



Editorial Statement

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Our Journal, Journal of Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth International Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies (JCBIS), focus and aims are various but interrelated. Being hosted by our parent institute, Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth International Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies, at Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-OK (Bangkok), we have a strong focus on developments within Thailand. However, at the same time, and in recognition of the local-regional interconnectivity, we interpret the 'region' as both, a political-economic and geographic concept, which is vital to our research focus. As such, geography and proximity are central aspects when related to the conception of a region.

Still, one also has to recognize the 'region' from a global, geo-political, perspective, as a focus of great power politics. Indeed, Acharya (2007), reminds us, that historically regions were defined by great power interest. One just has to recall the politics of colonial empires or the Cold-War confrontation. The issue of power politics is not singularly related to a global perspective on the region, but inherently linked to geography, as security, or better, insecurity, is local. Buzan and Wæver (2003) assessed that the security concern for most countries lies within the regional setting,

not at the system level. It is the neighbour state, which represents the potential highest security threat. As Mearsheimer (2013) states, a state can never be certain about the intentions of other states. This in turn generates an underlining and enduring uncertainty at the local and regional level. Hence, geography, location, and thus proximity, matter. Hence, in most cases, the focus of security relations is oriented towards neighbouring states, even when great power competition also generates a local impact on cooperation and conflict. Again, geography and proximity count. Yet, they also count, when it comes to economic cooperation and in considering an alternative approach to the region, one which recognizes local actors as a force for supporting regional cooperation.

An alternative, contemporary, explanation of region overcomes the traditional great power-related focus, while at the same time defining a region also becomes more ambivalent. There is general recognition, that, as stated by Hettner et. al. (2001), contemporary regional cooperation forms are more comprehensive, multidimensional, and plural in their outlook and focuses, consequently less focused on formal state-to-state relationships. One approach to characterizing regional cooperation differentiates between the regional, sub-regional, and micro-regional processes. Another is between top-down (state-led) and bottom-up (local actor-led) cooperation dynamics. Top-down regionalism refers to strong state involvement in regional cooperation, with an aim of developing a formal regional cooperation dynamic based on a specific regional institutional setting. The underlining argument supporting such an approach is based on the conviction that formal regional cooperation is the best way forward to address and solve common challenges neighbouring states are facing. Supporters of an institutional approach to regional cooperation, like Haas (1958) or Hurrell (1995) among others, also expect that a regional institutional setting will transform the

existing loyalties and identities of actors within a region from a state to a regional focus. Consequently, generating a new political identity at the regional level.

However, bottom-up approaches to regional cooperation have taken a fundamentally different focus, as they focus on local non-state actors and associated dynamics. Indeed, the focus is on how local economic interests, addressing local challenges (like missing or underdeveloped infrastructure) within a wider geographical setting, support a regional cooperation dynamic. In state of state-level actors, local and provincial actors are interpreted as the relevant actors. What's more, bottom-up regional cooperation dynamics may also include actors from different countries as economic space, not always need to be in accordance with national borders. It is worth remembering that economic activities are connected by space and across space. It may also be worth remembering that the bottom-up approach is closer associated with sub-regional and micro-regional approaches than with a regional-level approach. Söderbaum (2005) describe sub-regional cooperation as being based on a small number of involved states, and micro-regions as being either located within a single country or including selected spaces of different countries, like growth triangles. Whereas Breslin and Hook (2002) argue that sub-regional and micro-regional processes should not be portrayed as separate dynamics, but as an expression of the multidimensional nature of contemporary regionalism. They offer a quite similar description of micro-regionalism, describing it as a process of growing regional interconnectedness at the local level, that can transcend national borders to promote political, economic, or cultural interests (Breslin and Hook 2002). Earlier, Keating (1998) already offered a differentiation of the various characteristics micro-regions can take, including physical-geographic regions, cultural regions, economic regions, administrative/planning regions, and political regions. With regard to how to characterize

regional cooperation dynamics, it is vital to recognize the distinction between regionalism and regionalization. Hettn et al. (2001) state that regionalism is generally associated with a deliberate strategy of a national actor to support formal regional institution-building, whereas regionalization refers to a processual dynamic below the national level, but one which still can transcend national borders. Alike arguing Breslin and Higgot (2000) state that while regionalism refers to a formal top-down, government led-process, regionalization refers to a less formalistic bottom-up process, one more focused on creating a local specific, but occasionally, transnational economic space.

As our understanding of the region is changing, characterized by the top-down vs bottom-up discussion, our understanding of how a region comes into being is also changing. With hegemonic regionalism losing most of its appeal as an analytical concept, even great power politics does influence regional development, the perception that the region no longer represents a passive object took hold. Indeed, as emphasized by Söderbaum (2013), among others, the various dynamics of regional cooperation at the local level, have transformed the region into an active subject. Alike argues Acharya (2007) stating that regions are constructed from within. Identifying local interests as a vital aspect of supporting regional cooperation dynamics, offers strong support for the bottom-up interpretation of regional cooperation. Local support for regional cooperation dynamics can be based on several different aspects, like supporting local economic development, enhancing infrastructure development, but it can also be based on a shared historical, cultural, or linguistic link or a combination of them. After all, regional cooperation may offer different localities an opportunity of overcoming underdevelopment by connecting economic space or generating links to different economic areas. Awareness of belonging to a particular geographic area, like a mountain range or river network, can further enhance the prospect for regional

cooperation. Awareness of belonging to a specific regional setting can also be attributed to the success of earlier steps introduced, like economic cooperation or infrastructure development. A specific, one could even state, exceptional case of regional cooperation is described by the concept of 'security community'. The concept of 'security community' provides another interesting approach to regional cooperation, once which is state centred but at the same time emphasises the importance of generating a shared awareness. While there has been some recent re-evaluation of this concept, it became famous through Deutsch's academic engagement with the concept back in the 1950s and 1960s. Deutsch's definition of a 'security community' points towards a group of states where the cooperation dynamic generated a perception of trust and a sense of shared community among the involved states, supported by informal or formal institutional practices and settings, leading to peaceful cooperation (Deutsch, 1968). More recent academic evaluation of the concept of 'security community' is linked to work done by Adler and Barnett (1998), by pointing out that the concept of security community integrates security with community, consequently creating a stable peace, and not just a stable order. They too, take up the earlier argument from Deutsch, that the formation of a 'security community' requires a transformation in identity building, of generating we-feeling among a group of states. Alike argues Acharya (2009) emphasises that a regional cooperation dynamic, underlining a 'security community', requires a process of community formation, the transformation of state-to-state relations. Trade, culture, migration, and tourism can offer support towards the development of a shared identity over time, thus generating a sense of belonging.

Consequently, enhancing the dynamic of a bottom-up regional cooperation dynamic. While there is now a general recognition of the changing character of what constitutes a region, it should not

be overseen, that regional cooperation dynamics in general and bottom-up-based regional cooperation have benefited from fundamental changes at the systemic level. Indeed, only with the Cold War, a dominating global system rivalry, coming to an end open political-economic space where regional projects could drive. Economic globalization, characterized by global production chains, further contributed to local specific regional cooperation dynamics, like growth triangles. This embeddedness of global and local economic activities became a new focal point and with it the relevance of locality, space, and, by extension, the region increased. Thus, adding emphasis on geography and proximity. While this generated benefits within some local areas, it should not be ignored that economic development has a general tendency towards unevenness, consequently generating economic disparities. Recognizing this potential challenge is vital as we have to acknowledge that a regional cooperation dynamic, and a regional setting, do not represent a fixed posture, indeed, regional cooperation requires constant support. As such economic and development success of regional cooperation counts. Supporting a regional cooperation dynamic also requires supporting existing awareness of belonging, not without reason can we identify the organization of various events, emphasizing cultural, linguistic, or historical links in already established regional settings. Once again, indicating that generating regional awareness is not a one-off undertaking but requires constant support. This observation applies to both forms of contemporary regional processes, top-down and bottom-up processes.

To increase the complexity of how to identify different regional cooperation dynamics, one has to remember that local characterised bottom-up regional integration dynamics can be instigated by national-level decision-making or even being initiated by international actors within a specific regional setting. Good examples for the first case are successful central government-devised

special economic zones. One can take for example Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) as a good example. The EEC not only aims to attract foreign direct investment but also to take advantage of the available workforce from nearby Cambodia. Implementing the EEC also contribute to further local infrastructure development as well. Though it should be mentioned that the EEC represent a continuation of the earlier implemented Eastern Seaboard Development Program. Both regional development strategies are aiming to create a competitive and alternative industrial base outside Bangkok, to facilitate local development and a more equal distribution of economic opportunities. Comprehensive infrastructure development is one part of this strategy. While the EEC represents a local-based development strategy with a focus on a wider regional setting, its origin can be traced back to central government decision-making and Thailand's 20-year development strategy: Thailand 4.0. The more general aim of Thailand 4.0 is to transform Thailand's economy towards a more advanced level through a combination of physical and human capital with an added focus on innovation. To transform Thailand's economy into a world-class economy competitive advantage through knowledge, technology, and innovation needs to be developed. This also includes extensive infrastructure development as an additional focus for supporting various localities within Thailand in their economic development process.

Depending on its future success, it could develop into a case of local-based bottom-up regional cooperation case with transnational links, generating its own economic dynamic within a specific geographic area. Even the EEC should contribute to a national process of economic modernisation. Examples of the second category are the Asian Development Bank (ADB) inspired Economic Corridor concepts with the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). While the ADB-inspired Economic Corridors are organised within a specific regional setting, it is more challenging to

identify their specific local impact, and the questions remain to what extent the two end points of an Economic Corridor are gaining more from the investment undertaken than the communities along an Economic Corridors. Consequently, the expectations that those Economic Corridors will contribute to a local-based regional bottom-up dynamic are rather low. Not least, they cover a considerable distance, crossing various national borders and different provinces within different states, rather undermining the development of shared awareness of the communities included in an Economic Corridor project. Yet what has regional cooperation processes in common is supporting local economic growth, offering the prospect of development consequently reducing the prospect for violent confrontation between states. It is worth recalling a now famous statement of a previous Thai prime minister, Chatichai Choonhaven, who in 1988 stated, to turn Indochina from a battlefield into a marketplace. One can argue that this vision, though supported by various international actors, like the ADB, has become a reality.

Interpreting the formation of regional cooperation from the perspective of contemporary regional cooperation projects, their support for economic growth and wider development becomes well recognised. While such an approach does transcend the historical concept of a region based on great power politics, it should not be argued that great power politics does not play a role in contemporary regionalism either. The newly devised concept of the Indo-Pacific offers the latest example of political invention regarding regional space based on great power politics. As such, while the JCBIS focus on the economic and development impact of regional cooperation, the impact of great power politics on regional cooperation dynamics cannot be ignored either.

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