

Recognizing Regions: The Role of Recognition in Regional Cooperation

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Does recognition matter for a region as much as it does for a state and a person? This paper examines the power of recognition in shaping regional cooperation. Rather than focusing on the behaviours and interactions between member states which most studies have done, the discussion introduces a recognition model to investigate how the social practices of a region with non-member entities promote regional cooperation. By viewing recognition as a tradable commodity and an independent variable, the framework illustrates how the contest for recognition permeates beyond inter-personal and inter-state interactions to include the struggle for recognition by regions. The model hypothesizes that the extent of recognition accorded to a region has an influence on its development. Drawing on newly released U.S. declassified diplomatic records, this paper tests the soundness of the proposed model for the recognition of regions by analyzing ASEAN's struggle for recognition in the 1970s. It discusses how recognition was traded between ASEAN and three foreign powers, namely, the U.S., Japan and the European Economic Community, during the grouping's formative years. The findings suggest that the strengthening of a regional concept is influenced by the willingness of, and the extent to which, foreign powers recognize the entity. The central theme of this paper is that recognition plays an important function in the development of a regional concept.

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