

*APEC and the Construction of Pacific Rim Regionalism.* By *John Ravenhill*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Index, notes, bibliography, tables, figures. xii + 294 pp. Cloth, \$70.00; paper, \$25.00. ISBN: cloth 0-521-66094-7; paper 0-521-66797-6.

Reviewed by Richard Feinberg

John Ravenhill has given us the most comprehensive assessment of the origins and evolution of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum available to date. An eclectic and flexible mind, Ravenhill skillfully applies international relations theories to the contemporary dynamics of the Asian Pacific political economy. His point of view is not always steady, and he spreads his criticisms across a wide spectrum, but his conclusion is clear: the credibility gap between APEC's rhetorical goals and its less impressive accomplishments can be attributed to the weaknesses purposely built into APEC's principles and structures and to the misguided efforts, mainly by Americans—both policy entrepreneurs and government officials—to push APEC to extend beyond its original political goals.

Historically, Asia and the Asian Pacific nations have been notably unwilling to engage in institutional collaboration. The region's obvious cultural, political, and economic diversity and its history of imperialism, colonialism, and bloody wars are formidable obstacles to multilateralism. Why, then, did governments form APEC in 1989? Ravenhill rejects simple explanations based on hegemonic theory that would emphasize shifts in U.S. power, preferring to dwell on the complex interaction of factors that affect governments' decisions. He recognizes that growing economic interdependence and the spread of multinational firms created more demand for cooperative problem-solving, and he acknowledges as well the role of ideas, policy entrepreneurs, and epistemic communities.

Ravenhill's exploration of the separate reasons that drove the major nations to initiate or to join APEC is particularly interesting. Their decisions to become members grew out of a rich mixture of offensive and defensive motives, tactical and strategic goals, and varying degrees of commitment. Some governments were ambivalent, or even negative, toward the idea of a trans-Pacific organization, and had it not been for the leadership of certain individuals, notably in Australia and Japan, APEC might never have seen the light of day.

The developing countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) feared that APEC might overshadow their regional institution and serve as an instrument for U.S. or Japanese imperialism. To accommodate ASEAN, APEC founders agreed that APEC would be guided by the "Asian way" principles of consensus, voluntarism, and unilateralism, eschewing

precise objectives whose implementation would be rigorously monitored, evaluated, and enforced through the imposition of meaningful sanctions on cheaters. Further, APEC's secretariat would be limited to a logistics role and would not be given the authority, resources, or staff to carry out an agenda that might infringe upon members' sovereignty. Thus, from the outset, APEC was structured as a weak regime.

In Ravenhill's view, this "soft" consensual accommodation was violated by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), which was appointed by APEC in 1992 to help it devise a substantive agenda. Under the entrepreneurial leadership of U.S. economist Fred Bergsten, this small epistemic community foisted on APEC free trade and investment goals that many member nations were not genuinely committed to. The Americans again erred when the U.S. government in 1997 tried to push through a policy of sectoral liberalization that made many ASEAN countries uneasy and that Japan, under pressure from its agricultural and fishing interests, ultimately vetoed.

To attain a sustainable equilibrium and return the organization to its original blueprint, Ravenhill recommends that APEC lower its sights and concentrate on facilitating trade measures of interest to both business and governments, such as harmonizing customs methods and regulations and offering economic and technical assistance. Even these modest objectives, however, would require the installation of a more capable secretariat and the allocation of more economic resources—reforms that APEC members seem unwilling to endorse.

Notwithstanding his intellectual toughness, Ravenhill skirts some troubling issues. He is aware that Malaysian president Mohamad Mahathir views APEC as a threat to his preferred East Asian integration schemes and has cynically played a "wrecker" role, but Ravenhill does not endorse the "N minus x" way out of this dilemma, perhaps because this would violate APEC's principle of requiring a full consensus and would enable the United States to form coalitions of the willing nations. While recognizing that APEC's annual summits provide impetus and visibility, he does not advance a formula for attracting leaders to meetings with a smaller, more targeted agenda. A possible answer post-9/11 has been to tackle security issues, and APEC has in fact adopted a counterterrorism plan that repackages and expands measures in customs, airport security, and money laundering.

It is difficult to evaluate the success of a multilateral undertaking like APEC, and Ravenhill does not develop a persuasive methodology for measuring how well the organization has attained elusive goals like socialization and agenda-setting. He recognizes that, despite the Asian financial crisis, most APEC members have continued to liberalize their economies, but he does not attribute this development to APEC. Nor does he delve into the detailed programs and

projects of APEC's many functional forums, where representatives of national agencies (and sometimes of business and academic communities) meet to form networks of specialists that exchange best practices, harmonize standards, and foster socialization. Some APEC proponents would argue that real community-building and problem-solving take place at this less visible, midlevel tier.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, Ravenhill's superb case study of regionalism in the Pacific Rim will quickly become the standard text on APEC at the turn of the millennium.

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