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Imaginings, Identity, Integration: Asia in the Minds of Singapore Students

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INTRODUCTION

The Idea of Asia

What do we mean by 'Asia'? In other words, what does the idea of 'Asia' incorporate? Geographically, there exists a continent bounded by the Pacific, Arctic and Indian Oceans that is called 'Asia'[1] but sociologically, politically and historically; the idea of 'Asia' has always been contested. The extra-geographical conceptions of 'Asia' have always been a source of conceptual disunity.

Sociologically, Edwardes (cited in Kausikan, 1971:12) writing in 1962, a period of rapid decolonization and where perceptions of geopolitics were driven by Cold War considerations, concludes that 'Asia' has no meaning, although he admits that the word tends to be commonly employed as if it has a precise meaning Politically, Asia is often defined within the context of colonialism as the repository of everything inferior (Kausikan, 1971:12; see also Said 1979). Hence, Buszynski (2004:138) defines Asia as a "geographical concept representing a vast stretch of territory comprising diverse traditional cultures and civilizations that has been colonized by the West. The idea of Asia is a product of contact with the West."

Specifically, Asia comes from a Greek word first used by Herodotus to describe the land belonging to the Persian Empire, in opposition to the lands called Greece and Egypt[2]. Historically however, not all civilizations living in the continent we call 'Asia' has always conceptualized space the same way. China used to view itself as 'Chung Kuo' –the middle kingdom (Kausikan, 1971:29).[3] The idea of being at the centre of all civilizations implies the rejection of the idea that China is part of 'Asia'. Muslims, the majority of whom live in the continent called 'Asia' also have a different conceptualization of geography. One aspect in classical Muslim thought divides the world into Dar as-Salam and Dar al-Harb (see Sherwani, 1985). This division is based broadly on the idea of religious security, rather than absolute space. The former defines countries where a Muslim can practice their religion freely while the latter is its anti-thesis.

If we agree that one of the basic questions of ontology deals with the relationship between the properties of an object and the object itself (see Hyde 2007), then we can agree that the idea of 'Asia' is an ontological problem that expresses itself in geographical, political, sociological and historical modes of analyses and thinking. These ontological problems however, do not prevent elites of various

[1] Even within physical geography, the idea that 'Asia' is a continent distinct from 'Europe' does not form a common stock of knowledge. For example, "Sir Barry Cunliffe, the emeritus professor of European archeology at Oxford, argue that Europe has been geographically and culturally merely 'the western excrescence of the continent of Asia.'" (See entry on *Asia* in Encyclopedia Britannica. 2006 Edition).

[2] For an excellent overview of the origins of the word, see Boston's University School of Theology entry on Asia at http://sthweb.bu.edu/index.php?option=com_awiki&view=mediawiki&article=Asia&Itemid=357#cite_note-5.

[3] Until now the term "Chung Kuo," or its *hanyu pinyin* "Zhongguo" is still used by the Chinese (both mainland Chinese and those in diaspora) to refer to China. Nevertheless, the notion of it being the Middle Kingdom at the centre of all civilizations has been diluted.

ideological backgrounds from continuing to construct their own *ideas* of 'Asia'[4]. Thus, for instance, from the 1970s until the late 1990s, we come across a vast array of intellectual output, thinking and rhetoric on ideas like the 'Asian Values'[5] (see for instance Chen, 1976; Nury, 1996) and 'Asian Renaissance' (see for instance Anwar 1996, Francois 1996). The latest attempt towards constructing Asia takes the form of the East Asian Community (EAC).

East Asian Community (EAC)

The importance of the EAC is apparent in Higgott's (2006:32) assertion that "the Asian voice of region that is emerging in the global political economy is a new 'East Asian' one".

Background of the East Asia Community (EAC)

The idea of a regional organization that comprised East Asia was first proposed by then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, in the form of an East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) in 1990. Mahathir envisioned the EAEC to be a body that would exclusively link the countries of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia (Terada 2006:224). The proposal did not lift off for two key reasons: First, the countries which Mahathir envisioned to be part of the EAEC were generally reluctant to be part of another regional organization, especially since the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was then seen to be a promising regional body. Second, the proposal was construed to be a trading bloc, which carried connotations of protectionism. This was rejected by many members whose countries adopted a neo-liberal approach to economic development. As Tommy Koh, currently Singapore's Ambassador-at-large put it, "Mahathir's mistake was the way he put it and the language used" (quoted in Terada 2006:222). The EAEC eventually was subsumed under APEC as a caucus.

The idea of an East Asian body was revived in the mid 1990s after two key events. The first was the launch of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1995, where Asian countries became acutely aware of the absence of a mechanism to bring all the Asian countries for internal consultations, unlike Europe. This mechanism eventually took the shape of the ASEAN+3 (China, South Korea and Japan), which later gained momentum after the failure of APEC to address the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997/98 satisfactorily (see also Stubbs 2002:443). The idea was officially articulated in a joint statement titled, "A Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation" by the leaders during an informal summit in Manila in March 1999 (Terada 2006: 225).

In 2001, the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG), made up of prominent intellectuals from the ASEAN + 3 countries, submitted its recommendations on its visions of an East Asian Community (EAC). This was later taken up at the working level by the East Asia Study Group (EASG), made up of government officials, who submitted a final report during the ASEAN +3 Summit in Cambodia in 2002. We will make occasional references to the EAVG and EASG reports in the paper.

Two issues are of importance in understanding the EAC. First, there is a *strong emphasis on economic reasons* for the establishment of an EAC. Thus, "unlike the European Union, which started with the clear goal in mind of not wanting another war erupting on its continent, efforts to integrate Asia are driven by economic interests[6]." This emphasis is reflected in the EASG Report. Out of the 26 recommendations in the report, eleven are economic-related.

Second, state actors are much preoccupied with *issues of 'community building'*. The EAVG and EASG reports dwell in great length on ways to build 'identity' and

[4] For an example of Australia's idea of Asia and its ambivalent relationship within it, see Milner and Quilty (1996).
[5] This idea continues to be the focus of many works. See for instance Hill (2000), Mushkat (2004) and Xu (2005).
[6] "Legacy of war stifling bid for single EAC market". *Bangkok Post*. 22 November 2006

'community' although it is unclear what they mean by these terms, particularly when the issue of EAC has yet to be resolved. Although it has been agreed that the ASEAN + 3 members will be the driving force in creating the EAC[7], membership of the EAC could either be limited to only the ASEAN + 3 or expanded to include members of the East Asian Summit (ASEAN + 3, India, New Zealand and Australia).[8] Thus Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi notes that the problem of a proposed EAC is the "never ending debates about membership and inclusion."[9]

However, what constantly features in these debates is that the idea of the EAC has systematically excluded West Asian,[10] Central Asian and South Asian countries (with the exception of India), while taking it as a given that countries in the Northeast and Southeast Asia are 'naturally' members. History tells us that this has not always been the case. The 1955 Conference of Southeast Asian Prime Ministers, which preceded the historic Bandung Conference of Asian and African states in Jakarta in the same year, included leaders of India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Pakistan (Acharya, 2006b:83). Thus, debates of which countries should be included in the EAC have much to do with the broader intellectual problem of what Asia is, a point which was introduced earlier and which we will revisit shortly.

At this point, it suffices to note that regardless of the membership criteria, the idea of a 'community' must imply some level of shared interests, norms, values and attitudes across the EAC potential member countries. But are there such commonalities, and what are they? The cultural complexity and diversity of the potential EAC members implies that the supposedly "shared" values, norms and attitudes tend to be imagined and aspired to, rather than objective and 'real' (Thompson, 2006; Acharya, 2000). Whose subjective imaginations and aspirations matter then? Does the governments' emphasis on economic integration resonate within the community? What makes a regional community?

These questions have been conveniently neglected because they elude easy answers. We propose that the concept of regionalism might shed light on these issues.

Regionalism and regionalization

Conceptual problems

The elimination of post-Cold War geopolitical landscapes has facilitated the trend towards regional cooperation (Dodds, 1998:725). One concept in the study of regions that has attracted much attention is 'regionalism' (see for instance Higgott & Stubbs, 1995; Camilleri, 1999; Sathyamurty, 1999; Higgott, 2006; Acharya, 2006a, Curley and Thomas 2006, Breslin 2006, Dent 2008). However, like many concepts in

[7] "Chinese Minister says 'ASEAN + 3 to be used for talks in the Philippines". *BBC*. 6 Dec 2006

[8] Some of the debates are about the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand as part of "East Asia". While Mahathir insists that Australia could not be part of the EAC because "they are Europeans, they cannot be Asians" (*New Straits Times* 5 Dec 2006), New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters, in an effort to legitimize New Zealand's participation in the East Asia Summit, points out to much skepticism that the indigenous people of New Zealand came from China (*The Press*, 28 July 2006).

[9] "PM: Rivalries, distrust, root of East Asia woes". *New Straits Times*. 5 Dec 2006

[10] This is probably because West Asia is now commonly known as Middle East, which does not connote a sense of 'Asia-ness'.

the social sciences, 'regionalism' does not lend itself to a precise definition. Studies articulating the concept tend to run into the problem of conceptual deflation. This refers to the tendency to focus on a narrower range of attributes of a concept while de-emphasizing or ignoring its other attributes. As a result, the concept is used to refer to a much delimited area of social reality.

In the case of regionalism, this is reflected in the tendency to focus only on the *formal, elite level characteristics* of regionalism to the point that its other aspects disappear. For instance, Breslin (2006:27) defines regionalism as "formalized regions with officially agreed memberships and boundaries that emerge as a result of intergovernmental dialogues and treaties", while Higgots (2006:24) defines it as "state-led projects of cooperation that emerge as a result of intergovernmental dialogues and treaties. In both definitions, there is no suggestion that regionalism could occur at any level other than the elite's, which effectively dismisses the notion of a grassroots level regionalism, or regionalism among the people.

The problem of conceptual deflation also occurs with respect to the related concept of *regionalization.* In this case, the tendency is to emphasize the role that economic aspects play in regionalism. Higgots (2006:24) for instance, defines regionalization as a process of "integration that arise from markets, private trade and investments flows and from the policies and decisions of companies rather than the predetermined plans of national or local governments", while Breslin (2006:29) observes that regionalization involves "processes by which societies and economies become integrated – particularly but not only in the economic sphere".

In this occasion, however, Breslin adopts a more nuanced tone, noting that regionalization entails "filling the region with substance" that goes beyond purely the economic and political. He argues that regionalization also involves the feelings of cultural belonging and the creation of political trust and ties (Breslin 2006:30). In other words, an element of *regional consciousness* is involved in regionalism and by extension regionalization (Terada, 2006:219). This consciousness may be objectively or subjectively defined. However, as discussed earlier, 'Asia' is an idea that is much more subjective than it is objective. Thus, it would be fair to say that feelings of regional consciousness in Asia would assume subjective, 'imagined' characteristics.[11]

Working definition of regionalism

However, we should be careful not to overstate the importance of identity and subjective ties in the process of regionalism and regionalization. Regional organizations, especially in Asia, are forged due to the strategic national interests of member states that take into account the geopolitical conditions of the region and the world *first* rather than a sense of shared belonging. These interests, such as in the case of the EAC, are often economic in nature, which explains why the economic aspects of regionalization and regionalism are often stressed.

[11] This is not a new idea. The criterion for membership in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was not simply whether the country was 'Asian' or based in the 'Pacific'. Geography was a loose and ambiguous criterion. Rather, it was primarily based on the belief in the ethos of a "neo-liberal economic creed" by member states (Higgotts and Stubbs 1995). This belief forms the thread of common consciousness, or identity for APEC. See however Buszynski who argues against the existence of shared values or culture in the Asia Pacific (2004, especially chapter 6).

Yet to completely ignore the 'softer' aspects of community building, in particular the notion of identity and attitudes, especially amongst non-state actors, could hinder long term efforts towards community building, especially after the hard aspects (for example economic integration) have taken place.[12] For instance, citizens of individual member states who distrust or hold negative attitudes towards one another will make it difficult for regional organizations to work effectively on non-traditional security issues that carry a human dimension – like illegal migration and transnational crime. As Acharya (2006b:81-83), writing in the context of Southeast Asia observes:

> The success or failure of Southeast Asian regionalism is explained not just by the great power balance, but also by ideational forces; including norms and the politics of identity building. Norms and identity matter; while they are not the only determinants of regionalism in Southeast Asia, they are a central determinant…while norms do matter, they do not necessarily matter in a positive, progressive manner. They can matter negatively, by creating barriers or obstacles to change.[13]

Thus, Hurrell (quoted in Camilerri, 2006:52) fairly notes that regionalism is a *multidimensional* concept incorporating five aspects: "Regionalization, regional awareness and identity, regional cohesion, level of cooperation amongst member states, and state-led effort towards promoting regionalism". To look at regionalism requires a comprehensive, balanced analysis of both its *formal and informal conceptualization.* A simpler way of phrasing it is that regionalism involves both hard (formal) and soft (informal) aspects. The former refers to regionalism at the institutional level which addresses "official" aspects like economy and security, while the latter refers to a "sense of belonging or feelings of community in a socio-cultural sense—that is, it is a construct associated with identity" (Rumley, 2005:6). At the same time, it is also important to shift our gaze from discussing regionalism at the elite level to that of non-state actors. As Thomas (2006:5) astutely observes, "If a regional community is to be forged, then it has to go beyond the policy elites to include the peoples, societies and nations [of the region]."[14]

We adopt a multifaceted notion of regionalism as the framework to understand Singaporean students' perceptions and attitudes towards the idea of Asia as a region and community. In particular we will be looking closely at the EAC, which is the

[12] The lack of initiatives or agreements to develop this 'softer' aspect of socio-cultural integration is apparent in many instances of regional cooperation, including the EAC. In the context of the EAC, it has been noted that of its three proposed pillars—economy, politico-security and socio-cultural—the socio cultural pillar is deemed to be the weakest owing to the focus being on the first two realms (Thomas, 2006:21).

[13] The role of norms and identity in regionalism is still a matter of debate in the literature. Scholars like the late Michael Leifer, who adopts a realist perspective on international relations, generally minimize their importance, seeing them as being convenient instruments of states. See Liowand Emmers 2006.

[14] This view is shared by many other scholars, especially those studying ASEAN. For one, Estanislao (2000:90) has noted that the continued relevance of ASEAN in the future would rest on its "pragmatic flexibility". This calls for an expansion of ASEAN's traditional mandates of high-level political and security issues to issues that are more relevant on the ground level. The new vision is that of the "People's ASEAN", where it shifts from "a government-driven regional association to a people-centred regional community" (ibid:91).

proposed regional body driven by the ASEAN+3 countries--countries where our respondents also hail from. A comparative look would be employed where appropriate with regards to the issues of regional awareness and identity, regional cohesion and level of cooperation among likely member states at the people level.

Our paper is divided into three key parts. The first part will discuss *the idea of Asia* from the perspective of Singapore students. How do they construct the idea of Asia? Is Asia a single region with clearly defined borders, or are there further sub-regions they identify within the geographical boundaries of Asia? The second part will take a closer look at the extent of Singaporeans' *regional identity and consciousness* by examining how Singapore students identify themselves vis-à-vis Asia. Finally, the paper will conclude by looking at the hard aspects of regionalism, in particular Singapore students' attitudes towards *economic and security aspects of regional integration*. Before that however, a note about the profile of our respondents is necessary.

Profile of Respondents

The Global COE Program GIARI collected raw data for its Asian Student Survey 2008 based on interviews with 453 Singapore students from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU). A parallel data collection was also done in five other countries—South Korea, China, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines--to form an Asian dataset. The data were then subjected to various statistical analyses in SPSS Version 16.0. The Singapore sample size of n=453, which is comparable to the sample size of respondents in the other countries surveyed, is large enough for a meaningful exploratory analysis.

49.9 % of the Singaporean respondents were females. 54.1% studied 'Science' while the rest studied 'Arts'. Gender and discipline of study had no bearing on the survey results reflected in this paper. More than 90% of the respondents are heavy users of the Internet, email and mobile phone(to read and write messages), that is more than 90% made use of these channels and devices 'almost every day'.[15]

Being the main language of communications and an official language of Singapore, it is not surprising that English is proficiently spoken by all the Singapore respondents. About 93% of the students are either fluent in Mandarin or speak it daily. This is an important point, as it allows us to infer that an overwhelming majority, if not all, of the respondents are Chinese Singaporeans. If so, then one shortcoming in the survey is the under-representation of minority (that is, Indian and Malay) students. There are very few Singapore students who wield the same level of proficiency in Korean and Japanese. Most of them indicated that they have "very little" command of

[15] Although internet usage is frequently employed as a rough indicator of 'globalization', nothing much can be inferred from the sample population. NUS' and NTU's pedagogies rely heavily on the internet, especially email systems and dedicated websites, to deliver course-related contents and the universities administrative issues. Since other indicators measuring internet usage (such as type of website surfed, exposure to global websites and news) are not asked, we refrain from making any further inference in this matter. The heavy use of short message service (SMS) by the respondents is also not an indicator of anything new, since the use of SMS is also common in third world villages, where mobile phones have dramatically bypassed the more expensive, unreliable land line systems to be the preferred communication of choice by both literate (who uses SMS) and illiterate villagers in isolated areas.

these Asian languages. The table below summarizes the language profile of the Singapore respondents.

Table 1. Linguistic profile of Singapore respondents

Language	Singapore students who speak it fluently or use it in daily conversations
English	100%
Chinese (Mandarin)	92.9%
Korean	0.2%
Japanese	2.0%

PART I

The Idea of Asia: Singapore students' perspectives

In his analysis of the Asia Pacific region, Buszynski (2004:163) argues that "conceptions of Asia will continue to shape regional responses to the West and will provide ideological support for notions of Asian regionalism." It is therefore useful to uncover Asia as it is being constructed or conceptualized in the minds and imaginations of Singapore students. How do these students characterize Asia, and what framework(s) do they use to mark the boundaries of state inclusion and exclusion, so as to differentiate insiders from outsiders in the region (Rumley, 2005:7; Terada, 2006:219)?

Q: When you hear 'Asia' what kind of images do you have?

There are seven dimensions that are available for the respondents to choose in answering the above question. The seven dimensions are posed as opposing adjectives at the extremes of a 7-point Likert-scale as follows:

Dirty 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 Clean
Stagnant 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 Developing
Young 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 Old
Static 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 Dynamic
Homogenous 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 Heterogeneous
Safe 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 Dangerous

If we assume that a rank of '4' in the scale above represents 'neutral,' and focus on the top three mean scores; *Singapore students on average describe 'Asia' as 'Dynamic,' 'Heterogeneous' and 'Developing'* (see *Table 2*).

Table 2. "When you hear 'Asia', what kind of images do you have?" (Singapore data)

	Image of Asia					
	Dirty (1) vs. Clean (7)	Stagnant (1) vs. Developing (7)	Young (1) vs. Old (7)	Static (1) vs. Dynamic (7)	Homogeneous (1) vs. Heterogeneous (7)	Safe (1) vs. Dangerous (7)
Valid	452	448	449	445	436	452
Mean	4.55	**5.38**	4.16	**4.83**	**4.90**	4.08

This comes as little surprise as 'Asia' has always been promoted by Singapore national leaders as the next engine of growth in the world economy. For instance, at the onset of the American sub-prime crisis, there was a strong belief in the by now

discredited decoupling theory that despite the US facing a financial crisis, Singapore will continue to grow, propelled by the engines of China and to some extent, India. Furthermore, living in a multi-racial society and surrounded by ethnically diverse neighbours like Malaysia and Thailand, the Singapore respondents have been made well aware of the heterogeneity of Asia.

But how 'far' and 'deep' are Singapore students' concept of 'heterogeneity', and which countries do most have in mind when they speak of Asia as 'Dynamic' and 'Developing'? To what extent do these scales of regionalism function as the basis of inclusion/exclusion?

Q: Which countries are included in your image of Asia?

All the ASEAN member countries are included in the Singapore students' list of countries of Asia. In fact, there are no anomalies or surprises in the countries listed as 'Asia'. The point of interest lies in the exclusion list.

Countries in South and Central Asia are overwhelmingly excluded in this list. The majority of respondents exclude Afghanistan and Kazakhstan. In the case of South Asia, only India is seen as part of 'Asia' by the majority of respondents. 47% of respondents excluded Sri Lanka while 58% excluded Bangladesh. The other four countries in South Asia--Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives and Pakistan--were excluded by 78.6%, 62%, 85.4% and 68.2% of the respondents respectively.

Why are South Asian countries with the exception of India (and marginally, Sri Lanka), excluded as Asia? The first reason could simply be a lack of grasp in *geography*. It might be that Singapore students are totally unfamiliar with the location of--and do not care much about--the countries that seem so 'far away'. India on the other hand, is immediately recognizable because of its sheer size. Moreover, in school textbooks, students are often taught that India is one of the most populous countries in the world.

Furthermore, in the past two to three years, there has been a discernible trend in Singapore's foreign policy towards greater engagement of India, such that India is now mentioned with China in the same breath as emerging Asian giants. In other words, India's recognition could be due to it being increasingly embedded in the political and economic vocabulary of Singapore. Lastly, Indians, constituting about 7% of the population, form a significant minority in Singapore. This could have contributed to the awareness of India amongst Singapore students.

Yet visibility and geographic familiarity alone does not guarantee the inclusion of a country in Singaporeans' image of Asia.[16] Pakistan, for example, has

[16] A note on Maldives: It is a 'far away', small country that is relatively unheard of in Singapore, except in tourism brochures where it is represented in an overwhelmingly singular image –a tourist paradise with blue waters and white sandy beaches. 85.4% of Singaporeans do not feel that Maldives is part of Asia. We suspect that this is due to the association that such images do not gel with their image of Asia. Recall that Singaporeans are at most, neutral in terms of whether Asia is dirty or clean. Thus, most would feel that the image of Maldives as a tropical paradise is too 'clean' to be seen as part of 'Asia'.

received much attention in the media over the past few years[17] due to terrorism, Benazir Bhutto's assassination, its delicate relationship with the USA and its increasingly fraught political environment. Yet it is excluded by close to 7 out of 10 Singapore students.

This implies that Singapore students are relying on criteria other than geography. This criterion becomes more apparent when we look at the most obvious anomaly in the data – the fact that only 59.6% of the respondents included North Korea as part of Asia, compared to 68% for South Korea. The difference accorded to the two Koreas reveal that an *extra-geographical element* is involved in deciding which countries are seen as part of 'Asia', especially if these countries are 'far away'.

Recall that Singapore students are slightly inclined to perceive Asia as 'Dynamic' and 'Developing'. In other words, Singapore students tend to see 'Asia' within the *framework of 'progress'*. North Korea and Pakistan contradicts forcefully this image. North Korea is by and large portrayed in the media as being governed by an irrational, backward regime with a leader known more for his eccentricities rather than achievements. Pakistan, as mentioned earlier, is largely portrayed in the media as an unstable and violent country. To bluntly put it, these countries are seen as 'basket cases' that do not exhibit any element of 'progress'.

The same case is also observed for Iran's exclusion. 77.3% Singapore respondents do not see Iran as part of Asia. This contradicts Thompson's (2007) hypothesis in an earlier study that aims to explain why the majority of Singapore students tend to include Saudi Arabia as part of Southeast Asia. He conjectures that this "anomaly" is partly due to the use of "Muslim/Islam" as a criterion in associating countries. Specifically, he puts forth that Singaporeans hold the perception that they are a "Chinese" island surrounded by "Muslim neighbours" (Thompson, 2007:282).

His hypothesis does not hold in the present study because we would expect both Pakistan and Iran, being Muslim countries, to be seen as part of Asia. In fact, beyond Southeast Asia, being 'Muslim' seems to exclude a country as 'Asian' from the perspective of Singapore Chinese students. The framework of 'progress' helps to explain Pakistan's and, perhaps, likewise Iran's exclusion. Iran is another country that has received unfavourable media coverage. It is depicted as a potentially unstable country with an irrational leader in the person of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Singapore students could have classified Iran in the same terms as Pakistan and North Korea, therefore supporting our hypothesis that the framework of *progress* influences Singapore students' perceptions in this area.

A third factor can also be added. This has to do with the role of "*ethnic frames of reference*" (Thompson, 2007) in driving perceptions of countries. In his study of ASEAN member countries, Thompson (2007) notes the role of ethnicity in shaping perceptions of countries. He observes that Malay Singaporeans, as compared to Chinese Singaporeans, tend to view the Philippines as 'different.' On the other hand, Chinese Singaporeans, as compared to Malay Singaporeans, tend to judge Malaysia and Brunei as 'different' (Thompson, 2007:251).

[17] Pakistan also made it to the front cover of Economist Magazine in its January 5th 2008 issue with the attention grabbing headline: "The World's Most Dangerous Place".

We have earlier established that there is a high likelihood that the vast majority of Singapore students in this survey are Chinese. From this perspective, Singapore students' image of Asia is really the image of Asia from the lenses of *Chinese* Singaporeans.[18] This occurs because the composition of the sample is such that it simply reflects the culture and thinking of the majority, rather than the Singapore population as a whole. This could partly explain why all the countries in Northeast Asia are included as part of Asia, while most countries in South Asia are not. This difference could be due to the tendency to see Asia beyond the immediate region as a place where people look *racially similar*. Thus, although Singapore students view Asia as 'Heterogeneous', this perception of heterogeneity is limited.

Q: Do you think the following countries have a good or bad influence on you?

One factor that can affect integration is whether citizens of one country feel positively or negatively about another country. Singapore students in general perceive China, South Korea and Japan as either a 'good influence' or 'rather good influence' (that is, positive influence) for Singapore. Japan receives the highest score in this measure. 81.4% of respondents feel that Japan has a positive influence on Singapore, followed by South Korea (55%) and China (51.9%).

However, most Singapore students do not see their neighbouring countries as having positive influence on Singapore. Most respondents choose a neutral response ("Neither good nor bad influence"). Only about 1 out of 5 respondents see Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines as having positive influence on Singapore. 23% of respondents believe that Vietnam has a positive influence while the response is 34% for Thailand. Overall, the Southeast Asian countries receive much lower votes as compared to the favourable ratings obtained by China, South Korea and Japan.

In a paper examining Singapore students' perception of ASEAN countries, Thompson (2006:180) describes Singapore's position as one of "exceptionalism." He found that Singapore students tend to see Singapore as being apart from ASEAN, rather than as part of it. He further describes Singapore students as preferring to look to the West and (North) East Asian countries as models to emulate rather than its immediate neighbourhood. When made to choose an ASEAN country which Singapore should "try to be like," they do so grudgingly and believe that Singapore should not emulate any of the neighbouring countries at all, for it would be a "step back" (ibid:189). Thompson concludes that the *economic-developmental criterion* is the frame of reference uppermost in the minds of Singapore students when choosing which countries to emulate.[19]

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[18] A good analysis of the problems of a Singaporean identity and its relationship with race is provided by Chua (1998).

[19] While Thompson's research provides valuable insights to the cognitive mapping of countries by Singaporean students, the economic-developmental criteria alone is insufficient because it does not explain the position of Malaysia. In Thompson's study earlier, Singaporean students placed Malaysia closest to Singapore by virtue of Malaysia being seen as relatively developed compared to other ASEAN countries. We would expect Malaysia to be seen in a 'better' light in the Asian Student Survey 2008 as well. That this is not the case shows a simpler factor at work –*the impact of bilateral relations*. Malaysia, together with Indonesia are often portrayed as countries where Singapore foreign policies are fraught with difficulties. A cursory glance at the Straits Times – Singapore's sole national newspaper

Perceptions of countries and regions are often based on the conflation "of various senses of geography, history and ethnological imaginations" (Thompson 2006:192). Singapore students' imaginings of Asia show that they perceive *Asia to be developing, dynamic and heterogeneous*. However, by Asia, they have in mind only an exclusive number of countries. These countries (with the exception of India) are the ASEAN member states and countries in Northeast Asia. In short, *there is a conflation of Asia with East Asia (Northeast and Southeast Asia)*

Thus, in this respect, *Singapore students' regional consciousness of being part of East Asia seems to be strong enough such that it ends up narrowing the idea of Asia*. Furthermore, their perceptions of Asia are partly driven by the *idea of progress and a sense of racial commonalities,* such that countries that are 'backward' like Pakistan, Iran and North Korea are excluded or marginally excluded, while countries where its citizens look 'different', like those from South and Central Asia are excluded. A more specific idea of progress--economic-developmental--may help to explain why Singapore Chinese students tend to rate Northeast Asian countries more favourably than Singapore's immediate neighbours, which are not as economically developed as Singapore. At this point, we may also speculate that Singapore students could perhaps feel a sense of closer cultural affinity to Northeast Asia than Southeast Asia, a point worth investigating in future studies.

A final note should be made about Singapore students' perceptions of China before moving on to the next section. Since the 1990s, the Singapore government has been engaged in efforts to "re-sinicize" Chinese Singaporeans (Tan, 2003:751) through various measures like the intensive promotion of the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign" and the tweaking of the Chinese language syllabus in national schools in order to produce "a core group of Singaporeans who are steeped in the Chinese cultural heritage, history, literature and the arts" (Tan, 2003:760). Such an approach is in part driven by motivations to create and maintain cultural affinities with China in order to reap both economic and political benefits. It stems from the belief that economically, a sense of 'Chineseness' is required to successfully penetrate the China market. Politically, this stems from geopolitical considerations that it would be important to maintain close ties with a nation deemed to be an emerging superpower. However, it seems that more efforts are needed to foster a sense of affinity to China, as only slightly more than half of Singapore Chinese students (51.9%) feel that China is a positive influence for Singapore.

This section has discussed in detail Singapore students' ideas of Asia. The next sections deal with the issues of identity and integration.

PART II

Regionalism and identity

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will reveal that reports on Malaysia and Indonesia tend to focus more, if not exclusively, on negative news pieces like political problems, crime, corruption and disaster.

As mentioned earlier, one of the preoccupations of the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) and East Asia Study Group (EASG) Reports have to do with issues of identity and regional consciousness. The EASG Report recommends that countries "work together with cultural and educational institutions to promote a strong sense of identity and an East Asian consciousness" while the EAVG Report recommends the "promotion of a regional identity and consciousness". What these mean are unclear and particularly problematic as membership of the EAC has yet to be finalized.

Furthermore, many commentators on Asian regionalism have observed that the Asian sense of regional awareness and identity is weak. In the context of APEC, Rumley (2005:5) contends that "what regionalism there has been has been relatively weak and highly contested." In the context of ASEAN, Thomas (2006:175) points out that "ASEAN is an elite-driven institution that does not resonate with the public consciousness within the ASEAN states, resulting in a shallow ASEAN identity". While with respect to the EAC, Blondel (2006:225) wonders, "…the question arises as to whether the [North] East and Southeast Asian region is culturally united. Serious doubts can be expressed in this respect."

Before we could discuss—in the context of the EAC—Thomas' concern of the "public consciousness", we need to address Blondel's questioning remark: *Is* there anything in common among the countries that potentially make up the EAC?

Does the EAC possess any common traits?

It is obvious that Northeast and Southeast Asia are culturally diverse. In fact, this diversity extends beyond the cultural realm to include areas like political systems and philosophies; as well as the historical experience of individual countries. However, some commentators have argued that despite these differences, these countries share several common traits.

First, most of the countries collectively called East Asia were beneficiaries of Japanese capital in the late 1980s (Stubbs, 2002:444). This arose after the Plaza Accord was ratified by Japan, USA, France, United Kingdom and the then West Germany in 1985. The Plaza Accord allows for the US dollar depreciating against the yen (Acharya, 2000:124), which made Japanese products too expensive to be manufactured in Japan, resulting in a shift of Japanese capital and manufacturers to lower cost countries; first to its neighbouring countries and later, to Southeast Asia (Acharya, 2000:125). This in turn compelled Japan to push for greater trade liberalization to facilitate movement of Japanese goods like spare parts of motor vehicles across these countries, leading to closer economic integration in the region.

Second, these countries shared similar experiences during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/1998. Stubbs (2002:443) notes that "group identities develop out of common experiences; political actors must act together as a group before they can recognize the existence of that group". During the crisis, there emerged a consciousness that their economies were more closely interconnected than it was previously thought, with the crisis which started in Thailand spreading to South Korea. Reactions to the crisis by the US and Europe also created the perception that the 'West' was not deeply concerned with the fate of the Asian countries. Lee Kuan Yew, then Singapore's Senior Minister, observes:

> …there have been developments showing that neither Europe nor America has the same level of interest in the rapid recovery or the wellbeing of the Asian countries that have been hit as much as Japan or even China does…You see that we have more interest in each other's well-beings than do Europeans or even Americans. (quoted in Terada, 2006:225)

It is this sense of shared experiences during the crisis that facilitates the creation of the EAC (see also Higgott, 2006; Terada, 2006; and Camilerri, 1999).

Third, it is believed that these countries have values that make them 'different' from the 'West'. The belief in the existence of a common 'Asian values'; which stresses, amongst others, the importance of duties over rights and the primacy of communalism over individualism remains a debatable proposition. Buszynski (2004:143) for instance, points out that

> Asian values fell victim to Asian diversity as there was a proliferation of ideas and opinions as to what those values were. Asia had no common value system, as Lee Kuan Yew referred to Chinese East Asia while Mahathir was concerned about Islam, and even the role of the family that Lee Kuan Yew referred to was not specifically Asian but universal.

It is not the purpose of this essay to articulate the debate. Nonetheless, perceptions and imaginings of shared attitudes are often enough for group formation. Buszynski (2004:160) contends that "assumptions of a shared Asianness served as ideological underpinning for [Asian regionalism]" while Acharya (2000:99), paraphrasing Anderson, notes that "regionalism came to represent an imagined community underpinned by its organizing myths and principles".

But moving away from an elite-level viewpoint, one may ask to what extent, if any, is there regional consciousness amongst non-state actors? Data from the Asian Student Survey 2008 provide a good opportunity to tease out aspects of this consciousness from the perspective of Singapore students. But first how do we operationalize 'regional consciousness'?

Operationalizing 'regional consciousness'

A regional consciousness is by definition *trans*-national, an identification beyond the "imagined community" of the nation to include "the otherness of the other" into one's imagination (Beck, 2002:17). This "dialogic imagination," says Beck, centrally characterizes one's cosmopolitanization, or the extent to which one internalizes globalization in one's everyday living. This is opposed to the 'monologic imagination' of the national perspective, which Beck (2002:17) contends as "exclud[ing] the otherness of the other" by only looking at the nation-state as "Self". Dialogic imagination, on the other hand, includes that notion of otherness in one's everyday living and consciousness.

In looking at regional consciousness, we are narrowing the scope of this cosmopolitanization from the global to the Asian region. The "other," in this case, therefore specifically refers to the other countries in Asia. Thus, we operationalize

regional consciousness in terms *of Singapore students' sense of identity and belonging towards 'Asia'*. Where appropriate, we will contrast the Singapore data with results from other countries.

Sense of Identity and Belonging

Sense of Self vis-à-vis Community

Singapore students, like their counterparts from other Asian countries, hold a multiplicity of identities. The majority of Singapore students see themselves as 'world citizens', 'Asians', 'Singaporeans', 'members of their local community' and 'autonomous individuals'. This implies what Beck (2002:19), in his cosmopolitanism thesis, calls "the pluralization of borders", more specifically, "the pluralization of nation-state borders or the implosion of the dualism between the national and the international."

However, not all "borders" are seen with the same degree of identification. From the survey data, most Singapore students see themselves in light of the first four identities, implying that their sense of identity is largely defined vis-à-vis a broader (imagined) community which they see themselves being part of (see *Table 3*). Their relational sense of identity therefore follows Buszynski's (2004:4) definition as "an understanding of self and one's place in this world *relative* to others; it is a group's image of *itself in relation to the external world* providing its members with *a sense of relatedness*" (emphasis ours). It is also evident that in cosmopolitan societies like Singapore, this notion of "the external world" has expanded beyond the confines of the nation states to include the others in the region and the world as part of one's "imagined community".

Table 3. Multiple Identities adopted by Singapore students, ranked by salience (Combined percentage of respondents who "Agree" and "Strongly agree" with each identity)

Identity	Percentage	Rank
"I see myself as part of my country"	96.0%	1
"I see myself as part of local community"	93.7%	2
"I see myself as part of Asia"	90.1%	3
"I see myself as a world citizen"	70.3%	4
"I see myself as an autonomous individual"	57.2%	5

Table 4. Multiple Identities adopted by Asian students, ranked by salience (Combined percentage of respondents who "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" with each identity)

Identity	Percentage	Rank
"I see myself as part of my country"	97.7%	1
"I see myself as part of Asia"	92.7%	2
"I see myself as a world citizen"	88.2%	3
"I see myself as part of local community"	87.2%	4
"I see myself as an autonomous individual"	68.1%	5

"I see myself as part of Asia"

As seen in *Table 3*, 9 out of 10 Singapore students identify themselves as part of Asia, a trend that is also mirrored in all other Asian countries surveyed (Asian average=92.7%). However, the *intensity* of Singaporean students' identification with Asia is rather weak. On the attitude scale where '1' expresses strong agreement and

'4' strong disagreement, Singapore students score almost '2' (1.92) as compared to the Asian average of 1.76 (See *Table 5*). Likewise, going by percentage distribution, only 18.9% of Singapore respondents 'strongly agree' to see themselves as part of Asia, which is considerably lower than the overall Asian average of 31.9% (See *Table 6*).

Table 5. "I see myself as part of Asia"—Means comparison (1-"strongly agree", 4-"strongly disagree")

Country	Mean
South Korea	1.79
China	1.81
Vietnam	1.73
Thailand	1.67
Philippines	1.62
Singapore	**1.92**
Total	**1.76**

Table 6. "I see myself as part of Asia"—Percentage distribution

Q10d I see myself as part of Asia					
Country	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
South Korea	106	264	22	1	393
	27.0%	67.2%	5.6%	.3%	100.0%
China	120	240	38	2	400
	30.0%	60.0%	9.5%	.5%	100.0%
Vietnam	135	239	24	1	399
	33.8%	59.9%	6.0%	.3%	100.0%
Thailand	167	200	30	3	400
	41.8%	50.0%	7.5%	.8%	100.0%
Philippines	165	222	12	1	400
	41.2%	55.5%	3.0%	.2%	100.0%
Singapore	83	312	36	7	438
	18.9%	71.2%	8.2%	1.6%	100.0%
Total	776	1477	162	15	2430
	31.9%	60.8%	6.7%	.6%	100.0%

The point of interest here is not the observation that the majority of Singapore (Chinese) respondents feel themselves to be part of Asia; rather, what could explain the 'lukewarm' identification, or the very low figure for 'Strongly Agree'? This is particularly interesting sociologically in the case of Singapore, where the state, since independence, has tried to socially engineer culture by emphasizing 'Asia-ness'. In particular, the Singapore state has been promoting for decades a neo-Confucianist ethos that has been formally enshrined in the form of 'Shared Values'[20] since 1991. These 'values', in turn, have been taught to all students at the primary level. As such, we would expect a strong sense of identification with Asia by the population under study. That this is not the case makes for an interesting topic for further study.

[20] The Shared Values are (a) Nation before community and society above self, (b) Family as the basic unit of society, (c)Community support and respect for the individual, (d)Consensus, not conflict and (e) Racial and religious harmony.

Despite the 'lukewarm' subjective identification, Singapore students undeniably identify with the region, that is, Asia, to some extent. What is their vision of the Asian identity, and how important do they perceive it to be?

Asian identity and Asian citizenship

Singapore students are rather ambivalent on whether Asia lacks an identity, with equal proportions of respondents being split between agreeing or strongly agreeing, and disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. However, the majority of them assign considerable importance to growing Asian identity and fostering an Asian citizenship in Asia (See *Table 7*). We found that Singapore students' sense of belonging to Asia has moderately positive correlation with their vision of fostering Asian citizenship (gamma=.357, p=.00) and the importance they place on growing an Asian identity (gamma=.345, p=.00). These data statistically support our earlier hypothesis that Singapore students' sense of belonging to Asia positively correlates with their regional consciousness (that is, inclination towards building greater Asian identity and citizenship).[21]

Table 7. Singapore students' vision of Asian identity

Q12d. We should foster the concept of Asian citizenship				
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
46	152	195	33	426
10.8%	35.7%	45.8%	7.7%	100.0%
Q12e. Asia is lacking its own identity				
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
62	300	68	5	435
14.3%	69.0%	15.6%	1.1%	100.0%
Q7d. Stability in Asia: Growth of Asian identity				
Very important	**Somewhat important**	**Not really important**	**Not important at all**	**Total**
190	198	54	6	448
42.4%	44.2%	12.1%	1.3%	100.0%

An interesting variation is observed among the Northeast (South Korea and China) and Southeast Asian (Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore) sub-regions in their views on Asian identity (or the lack thereof) and the related vision of fostering an Asian citizenship.[22] There is strong and significant correlation between sub-region and Asian identity (gamma=.608, p=.00), as well as sub-region and vision of Asian citizenship (gamma= -.334, p=.00).

The variations of responses across sub-regions are insightful: in a scale where '1' denotes strong agreement and '4' denotes strong disagreement, Southeast Asians score closer to '3' ('disagree') while Northeast Asians score closer to '2' ('agree') that Asia is lacking its own identity. Correspondingly, about 7 out of 10 Northeast Asian

[21] The correlation between the two measures—"growing Asian identity" and "fostering Asian citizenship"—is moderately positive and statistically significant (gamma=.356, p=.00).

[22] The two measures of identity and citizenship are analyzed together here because they are intuitively pertaining to the concept of identity and belonging in Asia. Despite this, we find only very weak but significant correlation between the two measures (gamma=.054, p=.000). Nevertheless, there is a moderately positive and significant correlation between growing Asian identity and fostering Asian citizenship (gamma=.295, p=.000).

students feel that Asia lacks its own identity, while almost the same proportion of their Southeast Asian counterparts believe otherwise—that Asia *does* have a distinctive identity of its own (See *Table 8*).

The majority of Southeast Asian students (85.8%) are therefore keen to take this a step further and 'formalize' this common identity into a common Asian citizenship. On the other hand, only about one in three East Asian respondents share this view, while about two in three of them are not interested in fostering the concept of an Asian citizenship. Correspondingly, the Southeast Asians show stronger agreement (mean=1.93) than the Northeast Asians (mean=2.20) on the notion of fostering an Asian citizenship (See *Table 9*).

Table 8. Asia is lacking its own identity
'1'=strongly agree' and '4'=strongly disagree

Sub-region	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)	Total	Mean
Northeast Asia	133	433	205	17	788	
	16.9%	54.9%	26.0%	2.2%	100.0%	2.13
Southeast Asia	137	372	739	376	1624	
	8.4%	22.9%	45.5%	23.2%	100.0%	2.83

Table 9. We should foster the concept of Asian citizenship
1'=strongly agree' and '4'=strongly disagree

Sub-region	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)	Total	Mean
Northeast Asia	118	413	216	29	776	
	15.2%	53.2%	27.8%	3.7%	100.0%	2.20
Southeast Asia	363	1033	216	16	1628	
	22.3%	63.5%	13.3%	1.0%	100.0%	1.93

Despite the difference in perception however, almost all respondents (91.4%) across countries (and sub-regions) concur that the growth of Asian identity is necessary (either very important or somewhat important) to maintain stability in Asia. The same sentiment is expressed by 86.6% Singapore students. This is reflected in the *Table 10* below.

Having discussed their sense of regionalism in this section, we would look at Singapore students' identification of self as part of their countries in the following section.[23] This would allow us to gauge their sense of national and global identity, and how these compare with their sense of regional consciousness.

"I see myself as Singaporean"

Singapore students' sense of regional identity ranks slightly behind their national identity. In fact, identification of self as part of the nation appears to be the most salient identity among the respondents from all countries surveyed. Practically

[23] Almost all Singaporeans also identify themselves as part of their local community (see *Table 3*). However, it is difficult to pin down exactly how the respondents interpret the idea of the local community—which could refer to ethnic group, geographical proximity, village of origin, linguistic group, religious group, etc. We are therefore hesitant in drawing too much conclusion from this particular question because of the likelihood of the different interpretations among respondents.

all Singapore students (96.0%), mirroring their counterparts in other Asian countries, see themselves first and foremost as part of their own country (see *Table 3* and *Table 4* earlier). However, it is interesting to note that the Singapore students' sense of national identity does not seem to be particularly strong. 45.1% Singapore students strongly see themselves as part of their country, which is slightly lower than the Asian average of 57.1% (See *Table 11*). There is also no variation across gender in the Singapore case, which is somewhat surprising given the consistent rhetoric by the state that compulsory national service for all Singapore males will lead to a stronger sense of national identity.

Table 10. Growth of Asian identity

Country	Q7d Stability in Asia: Growth of Asian identity				
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not really important	Not at all important	Total
South Korea	240	148	18	4	410
	58.5%	36.1%	4.4%	1.0%	100.0%
China	171	179	42	3	395
	43.3%	45.3%	10.6%	.8%	100.0%
Vietnam	185	183	28	4	400
	46.2%	45.8%	7.0%	1.0%	100.0%
Thailand	192	178	27	3	400
	48.0%	44.5%	6.8%	.8%	100.0%
Philippines	282	94	22	2	400
	70.5%	23.5%	5.5%	.5%	100.0%
Singapore	190	198	54	6	448
	42.4%	**44.2%**	12.1%	1.3%	100.0%
Total	1260	980	191	22	2453
	51.4%	**40.4%**	7.8%	.9%	100.0%

A caveat needs to be sounded at this point. An earlier study by Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies on national pride find that Singaporeans are generally "very proud" of their country, ranking second in the Chicago's National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) worldwide list of 23 nations.[25] The study notes that university students in Singapore tend to have the least national pride as compared to their less educated counterparts. In the same study, it is also observed that Singapore Chinese, whom we infer to be the majority respondents in this present study, have relatively lower pride in their country as compared to the Malay and the Indian minorities in Singapore. As such, the level of national identification in Singapore could not be accurately measured by the present sample, which only focuses on university students and fails to fairly represent the ethnic diversity in Singapore.

[25] The national pride was measured by a 5-items survey on attitudes and perceptions about Singapore as compared to other countries, which includes questions like *"I would rather be a citizen of Singapore than of any other country in the world"* and *"Generally speaking, Singapore is a better country than most other countries."* See http://www.ips.org.sg/press/Press%20-%20Citizens%20and%20the%20Nation.htm

Table 11. I see myself as part of [your country]

Q10c I see myself as part of [your country]					
Country	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
South Korea	211	188	9	1	409
	51.6%	46.0%	2.2%	.2%	100.0%
China	228	162	9	1	400
	57.0%	40.5%	2.2%	.2%	100.0%
Vietnam	253	142	5	0	400
	63.2%	35.5%	1.2%	.0%	100.0%
Thailand	289	105	6	0	400
	72.2%	26.2%	1.5%	.0%	100.0%
Philippines	220	172	6	2	400
	55.0%	43.0%	1.5%	.5%	100.0%
Singapore	203	229	14	4	450
	45.1%	50.9%	3.1%	.9%	100.0%
Total	1404	998	49	8	2459
	57.1%	40.6%	2.0%	.3%	100.0%

I see myself as a world citizen

It is worth noting that the idea of world citizenry does not hold a strong appeal to a great many Singapore students, as compared to those who identified themselves as being part of Singapore and Asia. From *Table 12*, it appears that only 7 out of 10 Singapore students see themselves as world citizens, as compared to the Asian average of close to 9 out of 10. Furthermore, in a scale where 1 denotes strong agreement and 4 strong disagreement, the mean score of Singaporeans (2.26) tilts more towards ambivalence between agreement and disagreement to being world citizen. The average Asian student, however, squarely agrees with this statement, as reflected in the mean score of 1.94.

There appears to be a contradiction here, because there is a tendency to associate being Singaporean—being a citizen of a global city that embraces cosmopolitanism in various ways—with being 'global minded'. Singaporeans are also frequent travelers: 95.6% Singapore students in this survey have been to a foreign country, which is the highest among all countries surveyed and almost double the Asian students' average of 54.6% (see *Table 13*). Thus, it appears that being abroad alone is not indicative of one being globally-oriented. This contradiction merits further research in this area, especially along the line of cosmopolitanism.

Table 12. I see myself as a world citizen: Percentage distribution and Mean comparison '1'=strongly agree, '4'=strongly disagree

Q10a I see myself as a world citizen						
Country	**Strongly Agree (1)**	**Agree (2)**	**Disagree (3)**	**Strongly Disagree (4)**	**Total**	**Mean**
Singapore	28	270	112	14	424	**2.26**
	6.6%	**63.7%**	26.4%	3.3%	100.0%	
Total	696	1435	250	34	2415	**1.84**
	28.8%	**59.4%**	10.4%	1.4%	100.0%	

Table 13. Have you been to a foreign country?

Country	Yes	No	Total
South Korea	279	131	410
	68.0%	32.0%	100.0%
China	69	331	400
	17.2%	82.8%	100.0%
Vietnam	84	316	400
	21.0%	79.0%	100.0%
Thailand	297	103	400
	74.2%	25.8%	100.0%
Philippines	184	216	400
	46.0%	54.0%	100.0%
Singapore	433	20	453
	95.6%	4.4%	100.0%
Total	1346	1117	2463
	54.6%	45.4%	100.0%

Sectional summary

One of the goals in both the East Asia Vision Group and East Asia Study Group Reports was the creation of an East Asian identity and consciousness. A condition for this to occur is to in the first place inculcate a sense of belonging to Asia. This sense of belonging, of course, takes the form of many subjective imaginings, the substance and form of which lies beyond the scope of the survey. Nonetheless, when asked at a basic level, a majority of Singapore students feel themselves to be part of Asia.

In an earlier section, we have pointed out that Singapore students' idea of Asia overwhelmingly excludes South and Central Asian countries, and predominantly include countries of Southeast and Northeast Asia. These also happened to be the ASEAN + 3 countries which are driving efforts to build the EAC. Although we cannot objectively link these two strands of results together for lack of appropriate data, we can cautiously infer at this point that *Singapore students feel a sense of belonging to East Asia (Southeast and Northeast Asia),though the intensity of this belonging is not strong.*

Furthermore, *there is a gulf between students in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. The latter are more positively inclined towards believing that Asia has its own distinct identity while the former is less so.* Thus, overall, identity building efforts by state actors need to take into account both national and sub-regional differences.

Also, two interesting sociological observations can be made for the Singapore data. State-led efforts to create an Asian identity for Singaporeans through various means seem to have a mixed impact. In an earlier section, we have noted that despite concentrated investments to create cultural affinities with China for various reasons, only slightly more than half of Singapore students feel that China has a positive influence for Singapore.

The data used in this analysis reveal that about one in five Singaporean students 'strongly agree' that they are part of Asia. This low figure seems to suggest that government efforts since the 1970s to instill in the population a sense of Asia-ness by various means have not translated into producing a large number of a younger population who strongly identify themselves with Asia. Perhaps, multiple indicators measuring different aspects of this idea are necessary to help us make more sense of this information, which for now looks mixed.

Second, Singapore has been geographically described as a global city state not simply due to its size and the collapse between the national/local. One other defining feature of a global city state is the projection of its hinterland to the region and beyond (Olds and Yeung, 2004:507). It is the orientation beyond the national and towards the global that makes Singapore 'cosmopolitan'. We would therefore expect a large number of Singaporean students to strongly agree to define themselves as 'world citizens'. However, less than 7% of respondents did so.

This could be because of two reasons. First, the phrase 'world citizen' might have sounded ambiguous, thus, to err on the side of caution, respondents chose a less definitive response. On the other hand, it could also be that they genuinely do not feel globally oriented. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate this discrepancy further. But if we take the current results at face value, they suggest that in the context of Singapore, the creation of a regional identity would not compete with the 'global'; rather, it would have to compete, cooperate and complement the 'local' (that is, national identity).

Proponents of globalization tend to take a simplistic approach in viewing the nation and the region. They tend to express what, in actual fact, are complex and dialectical interactions between the local, regional and global as a zero sum game; whereby the nation-state and, hence, national identity are seen to be weakened by globalization. Regionalism, on the other hand, is seen to be a threat to globalization by creating regional blocs that inhibit the globalizing process. However, national identity, regionalism and globalization are "complementary processes (that) occur simultaneously and interact" (Rumley, 2005:8). If we take the current results at face value, they suggest that in the context of Singapore, the creation of a regional identity will have to compete, cooperate and complement with the stronger tug of national identity, and less with a global identity.

The next section discusses the 'hard' or formal aspects of regionalism in the form of economic and security cooperation.

PART III

Regionalism and Integration

While it would certainly be beneficial, scholars note that the sharing of norms and values need not be a prerequisite for cooperation to take place. As Buszynski (2004:134) points out,

> cultural commonalities within the context of a natural region may not be required for the successful implantation of cooperative institutional structures.

> Patterns of economic and security interaction between states may be more reliable guides to cooperative behavior than cultural commonality.

It is unclear what Buszynski (2004) means by "natural region" as 'region' is a subjective construction based on various layers of imaginings. Nonetheless, he makes an important point by highlighting the importance of economic and security issues in facilitating, even pushing (culturally diverse) states towards regional cooperation. In other words, the formal or 'hard' aspects of regionalism tend to lead to greater chances of integration.

Cooperation is an existential concern of any transnational organization. States have to agree to move beyond national interests and find a convergence, or compromise on issues that would permit actors from different states to cooperate with each other**.** Thus, individual members of a regional organization need to form a concert, which "requires from its members a commitment to common goals and policies while at the same permitting members to pursue their own specific interests" (Vayrynen, 2003:29).

In this section, we will focus on two areas of cooperation—economic and security. Economic and security issues are also identified in the EASG and EAVG Reports as important areas of cooperation.[26] We will examine Singapore students' attitudes towards economic integration as well as their perceptions of the kinds of issues they consider to be key threats to Singapore and the world. If the framework of development forms their basis of the cognitive mapping of Asia, it stands to reason that the Asian regionalism, from the perspective of Singapore students at least, would be driven, among others, by the goal of economic development. We will also compare their responses with students from other countries to assess whether or not there are some common interests, goals and a sense of shared future at the students level.[27]

Economic Cooperation

Table 14. Perceptions on the impact of Economic integration" (Singapore data)

Q11b Economic integration: Greater income inequality				
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
39	208	137	8	392
9.9%	**53.1%**	34.9%	2.0%	100.0%
Q11c Economic integration: Enrich our life				
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
42	279	68	2	391

[26] As mentioned earlier, out of the 26 recommendations made in the EASG Report, eleven deal with economic issues. With regards to security cooperation, the EASG Report recommends strengthening "mechanisms for cooperation on non-traditional security issues". This seems to be a dilution and a more cautious approach to the earlier EAVG Report that recommends "establishing and strengthening of mechanisms for addressing threats to peace in the region".

[27] Scholars like Beck (2002) argue that trans-national cooperation in the age of globalization could not be based on values stemming from a shared past, but in *common goals for a shared future.* This seems to be what ASEAN was alluding to in its People's Declaration, which states that "Aware that our diversity has not undermined the reality of *our shared destiny*" (Institute of Strategic and Development Studies, 2003, cited in Delanty and He, 2008:340).

Table 14. Perceptions on the impact of Economic integration" (Singapore data)

Q11b Economic integration: Greater income inequality				
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
39	208	137	8	392
10.7%	**71.4%**	17.4%	.5%	100.0%
Q11f Economic integration: Destroy domestic economies				
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
15	134	208	23	380
3.9%	35.3%	54.7%	6.1%	100.0%
Q11g Economic integration: Benefit only multinationals				
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
13	109	236	36	394
3.3%	27.7%	59.9%	9.1%	100.0%

Table 15. "Is economic inequality a threat to your country?"

Country	**% Yes**
South Korea	84.6
China	74
Vietnam	45.2
Thailand	78
Philippines	79.8
Singapore	**61.8**

In terms of economic integration, while most Singapore students believe economic integration will create income inequality (63.0% "Agree" or "Strongly Agree") and that the latter is a threat to Singapore (61.8% "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"), they also believe that economic integration will "enrich our lives" (82.1% "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"). This seems to suggest that Singapore students feel they will not fall 'victims' to the impact of economic integration but will instead benefit from it. The positive attitude of Singapore students towards economic integration is perhaps unsurprising, given Singapore's open-ness and exposure to globalization. Consistently, the majority of Singapore students (60.8%) do not believe that greater economic interdependence will hurt domestic economies, while 58.3% do not view it as only benefiting the multinationals.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents in all countries believe that economic integration will "enrich our lives" (see *Table 16*), and that economic development is 'very important' for the stability of Asia (see *Table 17*). We believe that the operating factor at work here is class.

A discernible trend from the early 1990s onwards was the emergence of a middle class in Asia (see for instance Birdsall, 2000; Rohwer, 1995; Robinson, 1995; and Katzenstein and Shiraishi, 2006). This middle class has been created and sustained by decades of economic growth in countries characterised by "interventionist, facilitative, or developmental states [which] emphasized export-oriented industrial development" (Stubbs, 2002: 445). Although the class background of the respondents are not reflected in the survey, it seems likely that most of the university students surveyed would have a middle class background, or aspire towards

middle class status once armed with university qualifications, which could explain their favourable views of economic integration.

Table 16. "Economic integration will enrich our life"

Country	Q11c Economic integration: Enrich our life				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
South Korea	26	227	108	11	372
	7.0%	61.0%	29.0%	3.0%	100.0%
China	35	275	72	10	392
	8.9%	70.2%	18.4%	2.6%	100.0%
Vietnam	130	257	10	2	399
	32.6%	64.4%	2.5%	.5%	100.0%
Thailand	60	258	79	3	400
	15.0%	64.5%	19.8%	.8%	100.0%
Philippines	55	266	67	6	394
	14.0%	67.5%	17.0%	1.5%	100.0%
Singapore	42	279	68	2	391
	10.7%	71.4%	17.4%	.5%	100.0%
Total	348	1562	404	34	2348
	14.8%	**66.5%**	17.2%	1.4%	100.0%

Table 17. Economic development is important to maintain stability in Asia

Country	Q7c Stability in Asia: Economic development				
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not really important	Not at all important	Total
South Korea	232	159	14	5	410
	56.6%	38.8%	3.4%	1.2%	100.0%
China	312	81	5	2	400
	78.0%	20.3%	1.3%	.5%	100.0%
Vietnam	295	98	7	0	400
	73.8%	24.5%	1.8%	.0%	100.0%
Thailand	292	102	6	0	400
	73.0%	25.5%	1.5%	.0%	100.0%
Philippines	366	30	3	1	400
	91.5%	7.5%	.8%	.3%	100.0%
Singapore	288	154	7	0	449
	64.1%	34.3%	1.6%	.0%	100.0%
Total	1785	624	42	8	2459
	72.6%	**25.4%**	1.7%	.3%	100.0%

It is therefore not surprising that there is an overwhelming agreement among all respondents that economic integration will be a foundation for building an East Asian Community (*Charts 1 and 2*), although it seems that the respondents are being more cautious in predicting the establishment of EAC by 2020. There is also some

variation among respondents across sub-regions with regards to economic integration being the cornerstones of EAC. As evident in *Tables 18 and 19*, the Northeast Asian countries have more respondents disagreeing that economic integration would be the foundation of the EAC. Compared to the Southeast Asian respondents, the Northeast Asians are also less optimistic, even ambivalent, that the EAC could be established by 2020.

Chart 1.

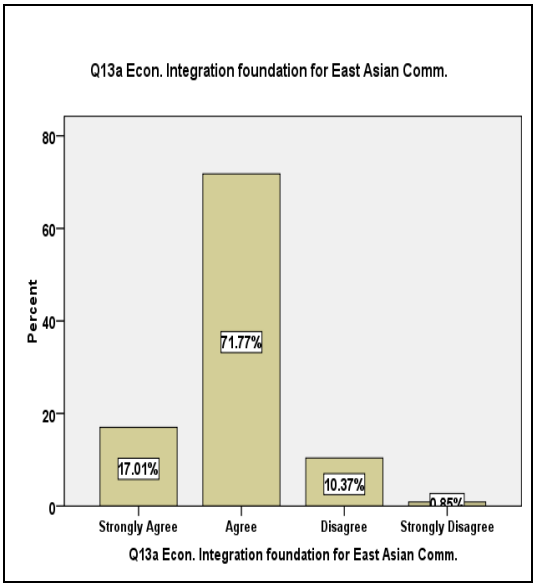

Chart 2.

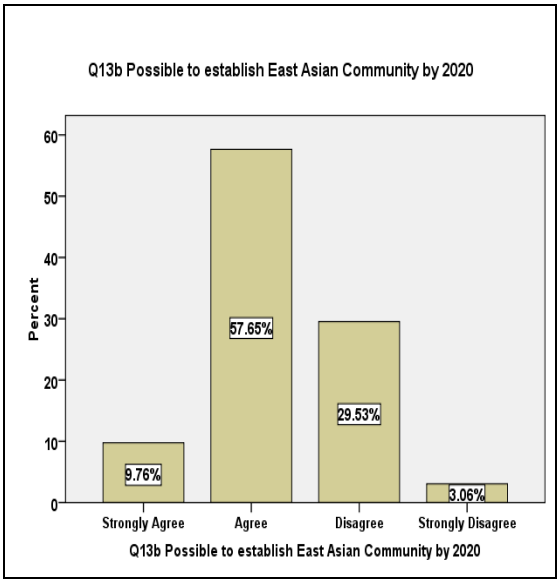

Table 18. Economic integration as foundation for the EAC

Country	Q13a Econ. Integration foundation for East Asian Comm.				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
South Korea	39	275	71	5	390
	10.0%	70.5%	18.2%	1.3%	100.0%
China	56	266	60	9	391
	14.3%	68.0%	15.3%	2.3%	100.0%
Vietnam	147	234	16	0	397
	37.0%	58.9%	4.0%	.0%	100.0%
Thailand	65	300	34	1	400
	16.2%	75.0%	8.5%	.2%	100.0%
Philippines	47	321	29	2	399
	11.8%	80.5%	7.3%	.5%	100.0%
Singapore	46	292	34	3	375
	12.3%	77.9%	9.1%	.8%	100.0%
Total	400	1688	244	20	2352
	17.0%	71.8%	10.4%	.9%	100.0%

Table 19. Possibility of establishing East Asian Community by 2020

Country	Q13b Possible to establish East Asian Community by 2020				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
South Korea	29	162	156	19	366
	7.9%	44.3%	42.6%	5.2%	100.0%
China	16	197	156	15	384
	4.2%	51.3%	40.6%	3.9%	100.0%
Vietnam	74	217	86	7	384
	19.3%	56.5%	22.4%	1.8%	100.0%
Thailand	32	289	73	6	400
	8.0%	72.2%	18.2%	1.5%	100.0%
Philippines	37	228	118	14	397
	9.3%	57.4%	29.7%	3.5%	100.0%
Singapore	32	207	77	8	324
	9.9%	63.9%	23.8%	2.5%	100.0%
Total	220	1300	666	69	2255
	9.8%	57.6%	29.5%	3.1%	100.0%

Security Cooperation

This section will look at the top three[28] 'threats' as selected by the majority of the Singapore students and compare them with the other countries in the survey.

Aging Population

The aging of population is seen as a threat by the most number of Singaporeans, a perception shared only in South Korea. A government statistic reveals that 1 out of 5 Singaporeans will be 65 years and older by 2030, up from 1 in 12 today[29]. This demographic change in Singapore society is quite evident at the everyday level. The awareness of this problem is further reinforced by the state via campaigns aimed at encouraging employers to hire older workers, as well as initiatives like the multi million dollar 'Council for Third Age'—a public-private partnership that promotes holistic wellness for elderly through active ageing.

Table 20. Is the aging of population a threat to your country?

Country	% Yes
South Korea	64.9
China	35.2
Vietnam	11.5
Thailand	23.0
Philippines	12.2
Singapore	**77.0**

[28] This will exclude 'income inequality', which had been discussed in the earlier section.

[29] See Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports of Singapore, 'Report on Ageing Population' at http://www.mcys.gov.sg/successful_ageing/index.html

Terrorism

73.7% of Singapore students feel that terrorism is a threat to Singapore. In this respect, there is a great gulf between the East Asian countries and ASEAN countries[30] on the threat of terrorism. The majority of students from ASEAN countries cite 'Terrorism' as a threat but only 12% of South Korean students and 6.5% of students from China did so. The reason may be quite simple. Southeast Asia is one of the fronts against the 'war' on terror, with terror networks like the Jemaah Islamiyah being indigenous in this region.

Of key interest, however, are the attitudes towards 'Religious Fundamentalism'. Given the increased media coverage of Islam and its perceived association with violence and acts of terror, we would expect a correlation between 'Terrorism' and 'Religious Fundamentalism,' that is, given that the majority of respondents cite 'Terrorism' as a threat, we would expect the majority to cite 'Religious Fundamentalism' as a threat too. However, the complete opposite occurs. In every country surveyed, 'Religious Fundamentalism' is cited as a threat only by a small proportion of students, as reflected in the table below. This discrepancy suggests that university students are able to 'filter' out media images and delinked religion from acts of terror.

Table 21. Is terrorism a threat to your country?

Country	% Yes
South Korea	12
China	6.5
Vietnam	Not asked
Thailand	77.5
Philippines	82.2
Singapore	**73.7**

Environment

Environmental destruction is a non-traditional security issue (Bedeski, 2000). The majority of Singapore students consider this to be a threat, but the numbers are overwhelmingly higher in the other countries surveyed. Later, when asked to decide, from a list of five options, which one is deemed to be the "greatest threat to the world", most students from Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam and South Korea chose "Pollution and other environmental problems" (See *Table 23*).

Table 22. Is environmental destruction a threat to your country?

Country	% Yes
South Korea	73.9
China	87.2
Vietnam	80.2
Thailand	81.8
Philippines	87.8
Singapore	**61.6**

[30] This question was not asked in Vietnam.

Table 23. Danger that poses the greatest threat to the world

Country	Q9 Danger that poses the greatest threat to the world					Total
	Spread of nuclear weapons	Religious and ethnic hatred	AIDS and other infectious diseases	Pollution &environmental problems	Growing gap between rich & poor	
South Korea	73	88	22	**127**	95	405
	18.0%	21.7%	5.4%	**31.4%**	23.5%	100.0%
China	118	58	19	**99**	106	400
	29.5%	14.5%	4.8%	**24.8%**	26.5%	100.0%
Vietnam	113	55	45	**146**	41	400
	28.3%	13.8%	11.3%	**36.5%**	10.3%	100.0%
Thailand	37	103	16	**206**	38	400
	9.3%	25.8%	4.0%	**51.5%**	9.5%	100.0%
Philippines	68	42	14	**145**	131	400
	17.0%	10.5%	3.5%	**36.3%**	32.8%	100.0%
Singapore	115	110	48	**122**	53	448
	25.7%	24.6%	10.7%	**27.2%**	11.8%	100.0%
Total	524	456	164	**845**	464	2453
	21.4%	18.6%	6.7%	**34.4%**	18.9%	100.0%

Table 24. Who should decide on policies pertaining to the issues of environmental protection?

Country	Q8b Deciding policies: Protection of the environment			
	National governments	Regional organizations	International organizations	Total
South Korea	153	83	169	405
	37.8%	20.5%	41.7%	100.0%
China	159	66	175	400
	39.8%	16.5%	43.8%	100.0%
Vietnam	164	85	150	399
	41.1%	21.3%	37.6%	100.0%
Thailand	111	100	189	400
	27.8%	25.0%	47.3%	100.0%
Philippines	194	69	136	399
	48.6%	17.3%	34.1%	100.0%
Singapore	131	89	226	446
	29.4%	20.0%	50.7%	100.0%
Total	912	492	1045	2449
	37.2%	**20.1%**	42.7%	100.0%

This option had the third highest response in China, which is only 5% lower than the issue seen as the greatest threat in China by most respondents: the spread of nuclear weapons. This suggests that environmental problems are deemed to be a very serious threat by the majority of all students surveyed.

At the same time, only about 20% of students across countries believe that this problem is best tackled by regional organizations. We can infer that they have

relatively low confidence in the ability of regional bodies to deal with the problem, preferring that the issue be tackled either at the international or national level instead.

Sectional summary

Singapore students, as well as their counterparts in all the countries surveyed, generally have a *positive attitude towards economic integration*. Although they perceive income inequality as a threat, they project this inequality away from themselves. This positive attitude towards economic integration, especially in relation to the EAC, reflects the perceptions at the level of state actors: that the EAC will be primarily driven by economic imperatives. This attitude is shared by the emerging professional/middle class in the countries surveyed.

The top issues that are seen as threats by Singapore students are 'Aging of Population' (77%), Terrorism (73.7), Economic Inequality (61.8%) and Environmental Destruction (61.6%). However, not all of these issues are perceived in the same light by students in other countries. There is also a sub-regional trend at work, in which differences in opinions are clearly seen between ASEAN countries and those in East Asia.

One prominent example is terrorism. This means that efforts to promote cooperation at the level of student exchanges and dialogues with respect to issues of terrorism would be better executed within ASEAN. The most promising area of cooperation for EAC in the form of student exchanges, interactions and dialogues would be that of environmental problems. This is an area in which the majority of tertiary students across all countries surveyed displayed a high level of concern. This dovetails neatly with the recommendations in the EASG report on environmental cooperation[31]. Since environmental problems are also a concern at the elite level, it means that environmental concerns provide a promising opportunity for the EAC to promote environmental cooperation of shared concerns at the student-level.

However, most students do not feel that this problem could be tackled at the regional level. The implication of these two opposing results is that the future EAC has to put in greater effort to ensure its credibility in tackling environmental problems. At the same time, focusing on environmental cooperation amongst tertiary students can help develop grassroots level mechanisms to tackle this non-traditional security threat, while at the same time promoting integration.

CONCLUSION

This has been an essay on the perceptions and subjectivities of geography, identity and integration. "Regions disappear and reappear as they are transformed by various economic, political and cultural factors" (Vayrynen, 2003:25) and in the cognitive mapping of Singapore students, there seems to be a shrinking in the idea of Asia based on factors and criteria discussed earlier to heavily mean East Asia. As such, the Singapore case indicates that there is sufficient basis for East Asia to be perceived as a common region from which a regional body like the EAC could be built upon.

[31] The EASG report recommends"closer regional marine environmental cooperation".

Singapore students also appear to have sufficient identification of self as part of Asia, although this regional identity is weaker that their national identity, while their global identity is weakest. Lastly, tackling environmental problems seems to be the most promising area of regional cooperation, although more efforts should be taken up by the future EAC to increase the credibility that regional bodies are 'good enough' to shoulder this non-traditional security threat.

At this point, we will end by highlighting two areas that merit further studies. First, two counter-intuitive findings in the Singapore data mean that more detailed studies need to be carried out to resolve the discrepancies. This refers first, to an unexpectedly low proportion of Singapore Chinese students who felt that China was a positive influence, although the state has invested heavily for many years in trying to develop cultural affinities with China, for reasons discussed earlier. It could be that Singaporeans distinguish between Chinese culture and the People's Republic of China. The second discrepancy lies in the relatively lower proportion of Singapore students who felt that they were global citizens. This runs counter to the 'common-sense' perceptions that Singaporeans are globally minded.

Projecting at a higher level of abstraction, perceptions of countries as positive/negative, feelings of identity and perceptions of threats are all related to the concept of social capital or trust. The relationship between social capital and regional formation hardly exists in the body of literature on regionalism. One exception is a study by Ruiz and Zahrnt (2008) who developed a preliminary theoretical model linking regional ambition, social capital and regional institutions. More such conceptual and theoretical efforts are needed to enrich the study of regions.

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