Japanese popular culture in East Asia: a new insight into regional community building

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Abstract

This article seeks to enhance our understanding of an East Asian community by focusing on its cultural aspect. The specific focus of analysis is Japanese popular culture, whose elements include J-pop music, TV dramas, movies, *manga* (comic books), and *anime* (animations). This article sheds light on the progress of community building in the cultural sphere by demonstrating that Japanese popular culture has been favored by the people in the East Asian region. By so doing, it modifies our common beliefs about the characteristics of an East Asian community and our conventional expectations of the nature of an East Asian regional identity.

1 Introduction

In the political and economic spheres, regional cooperation in East Asia has made progress. Countries have begun to develop multilateral institutions for the sake of peace and prosperity in this region. The members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), together with

their three Northeast Asian partners – namely China, South Korea, and Japan – held the first summit meeting of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) in 1997 and launched the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005. Within these frameworks, the East Asian countries have expressed their commitment to building an East Asian community that would 'contribute to the maintenance of ... peace and security, prosperity and progress' (APT, 2005; also see EAS, 2005). Moreover, they have strengthened their ties through a network of free trade agreements (FTAs). The Southeast Asian association has forged FTAs with each of its Northeast Asian partners, thereby developing economic cooperation at the East Asian level. This has enabled business actors to increase their activities in the region, in terms of trade and investment. These developments in the political and economic spheres are significant: however, as students of Asian regionalism, we should broaden our perspective, as the present study demonstrates.

This article seeks to enhance our understanding of an East Asian community by focusing on its cultural aspect, which has not been explored in depth in the existing literature. To be specific, its two main sections do two things in turn. The first section examines whether East Asian community building in the cultural sphere has made progress. It does so by focusing on the spread of Japanese popular culture, whose elements include J-pop music, TV dramas, movies, *manga* (comic books), and *anime* (animations). It concludes that East Asian community building in the cultural sphere is making progress, on the ground that Japanese popular culture has been favored by the people in this region. The second section discusses the implications of the argument in the first section for the characteristics of an East Asian community and for the nature of an East Asian regional identity.

These effectively mean that, by shedding light on the progress of community building in the cultural sphere, this article modifies our common beliefs about the characteristics of an East Asian community and our conventional expectations of the nature of an East Asian regional identity. We tend to expect an East Asian regional identity to exhibit at least three negative characteristics: it is likely to be monopolized by political and business elites, fraught with political fault lines, and championed by a particular player for its own interests, namely ASEAN, Japan, or China. However, a focus on community building in the cultural sphere allows us to modify all these negative expectations. In concrete terms, we

may expect an East Asian identity to be shared by students and ordinary citizens, accommodative in nature, and flexible enough to be articulated by anyone in any way, without privileging the interests of any particular party.

This study represents a new direction for research on Asian regionalism, in particular, community building in the East Asian region – which, in this article, simply refers to an area encompassing Northeast and Southeast Asia. The research on Asian regionalism, to date, has paid insufficient attention to cultural exchanges, with a few important exceptions (Shiraishi, 1997; Katzenstein, 2005, ch. 5; Otmazgin, 2005; Leheny, 2006). Its main concerns have been issues central to the literature in international relations (IR) and international political economy, namely, intergovernmental political and economic cooperation, centered on institutional frameworks such as the APT, the EAS, and FTAs, as an engine of the top-down process of 'regionalism'; and regional economic exchanges at the societal level, in terms of production, investment, and consumption, as an engine of the bottom-up process of 'regionalization' (Hurrell, 1995, pp. 39–40; Pempel, 2005, pp. 19–24). The research on a more specific topic, community building and regional identity formation in Asia, has also paid insufficient attention to cultural exchanges. Its main concern has been developments in the security sphere, namely, the spread of cooperative security ideas through diplomatic exchanges, which facilitate the formation of a community of friendly nations, or the cultivation of a sense of 'we-ness' or 'we-feeling' – described by Karl Deutsch *et al.* (1957, p. 36) as an integral component of regional community (Snitwongse, 1995; Acharya, 1998, 2001; Dösch and Mols, 1998, pp. 170–171).

Yet, to enhance our understanding of an East Asian community, it is essential to focus on its cultural aspect – i.e. the spread of cultural products across the region through international cultural exchanges, the core component of which is the consumption of foreign cultural products. This is because the consumption of cultural products should facilitate community building and collective identity formation, or the cultivation of a sense of 'we-ness' or 'we-feeling'. The consumption of these products is all about the sharing of common images and feelings through the exchange of these ideational elements across national boundaries. The IR literature maintains that the sharing of common ideational elements through various forms of communication and exchange across borders facilitates community building and the formation of collective identities

(Deutsch *et al*., 1957, especially p. 145; Adler and Barnett, 1998, especially p. 41; Barnett and Adler, 1998, pp. 416–418; also see Wendt, 1994, pp. 388–391; 1999, pp. 343–363). Indeed, a recent survey of students in six East Asian countries – China, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – shows that, by and large, those who are more frequently exposed to cultural products originating in East Asia – specifically, TV programs, movies, and animations produced in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China – tend to identify themselves more strongly as 'Asians', and be more sympathetic to the concept of 'Asian citizenship' (Katsumata and Iida, 2011).

This article deals with Japanese cultural products because they can be considered a hard case. Japanese products seem less likely to spread than others, for two reasons. First, the historical memories shaped in the first half of the twentieth century must have made the people in the East Asian region reluctant to accept anything originating in Japan. Second, the Japanese language is not spoken widely, and thus Japanese cultural products are disadvantaged, in comparison with those in other languages, such as Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. Among the various elements of Japanese culture, the present study concentrates on popular culture because it is a key to understanding the future of an East Asian community. The consumers of popular cultural products include students and youngsters, or the next generation who will in the future lead the creation of a regional community. The images and feelings which this generation share today must have a strong bearing on the characteristics of a regional community and the nature of a regional identity in the future – a point that will be revisited in the concluding section.

2 Japanese popular culture

Has East Asian community building in the cultural sphere made progress, and has Japanese popular culture been favored by the people in the region? Today, Japanese popular cultural products – such as J-pop music, TV dramas, movies, *manga*, and *anime* – are so widespread in the region that they can be found in almost all the countries in the region. This kind of situation should represent the progress of East Asian community building, because it indicates that consumers in the region are sharing common images and feelings through international exchanges.

However, skeptics may disagree, and offer at least two counter-arguments. First, the perceived spread of Japanese popular culture in the region is merely part of a global phenomenon; therefore, there is nothing 'East Asian' about what seems to be taking place in this region. Second, the core element of community building is the soft power diplomacy of the Tokyo government and/or the marketing strategies of media corporations, rather than the preference of consumers for Japanese popular cultural products; therefore, in East Asia, community building in the cultural sphere is half-hearted. This section deals with these two points in turn, thereby shedding light on the progress of the community building that is founded on the spread of Japanese popular culture.

2.1 Is it East Asian?

The first skeptical view is too simplistic, and the spread of Japanese popular culture in East Asia should not be seen as merely part of a global phenomenon. It is true that Japanese *manga* and *anime* are popular all over the world. It is even said that, on a global scale, Japan's cultural influence has grown and the country's 'gross national cool' has increased (McGray, 2002). However, at the same time, some aspects of the spread of Japanese popular culture are distinctively 'East Asian'. In other words, to a certain degree, the spread of Japanese cultural products can be considered an 'East Asian' phenomenon taking place within a particular geographical area. Three things are worth mentioning in this respect.

First, the popularity of certain kinds of Japanese popular cultural products is concentrated in East Asia, namely, J-pop music and TV dramas. These products are influencing the fashion and lifestyle of youngsters in many Asian countries. These young people can easily identify themselves with J-pop idols and Japanese actors/actresses, and are readily influenced by Japanese products. In this respect, it is understandable that, in comparison with Western consumer products, those from Japan are in general seen as 'cool' in Asian cities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taipei, Seoul, Bangkok, Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou (Hakuhodo, 2003). Furthermore, J-pop music and Japanese TV dramas are influencing the pop music and TV dramas produced in Asian countries. Dong-Hoo Lee (2004a) argues that the producers of Korean TV dramas have been inspired by Japanese TV dramas, although they have not directly copied Japanese programs. Nissim Kadosh

Otmazgin (2008, pp. 90–93) observes the influence of J-pop on the pop music and TV programs produced in such places as Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand. Through interviews, he has found that many producers regard Japanese products as a useful model.

Second, the exports of Japanese TV programs have largely been concentrated in East Asia. The Tokyo-based Institute for Information and Communication Policy (2007) found in 2005 that approximately 60% of Japan's total exports of TV programs went to the Asian region. A special project team of the Broadcasting Culture Research Institute of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation found in 2001–02 that nearly a half of Japan's total exports of TV programs went to the Asian region: 46.1% to Asia, 27.9% to Europe, 7.6% to North America, 7.1% to Latin America, and the rest to other areas. In terms of the number of programs, the top five export destinations were, in descending order, Taiwan, the United States, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In terms of the number of hours, the top five export destinations were, in descending order, Taiwan, the United States, Singapore, Thailand, and Hong Kong (Hara et al., 2004, pp. 217–218). The United States, which is the only non-Asian country in these lists, should be considered a special case. This is because a few cable TV channels are available for the Japanese who live there, in addition to NHK World, the international broadcasting channel of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, which is available in all countries.[1]

Finally, a network of *manga* and *anime* artists is developing in the region. These Asian artists are collaborating across borders, and thus the production of *manga* and *anime* has been increasingly regionalized. Symbolically, since 1996, they have organized annual meetings of the International Comic Artist Conference – or the International Manga

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1 The author thanks Yumiko Hara of the Broadcasting Culture Research Institute of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation for clarifying this point (also see Hara et al., 2004, pp. 222, 230). It should be noted that, unlike the case of TV programs, the export of Japanese CDs and DVDs is not concentrated in Asia: by and large, it cannot be said that more CDs and DVDs are exported to the Asian countries than to the United States or to the countries of Europe (Japan Tariff Association, 2008, pp. 942–943). However, this does not mean that J-pop music is less popular in Asia than in North America or Europe. In many Asian countries, illegal copies are rampant on the black market, and thus many people do not purchase official copies. While TV programs are purchased by media corporations, music CDs are purchased by consumers.

Table 1 Four types of community building in the cultural sphere

Driving force	Key actors	Status
Hard power diplomacy	Governments	Spurious
Soft power diplomacy	Governments	Orchestrated
Marketing strategies	Corporations	Orchestrated
Cultural preferences	Consumers	Self-invigorating

Summit – in Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, for the purposes of exchanging ideas and discussing copyright issues (International Comic Artist Conference, n.d.; *Nikkei Shimbun, 2002*). The network of artists began to form in the 1970s. According to Yasuo Yamaguchi, the Secretary General of the Association of Japanese Animations, Japanese *anime* production houses began to outsource some of their works at this time to companies in South Korea. In the 1990s, when wages in South Korea increased, they expanded their production network to China and the Southeast Asian countries. These activities led to the training of artists. Today, in all these places, a number of talented artists are providing indispensable support to Japanese production houses (Yamaguchi, 2004, p. 146).

2.2 Is it real?

A more detailed investigation is necessary to deal with the second skeptical view – that community building in the cultural sphere is half-hearted. A useful way to approach the status of community building in the cultural sphere is to focus on the driving force and the key actors. There are at least four sets of driving forces and key actors, and each of them indicates a particular status of community building (Table 1).

First, community building in the cultural sphere may be founded on the hard power diplomacy of governments. For the purpose of power politics, governments may impose certain cultural products on the people in other countries. To give an example, during World War II, the military government in Tokyo used *manga* for its wartime propaganda. Its propaganda *manga* sought to persuade the Asian nations to unite for the creation of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, and deceptively depicted the Japanese as the 'leaders' of these nations, who were struggling to liberate themselves from Western colonialism (Brcak and Pavia, 2002,

pp. 215–218). As long as it is founded on hard power diplomacy, of course, the status of any given community building remains spurious. Although certain cultural products may seem to have spread in foreign countries, the people there have not developed any real interest in them.

Second, community building may be driven by the soft power diplomacy of governments. While hard power is associated with enforcement and material incentives, soft power concerns the ability to attract others (Nye, 2004). A classic example of soft power diplomacy is the use made of Hollywood movies by the US government to promote liberal values such as democracy and freedom, throughout Europe and other regions during the Cold War (Fraser, 2008). When it is based on soft power diplomacy, the status of any given community building is one of governmental orchestration in that governments engage in it for the sake of their own political agendas.

Third, community building may be founded on the marketing strategies of media corporations. In their pursuit of profit, these corporations may seek to create new demands for their popular cultural products and to expand their business activities across the region and beyond. When it is based on their marketing strategies, the status of any given community building is one of business orchestration in that it is meant to serve their commercial interests.

Finally, community building in the cultural sphere may be driven by consumer preferences. Although any cultural product can always be promoted by governments or media corporations, unless it is accompanied by the development of consumer preferences for these products, the spread of culture remains incomplete. Ultimately, community building in the cultural sphere depends on the development of consumer preferences for common cultural products. Only when it is based on consumer preferences can the status of any given community building be considered self-invigorating.

Which of these four views are relevant in the case of Japanese popular culture? In short, the spread of Japanese popular culture has been driven mainly by the preferences of consumers in the East Asian region. This case has been founded on a combination, in ascending order, of the second, third, and fourth factors – i.e. soft power diplomacy, marketing strategies, and consumer preferences. Therefore, we can safely conclude that, in East Asia, community building in the cultural sphere is by no

means half-hearted. The rest of this section explores the relevance of each of the four elements in turn.

2.2.1 Hard power diplomacy?. It is fair to state that no element of hard power diplomacy is present in the case of Japanese popular culture. The Tokyo government is not trying to promote the country's popular culture internationally for the sake of power politics. There is a fundamental difference between Tokyo's wartime policy and its cultural diplomacy today. During the war period, the military government controlled the content of the country's cultural exports to Asia. It forced the authors to draw a particular kind of *manga*, which was in line with its political goal of creating the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Today, in contrast, without controlling their content, the Tokyo government is simply using the popular cultural products that are already available in the market. It has been doing so for the diplomatic purpose of boosting the country's soft power, as will be argued next.

2.2.2 Soft power diplomacy. In recent years, the Japanese government is exerting itself to enhance the country's soft power and to project its positive image by promoting its popular culture internationally. Indeed notions such as 'soft power' and 'cultural diplomacy' are widely used in the Japanese domestic policy debate today (Gaiko Forum, 2003; Japan Echo, 2004, 2005; Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters, 2009). According to the Council on the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy, the goals of Japanese cultural diplomacy should be to promote the understanding of Japan, enhance its image, cultivate mutual understanding, and develop shared values (2005a,b). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been the key agency, actively pursuing these goals. Symbolically, it established a public diplomacy department in 2004, which deals with public relations and cultural exchanges. After being appointed as the first director general of this department, Seiich Kondo wrote that, through a variety of cultural exchanges, Tokyo should work to increase the understanding of Japan among the citizens of other countries (2004, p. 34). He later added that cultural diplomacy means creating the conditions under which the Japanese can 'fully tap their latent cultural ... powers' (2005, p. 37). In this spirit, embassies have been actively practicing cultural diplomacy. In particular, the embassy in Beijing has been using the country's popular cultural products as a means of improving the Chinese

people's understanding of Japan (Watanabe, 2003). In addition, the ministry has emphasized its partnership with the Japan Foundation, whose task is to promote international cultural exchanges. One of the central focuses of this foundation in recent years has been to promote Japanese TV programs overseas. For example, in the fiscal year 2006, it provided programs to 33 broadcast stations in 29 countries (Japan Foundation, 2007, p. 13).

Few other Japanese politicians have been more active in promoting Japanese popular culture overseas than Taro Aso. In particular, while serving as Foreign Minister in the mid-2000s, he initiated a number of innovative policies. Although it is common practice for Japanese ministers to simply endorse the policies planned by ministry officials, in this case, he took the lead in developing ideas and implementing policies (an anonymous foreign ministry official, author's interview, Tokyo, 17 October 2008). In April 2006, he delivered a speech in the electronics quarter of Tokyo, Akihabara, and made it clear that his ministry would 'market' Japanese popular culture overseas (Aso, 2006). In January 2007, in his foreign policy speech before the Diet, Aso elaborated on his plan to conduct 'proactive diplomacy' in the cultural sphere. He emphasized that, '[i]f the use of pop culture...[could] be useful, [Japan] certainly should make the most of [it]' (Aso, 2007). A unique initiative of his was to establish an International Manga Award in 2007. For him, this award is equivalent to a 'Nobel prize' in *manga* (Aso, 2006).

However, the role that the Tokyo government has played in the spread of Japanese popular culture overseas has been marginal. The government did not popularize the country's cultural products in East Asia. It has simply taken advantage of their existing popularity for the purpose of enhancing the country's soft power (Lam, 2007, p. 351; Otmazgin, 2008, pp. 80–83; Heng, 2010, pp. 286–287). Only in the mid-2000s did the government realize the utility of popular culture and start to incorporate it into its diplomatic strategy. Key players in cultural phenomena cannot be found at the governmental level, but at the societal level. In this respect, it is worth focusing on media corporations.

2.2.3 Marketing strategies. Japanese media corporations have been implementing various marketing strategies to stimulate the demand for their popular cultural products and to expand their business overseas. They have been especially active in the Asian region, against a background of

the increasing purchasing power of its consumers. While setting up over-seas subsidiary companies to coordinate their regional businesses, they have also forged partnerships with local media corporations. In other words, they have formed what Saya Shiraishi calls 'image alliances' – i.e. multinational alliances of media corporations, including production houses, TV stations, publishers, and advertising agencies (1997; also see Otmazgin, 2005, pp. 507–510, 512–513; 2008, p. 87).

One of the important tasks in their marketing strategies has been to reduce the prices of their popular cultural products, so as to bring them within the reach of students and youngsters. To this end, they have made efforts not only in Asian countries but also in Japan by lobbying the Tokyo government for favorable policies. Most notably, in 2005, music labels successfully lobbied for the restriction of the 'reverse import' of Japanese music CDs sold in Asian countries. Before they were restricted, traders were able to import these CDs back to Japan, and practices of this kind effectively prevented music labels from setting the prices of their products lower in Asian markets than in Japan. With the restriction in place, music labels have been able to implement drastic price reductions in Asian markets, without the risk of losing domestic profits. Indeed, one major label reduced the price of CDs in China to a third of what it had been (Abe, 2005; *Nikkei Marketing Journal, 2005*).

However, it is premature to conclude that the spread of Japanese popular culture is mainly the result of the marketing strategies of media corporations. This is because of the existence of a black market for pirated copies. While media corporations are making continuous efforts to market their products with the aim of maximizing profits, their business has been harmed by the illegal copies that have circulated out of control across the region. The growth of a black market demonstrates that the popularity of Japanese cultural products is not premised on the business activities of media corporations, although the converse is prob-ably the case. A focus on the black market indeed reveals the real driving force behind the spread of popular culture.

2.2.4 Consumer preferences. It is fair to state that the spread of Japanese popular culture has been driven mainly by the preferences of consumers in the East Asian region, and that their cultural preferences form the core element of community building, rather than the soft power diplo-macy of the Tokyo government or the marketing strategies of media

corporations. This is because illegal copies have been popular on the black market, despite the strenuous efforts made by the government and media corporations to crack down on piracy. As early as the 1970s, when Japanese *manga* and *anime* were still not well known in Europe and North America, illegal copies of Japanese *manga* were already available in many parts of East Asia, including South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand (*Nikkei Shimbun, 2002*). Since the 1990s, against the background of technological innovations, illegal copies of Japanese TV dramas have been widespread in the form of VCDs, which are more affordable than DVDs (Hu, 2004). No reliable data can be found on the status of Japanese popular cultural products on the black market today. The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry estimates that 85% of CDs in China and 88% in Indonesia are illegal copies (2006, p. 11). There is little doubt that a substantial chunk of them are illegal copies of Japanese products.

The Tokyo government and Japanese media corporations have been making strenuous efforts to crack down on illegal copies, but without much success. The activities of the Content Overseas Distribution Association (CODA) deserve attention. CODA is a private-sector association, established in 2002 to crack down on pirated copies overseas, with the support of the Cultural Affairs Agency and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. It has been in charge of the system of the CJ Mark (the Content Japan Mark), which will be attached to official copies as a measure against illegal activities. In China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, between January 2005 and February 2008, the enforcement activities of CODA, carried out in collaboration with local law enforcement agencies, resulted in the detection of 5,281 instances of illegal activities, 1,757 arrests, and the confiscation of more than 4 million DVDs/VCDs (CODA, n.d.). Nevertheless, a CODA official admits that these results constitute the tip of the iceberg, and illegal copies are still flourishing in these countries (author's interview, Tokyo, 16 October 2008).

The preferences of consumers on the black market are so powerful that they sometimes influence government policies. Here the case of South Korea is noteworthy. In this country, Japanese popular culture has been increasingly popular since the 1990s. On the surface, this phenomenon seems to be the result of the concerted polices of the governments in Seoul and Tokyo. In 1998, the South Korean government eased the regulations for Japanese cultural products in response to the plea of the

Japanese government. However, it would be mistaken to suppose that the consumers in South Korea developed a preference for Japanese popular culture as a result of the government's deregulation policy. Even before the deregulation in 1998, they had had a taste for Japanese cultural products on the black market (Okuno, 2004, p. 111). This means that their preferences influenced the decision of the Korean government and not vice versa.

2.2.5 Two caveats. It can be concluded that East Asian community building in the cultural sphere is making progress on the ground that Japanese popular culture has been favored by the people in this region. Yet, two caveats are in order before proceeding any further. First, the progress of this community building exhibits no aspect of cultural insulation. That the East Asians have developed a preference for cultural products originating in the region by no means implies that they have been culturally insulated from the global society. They watch Hollywood movies, drink French wine, eat Italian pizza, and listen to European classical music such as Beethoven and Mozart. However, at the same time, some aspects of the spread of Japanese popular culture are distinctively East Asian, as discussed earlier. The case of Japanese popular culture demonstrates the development of the cultural aspect of an East Asian community. The East Asian region is more than merely part of a 'McWorld' in which Hollywood movies are dominant (Barber, 1992, especially p. 58).[2]

Second, the status of Japanese popular culture in East Asia is by no means hegemonic. The people in this region have developed a taste for various popular cultural products, originating not only in Japan but also in various other places, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea. The Japanese themselves are no exception. According to a survey, in the first half of the 2000s, 38% of the population watched at least one episode of the Korean TV drama, *Winter Sonata*. Many of them either held a favorable view of South Korea or developed a new interest in this country (Mitsuya, 2004). Furthermore, the lifestyle of

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2 A Japanese advertising agency, Hakuhodo, in 2001, surveyed the preference for Japanese popular culture of the youngsters (aged between 15 and 24) in several Asian cities. The result shows that, in Taipei and Hong Kong, Japanese popular cultural products are undoubtedly more popular than American and European ones. In Shanghai, Bangkok, and Singapore, the results are more mixed, depending on the kind of cultural product. In Seoul, American and European products are more popular (Hakuhodo, 2001, 2002, p. 6).

Table 2 Common beliefs and new insights

	Common beliefs	*Implications*	New insights	*Implications*
Key participants	Political and business elites	*Elitist identity*	Consumers	*Popular identity*
Political nature	Fragmented	*Fragmented identity*	Accommodative	*Accommodative identity*
Center	ASEAN Tokyo Beijing	*Sponsored identity*	Decentralized	*Open-sourced identity*

many people in East Asia must be influenced by Chinese cultural traditions, while that of others is probably based on Malay or Indian traditions. Ultimately, the cultural aspect of an East Asian community is characterized by the cultural diversity of the region.

3 Implications for regional identity

Why are all these important? What are the implications of the argument in the previous section – that community building in the cultural sphere is making progress? This statement is important because it challenges our common beliefs about the characteristics of an East Asian community and our conventional expectations of the nature of an East Asian regional identity. The characteristics of an East Asian community can be approached from three aspects: its key participants, political nature, and center. The nature of an East Asian regional identity depends on the characteristics of these three aspects (Table 2).

3.1 Key participants

3.1.1 Common belief. We tend to believe that community building in East Asia is dominated by political and business elites. In the security area, ministers and government officials have been actively strengthening their ties within institutional frameworks such as the APT and the EAS. In the economic area, together with governmental actors, business elites have been active. They have been trading and investing internationally, exchanging technologies, and even lobbying for greater regional economic cooperation. However, the roles of civil-society organizations (CSOs) have been restricted, in particular, within multilateral

intergovernmental frameworks (Morada, 2007; Collins, 2008). East Asia has a long way to go before it institutionalizes 'participatory regionalism', the key features of which include the involvement of CSOs in regional cooperation (Acharya, 2003a). To be sure, some non-governmental actors are involved in regional cooperation: they are participants of the track-two activities, in particular, researchers of strategic studies institutions, such as the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies. However, the status of these track-two actors is unique in that they have close links with government officials. In this respect, they should be considered political elites (Ball *et al.*, 2006; Soesastro *et al.*, 2006; Katsumata, 2009, ch. 4).

On the basis of this common belief, we tend to expect an East Asian regional identity to be elitist, monopolized by political and business elites – if such an identity is to develop. Ministers, government officials, business elites, and track-two actors may be able to share a sense of 'we-ness' or 'we-feeling'. Nevertheless, ordinary citizens will remain in a marginal position, without developing any sense of belonging to an East Asian community.

3.1.2 New insight. Community building in East Asia involves consumers, including students and ordinary citizens who have little political and economic power. In the case of the spread of Japanese popular culture, neither Tokyo's soft-power diplomacy nor the marketing strategies of media corporations form the core element of community building, but the preferences of consumers do. To the extent that students and ordinary citizens are developing the cultural aspect of an East Asian community, participatory regionalism is taking hold in this region.

On the basis of this new insight, we can expect the development of a popular identity at the regional level, which is shared by students and ordinary citizens. In other words, they can be expected to share a sense of 'we-ness' or 'we-feeling'. That consumers are driving community building means that they are sharing common images and feelings through cultural exchanges across national boundaries. This augurs well for the formation of a popular identity. As noted earlier, the sharing of common ideational elements through various forms of communication and exchange across borders facilitates the formation of collective identities.

The statement above – that East Asian community building involves consumers – may not sound novel. It is well known that, with their increased disposable income, urban middle-class citizens in the region have been purchasing durable consumer goods, such as TVs, air conditioners, and refrigerators, many of which are produced in East Asia. However, the consumption of durable goods can be seen only as a superficial involvement in community building, because its implications for regional identity are unclear. The consumption of these goods is mainly about the sharing of common functions and utilities, determined by the strategic calculation of prices and expected benefits. In this area, the origin of the product is relatively unimportant. In contrast, the consumption of popular cultural products can be seen as a more substantial involvement in community building because it must have strong implications for regional identity. The consumption of these products is all about the sharing of common images and feelings, determined by the extent to which consumers are attracted to them in an ideational sense. Here the identity of the country of origin can more clearly be recognized, and consumers should more easily be able to develop a sense of affinity to the country of origin. In the case of Japanese popular culture, J-pop and TV dramas undoubtedly represent the people, fashion, and lifestyle in Japan, although *manga* and *anime* depict an imaginary world that does not always represent Japanese life. To be sure, those who do not favor Japanese popular cultural products may regard the spread of these products as a form of 'cultural imperialism'. Yet the reality in East Asia is that a majority of students and youngsters are enjoying listening to J-pop and watching Japanese TV dramas. Their consumption behavior must have some bearing on the formation of a popular identity.

3.2 Political nature

3.2.1 Common belief. We tend to believe that community building in East Asia is fragmented. Although there have been some remarkable institutional developments, symbolized in the APT and the EAS, community building in this region bears several permanent political fault lines. Four sources of the fault lines are worth mentioning here. The first is the exclusive nationalism that has developed in China and in Japan. Chinese and Japanese nationalism are creating a rift between two important countries in East Asian regionalism. The second is the bitter historical memories of

World War II, which are especially strong in Northeast Asia. In various places such as China and Korea, these historical memories have made the people there reluctant to cooperate with the Japanese. The third source is the question of sovereignty over the Taiwan Strait, which has remained unresolved for half a century. Due to fierce resistance from Beijing, Taiwan is unable to participate in regional institutions, such as the APT and the EAS, or to forge FTAs with countries involved in these frameworks. Finally, the fourth source is constituted by geopolitical matters. The Korean Peninsula has been divided into two countries for half a century. Washington's hub-and-spokes security system is creating a fault line in Northeast Asia between China, on the one hand, and Japan, South Korea, and perhaps also Taiwan on the other.

On the basis of this common belief, we tend to expect an East Asian regional identity to be fragmented and fragile along its several permanent political fault lines. Some nations may be able to develop a sense of 'we-ness' or 'we-feeling' over time, but the geographical reach of their regional identity is expected to be limited. In other words, we do not anticipate a comprehensive regional identity that covers the entire region.

3.2.2 New insight. Community building in East Asia has an accommodative aspect, which mitigates the existing political fault lines. Japanese popular culture has been favored by many nations, including the Chinese and Koreans. Japanese *anime* has even been broadcast in North Korea, sometimes without the knowledge of the producer in Japan (Okuno, 2004, p. 114). In addition, although the diplomatic status of Taiwan is ambiguous, Taiwanese popular culture has been favored in various parts of the East Asian region. Furthermore, Korean TV dramas have been popular across the region, and Chinese traditions have been widely practiced in Asia. It is worth mentioning that no element of the cultural aspect of an East Asian community is exclusive in nature, unlike the four sources of political fault lines mentioned above – nationalism, bitter historical memories, sovereignty, and geopolitics. Cultural products can be preferred by anyone without excluding others.

On the basis of this new insight, we can expect the emergence of an accommodative regional identity that cuts across the existing political fault lines. This means that these fault lines should not be seen as permanent obstacles to developing an East Asian community. Notably, with regard to Japanese popular culture, a number of experts have argued that

the spread of the country's cultural products has improved Japan's image and boosted the people's sense of affinity with the Japanese, in such places as Taiwan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand.[3]

The statement above – that East Asian community building has an accommodative aspect – may not sound new. It is well known that political and business elites have been actively engaged in economic exchanges, cutting across the existing political fault lines. However, the nature of these exchanges is not always accommodative because they do not necessarily involve any positive recognition of the identity of partners. In trade and investment, one's selection of partners is determined mainly by cost–benefit calculations. In contrast, the nature of cultural exchanges is more accommodative because they inevitably involve a positive recognition of the partner's identity. One's selection of popular cultural products is determined by his/her feelings. One will probably not be able to enjoy a cultural product if his/her view of the country of origin is totally negative. In the case of Japanese popular culture, the popularity of the country's cultural products at least demonstrates that the people in East Asia have positively recognized a certain aspect of contemporary Japan, although they may not have disregarded the issue of history. In short, it is only when we focus on its cultural aspect that the accommodative aspect of East Asian community building makes sense.

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3 Ishii Kenichi, Satoshi Watanabe, and Susumu Kohari have conducted surveys in Taipei, Seoul, and Shanghai, and found that, in each of these cities, people who watch Japanese TV programs tend to develop a favorable view of Japan (Ishii and Watanabe, 2001, pp. 62–64; Kohari, 2005, pp. 68–70). Wai-ming Ng notes that, in Hong Kong and Singapore, Japanese popular culture is improving the country's image and enhancing the people's sense of affinity with the Japanese (2006a, p. 198, 2006b, p. 203). Worawut Worawittayanon (2003) maintains that Japanese *manga* and *anime* are enhancing the Thai people's interest in Japan. Homare Endo (2008, p. 61) observes that Chinese youngsters are developing a sense of affinity with the Japanese, although they remain critical of Tokyo's attitude toward the issue of history. Yoshiko Nakano (2008) has drawn a similar conclusion, by conducting rounds of interviews with a large sample of Chinese university students: Japanese popular culture has not washed away the negative memories of the past, but it has created a positive image of contemporary Japan. By surveying undergraduate students in Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Seoul, Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin (2008, pp. 93–95) has found that the appreciation of Japanese popular culture tends to foster a positive image of Japan and incites additional interest in other aspects of Japan, such as customs, sports, and fashion. On the basis of his interview data, Ming-tsung Lee (2004b) argues that many Taiwanese who had watched Japanese TV dramas traveled to Japan by joining the so-called Japanese TV drama tour and then enhanced their interest in the country.

3.3 Center

3.3.1 Common beliefs. We tend to believe that community building in East Asia is centered on a certain political pole. Undeniably, regional activities of political and business elites commonly have a political center of gravity. In the security area, the leadership and influence of a certain player is often essential in developing regional institutions. In the economic area, business elites must acknowledge and collaborate with political authorities, as long as they remain in the legitimate market. Their success depends on what political authorities can provide, such as the reduction of trade barriers, the formation of FTAs, the stabilization of the currency market, and the provision of economic assistance.

There are at least three common beliefs about the center of community building in East Asia: ASEAN, Japan, and China. First, we often assume that ASEAN is at the center of gravity. We do so from observing that it has been sitting in the 'driver's seat' of regional institutions, such as the APT and the EAS, and that it is at the hub of the network of FTAs, involving China, South Korea, and Japan. The meaning of ASEAN's centrality has been a subject of debate. Some take a skeptical view, suggesting that ASEAN has been able to take the lead simply by default, against the background of great power rivalries, in particular, the Sino-Japanese rivalry (Narine, 2009, pp. 380–382; Webber, 2010, p. 323). For these skeptics, the APT should be seen as a forum in which the major powers in Northeast Asia compete for influence (Jones and Smith, 2007, pp. 180–183). Others underline ASEAN's achievement in promoting its cooperative security norms and socializing its external partners (Johnston, 1999, pp. 309–310; 2008, ch. 4; Acharya, 2003b; Ba, 2006). In line with their view, the present author has argued elsewhere that, within its cooperative security enterprise, which is analogous to a 'norm brewery', ASEAN has taken the role of a 'brewmaster' who teaches the art of brewing to his/her assistants. It has specialized in Asian medicinal liquor which is free from side effects, rather than in modern pharmaceuticals – or in cooperative security that is free from a security dilemma, rather than in collective defense (Katsumata, 2009, pp. 8–9). Regardless of the relative superiority of these two opposing views, ASEAN's centrality within intergovernmental frameworks seems to be an established fact.

Second, we sometimes regard Japan as the center of regional cooperation, in particular, in the economic realm. Here what is crucial is the 'iron triangle' in Tokyo, formed from the political, administrative, and business districts – i.e. Nagatacho, Kasumigaseki, and Marunouchi, respectively. Within this triangle, three groups of actors have been coordinating their strategies, namely, political parties, governmental agencies, and large corporations. By so doing, they have been enhancing the efficiency of Japanese economic activity and stimulating the economic growth of the East Asian region. The elements of Japanese economic activity include official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), technological transfers, and production networks. This view is associated with the 'network power' thesis, advanced by Peter Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi (1997).

Finally, we sometimes believe that China has now become the *de facto* center of regional cooperation. Beijing has launched a 'charm offensive' against the Southeast Asian countries, thereby implementing a series of favorable policies toward these countries (Kurlantzick, 2007). Shambaugh (2004) maintains that China is engaging Asia and reshaping the regional order. Alice Ba (2006) goes as far as to suggest that China is now trying to socialize its Southeast Asian partners into its cooperative policies. Notably, since the late 1990s, China has advanced a set of 'new security concepts' that emphasize notions such as cooperation, security dialogue, mutuality, and equality (Information Office of the State Council of China, 1998, pp. 6, 30; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2002). In 2002, it strengthened its relations with ASEAN by agreeing to establish an ASEAN–China FTA, and by signing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

On the basis of these three common beliefs, we tend to expect an East Asian regional identity to be championed by a particular player – namely ASEAN, Japan, or China – for its own interests. That is to say, these common beliefs suggest the development of what can be regarded as a 'sponsored identity', promoted by any of these three players. First, an ASEAN-sponsored regional identity will be based on a set of norms associated with the ASEAN Way of diplomacy. ASEAN's diplomatic norms call for an informal and gradual approach to cooperation, based on consultation and dialogue, by emphasizing state sovereignty and the principle of non-interference. Second, a Tokyo-sponsored regional identity will define Japan as the economic leader in the region and encourage

other East Asian countries to build a strong relationship with Tokyo, in terms of ODA, FDI, technological transfers, and production networks. Finally, a Beijing-sponsored regional identity will be associated with a sense of belonging to a Sino-centric world or Beijing's sphere of influence in which the influence of the United States is marginalized. In this respect, it may be anti-Western in nature. Here the notion of the 'Beijing consensus' becomes relevant, which emphasizes sovereignty and multilateralism, and offers to developing countries an alternative to the 'Washington consensus' (Ramo, 2004).

All of these three sponsored identities are controversial. An ASEAN-sponsored identity may be morally questionable. Due to its emphasis on state sovereignty and the non-interference principle, the ASEAN Way may serve the interests of authoritarian regimes, but not necessarily those of the people in East Asia, some of whom have been under political oppression (Katsumata *et al.*, 2008; Dunn *et al.*, 2010). A regional identity sponsored by Tokyo is likely to be rejected by Beijing, and vice versa. In this respect, neither Tokyo-sponsored nor Beijing-sponsored identities have the potential to serve as the basis of an East Asian community.

3.3.2 New insight. Community building in East Asia has a decentralized dimension. Cultural exchanges in this region encompass multiple cultural hubs, but involve no structure of authority. With regard to Japanese popular culture, inside Japan, there are several cultural hubs, none of which overlaps with any corner of the iron triangle in Tokyo. They include Akihabara, Shibuya, and Harajuku in Tokyo, and Nihonbashi in Osaka. Artists and musicians are connecting these hubs by forming informal networks, which have neither a clear structure of authority nor any official affiliation with political authorities. Moreover, outside Japan, there are several cultural hubs, such as Seoul, Taipei, and Hong Kong. In these places, too, artists and musicians have formed informal networks that are by no means authoritative. In addition, across the region, unofficial dealers are operating on the black market in defiance of political authorities. Benefitting from their underground activities are students and youngsters whose disposable incomes are relatively low.

On the basis of this new insight, we may expect an East Asian regional identity to be flexible enough to be articulated by anyone in any way, without privileging the interests of any particular party. In other

words, we may expect the development of what can be regarded as an 'open-sourced' regional identity, whose features are analogous to those of open-sourced computer software. Such software is available to anyone for free. Its program codes are open, and thus constantly being modified by a number of unidentified users who wish to improve them. By the same token, we should expect an East Asian regional identity to be articulated and modified by anyone in any way. Such an open-sourced identity must be more accommodative to diverse views and interests than any sponsored identity could be.[4]

4 Conclusions

Skeptics may dismiss all the implications discussed above – centered on the proposition that we may expect the development of popular, accommodative, and open-sourced regional identities. They may argue that community building in the cultural sphere is an epiphenomenon, and thus all these implications for an East Asian regional identity are of secondary importance. It is certainly true that culture is simply one of several aspects of an East Asian community. With regard to security and economic cooperation, political and business elites are dominant, political fault lines are conspicuous, and several players are seeking to play a central role for their own interests.

Nevertheless, the relevance of community building in the cultural sphere should not be underestimated, and thus we should take note of all the implications discussed above. This is because community building in the cultural sphere is driven primarily by a future generation, consisting of students and youngsters. This generation has been developing a strong preference for the pop music and TV dramas that originate in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and other such places. It has been exchanging images and feelings across national boundaries, cutting across the existing political fault lines, and connecting various cultural hubs. Importantly, it is the one that will, in the future, lead the creation of an East Asian community in various fields, including security, the economy, the environment, education, and culture. This means that the impact of popular culture on an East Asian regional identity will be

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4   The discussion of an 'open-sourced' regional identity here is inspired by Satoshi Miura's insight into an open-source approach to developing norms (Miura, 2005).

long-lasting and incremental. In other words, in the future, the force to create popular, accommodative, and open-sourced regional identities will be strong, in comparison with that to create elitist, fragmented, and sponsored regional identities. The long-term trend in the region is to form what can be regarded as an 'East Asian cultural community' in which ordinary citizens take center stage, no political fault lines are relevant, and no political interests are privileged.

Acknowledgements

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