

Comparing Regional Integration in East Asia/Southeast Asia and Central Asia

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“Cognition comes through comparison.”

A Russian proverb

Abstract

Central Asia?! For many scholars, policy-makers and the general public in different parts of the world, Central Asia remains an unknown region. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Central Asia emerged as a separate region comprising five newly independent states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.¹ This study aims to present regional integration efforts in Central Asia by comparing them with integration processes and schemes in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Such a comparative analysis allows for insightful reflections on the cases of Asian regional integration, and shows there is much to learn about and from regional integration experiences in Asia. The first part of the paper compares regional trends and features and the second part discusses key factors to explain differences and similarities between the regions and their regional integration efforts. The study is a descriptive analysis comparing the internal dynamics and external forces that drive the integrative realities and potentials in these two regions.