Geopolitical Configurations in ASIA

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In the context of strengthening the interconnectedness of the various territories of the world, including the Eurasian space, the task of defining the Asia-Pacific region as an aggregate of geographical, political, economic territories and regions became urgent. This makes it possible to avoid politicized pseudo-scientific generalizations (such as Indopacific) and to determine the perspective.To formulate the theoretical foundations of international relations in Asian politics in the modern era and the participation of external strategic entities of the APR; to present a reasoned criticism of Euro-oriented IR-theories and to study Asian IR-theories with consideration of views of Asian countries.The authors developed the concept of the "Asian core", which includes territories from Mongolia to Indonesia and from the eastern borders of the PRC to Japan. The "Asian core" includes the historically established territories of the Confucian civilization and the territory of the "Eastern economic miracle". The authors did not include the leading world powers (the United States, Australia, Russia) in the "Asian core", believing that they are only external geopolitical subjects with deep participation. The definition of the new APR brand is necessary to preserve the geostrategic and geopolitical balance in Asia and important for Russian the predictive assessments of Asian foreign policy.

Keywords: Asia, Pacific Ocean, Asian regional integration, "Asian core", external strategic entities, economic presence in Asia

Western Conception at Asia

21st century is often called "Asian Century" due to spectacular economic growth of China, "Asian dragons" and more recently—India, as well as increasing influence of Oriental powers in global affairs. In fact these tendencies were envisaged almost a century ago, when in 1924, Karl Haushofer used the term "Pacific age" (Haushofer, 1924): "A giant space is expanding before our eyes with forces pouring into it which await the dawn of the Pacific age, the successor of the Atlantic age, the over-age Mediterranean and European era" (Weigert, 1942).

Also the name is attributed to Deng Xiaoping's discussions with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and started to be widely used in US political science and politics discourses in 1980s. The concept of Asian Century is related to the description of 20th century as the American Century, and the 19th century as Britain's Imperial Century. However, what countries and territories were meant to be the "rising" ones was never made clear.

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Up to this day, the issue of geopolitical configurations in Asia is still not clear and the definition of the area in question is not fully agreed on. Especially due to the recent increased spread of the different new concepts (like that of Indopacific) what is implied by Asia in geopolitics is far from clear. These kinds of geopolitical constructs in fact dilute the real problems of regional connectivity, joint efforts, and common regional fate.

Anybody knowledgeable in foreign policy and area studies would admit, that the vast area of the globe, commonly referred to as Asia, comprises dozens of different nation-states and even civilizations, having different sets of priorities both internally and externally, facing vastly different problems and unevenly involved into the globalization process. Therefore the need is obvious to suggest a concept of clear division within the geographical limits of Asia and the Pacific and differentiate the political strategies of other geopolitical actors towards each area.

These issues are not paid much attention to in Western IR theory and political science. The motivation to downplay the power potential in the Asian rising states is illustratively articulated by Kenneth Waltz who argued "it would be ridiculous to construct a theory of international relations based on Malaysia and Costa Rica" (Waltz, 1993). The Western IR scholarship is heralded by the notion that one should concentrate "on the states that make the most difference" (Waltz, 1979) as other actors simply adjust their behavior according to trends set by great powers.

The essence of such approaches is illuminated in the notion of benign hegemony. That is the name given to American dominance in the theoretical swaths of international relations by John Mersheimer. The author believes if one is not suppressed and ideas of US origin would be spread and shared universally, then the discipline does not experience the need to "broaden its horizons" (Mearsheimer, 2001). Others use even stronger rhetoric arguing that the Gramscian hegemonic status of Western IR binds all the latecomers to adjust and fit the given framework (Chen, 2011). This is especially true with respect to Asian studies.

Russian scholars usually follow suit, concentrating their attention to global problems mostly on Euro-Atlantic. This is a tendency established long ago. As IR theory formation in Russia was affected by the Soviet power that prescribed "the most advanced" Marxist-Leninist philosophy to all social studies, the process of opening-up to the world implied an unavoidable period that Russian scholar Bogaturov called "a paradigm of absorption" (Bogaturov, 2000).

Before introducing new concepts into theoretical discourse to learn the predecessors' studies is a must. The 1990s period in Russia is characterized by massive inflow of Western ideas and IR literature to the national market; intensified translations of books on this specialty; implementation of Western textbooks into the IR educational programs; and the rise in overseas educational and business trips. Beside Russia the similar pattern can be evidently traced in India and China.

Therefore the vision of the world as centered on the "core" countries became universal. And these views tend to neglect Asia as mostly the "Third World".

Asian Core Countries

One of the classics of the leftist IR theories Immanuel Wallerstein distinguishes three macro regions of the world: core, semi-periphery, and periphery, where the first group parasitizes the latter, advancing itself at the expense of underdevelopment in the Third World (Wallerstein, 1974). He argues that neither economic development nor backwardness is essentially natural as they reflect unequal international relations. A prolonged

redistribution of goods from periphery to the core has resulted in "dependent underdevelopment" of the South. Moreover, he is convinced that underdeveloped states are doomed for perpetual backwardness. This phenomenon invigorated the idea of neocolonialism defined as non-military economic exploitation of former colonies.

From Wallerstein's perspective, most of Asian countries should be allocated into the category of semi-peripheral states. Here again we see a deliberate generalization of Asia ignoring the differences between different actors. He means that the in-between status of this unit predisposes some specific functions that are transferred to semi-periphery. One of these duties is a tension defused or, as Wallerstein puts it, "these middle areas <…> partially deflect the political pressures which groups primarily located in peripheral areas might otherwise direct against core states" (Wallerstein, 1974). Here again we see the generalized West (or core)—centered approach.

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The civilizational approach, bases on the notion of Judeo-Christian civilization as the supreme one leads to neglect to Asia's specifics. In his book *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics* (Hobson, 2012), Hobson researches six deep-seated myths that cause profound Eurocentrism in IR.

The first—"foundation's"—myth is dedicated to benign origin of contemporary IR theory that was an offspring of World War. Hobson traces Western theories back to 1760 to prove that they were Europe-defensive and Europe-centered from the very beginning.

The second "positivist" myth is aimed to convince us that theories provided by the West are epistemologically and ideologically neutral. The linear and evolutionary nature of mainstream IR theories is buttressed by "great debates myth". Next "victims" of Hobson analysis are the nexus between sovereignty and anarchy (myth number four) and globalization that allegedly was suggested as a theoretical hypotheses much earlier than is stated (the fifth myth).

And finally the last myth roots in minds—the idea of "great theoretical traditions" existing in IR scholarship. By traditions the author means accepted as worldly linear knowledge concepts of Fukidid and Hobbes, Machiavelli and Waltz, and many others (Hobson, 2012). Acknowledging the value of the abovementioned exposure, one can hardly deny the significant contribution of European and American IR scholars.

Recalling Hoffmann' statement about American dominance in IR studies (Hoffmann, 1977), a few decades later another American scholar, Stephen Walt, came to the same conclusion. In the broader line of inquiry, he sees the roots of theoretical exclusion in the limitations of political regimes. For instance, in his opinion China cannot allow a wide-range of thought and debate inside the country, what is more, concentrating the intellectual potential within several key gatekeepers instead of making the entire academic market competitive (Walt, 2011).

Indeed, according to Kristensen's analysis (Kristensen & Nielsen, 2013), the whole number of IR articles produced in China are written in four top IR institutions (CASS, Fudan, Peking, and Tsinghua University) that can partly acknowledge the Walt's supposition. However, Kristensen demonstrates that within the cradle of social science—in the United States of America—distribution of intellectual potential is not extremely different from the "marginal" states of India and China with only seven US states accounted for 50% of all US-made articles (Kristensen & Nielsen, 2013).

Why Western school dominates the field:

(1) Western universities retain the leadership in the field, in the size of intellectual market, methodological and theoretical findings, financing, etc.

(2) English language enjoys a dominant position of world language facilitating the communication between scholars from English-speaking regions and the publication of their studies in leading IR journals.

(3) A wide set of non-governmental organizations, independent institutions, think tanks has IR issues in their agendas.

(4) A massive granting system is aimed at financing diverse IR projects, books' publishing, international conferences, academic mobility, etc. (Shiryaev & Zubok, 2015).

(5) A vast program for educating non-Western scholars encompasses the intellectuals from all parts of the world, thus acknowledging their further findings as American (Biersteker, 2009).

As A. Tsygankov argues "the development of global social science should not be a unilateral process where there is only one teacher (the West) and all the others are learners" (Tsygankov, 2008).

So the reasons of generalizing "Asia" in the theoretical research are now clear. The inventor of a collocation "Rise of the Rest" and simultaneously an adherent of post-American outlook Fareed Zakaria in his book *Post-American World* concludes that the era of America is being displaced by the ascendance of the emerging states. He explains the willing of the developing world to play proactive role in the international system by a "pent-up frustration with having to accept an entirely Western or American narrative of world history" (Zakaria, 2008). However what areas the countries in focus belong to and why they should be treated in an equal manner is not specified.

The idea of regional self-presentation with local peculiarities taken into account is a step forward. Some Western theories do not leave any room for cultural manifestation leading to excessive generalization and limited explanatory power.

The ethnocentric factor explains why the intellectual products from the West have difficulties in adjusting to non-Western setting. The Russian scholars recalls "shock therapy" in transition to market economy that was borrowed by Russia in 1990s and failed and multiple examples of unsuccessful democratic transitions that stumbled in the uncommon conditions (Tsygankov, 2014).

ASEAN and West Conception

What about non-Western IR concepts? In Asia and the Pacific countries, the issue of "Asianess" and local identity started to be discussed in 1980s, mostly in connection of the rise of ASEAN. In 1990s the theory of "Asian values" was promoted (codified in the Bangkok Declaration of 1993), which emphasized the principles of sovereignty, self-determination, and non-interference in civil and political rights. The "Asian ideals", not limiting themselves to Asia only, as guiding principles of states' activities boiled down to social harmony, socio-economic prosperity and the collective well-being of the community, loyalty and respect towards leaders and authorities, collectivism and communitarianism. Again, what nations and states were supposed to be the drivers of these values was not defined. However South-East Asian nations are supposedly in the lead. One can recall nonintervention principle enshrined within ASEAN states. As a relatively weak group of state, according to He (He, 2016), ASEAN tried to impose its normative power on strong neighbors, such as China and the United States keeping sovereignty as a basis for the framework of cooperation. ASEAN posits its policy on the ideas of cooperative security that resembles, for instance, the European Union but also complements it with

"regional solutions to regional problems" (Acharya, 2003). ASEAN prefers dialogue and mutual trust to political transformation and binding enforcement. That is a reason why the European Union's model of socialization does not suit for export in developing states and that might be quoted as a vivid example of the non-universal character of Western concepts reflecting the general need to clearly define the area and its specifics before suggesting theoretical conceptualization.

Another example of attempts to modify and "Asianize" established theories can be traced in Japan. Inspired by English school as a referent model of non-Westphalian inclusive politics Japanese academic community stand for autonomy as indigenous ideas (Chen, 2012). In other words, scholars from Japan attempt to find a balance between upholding the dialogue with the West and preserving the national uniqueness. This concept is supported by historical evidence of middle position of Japan between the colonizers and the colonized (Ikeda, 2008).

In parallel to other actors in the Asia Pacific, the People's Republic of China was preoccupied with the agenda to delineate national specifics in the world politics as well. In the 1980s, Chinese academic community starts coming to terms with the initiative to develop an IR school with Chinese characteristics. Similarly to the path of mainstream IR theory Chinese scholars had three rounds of "great debates". During the first of them several group of academics argued whether they need to separate from the global discourse and create a new theory with Chinese perspective. In 1990s, another round of debates has unfurled with a central question put in front of realists and liberals the following way—"what is the best way to realize national interests of China via theory?". Once again, the diverse postures have led to simultaneous advancement of various local strands. The last stage of debating has occurred in the beginning of the XXI century and sought to specify the appropriate approach. Universalist stance and traditionalist one are considered as the main contenders (Grachev, 2017).

Chinese theoreticians promote aspiration for sharing the burden of global responsibility with fellow states. The pattern can be traced in moral realism strand developed by Yan Xuetong. Yet the core goal of the author is to justify the peaceful rise of China he pays attention to the constellation of other actors in the portrayed China-centric model. In his view, the international system should be harmonized in regards to rights and responsibilities of states, different political regimes' coexistence, and strategic reliability (Yan, 2013).

Another independent strand was introduced by Yaqing Qin who reinvigorated the notion of relations (Guanxi) as a unit of power and incorporated it into relational theory. He noticed deep-rooted differences in the understanding of the nature of polar binary in Western and Chinese thought. The Western philosophical tradition understands the universe as a room for two polarities in relations of perpetual dichotomy. Chinese scholars, conversely, provide more positive template of yin and yang as two correlated parts of an organic whole that strive for universal harmony. In other words, the adherents of relational theory argue that there is no such phenomenon as incompatibility in world politics and relations among states are of the fundamental importance (Qin, 2016).

How these theoretical issues could be applied to the object of this research, namely, definition of the nature of the term Asia and its place and role in geopolitics?

More than hundred years ago, Mackinder (Mackinder, 1904) argued that the Earth's land surface was divisible into: the World-Island (Europe, Asia, and Africa), the offshore islands (including the British Isles and the islands of Japan), and the outlying islands (including North America, South America, and Australia; and the Heartland lay at the center of the world island, stretching from the Volga river to the Yangtze river and from the Himalayas to the Arctic). These ideas lie in the base of numerous Eurasian theories, now especially popular

in Russia, the conclusion from which is that "Russia is both European and Asian power". However what is Asia not only from primitive geographical perspective, but from historic, civilizational and geopolitical point of view is not clearly defined by Eurasianism's adepts.

So, finally, what is Asia? In fact, the territory to the east of the Ural Mountains from time immemorial was called by Europeans Asia. In fact, it was the name of everything known in this era which was not Europe on the Eurasian continent from the Bosporus to Japan (up to the place "where the sun rises").

After the increased U.S. involvement in Asian affairs in the wake of the Second World War the term Asia and the Pacific started to be used widely, connecting the U.S. directly with the region. Now the general understanding is that Asia and the Pacific is "the part of the world in or near the Western Pacific Ocean. It typically includes much of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. The term may also include Russia (on the North Pacific) and countries in North and South America which are on the coast of the Eastern Pacific Ocean".

The term has become especially popular in economics and politics since the late 1980s due to globalization, as most of the nations within that area are emerging markets experiencing rapid growth. The APEC basic framework adds Pacific-facing Latin American nations to the region, with Australia and Oceania considered part of the APR as well. So it stretches all the way from the Arctic to Antarctica.

Lately a construct of Indo-Pacific has emerged, supported by India and now enthusiastically embraced by the United States (in fact, this term was widely used by the U.S. Navy to describe the area of responsibility of PACOM, ignoring geographical and natural borders). It includes, in the eyes of US strategic planners, the Indian Ocean up to the coast of Africa and in fact covers the most of the Third World. However, Indians see it differently, talking about "two oceans, two continents" (meaning South Asia and Africa) and not including the vast Pacific territory.

Asian Civilization and Political Diversion

As such, due to its civilizational, political and economic diversity, and poor logistical connectivity, countries in such an Indo-Pacific area have little in common with each other and this area hardly deserves to be called a "region" at all. The reason for its introduction and promotion by the US is widely believed to be the need to bring India into scheme to "encircle" China as a U.S. chief global adversary and to create QUAD—a union of "ocean democracies" against the totalitarian empire. India seems not to share this concept, but is aptly using its implications to contain China. Indian scholar Abhijnan Rej (2018) from ORF sets as India's important foreign policy goal to "Engage with the two great continental projects: the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia" and does not agree with US concept of QUAD as a "diamond of democracies".

Anyway such "artificial regional" concepts also undermine the true meaning of regional cooperation and security, leaving all the "supranational" governance in the hands of existing global regulators.

In the case of Asia that might not work. As the name Asia might be a misnomer by Ancient Greeks' standards, we suggest singling out an area which is quite distinct and separate. It is geographically limited to Eastern (not Northeast Asia, which includes Pacific Russia) and South-Eastern Asia. It stretches from Mongolia and Russian Far Eastern provinces in the North, to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea in the South, and from Myanmar in the West to Japan in the East. The homogenous nature of this area, which we tentatively designate as "CORE ASIA" or "KERNEL ASIA" is the bedrock of regional identity. It has common racial, cultural, religious, and civilizational peculiarities, making "Asians" quite noticeable in any part of the world. Core Asia is the heartland of unique ancient civilizations and long state history, unlike other parts of the globe. It also has

a distinct cultural identity developed from a common mold. If we speak about foreign policy concepts, the actors here are united in adhering to the primacy of nation-state as compared to liberal values (such as human rights), primacy of sovereignty (sometimes close to nationalism), and tendency to pursue zero-sum policies.

It is home to 2,261mln people (30% of global population), producing 21,468 billion U.S. dollars (27% of global GDP), and generating 4,652 billion U.S. dollars (30% of global exports).

That is not to say that Core Asia is regionally integrated, homogenous and enjoys similarity in policy goals and approaches. On the contrary, this is the home to most acute interstate contradictions, ranging from geopolitical competition between Japan and China and animosity towards the former on the part of many Asian nations to numerous local conflicts, many of which include China and neighboring countries, with extreme case of confrontation on the Korean Peninsula.

Core Asia is the homeland of the so-called "Asian paradox"—economic growth and interdependence do not automatically ease security issues; the opposite is often the case. The intra-regional problems in this area are real and multifold—territorial conflicts, natural and man-made disasters, epidemics, ecology, transnational crime, economic contradictions, and integration issues. These problems, although part of the global agenda, can be most effectively solved within the region, which has an established state structure, systematic international relations mechanisms, and established regional international organizations.

Out of the whole Indopacific area, the Core Asia is most influential both politically and economically and though not unified, projects its influence both regionally and globally. Of course, there may be a question, why Central Asia, politically and economically very much connected, is not included into Core Asia (such a logic would suggest that even Tibet and the Uyghur region, ethnically and racially different from the Core Asian nations, should have some different identity, although they are part of China). This is an issue for ethnographers and historians to discuss, but as of now, these areas are more connected (not necessarily politically, but culturally and even logistically) with West Asia. However due to political sensitiveness in the mealtime, the region should be clearly limited by national borders for lack of other indicators.

What about other resident Pacific nations, like the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Russia, and, say, Canada? They do have, of course, vital interests and established channels of interacting with the "Asian core" and even integrating into it. However, with all due respect, they are external partners and should be rule-takers, not rule-makers in the region. Of course, from the position of political realism, the U.S.'s and its military allies' role will not suddenly disappear. But it is necessary to separate politics and military security from national identity and geography. Otherwise the logic of natural development would be substituted by political and strategic interests, not necessarily beneficial to the regional nations.

The burning question is the "elephant in the room". Does this concept mean that China will naturally dominate this region? Does its "shared future" slogan imply just that? Is the "Asian core" concept seen as a justification of China's predominance and relegating other states to "vassals"?

Not necessarily, especially now that "the Westphalian system of Asia" is in the making. On the contrary, joint rule-making can help control Chinese policy and make China respect other actors' interests and concerns, providing for indivisibility of peace.

Alternative to the system of joint rule-making and harmonization of the international system is the creation of dividing lines and block-building (the latest example being QUAD). Nothing can do more harm to the peoples of Asia, than contrasting "continental" and "ocean" states or "democracies" and "non-democracies".

There is also a strong established grouping, claiming the "driver's seat" and "central role" in Asian

affairs—ASEAN and the mechanisms created by it (ARF, ADMM+, EAS etc.). The "Core Asia" concept may be much more appropriate for ASEAN than the "Maritime Southeast Asia" idea nurtured in certain quarters. ASEAN's self-proclaimed "central role" in the Asia-Pacific community-building, much heralded since 1990s, has somehow been diluted due to new geopolitical tendencies. ASEAN Regional Forum is seen by many scholars as a central piece of the dialogue model in Asia as it possesses normative influence that can socialize great powers in the neighborhood and offer a set of norms that they can share for regional peace and stability (Katsumata, 2009).

If the "Core Asia" approach is adopted, ASEAN and the ARF will have to concentrate on the efforts to work out some kind of region-wide security "code of conduct", or "manual", or "terms of reference" for Preventive Diplomacy which they can adopt on the official level as guidelines. These "guidelines" could serve beyond the ASEAN geographical scope as a norm-setting example in the whole of Asia Pacific or in other troublesome areas like Africa. Such efforts would bring in China and other influential regional players into coordinating policies and compromise-seeking and also help increase compliance. After all of regional nation-states have been "entrusted" with setting up rules without outside interference, China will have only one vote, while ASEAN will have ten. As Alica Ba claims, "ASEAN's talk shop has produced new social norms, a new culture of regional dialogue, as well as new social and institutional practices" (Ba, 2009).

This has important implications for Eurasian theory and Russia's role in it as well as practical policies. Russia thus is not the integral part of the Core Asia, but the closest and the most important partner for it. Russia should rather see itself as "Europacific power", having vital interests both to the West and to the East of its borders (as well as to the South, of course), but a separate entity, not part of any geo-economics area.

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