1 Introduction: interrogating regional international society in East Asia

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This book is about international society at the regional level using East Asia as a case. Its main aim is to investigate whether or not significant, distinct, international social structures exist at the regional level represented by 'East Asia'. If they do, what do they look like? How are they differentiated from global-level international society? In which ways do they inform our understanding of the interactive dynamics of regional and global order? Why do they matter theoretically, with particular reference to extending the English School theory? And why do they matter empirically, with specific focus on East Asia's pursuit of regionalism and regional community-building? Putting it differently, using international society as the central analytical idea, we ask two questions: first, what, if anything, can East Asia tell us about international society at the regional level? And, second, what insights, if any, can the English School theory provide in understanding the regional order in East Asia? We address ourselves, therefore, to two main audiences, who are mainly distinct from each other: those interested in developing English School theory as an approach to the study of international relations; and those interested in the empirical study of East Asian international relations. A third audience we have in mind is those interested in comparative regionalism (Acharya and Johnston 2007b; Pempel 2005; Solingen 2013). We hope that each of these three audiences will find value in our analysis that is specific to its own concerns. But we also hope to foster greater awareness of common ground among these different groups of scholars and to encourage them to make more use of each other's insights in their own work. In explicitly engaging East Asia as an empirical case from a purposively identified theoretical perspective, this book also seeks to bridge the gap between comparative and foreign policy scholarship on East Asia and international relations (IR) theory identified by G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (2003), and to address Alastair Iain Johnston's (2012) concern about the neglect by transatlantic IR theory of the international relations of East Asia.

For the English School audience, we have two principal aims. The first is to extend the project on comparative international societies that was

begun by Martin Wight (1977) and Adam Watson (1992) in historical mode, and has now begun to address regional differentiation in contemporary international society. More specifically, this builds on an earlier project on regional international society in the Middle East (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009b) and seeks to use regionally specific knowledge about East Asia to enrich, as well as to critique, the English School theory. The second is to question the tendency among English School scholars to treat global-level international society as a rather homogeneous construction based on universal sovereign equality, by putting forward a more core–periphery view that we label *Western–global international society*. Now that we have moved beyond the expansion story, the English School needs to develop a more differentiated and nuanced view of how international society is structured and how it is developing both temporally and spatially. Focusing on international society at the regional level addresses both of these aims. East Asia is arguably now the most important region on the planet, with on-going political and economic transformation at national, regional and global levels. While realists, liberal institutionalists and constructivists have made divergent and competing theoretical claims about the region, it is as yet not much studied systematically from an English School perspective.

For the East Asian specialists, we offer a different and certainly, for most, a less familiar theoretical perspective on their region – largely absent from the study of contemporary East Asia except for the odd passing reference, for example, in synoptic works on the region such as Muthiah Alagappa (1998: 613, 644; 2003a: 584–7). The familiar realist take on East Asia focuses analytically on the changing distribution of structural power and hegemonic transition, with special interest in great power rivalries, security dilemmas and military conflicts (Friedberg 1993–4, 2011; Glaser 2011). The liberal approach also takes hegemony seriously, but looks more to the ameliorative effects of the logics of absolute gains and emphasizes the role of economic interdependence, and of inter-governmental regimes and international institutions, in promoting regional co-operation, stability and prosperity (Dent 2008; Mansfield and Milner 1999; Stubbs 2002). More recent constructivist intervention has challenged the structural and material understanding of the East Asian order, highlighting the mediating role of culture, civilization, identity and socialization (Berger 2003; Johnston 2003; Kang 2003; Katzenstein 2012).

The English School approach is closest to constructivism in that it focuses mainly on discourse, practice and social structure. We agree with Thomas Diez and Richard Whitman (2002: 48) that all forms of society are manifestations of discourse because 'society does not have an

essence beyond discourse'. There is certainly a discourse around and about the social construction of 'East Asia', but this discourse does not necessarily make clear either what type of region East Asia is, or how it is differentiated from Western–global international society or neighbouring regional international societies. It is also important to note that power plays an important role in the discursive construction of a region. 'The power to name and shape the identity and boundaries of a region matters a great deal' (Hurrell 2007a: 243). As we will show, this discourse is as much about contestation over the designation and constitution of 'East Asia' as it is about constructing a specific structure. The English School offers a much more finely tuned and historically rooted conception of social structure than generally found in constructivism. With its concept of *primary institutions* – sovereignty, territoriality, diplomacy, balance of power, international law, nationalism, human equality and suchlike – the English School sets out detailed criteria with which both to characterize types of international society, and to differentiate regional international societies from each other and the Western–global one. This analytical framework is also what we offer to those interested in comparative regionalism generally, and the eight empirical chapters that follow will all in their various ways focus on East Asia through the lens of primary institutions. Bringing in East Asia in this way, therefore, may reinforce or destabilize some generic theoretical assumptions of the English School about international society, particularly where the theoretical contentions are only tentative. This is more than a trivial benefit for the ES theorizing.

The central focus of this book is therefore on regional international society, both theoretically and in relation to the particular case of East Asia. For the regional level of international society to be meaningful, there have to be ways of differentiating regions in this sense both from the Western–global level and from neighbouring regions. If all states were of a similar type, shared the same set of primary institutions and interpreted them through similar practices, there would be no regional level of international society. To the extent that they exist, all contemporary regional international societies can therefore be characterized in terms of four general attributes: their degree of differentiation from the Western–global core, their degree of differentiation from neighbouring regional international societies, their degree of internal homogeneity and integration, and their placement on a pluralist–solidarist spectrum (is the principal governing logic of the region power political, coexistence, co-operation or convergence? See glossary of terms). Identifying these four general characteristics as they mark out East Asia as a region is therefore key to understanding whether or not a meaningful regional international society exists in East Asia today. This is what has prompted our authors,

all specialists on the region, in their enquiries in individual chapters of this volume. This means that, collectively, we need to look specifically at the patterns and configurations of primary institutions in the region. Is East Asia differentiated from Western–global international society and from neighbouring regional international societies and, if so, in terms of which institutions and practices, and how strongly or weakly differentiated? What does the nature of this differentiation in terms of primary institutions suggest about how East Asia will relate both to its neighbours and to Western–global international society? If East Asia can be understood as a regional international society in terms of its profile of primary institutions, how homogeneous is it and how closely is it integrated? And given its profile of primary institutions, how can it be characterized as a type of regional international society: power political, coexistence, co-operative, convergence? We are interested in, to paraphrase John Ruggie (1998), not only what makes East Asia hang together, but also what makes East Asia hang together differently from the Western–global international society as well as from other regions?

We will return to these questions in the final chapter as a framing within which to summarize our findings. In the rest of this introductory chapter, we provide first the English School conceptualization of international society at the regional level and the way in which the East Asian case helps extend or destabilize basic assumptions about regional international society. This is followed by an elaboration of how studies of East Asian international relations can be enriched by engaging in the English School approach. The final section gives brief chapter summaries for the rest of the book.

Conceptualizing international society in East Asia

One of the purposes of this book is to extend the English School project on comparative international societies into the present day. It asks whether and to what extent there has emerged a distinctive East Asian regional international society. It puts this question into a long-term historical perspective, and it attempts to establish that some degree of regional differentiation exists from the Western–global core. If such differentiation is marked enough, this is interesting and significant in itself because it re-opens the scope for comparative international societies that was lost when the expansion of Western international society overrode older international societies. It also raises important questions for how we understand what international society at the global level actually means. How homogeneous is it, and what is the significance of the ways in which it is internally differentiated? To study regional international societies in contemporary terms is thus about a lot more in English School terms than

just regions. The empirical study of primary institutions should tell us both whether there is regional differentiation from the global level and, if there is, in what form and to what degree.

It is easy to get the impression from the classical English School literature that there is a relatively homogeneous, if fairly thin, global international society based on universalization of the Western model of the sovereign, territorial state, and its accompanying set of Westphalian institutions (in Hedley Bull's 1977 classic rendering: balance of power, international law, great power management, diplomacy and war). In this view, decolonization generated a society of states that was relatively uniform in terms of being composed of sovereign equal states, though not in terms of power and level of development. There was concern about the revolt against the West arising from decolonization, but this was mainly in relation to the stability of global-level international society. Neither regional international societies nor the complex and differentiated structure of primary institutions was given much thought. In its expansion of international society story (Bull and Watson 1984a; Buzan 2010b; Buzan and Little 2010; Gong 1984; Watson 1992), the English School makes a quite powerful case for the way in which the West imposed its own 'standard of civilization' on other states and peoples, in the process creating a global-level international society composed of like (sovereign) states with a significant set of shared Westphalian primary institutions. The on-going influence of the Western–global core has continued to extend this process, and a number of key primary institutions have been naturalized across nearly all of international society.

But the concept of 'global-level international society' is not as straightforward as this story might make it appear. Global-level international society is more accurately understood as a core–periphery structure in which the West projects its own values as global, and this projection encounters varying degrees of acceptance and resistance in the periphery: thus our label of *Western–global international society*. At some risk of oversimplifying, there are two general interpretations of what global-level international society is, and therefore of how the global and regional levels of it relate to each other:

- What might be called the *globalization view*, which sees international society as fairly evenly, if thinly, spread at the global level. Here the assumption is that the global level will tend to get stronger in relation to the regional one, and international society becomes more homogenized as a result of the operation of global economic, cultural and political forces (a.k.a. capitalism). This view sees either a triumph of liberal Western hegemony, or a kind of compromise in which some non-Western elements are woven into the Western framing.

- What might be called the *post-colonial view*, which sees international society as an uneven core–periphery structure in which the West still has a privileged, but partly contested, hegemonic role, and non-Western regions are in varying degrees subordinate to Western power and values. Here the assumption is that, as the Western vanguard declines relative to the rise of non-Western powers, the global level of international society will weaken. Anti-hegemonism will add to this weakening and will reinforce a relative strengthening of regional international societies as non-Western cultures seek to reassert their own values and resist (at least some of) those coming from the Western core.

The idea of a global-level international society clearly has considerable substance in terms of shared commitments to a range of key primary institutions, several of which have become effectively naturalized across many populations. Even values that were originally carried outwards by the force of Western military superiority during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have, over time, become internalized by those states and, up to a point, by peoples on whom they were originally imposed. At the level of state elites, sovereignty, territoriality, non-intervention, diplomacy, international law, great power management, nationalism, self-determination (not all versions), popular sovereignty, progress, equality of people(s) and in some measure the market (more for trade and production than finance) are all fairly deeply internalized and not contested as principles. Particular instances or applications may excite controversy, but the basic institutions of a pluralist, coexistence, interstate society have wide support among states and reasonably wide support among peoples and transnational actors. Most liberation movements seek sovereignty. Most peoples feel comfortable with nationalism, territoriality, sovereignty and the idea of progress. Most transnational actors want and need a stable legal framework. Even as Western power declines, it does not seem unreasonable to think that most of these pluralist institutions will remain in place, as too might the modest, and (it is to be hoped) increasing, level of commitment to environmental stewardship. A mixture of coercion, copying and persuasion meant that Western institutions became widespread, running in close parallel to Kenneth Waltz's (1979: 74–7) idea that anarchy generates 'like units' through processes of 'socialization and competition'. That said, the picture is, of course, mixed in terms of how these primary institutions are held in place. According to Alexander Wendt (1999), institutions can be held in place either mainly by consent (i.e. they are internalized to a logic of appropriateness), mainly by calculation (a logic of consequences) or mainly by coercion (a logic of compellence). Some primary institutions, most obviously sovereignty and nationalism, are broadly consensual. Others,

most obviously the market, reflect a mixture of all three of these binding forces, with different mixes in different places.

But while the 'like units' formulation carries some truth, it also deceives in various ways. Other primary institutions – such as human rights, non-intervention, democracy, environmental stewardship, war, balance of power and hegemony – are contested, and therefore need to be part of what is problematized in thinking about global-level international society and how it might be differentiated. As well as contestations over primary institutions, variations in the practices associated with them are quite easy to find. Non-intervention is relatively strong in East Asia and relatively weak in South Asia (Paul 2010: 3–5) and the Middle East. Human rights are relatively strong in the EU, much less so in most other places. Peaceful settlement of disputes is relatively strong in Latin America and the EU, much less so in South Asia, the Middle East and East Asia. Thus, while the degree of homogeneity at the global level is impressive and significant, it is far from universal or uniform. To find differentiation between international society at the global and regional levels one can track the differences in their primary institutions, which are the building blocks of international societies and which define their social structure. There are three possible types of difference:

(1) The regional international society contains primary institutions not present at the Western–global level.
(2) The regional international society lacks primary institutions present at the Western–global level.
(3) The regional international society has the same nominal primary institutions as at the Western–global level, but interprets them differently and so has significantly different practices associated with them. This might mean either that a given institution is associated with different practices (e.g. strong versus weak sovereignty), or that the value and priority attached to institutions within the same set are different (e.g. where sovereignty is the trump institution in one place, and the market, or nationalism, or great power management, in another).

The chapters that follow use these three criteria to try to delimit East Asian international society and differentiate it from its neighbours and the Western–global level.

Contestations about primary institutions, and differing practices within the same institution, offer one way of tracking differentiation within international society. These contestations relate to other, quite easily trackable forms of differentiation: types of state, types of civilization and degree of alienation from/integration with Western–global international society.

Variations in types of state are easy to find. The units in the system are not 'like' in some quite important ways: the post-modern states of Europe are not the same as either the United States, or the rising developmental states of East Asia. And all of the Western and other developed states are quite different from the weak post-colonial states found in Africa, the Middle East, and up to a point Latin America. That said, agreeing on a taxonomy for differentiation among the many available may be less easy. Barry Buzan's (2007: 93) spectrum of *weak–strong states* based on degree of socio-political cohesion (and set in contrast to *weak and strong powers* denoting the traditional distinction in terms of material capabilities) is a reasonable starting point. Europe, for example is dominated by strong, developed and liberal democratic states and contains several big powers, none of which has hegemonic status. This relative uniformity is reflected in its strong and distinctive regional international society based on a form of post-modern state: a security community framed by the institutions of the EU. Sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by weak, underdeveloped, dependent and often authoritarian post-colonial states, in which internal conflict and the threat of state failure dominate inter-state relations. Latin America is dominated by states of middle rank in terms of weak/strong, developed/developing and democratic/authoritarian. There are elements of security community and several substantial regional powers (Merke 2011). The Middle East is dominated by weak, authoritarian, dependent post-colonial states, with again several powers of similar strength and no potential hegemon (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009b). There is a high level of inter-state conflict, and it is too early to say whether the on-going 'Arab Spring' will unravel the long-standing stability of dictators and dynasties in the region's political constitution. South Asia has many weak states, but some quite strong powers (Paul 2010). Where a particular type of state dominates, this fact affects both the character of international society at the regional level and the way in which the region interacts with the Western–global level.

East Asia does not look like any of these. More so than most other regions, it contains a rich variety of state types. All regions have some diversity, but mostly this is subordinated within a general dominance of a particular type of state. East Asia contains states that range across the spectrum from Africa through the Middle East and Latin America, to Europe, as well as some that seem unique to it (China, North Korea). Cambodia and Laos feel more like Africa; Burma and Vietnam feel like the Middle East; Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia feel like Latin America; Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and arguably Singapore feel more like Europe, although without the element of security community. If North Korea has any comparators they might be found in Russia

and Belarus. China likes to think of itself as *sui generis*, and perhaps it is, combining a singular mix of communist government and capitalist economy with massive size and a unique civilizational heritage. Whether China should be thought of as a 'civilization-state' (Jacques 2009) is an interesting question. Most nation-states (think of France, or Iran, or Japan, or Egypt) would make a similar type of cultural claim and, if the civilization in reference is 'Confucian', then China is just one, albeit very big, state within that civilization. Across this diversity, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, East Asia nevertheless contains a distinctive form of *developmental state*.

If one accepts the view that international societies of any sort are generated by the leading states and societies within them, then there should be some significant correlation between the degree of homogeneity of state type, and the strength or weakness, or even existence, of an international society. European international society famously emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as European states became more alike in terms of defining themselves in relation to sovereignty, territoriality and dynasticism. In this perspective, East Asia's political diversity points towards no, or at best a weak, regional international society.

Variations in civilization are also easy to find. Europe has its Christian heritage, albeit with many subdivisions, and the Middle East has its Islamic one, again with many subdivisions. Latin America is an offshoot of one section of European culture and therefore has a more coherent shared Hispanic, Catholic civilizational legacy. Compared to these, East Asia is civilizationally as well as politically fragmented. In terms of the broad cultural patterns represented by 'civilization', often marked by religion, East Asia does not have a dominant core. Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos are mainly in the Buddhist tradition which is also significantly present in China (Tibet especially) and Japan. Malaysia and Indonesia are mainly in the Islamic tradition. The Philippines is mostly close to the Latin American tradition, and Christianity is a significant presence in many East Asian societies. There is a Confucian sphere centred on China, Korea and Vietnam, and up to a point Japan, but several other religious traditions are prominent within this sphere as well. So in this heritage, or background, sense, East Asia is again notably diverse and multicultural. To the extent that South Asia becomes linked to East Asia, this cultural diversity will be deepened.

Variations in the degree of integration with or alienation from Western–global international society are also pretty apparent. Some regions, most obviously Europe and North America, are inside the Western–global core and therefore mainly comfortable with it by definition. But even within the West there are marked differences of historical relationship

to Western–global international society, and these differences are even more marked and more significant for non-Western regions. Europe has had an unbroken historical relationship in which its own international society was imposed on the rest of the world. This involved formative encounters with other civilizations, most obviously the long and direct encounter with the Islamic world, but also the mainly indirect exchange of knowledge and goods with Asia. But Europe was never overwhelmed or occupied. So while Europe certainly interacted with other cultures, and drew knowledge from them, it retained its autonomy.

There are three routes through which non-Western regions have arrived at their current relationship with Western–global international society: repopulation, colonization/decolonization and encounter/reform (Buzan 2012). Latin America was largely repopulated and remade by European, and in some places African, immigrants and so has a high degree of disconnect between its original culture, largely exterminated, and its modern one. Because of this legacy it more easily joined the expanding Western international society, though retaining also a degree of alienation from it. Almost all of the Middle East, Africa and South Asia was directly colonized by the Europeans, with the process of colonization and decolonization leaving behind a heavy legacy not only of arbitrary state boundaries and Western institutions, but also of economic, political and cultural resentment against the West. There is thus a certain uniformity of encounter experience within these regions.

That is not the case for East Asia, whose experience of encounter with the expanding West was notably diverse. Some parts of East Asia were colonized early and for a long time by the Europeans (the Philippines, parts of Indonesia). Others were colonized only much later during the final phase of European expansion during the nineteenth century (most of the rest of Southeast Asia). China, Korea and Japan were not colonized by Europe at all. They were able to control relations with the West right up until the middle of the nineteenth century, largely setting their own terms for the encounter. From the middle of the nineteenth century, European and Western power became overwhelming, initiating a coercive process of encounter and reform. Japan was spectacularly successful at reform and by the late nineteenth century had joined Western–global international society as a great power. Japan's success was so great as to enable it to embark on its own colonial career in East Asia, and it quickly took over Taiwan and Korea. China was spectacularly unsuccessful, edging towards disintegration. It escaped Western takeover because the Western powers did not want to take responsibility for it, and instead endured a sustained Japanese attempt at occupation. Nothing like this diversity of experience can be found elsewhere, though with a bit of a stretch one might draw