press discusses the ideas that men have for coping with the day’s ration of problems, it is an atlas of policy possibilities, alternatives, choices” (Cohen, 1963: 13). When utilized as such, the elite press becomes “a significant force shaping our cultural and political future” (O’Heffernan, 1991: xi). The theoretical position of scholars making this argument is related to the social construction of reality. In this sense, Lynch (2004: 262-263) argues that each decision involved in the news making process contributes to whatever actions result from the information the news provides: “The jobs of commissioning, editing, producing and reporting involve choices; choices of which facts to include and which to leave out...These choices combine, over time, into discernible patterns, which exert a cumulative influence over the course of subsequent events.”

The constructing of these patterns, often interpreted as a process of the elite press manifesting its control over which events become news and how they are reported, is known as *framing* (Chaban, Bain, Stats, & Sutthisripok, 2008: 22). Especially with international news, where “alternative narratives against which to contrast those found in the news media” are less likely to exist (Chaban, Bain, Stats, & Sutthisripok, 2008: 22), this process of “selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” is a vital aspect of the elite press’ ability to provide “a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is” (Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991: 3). A lack of alternative narratives, in turn, makes the effect of framing that much more potent with international news. Thus, as Movahedi (1985: 20) argues that “images and perceptions of other nations provide the basic framework within which the conduct of international relations and conflict resolution takes place,” inquiries into how the elite press frames international news become worthy of academic research.⁷

International News Research

One way to measure news frames of the elite press is to reduce the information provided within the news to “smaller, more basic, individual parts” that can be quantified (Vogt, 1999: 238). Using this type of methodology, researchers focusing on the ‘cumulative influence’ that international news in the elite press have ‘over the course of subsequent events’ (see Lynch above) typically have examined one of three behaviors as dependent variables: how other derivative news media report international news, how the public responds to questions about international affairs, and how foreign policy makers determine the most appropriate course of action in response to international events. While most

the cables and reports come in. What they see and hear and read is often a broader and more diverse worldview than what they receive officially.”

⁷ On this same note, Jervis (1976: 28) argues that “it is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision makers’ beliefs about the world and their images of others.”

research to these ends has focused on what the content of coverage actually is, this study, by assessing the content of coverage of Asian integration against the standard of the existential phenomenon of Asian integration, is also an examination of what the content is not. In this way, this study serves as what Wimmer and Dominick (2003: 142-143) describe as a “reality check.”

Concretely, the purpose of this study is to show that integration among Asian countries is not visible in the elite news reporting by foreign correspondents stationed at news bureaus within Asia. Furthermore, this study attempts to show that when Asian integration is covered, it is not portrayed as particularly relevant to the United States. If this is indeed the situation in elite news coverage flowing from Asian bureaus, then the information provided within the news is in fact a type of misinformation. Were it not for foreign policy makers’ reliance on international news from the elite press to help form their world images, such misinformation might seem harmless. However, as Graber (1989: 345) argues, “Officials and publics who rely on foreign affairs news may be misled, and faulty policies may ensue.” Such faults are argued by Jervis (1976: 13) to result from discrepancies between “the ‘psychological milieu’ (the world as the actor sees it) [of foreign policy makers] and the ‘operational milieu’ (the world in which the policy will be carried out).”

Why This Type of Research Is Necessary Now

Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization published a report by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (1980), which helped expose the fact that transnational media, by transmitting to developing countries only news that they have “cut, filtered, and distorted...impose their own way of seeing the world upon the developing countries” (Masmoudi, 1979: 174), ‘reality check’ research (see Wimmer and Dominick above) has yielded insight on various types of distortion within international news coverage. Most research has focused on Western media outlets, especially those from the United States, and has sought to highlight distortions and/or bias within news about certain regions of the world, including Asia. In this regard, findings typically illustrate a lack of coverage about something other than natural disasters and political conflict. While these findings have been useful in delineating some determinants and effects of international news, little attention has been devoted to examining the way the phenomenon of regional integration is portrayed by another region or country’s news media.

One exception is a study by Chaban, Bain, Stats, & Sutthisripok, who investigated “media images of the European Union created in, and disseminated through, the news media discourses of four Asia-Pacific countries” (Chaban, Bain, Stats, & Sutthisripok, 2008: 23). Their study examined press coverage from the complete year of 2004 and found that in each Asia-Pacific country studied, the portrayal of the European Union by the news media was overshadowed by coverage of individual European Union member countries. They concluded:

It is possible that the prominence of Member States actually indicates a lack of understanding of the European Union's complex political reality by international newsmakers, or a tendency on their part to assume that their readers and viewers will only understand Member State actors and not the Community ones. Yet, this newsroom practice may mean a vicious cycle for the international media representations of the European Union. The more newsmakers portray only the Member State components, the more the public will come to view the European Union only in this fragmented way and the more newsmakers will have to prioritize such images in the future in order to retain their audience's interest (Chaban, Bain, Stats, & Sutthisripok, 2008: 56).

A similar argument could be made about the portrayal of Asian integration by the United States elite press, whereby through such a vicious cycle, the press exhibit a *rational ignorance*⁸ about Asian integration that may be exacerbating the ability of foreign policy makers to design policy toward Asia with an understanding of the region as one integrated entity and to better coordinate different types of foreign policy directed toward the region.

What difference would it make if United States foreign policy makers were able to design policy toward Asia with an understanding of the region as one integrated entity and better coordinate different types of foreign policy toward the region? The answer lies in the fact that while the process of becoming more integrated is itself a stated goal of Asian regional institutions such as ASEAN+3 and the EAS, the more difficult processes of building and fostering the identity of an Asian community are also cited as longer-term goals.⁹ Writing in the context of the European Union, Chaban and Holland (2008: 4) argue that such processes can be facilitated or thwarted by how a region's *international identity* is represented externally: "A lack of external recognition might negatively influence internal integration...[by] undermining the very legitimacy of the integration process for European Union citizens. In light of these potential risks, an account of the existing external imagery of the European Union becomes a necessity."

Similarly, this study argues that recognition of Asian integration by United States foreign policy makers would facilitate the Asian region's goal of building and fostering an identity toward an Asian community by further legitimating the process of regional integration to Asian citizens. However, results from this study's examination of how the United States elite press frames Asian

⁸ Hamilton (2004: 12) explains that one factor leading to the lack of public affairs coverage in the news media is the low demand for it from news consumers: "The low demand for public affairs information translates into fewer incentives for outlets to offer the coverage and sparse rewards for journalists interested in providing this type of news. Rational ignorance among consumers generates rational omissions among reporters. The result may be less than optimal amounts and types of public affairs coverage." The same argument can be made for news about Asian integration, which does not seem to be in high demand among news consuming foreign policy makers (or the public).

⁹ In a 2001 report, the East Asia Vision Group listed the following as its first guiding principle: "Shared Identity – Together we shall develop a shared regional identity by working to galvanize the aspirations of our peoples, promote greater trust and confidence, and advance common interests so as to foster a new sense of regional community" (East Asia Vision Group, 2001: 8).

integration suggest that such recognition from the United States might require an overcoming of the current rational ignorance (see Hamilton above) being exhibited by the press toward the region's integration. Thus, it may be in the best interest of regional institutions such as ASEAN+3 and the EAS to enhance the region's international profile in addition to the efforts made internally to foster a common identity.

Research Questions

This study is exploratory and seeks to yield preliminary results that can be used in future, more formal and systematic analyses. First, in order to acquire a general assessment of the state of coverage about the Asian region, the following research question is put forth: How has the newsworthiness of the Asian region changed since the Asian financial crisis? Second, as most literature on integration in the Asian region emphasizes the critical moment of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 as an instigator of the deepening integration that exists today,¹⁰ it is assumed that some characteristics suggesting the existence of integration would be detectable in the elite press of the United States. Thus, the following research question is put forth: To what extent has the elite press in the United States shown the Asian region to be integrating since the Asian financial crisis? Specifically, it is expected that since the crisis, coverage of the Asian region would become more illustrative of issues that are relevant to more than one Asian country. Third, having argued that United States foreign policy makers designing policy toward Asia lack an understanding of Asian integration, the following research question is put forth: to what extent has the United States been portrayed as relevant to the issues of the Asian region?

Design of Analysis

Because the press industry in the United States is made up of thousands of local newspapers with limited budgets, each focusing primarily on issues most relevant to local populations, the international news that appears in most newspapers across the country comes from just a few news outlets. The *New York Times* is considered among the most influential of these outlets due to its ability to affect the content of the nightly news programs of the major television networks and its wide circulation among those with political power, including foreign policy makers. Thus, although it is impossible to generalize the daily consumption of international news by foreign policy makers, the *New York Times* alone was selected for this study because a realistic execution of the analysis requires a media sample that is relatively narrow. In order to obtain a more comprehensive survey of United States news coverage of the Asian region and whether or not regional integration is an aspect of that coverage, studies might also employ any of the following news outlets: the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the Associated Press wire service, and the Cable News Network.

¹⁰ According to the East Asia Vision Group (2001: 7), "The Asian financial crisis of the recent past has provided a strong impetus to strengthen regional cooperation. This has given rise to the recognition that East Asia needs to institutionalize its cooperation to solve similar problems and prevent new ones."

Also to make the analysis more manageable, a comprehensive assessment of every year's worth of coverage after the 1997 financial crisis was not conducted. Instead, coverage from the following three years was employed to determine the presence of any general trends: 1999, 2003, and 2007. In most cases, when using United States news outlets to examine the news coverage of a given topic, it is wise to avoid years in which general elections are held, as unpredictable aspects of the election itself can become the most newsworthy topic and distort the trends of otherwise normal coverage. Thus, because general elections at the national level are always held on even-numbered years in the United States, this study used only coverage from odd-numbered years.

The year 1999 was chosen because it was the first odd-numbered year after the Asian financial crisis. It represents the time when Asian countries were beginning to collectively consider the inevitability of their interrelatedness and how it will determine their future as a region. The year 2007 was chosen because it is the most recent odd-numbered year to have been completed. Although it was two years prior to the time of this writing, in this study it represents the current situation of the *New York Times'* coverage of the Asian region. The year 2003 was chosen because it is exactly between 1999 and 2007, thus any observable change in coverage from 1999 to 2007 might be checked by coverage from 2003. In order to obtain a more comprehensive survey of news coverage, future studies might incorporate additional years; specifically, obtaining all coverage after 1999 would enable the conducting of a time series analysis to determine more conclusively the presence of statistical trends within the data.

Because this study is exploratory, specific issues, ongoing or otherwise, covered by the newspaper are not examined in detail. Entire years are used as units of analysis in order to mitigate the effects of dramatic increases in coverage due to minor crises. Indeed, although the news media do tend to increase coverage in response to crises, the increase is often temporal. This study assumes that crises occur every year and are thus difficult for researchers to avoid. However, by placing the coverage of crises in the context of the coverage of an entire year, it is believed that their effect on the daily coverage of otherwise normal affairs will be minimized. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, no statistical techniques more sophisticated than a comparison of means are employed. In this regard, the objective here is to acquire a general assessment of the characteristics of United States news coverage of the Asian region after the Asian financial crisis in order to construct more sophisticated hypotheses and employ more sophisticated statistical techniques for future studies.

Research Methodology

LexisNexis was used to obtain the newspaper data. Within the LexisNexis database, international news articles from the *New York Times* are categorized by world region. In order to obtain only the articles about the Asian region, article searches were limited to articles from the *Asia Pacific* category. Although it is likely that articles including Asian countries can also be found from other international news categories such as *Africa* or *Latin America*, this study assumes that articles covering any aspect

of Asian integration would likely be placed in the *Asia Pacific* category. However, this category also includes articles about countries that are not typically considered in the context of Asian integration, such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Thus, article searches were further limited to include only articles that mentioned at least one EAS member country. The EAS was chosen as an entity representative of Asia because it is the most comprehensive Asia-based international entity that does not include any countries outside the *New York Times*' international news category of *Asia Pacific*.¹¹

Also, all articles from the *New York Times* are categorized by LexisNexis as being from a certain *Desk* (for example, the Foreign Desk, Business/Finance Desk, Sports Desk, Arts/Culture Desk, etc.). The article searches were limited to only those that came from the Foreign and Business/Finance Desks. This procedure was taken because this study limits the concept of integration to a process that occurs across borders or between countries. Although Asian integration also occurs and exists in forms unrelated to politics and economics, this study assumes that its representation in a United States news media outlet would be most easily portrayed as a function of international relations.¹² Articles are categorized by LexisNexis as being from a certain Desk regardless of whether they were written by journalists with the *New York Times* or with a news wire agency subscribed to by the *New York Times*. On average, about 80% of the *New York Times* coverage used in this study was written by a *New York Times* journalist each year with the remaining 20% being from a news wire agency.

Newsworthiness of Asia

This study assessed the newsworthiness of the Asian region by comparing the number of articles that appeared in the newspaper over the three years and the average length of the articles. In newspaper research, the number of articles about a given topic is the most widely used variable to measure a newspaper's attention toward that topic. However, one setback in using this variable alone is that not all news articles are the same length, and length is often attributed to an article's capacity to provide contextual and implicative analysis. Thus, although it is often neglected, article length is an appropriate complement to the actual number of articles when examining the degree of media attention toward a given topic.

The length of each article was provided as a word count by LexisNexis during downloading. Because some investigatory articles can be exceptionally long, creating a large gap between the longest articles and those just above average length, the raw word counts were codified to give this variable a normal distribution. After the raw word count was recorded for each article, the word

¹¹ For example, the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) include a much more comprehensive sample of countries that could be defined as Asian, but they also include countries from the European Union and Latin America, which would make the sampling of articles much more difficult.

¹² Thus, for example, even though Korean soccer players who play for clubs in the Japanese professional league, and a tour of a Chinese ballet company throughout Asian cities are both forms of Asian integration in the cultural sense, articles about them would not be represented by this study's findings unless they came from either the Foreign or Business/Finance Desks.

counts were rearranged in ascending order and separated into sixty categories with an equal number of articles belonging to each category. Each category was then assigned a value ascending by 0.1 from 0.1 to 6.0. Thus, each of the sixty values was assigned to an equal number of articles. The values and the word count range they were assigned to are provided in Appendix 1.

The total number of articles retrieved from the years 1999, 2003, and 2007 was 3,535, thus the mean number of articles for the three years was 1,178. Results suggest that in terms of number of articles, the Asian region became less newsworthy over time, as the number of articles in 1999 and 2003 were above the mean (1,297 and 1,288, respectively) and the number of articles for 2007 (950) was below the mean. However, results for article length suggest that the number of articles alone cannot comprehensively illustrate the region's newsworthiness over the three years. The mean article length score for all 3,535 articles was 3.04, suggesting an average word count of between 616 and 639 words. The years 1999 and 2007 had scores above the mean (3.23 and 3.16, respectively) while the score for 2003 was below the mean (2.77). These results suggest that articles from 2003 were on average about one hundred words shorter than articles from 1999 despite the similarity between the years in number of articles. In sum, judging by the number of articles and article length, the year in which Asia as a whole was the most newsworthy was 1999, as it scored above the mean with both variables. Coverage from 2003 scored above the mean in number of articles but below the mean in article length, while coverage from 2007 exhibited opposite characteristics, scoring above the mean in article length but below the mean in number of articles.

However, it is not conclusive from these results alone that the Asian region, as defined by member countries of the EAS, has become more newsworthy over time. A more certain conclusion in this regard might be drawn by examining how extensively countries in the region were covered over the three selected years. A list of countries mentioned in each article was obtained from LexisNexis during downloading, which also provided a score representing the extent to which each country received coverage in each article. The range of score is similar to a scale of one through forty, with forty representing the highest level of coverage. However, because some scores were used more extensively than others, the raw scores were codified to give this variable a distribution closer to normal. Similar to article length, after the raw score was recorded for each country, the scores were rearranged in ascending order and separated into six parts. Divisions were made between categories so that they would be as equal as possible. Each part was assigned a value ascending by one from one to six. A review by the author of a selection of articles confirmed that a score of one was given when a country was hardly mentioned, while a score of six was given if an article was basically about that country. Scores two through five represent points along a continuum bridging these two extremes, creating a scale that quantifies how extensively countries are covered.

In order to determine how often some aspect of the Asian region was given considerable depth of coverage, this study examined the percentage of articles that awarded any member country of the EAS a top score of six. The percentage of all 3,535 articles that covered any EAS member country

at this highest level was 21.33. Individually, the years 1999 and 2003 were below this percentage (20.89 and 19.72, respectively) while 2007 was above (24.11). This finding seems to correlate somewhat with article length, suggesting that adequate space is required for countries to receive a high level of coverage. This finding also seems to negatively correlate with the number of articles appearing per year, suggesting that foreign correspondents stationed in the Asian region are now writing more in depth coverage about the region, albeit about a more limited number of topics. The findings from the four variables examined here, which suggest that Asian integration, although covered more extensively in recent years, may not be a phenomenon worthy of much coverage in the United States press, are shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Portrayal of Asian Integration

While the above findings regarding the newsworthiness of the Asian region are important to assess the general characteristics of coverage, they suggest little about the newspaper's coverage of integration among the nations of the EAS. Indeed, findings from the number of countries mentioned in each article suggest yet another trend. The portrayal of Asian integration was assessed by comparing the number of Asian countries that were mentioned in each article over the three years. It is assumed that as integration deepens within the region, issues become relevant to a larger number of countries in the regional. If this phenomenon is considered newsworthy by the newspaper's reporters, the evidence should be found in the number of countries appearing together in the daily coverage of the region.

Because this study has defined the Asian region as the member countries of the EAS, each time a member country was denoted by LexisNexis as having been mentioned in an article, its presence was recorded. The mean number of countries appearing in all 3,535 articles was 1.52. The years 2003 and 2007 had scores above the mean (1.59 and 1.56, respectively) while the score for 1999 was below the mean (1.43). Thus, similar to articles exhibiting a high level of coverage, even though the trend in the general newsworthiness of the Asian region seems to have decreased since the Asian financial crisis, the coverage itself seems to be congruent with the fact that Asian countries are indeed integrating. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution since, as Table 2 shows, the large majority of articles from each year include coverage about only one country, suggesting that the United States propensity for bilateral relations in the Asian region may be existent in this characteristic of news coverage.

[Table 2 about here]

Presence of the United States

It is assumed here that in order for the United States to design foreign policy based on an understanding of the Asian region as one integrated entity, issues relevant to integration in the region must also be perceived as relevant to the United States. Coverage of the Asian region within elite news media outlets such as the *New York Times* should provide some indication, symbolically or informatively, of whether or not an integrating Asia is considered relevant among American foreign policy makers. This study examined the percentage of articles that mentioned the United States as well as how extensively the United States was covered in each article. The method of collecting the data for these variables was the same as explained above regarding the data collection for the EAS countries.

The percentage of all 3,535 articles that mentioned the United States was 52.39, or 1,852 articles. The years 1999 and 2003 were below this percentage (50.81 and 51.09, respectively) while 2007 was above (56.32). This finding shows that on the surface, issues relevant to the Asian region seem to have been portrayed as increasingly relevant to the United States after the Asian financial crisis. The fact that data from this variable and the percentage of articles covering an EAS member country at the highest level were by far the highest during 2007 suggests that coverage of the Asian region is moving in a direction auspicious to portraying Asian integration as relevant to the United States. However, this finding suggests little regarding the level of coverage the United States received in these articles. The mean score for the level of coverage the United States received in all the 1,852 articles in which it was mentioned was 3.07. The years 1999 and 2007 had scores below the mean (2.97 and 2.91, respectively) while the score for 2003 was above the mean (3.29). Thus, even though the United States was most often mentioned during 2007, the level of coverage it received was the lowest, dampening the validity of any conclusion implying an increase in relevance of Asian issues to the United States over time. The findings from the two variables examined here are shown in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

Newsworthiness of Individual Asian Countries

Having established that coverage of the Asian region has included the mentioning of more countries per article in recent years than just after the Asian financial crisis, suggesting that Asian integration is being perceived by foreign correspondents stationed in the region, it would be useful to know if some countries are receiving more coverage than others. Particularly, if it is argued that the perception of Asian integration in the elite news media is symbolic and constitutive of the perception leading to certain policies toward the region, it would be important to know which countries are perceived as the most important actors in the integration process, as it is with these countries that the United States will most likely be interested in engaging.

To this end, this study examined the articles from Table 1 that covered EAS member countries at the highest level to determine which countries were most often given this type of coverage. Results show that for each of the three selected years, China not only received the largest

amount of high level coverage articles among EAS countries, but received more than all other EAS countries combined. Clearly, in terms of extensiveness of coverage, China is perceived as the most newsworthy country in the Asian region. Furthermore, this disparity is resilient to the cross tabulating of highest level coverage scores received by EAS countries with those received by the United States. Findings from the analyses here are shown in Table 4. Results indicate that the most extensive coverage given to the phenomenon of Asian integration, whether perceived as relevant to the United States or not, is portrayed through a China lens. Indeed, most of the time, relevance of an issue to China seems to be a prerequisite for highly extensive coverage.

[Table 4 about here]

Enhancing Asia's International Profile

This exploratory study sought to uncover some characteristics of the news coverage by the *New York Times* of the Asian region from the period just after the Asian financial crisis (1999) until two years prior to the time of writing (2007). The objective was to expose the low visibility of Asian integration within the coverage as well as the lack of perceived relevance of Asian integration to the United States. The argument put forth began with the fact that, despite its prominence within the region, the United States is notoriously ambivalent to institutions that represent and symbolize the deepening of Asian regional integration. It was argued that current accounts of this ambivalence, by focusing on the indifference of the United States resulting from its propensity to see the region through the lenses of its alliances and through bilateral relations, neglect to address the lack of perceived relevance of the integrative processes within Asia to the United States. Literature from the field of political communication was used to show that foreign correspondents of the United States elite news media are partially responsible for rectifying this lack of perceived relevance.

It was shown that even though fewer articles from the region have been published recently compared to just after the Asian financial crisis, recent articles tend to be longer and, to an extent, include more EAS countries per article. However, overshadowing this finding is the fact that most articles still only mention one country, which precludes any discussion of regional integration as a function of international relations. As for the perceived relevance of regional integration to the United States, results are similar. Recent coverage shows a higher percentage of articles that mention the United States; however, this increase in rate of mentioning is coupled with a decrease in the extent to which the United States is covered, which precludes any discussion of why issues related to Asian integration are relevant to the United States. Thus, this study concludes that Asian regional integration does indeed have a low visibility and is not portrayed as relevant to the United States, at least in the *New York Times*. Although it was beyond the scope of this study, future studies might compare the valence of the articles used here to determine if the increasing trend in characterizing the countries of the region as integrating is portrayed by more positive or negative coverage.

It was also argued that United States recognition of Asian integration would facilitate the region's goal of building and fostering an identity toward an Asian community, as it could further legitimate the process of regional integration to Asian citizens. For this reason, it may be in the best interest of Asian regional institutions such as ASEAN+3 and the EAS to enhance the region's international profile in addition to the efforts made toward a common identity. How can this be done? Because of the layered nature of Asian integration (from the existence of many overlapping institutions), the process of defining and enhancing a coherent international profile will likely require an unprecedented amount of cooperation between different regional institutions. It may prove useful to create a committee under the joint auspices of ASEAN, ASEAN+3, and the EAS whose main objective is to promote the understanding of Asian solidarity to other parts of the world.

The political communication research used in this study suggests that one method by which such an objective should be pursued is the winning over of major international news media outlets. This study did not discuss in detail the possible explanations for why the *New York Times* and/or other news outlets neglect the integrative aspect of Asia. Hamilton's (2004) argument on *rational ignorance* within the news media was mentioned to suggest that foreign correspondents ignore this aspect of the region because, in their view, the cost in understanding Asian integration and explaining its relevance to the United States would outweigh any potential benefit. If either such an argument is valid, then it is essential that efforts to enhance the international profile of Asia include explaining the relevance of Asian integration itself to desired targets, as the rational ignorance within the current media situation can only be overcome by competitive, alternative interpretations of reality.

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Table 1: General Characteristics of News Coverage

	1999	2003	2007	Total (Mean)
Articles (Count)	1,297	1,288	950	1,178
Length (Mean)	3.23	2.77	3.16	3.04
Level 6 (Percent)	20.89	19.72	24.11	21.33
Countries (Mean)	1.43	1.59	1.56	1.52

Table 2: Number of EAS Countries Mentioned per Article

	1999	2003	2007
1 Country	952; 73.40%	833; 64.67%	626; 65.89%
2 Countries	235; 18.12%	277; 21.51%	192; 20.21%
3 or More Countries	110; 8.48%	178; 13.82%	132; 13.89%

Table 3: Mention of the United States within the News Coverage

	1999	2003	2007	Total (Mean)
Articles (Count)	659; 50.81%	658; 51.09%	535; 56.32%	1,852; 52.39%

Level (Mean)	2.97	3.29	2.91	3.07
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Table 4: Highest Level Coverage of Individual Countries

	1999		2003		2007	
	Level 6	w/ US – 6	Level 6	w/ US – 6	Level 6	w/ US – 6
Brunei						
Cambodia	8; 3%	1; 4%	6; 2%		1	
Indonesia	6; 2%		7; 3%	2; 5%	7; 3%	
Laos	1		2; 1%		1	1; 4%
Malaysia	8; 3%		2; 1%		1	
Myanmar	2; 1%		9; 3%		11; 5%	
Philippines			8; 3%	1; 3%	1	
Singapore	1		2; 1%		4; 2%	
Thailand			2; 1%		1	
Vietnam			2; 1%		4; 2%	1; 4%
China	162; 60%	19; 76%	131; 50%	18; 49%	128; 55%	13; 57%
Japan	38; 14%	4; 16%	29; 11%	2; 5%	24; 10%	2; 9%
S. Korea	8; 3%		34; 13%	12; 32%	15; 6%	4; 17%
Australia	3; 1%		7; 3%	1; 3%	9; 4%	
India	34; 13%	1; 4%	18; 7%	1; 3%	26; 11%	2; 9%
N. Zealand	1		1			
Total	272	25	260	37	233	23

Appendix 1: Word Count Value Assignment

Value	Words	Value	Words	Value	Words	Value	Words	Value	Words	Value	Words
0.1	28~	1.1	179~	2.1	462~	3.1	639~	4.1	860~	5.1	1111~
0.2	71~	1.2	209~	2.2	479~	3.2	662~	4.2	889~	5.2	1140~
0.3	81~	1.3	246~	2.3	499~	3.3	687~	4.3	904~	5.3	1167~
0.4	88~	1.4	279~	2.4	519~	3.4	715~	4.4	931~	5.4	1211~
0.5	95~	1.5	310~	2.5	540~	3.5	739~	4.5	953~	5.5	1251~
0.6	100~	1.6	335~	2.6	559~	3.6	759~	4.6	975~	5.6	1314~
0.7	109~	1.7	359~	2.7	570~	3.7	776~	4.7	1003~	5.7	1387~
0.8	119~	1.8	379~	2.8	580~	3.8	796~	4.8	1028~	5.8	1480~
0.9	132~	1.9	406~	2.9	597~	3.9	816~	4.9	1051~	5.9	1653~
1.0	155~	2.0	436~	3.0	616~	4.0	839~	5.0	1080~	6.0	1903~