

Preface

The trade institutional landscape in the Asia-Pacific is in rapid flux. Countries in the transpacific region have been pursuing a web of bilateral and minilateral trade agreements. Controversy over which institutional configuration is best suited for the region has reached a high pitch, with leaders formulating new configurations on a regular basis. These ideas for new institutions come in the context of an already crowded field of arrangements and a moribund World Trade Organization (WTO). These include the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA), the ASEAN + 3 (including Japan, China, and South Korea) discussions, the East Asia Summit (EAS), which include these three plus India, Australia, and New Zealand, and APEC, with its 21 member economies (with Taiwan and Hong Kong, hence the term “economies”). More recently, we have seen a proliferation of bilateral free trade (or preferential, depending on one’s degree of cynicism) agreements. New efforts to bring some semblance of order to the potpourri of trade accords include the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPP), which would link existing and create new bilateral trade agreements among Asia-Pacific countries.

Ironically, in the 1980s, analysts expressed concern over the lack of institutional arrangements to manage economic relations in Asia. Although trade in Asia had grown rapidly with the networking role of Japanese firms and Chinese ethnic groups, some expressed concerns about the lack of formalized institutions. With the end of the Cold War, the Asian financial crisis, rising Sino-Japanese rivalry, and now the global financial crisis, scholars have often focused on these shocks as driving the institutional transformation of the Asia-Pacific. Yet this research on the East Asian region and the Asia-Pacific region more generally tends to be state-centric, focusing on characterizing actors’ national interests, but without paying adequate attention to key subnational players. Although shocks and systemic changes are undoubtedly crucial catalysts in accounting for the newfound rush to bilateral and minilateral efforts, these explanations fall short of fully capturing the crucial differences in national responses to common external shocks.

This book attempts to address this lacuna in the examination of different types of East Asian trade policies and American strategies through the careful characterization of types of accords and then the development of a systematic domestic

bargaining game approach focusing on idea, interests, and institutions to account for different types of arrangements. It is our claim that a focus on the interplay of these three driving forces can provide much deeper insight into the trajectory of trade institutions in the Asia-Pacific than a state-centric, billiard ball approach.

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