Awkward States and Regional Organisations: The UK and Australia Compared

INTRODUCTION – COMPARING AWKWARD PARTNERS IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION¹

Since the late 1980s, the comparative study of regional integration has undergone a renaissance. Originally undertaken largely outside EU studies, or with the EU and its academic literature constructed as an Other by scholars of the 'new regionalism', a recent rapprochement has generated the grounds for cross-fertilisation and a shared research agenda in which both sets of scholars are considered capable of contributing to an ongoing process of research (Acharya and Johnston 2008; Murray 2010a; Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond 2010; Robinson and Warleigh-Lack 2011).

This cooperation does not expect regions to be fully comparable with each other across every factor, variable or time period (Warleigh-Lack and Van Langenhove 2010). However, it suggests that situations previously considered unique, and perhaps intractable, if considered through the lens of an area specialism may now appear more capable of solution, or at least more capable of consideration from a fresh perspective, as the fruit of comparative study; beyond methodological nationalism, there may lie many new and fruitful comparisons of states and other actors, as they grapple with the challenges of globalisation, power shifts and the transnationalising world order (Slaughter 2004; Haynes 2005). In other words, if globalisation impacts structurally upon the unit of analysis of comparative politics scholars - nation states – then such scholars and those of international relations scholars can and should enter into fruitful dialogue.²

One such comparison is the role of the UK and Australia in their respective contexts of regional integration. This may appear counter-intuitive:

there are vast differences between the UK and Australia in terms of geography, economic linkages, and the place and role of each in its separate regional processes. Although the UK has traditionally shied away from articulating visions for the EU's future, Australia has not been reluctant to make proposals and seek to be a leader in Asia Pacific plans – such as APEC (the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation process) and Kevin Rudd's 2008 proposal for an Asia Pacific Community. Australia, unlike the UK, seeks to be a regional leader, but faces problems in being accepted as such. The UK is a member state of a group of 27 countries with common goals and objectives, despite many crises and problems. Australia is an outsider or outlier in its region. It confronts the fact that in many ways the Asian region is a 'special' case – it is highly diverse in terms of religion, statehood, nation-state development, economic development, and the institutional development of individual governance structures. Regional interactions in Asia are characterised by a desire for normative consensus and a respect for the integrity of the nation-state. Nationalism remains an important principle of the nation-states of Asia, albeit in different manifestations. Most importantly, democratic norms form the backbone of the Australian polity but this is not the case for most of its neighbours in the region. Moreover, the European Union (EU), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) processes occupy rather different places on the scale of region-ness (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000).³

Based on above differences one may legitimately question the comparability between these two cases. However, to dismiss it outright would be unwarranted. Probing into the comparison in some depth we found many commonalities, such as the problem of regional belonging as perceived by other partners, the various forms of awkwardness, and causal mechanisms. The issues confronted by the two states, both of which can be considered in International Relations terms as middle powers, in becoming

fully part of their respective regions are actually strikingly similar. Both can seek to play a leading role regionally, especially with regard to particular policy areas or the economy, but are often considered outside the mainstream, and thus with no sustained leadership capacity, by other states in their respective regions. Furthermore, Australia and the UK both use the 'Westminster model' of liberal democracy, a further commonality which sets them apart from most if not all their regional respective partners, which adopt either other forms of liberal democracy or, in the case of Australia's region, in which non-democratic governments may hold power. Additionally, both Australia and the UK have a significant security relationship with an extra-regional superpower, namely the US, which problematises their relations within their respective regions. The awkwardness problem of the UK and Australia, in fact, is a common challenge in the process of regionalism. Japan, the US, China, France, and even Mexico have all experienced some form of awkwardness. A comparative study of the UK and Australia will encourage further study of other awkward states and demonstrates that the so-called "uniqueness" of a country as an awkward partner, such as the UK or Australia, is in fact a nearly "universal" phenomenon in regional integration.

The article aims to assess and compare the ways in which the two states are 'awkward partners' in their respective regions, seeking to draw on the secondary literature to facilitate comparison and to generate hypotheses about how the states might contribute to, experience, and overcome their awkwardness, which will be explored in subsequent empirical work.

To carry out the comparison, we draw on the work of Katzenstein and Shiraishi (1997, 7–11, 23–31), who examine the role of international power, norms, and domestic state structures. We focus on how both material and ideational factors contribute to the awkwardness of the two states. As material factors, we count power relations, institutional and policy

preferences, economic objectives and preferences, security concerns, and domestic politics; as ideational factors, we count identity and vision. For us, 'identity' refers to whether or not the UK and Australia consider themselves to be fully part of their region and 'vision' refers to how Australia and the UK would like their respective regions to develop.

Through this comparison we argue that the UK and Australia are comparable as 'awkward partners' in their respective regions despite the existence of significant differences between them.

We further claim that the UK and Australia's status as 'awkward partners' is produced by the interplay of a mix of material and ideational conditions. While awkwardness is ultimately a social condition that is a function of the perceptions, judgement, and recognition of partners and the actors themselves, it is produced by the interaction of various factors that stem from both material and ideational origins. Through comparison we find that while other factors also play a role, power relations, domestic politics and cultural identity are the most important factors. It is the interaction of these three factors that produces the awkwardness, with the same causal mechanism in both the UK and Australia.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section, we focus on the UK as an 'awkward partner' in European integration. In section three, we do the same regarding Australia and its region. In section four, we compare and assess the findings, and also generate hypotheses regarding awkwardness as a feature of regional integration.

AWKWARD ALBION

The UK is generally considered the paradigm case of an 'awkward partner' in the European integration process. And yet, to date the UK has never rejected either an EU treaty or EU membership in a referendum.

Similarly, it has a reputation as a reliable implementer of EU legislation, with a better track record in this regard than most other member states (Armstrong and Bulmer 2003). The perception of British 'awkwardness' has also persisted despite the fact that, in day-to-day EU operations, the UK is often a dextrous player of diplomatic games, with officials able to smooth feathers that have been ruffled by their political masters (Wall 2008). In what follows we explore the material and ideational factors which allowed this diagnosis to arise and persist.

Material factors

Power relations

European integration has focused on developing a stronger European entity, in order to help erstwhile great powers recover after World War II and to help those same powers address the challenges of both the Cold War and globalisation. The role of the US in establishing what is now the EU was crucial, both in terms of providing material support through Marshall Aid and by helping create the context in which integration could flourish as part of US foreign policy (Lundestad 1986). Indeed, after the Suez crisis British policy-makers had to learn quickly that there were limits to their foreign policy autonomy, and applied to join the then-European Economic Community largely to ensure Britain did not lose value to the US as a security partner and ally (George 1998).

Institutions and policies

The UK has always been out of step with the European mainstream regarding the kind of institutions that are required for the integration process, and also on many of the policies it should produce. Britain's clear preference is for free trade, with a reluctance to allow supranational institutions and a

broad range of common policies to develop at regional level (Young 1999; Carey and Geddes 2010).

Moreover, Britain's failure to join the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) in 1952, despite the invitation to do so, meant that the EU institutions and policies which grew from this root did not reflect British preferences (George 1998). Thus, once the UK finally joined the then-European Economic Community in 1973, it was difficult for UK officials and politicians to operate effectively in the EU system: coming from political and legal traditions that are still outside the continental mainstream (Armstrong and Bulmer 2003), British officials and politicians often found the EU processes and institutions frustrating (Wall 2008). The resultant iterated attempts to renegotiate the terms of membership and core policy settlements such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) meant that the UK demonstrated different policy priorities from those already established, right from the outset (Weigall and Stirk 1992). Perhaps the most notorious example of British disruptiveness was the row about the contribution to the EU budget by the UK. The budget rebate discussions began under the premiership of James Callaghan, and were pursued with vigour to their conclusion by his successor, Margaret Thatcher (George 1998).

Economics

Economic policy considerations have also been important in shaping perceptions of UK awkwardness. As mentioned above, the UK has persistently advocated a free-trade, economically (neo-)liberal Europe. This advocacy has not been without success – the UK under Thatcher was a key contributor to the creation of the Single European Market (Bache and Jordan 2006a, Wall 2008) – but it has often placed the UK at odds with other member states, whose preferences are, or at least have been, for other varieties of

capitalism. A key issue here has been the so-called European Social Model, about which even Labour governments have been sceptical (Geddes 2002); British governments have repeatedly resisted transfer of social policy to the EU on grounds of both national sovereignty and ideological difference as, in sum, they have favoured a more market-driven approach to employment and welfare issues than their continental counterparts.

Security

Security calculations were certainly part of the UK's choice to seek membership of the then-EEC, but this was a negative choice taken for fear of being left behind by a potential US-USSR-Western Europe triangle of Great Powers, rather than a step taken out of positive conviction that the integration process should produce an independent security capacity (Young 1999). Thus, the changed security calculus that emerged after the Suez Crisis was crucial; without it, the Foreign Office might never have overcome opposition from the Treasury (Weigall and Stirk 1992).

However, the security calculation taken in the late 1950s set the tone for subsequent British views about the EU's role in providing security. Persistently Atlanticist in its orientation, the UK has continued to promote strong ties to NATO and to Washington. Thus, despite its recent and acknowledged role as a leader in the development of the European Security and Defence Policy, the UK has continued to ensure that this policy keeps the EU as part of the Atlantic alliance instead of developing in a more Gaullist direction – a further sign of 'awkwardness' for some, but not all, of the other EU states (Wall 2008).⁴

Domestic Politics

The domestic context of British policy towards European integration is often held up as a core source of London's 'awkwardness', and also as an

explanation for the latter's persistence. Over time, the UK has become thoroughly Europeanised as a polity, in its politics (patterns of interest representation, the impact on party politics and political parties), and in many of its policies (Bache and Jordan 2006b). There has even been a 'quiet revolution' in the way that central government works in Britain, deliberately undertaken as a means to help the UK shape EU policy more effectively (Bulmer and Burch 2006: 37). However, this does not equate to a British political context which would be favourable to deeper European integration, or in which political leaders consider that it is worth the risk to argue persistently in favour of deeper European integration.

The first way in which this can be seen is in the impact of public opinion. For example, Tony Blair calculated that it was electorally too risky to point out the political importance of EU matters to the general public (James and Oppermann 2009); this allowed the default popular perception that the EU is a persistent but ultimately inconsequential irritant, rather than a matter of great importance, to be maintained.⁵ The consequence was British failure to join the Euro, a factor which contributed to Blair's limits as a potential EU leader (Wall 2008).

Indeed, a failure to be clear about what was at stake in European integration has been a common feature of British politics ever since accession, perhaps with the exception of Margaret Thatcher's premiership (Young 1999). Moreover, an emphasis on costs, not benefits, of the EU, came to be a default position regarding membership; the construction of the UK as a bulwark against otherwise irresistible and rapacious EU forces has been a constant feature of British public diplomacy about the EU ever since the accession campaign in 1972 (George 1998).

The second way in which domestic politics places constraints on UK performance in the EU is linked to the internal politics of political parties and also to the wishes of powerful non-party actors, such as the popular press. Of

course, this is not entirely separate from public opinion, but it is expressed in a different way, i.e. institutionally. Divisions within political parties can restrict a Prime Minister's room for manoeuvre. For instance, John Major's difficulties in maintaining party coherence over the EU issue shaped the UK's negotiating position on the Maastricht Treaty, and meant that the UK had to insist on opt-outs from policies such as the single currency and social policy (Wall 2008). The more recent governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown shaped their EU policies in order to respond, in part, to pressure from newspapers, thereby ensuring that their opponents in Parliament had no opportunity to outflank them from a Eurosceptic position (James and Oppermann 2009).

Ideational factors

Identity

British policy towards European integration has been coloured since the outset by narratives of the cultural separateness, difference and even superiority that Britons and the UK enjoy vis-à-vis the rest of the continent (Weigall and Stirk 1992; Young 1999). Reinforced by political and legal traditions which are different from the continental mainstream (Armstrong and Bulmer 2003), these perceptions are reflected in popular assumptions that the so-called 'special relationship' with the US is more important than that with the EU, as well as being more culturally appropriate or intuitive (George 1998: 14- 15); membership of the EU is seen more as a reflection of decline than, as in many other member states, a way to ensure peace and prosperity (Young 1999). British people, in the main, do not feel European, trust EU institutions or consider the EU a worthy subject of electoral interest (Geddes 2002).⁶

Vision

Related to identity is 'the vision thing' – what kind of EU does the UK want, and how well does this mesh with the desires of other member states? Except in relation to the single market project London has been much better at setting out what it does *not* want than what it actively seeks from and for the EU (Armstrong and Bulmer 2003: 389); it has also been consistent in frustrating other member states' projects by developing alternative, minimalist variants as counter-proposals - for example, on the debates regarding differentiated integration in Europe (George 1998: 259-64). That said, elements of a British Euro-vision of a kind can be discerned: an intergovernmental, Atlanticist project, open to enlargement: this has not resonated fully with many of the original member states, but is more attractive to many of those which joined in the 2004-7 accession process.

In sum, the UK's awkwardness can be considered a mixture of material and ideational factors, and also as an ongoing but malleable feature of the UK-EU relationship. Britain is not always 'awkward', and can, as with the single market or ESDP, even be in the EU vanguard, but it is often considered to punch below its weight in EU politics. Cause and effect in British awkwardness are difficult to disentangle, but perhaps lie above all in a sense of cultural, economic and political distinctiveness, and a sense that Britain does not really need European integration for anything other than trade - expressed in policy terms as Atlanticism and in a preference for minimal political integration. We now proceed to discuss Australia's role within its regional integration context.

AWKWARD AUSTRALIA

Unlike the UK, Australia has been a facilitator and a driver of regional integration in the Asia Pacific, even playing a key role in moving APEC towards a formula for the inclusion of the three Chinese entities (China,

Taiwan, and Hong Kong) from 1991. APEC symbolizes Australia's regional vision and initiative. Australia has had a reputation as an honest broker, bringing together broad coalitions of interests. Australia has promoted peace-building in the region (e.g. in East Timor and the Solomon Islands) and participates actively in the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit.

Despite Australia's attempts to punch above its weight and become more entrenched in regional forums and trade and investment links, it is not regarded as belonging in the region. Australia is an 'awkward partner' in Asia Pacific context, and has experienced the 'liminality' of being neither here nor there, as somehow being on the margins of the region (Higgott and Nossal, 1997).

Material factors

Power Relations

Australia's role in the Asia Pacific is best understood in terms of the region's power politics. The US has played a significant role in influencing and even defining the politics of regionalism in Asia (Katzenstein, 2005; Higgott, 2007; He, 2011a, 2011b), although American strategic and economic objectives were of a hub-and-spokes kind and based on a reluctance to develop either deep regional security architecture or economic regionalism. It has thus been the middle powers that have driven regionalization in Asia because it enhances their status and influence in the region in relation to greater powers – or else because it is part of a vision for reconciliation and effective governance. ASEAN is the result of middle power-driven regionalization; the force of path-dependence renders ASEAN, in its own context, powerful. When Australia's then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd proposed an Asia Pacific Community (APC) that effectively sidelined

ASEAN, this was resisted by the organization's members and resulted in few concrete achievements (He, 2011a; 2011b; Murray, 2010b).

East Asians have pursued regionalism under conditions that do not undermine US domination: complementing and not opposing the US position. Although ASEAN has not sought to exclude the US from the region, it has developed normative and social mechanisms in which the US plays follower (and peer among a number of external 'dialogue partners') rather than leader. This is the case with the ASEAN Regional Forum⁷ and the East Asian Summit⁸, for example.

Australian engagement in regionalism has been constrained by its position in relation to the region's great powers – the US and China. As current Prime Minister Julia Gillard (2011) phrased it, Australia's future is based on space 'for a rising China' and a 'robust alliance between Australia and the United States'. Australian preferences for inclusion of the US in the region have nevertheless created a problem in fostering closer relations with China. So regional hierarchy and power relations in Asia influence how Australia plays a role in the region and explain the way in which the APC proposal was received.

Institutions and policies

On 4 June 2008, Rudd first presented his APC vision as 'a regional institution which spans the entire Asia-Pacific region ...able to engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security' (Rudd 2008a). He specifically included the US, Japan, China, India and Indonesia within his definition of the region, but not ASEAN as a regional grouping. The APC's purpose was 'to encourage the development of a genuine and comprehensive sense of community whose habitual operating principle is cooperation'. Rudd

later spoke of ASEAN's role and significant achievement in 'building a sense of regional identity, a sense of community, and a sense of neighbourhood' and he argued that ASEAN's 'habits of cooperation' had crafted 'a sense of genuine community' (Rudd 2008b). Contributors to that regional discussion would include the US, China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and India. Responding to criticisms following his original speech, Rudd explained that the proposed APC was not an economic union, a monetary union, a political union, nor a customs union. Yet, the wider region needed to learn from ASEAN's success 'how to build the institutions, habits and practices of cooperation across the policy spectrum' (Murray, 2010b). The focus was on institutions rather than on policies. He presented to Asian interlocutors a choice between building a regional architecture by further institutionalisation, or passivity (Rudd 2009a).

This middle power activism has been a hallmark of the Australian Labor Party for some decades, evident in the APEC proposals and in engagement with regional bodies. Despite its being an awkward partner for many Asian interlocutors in terms of identity, it has attempted to be a driving force in regional architecture debates.

In the process of regional institution building, Australia has had to tackle the issue of authoritarian states participating in Asia Pacific regionalism, which constrains Canberra's ability to develop a pragmatic approach towards regional development in Asia. On the one hand, Australia cannot allow the issue of democracy to hijack efforts to enhance regionalism, but on the other hand it cannot get around the issue of democracy and human rights when dealing with China. The exclusion of China from any economic regionalism in Asia is impossible - and China's place must be considered in any regional architecture. However, region-building will be unsuccessful if China stresses

the advantages of its own political system and Australia insists on promoting democracy. Here we observe that region-building and institution-building are bound up with ideational factors for Australia in its regional context.

Economics

Political economy is the foundation of the regionalization process for many regions. The fact that East Asia's economic engagement with the US is deeper than it is within the region itself underlines the Asian tendency towards open or porous regionalism. In trade, globalization is the most important trend for China and, indeed, all of Asia, while for Europe regional integration is more important, with high EU intraregional trade at approximately 65% , unlike ASEAN (24%). Asia constitutes an open and globalized economy, where Australia regards itself as a key player, as a primary products exporter to the region, especially of minerals to China. From a political economy perspective it is noteworthy that China's important trading partners are the EU and the US, not the rest of Asia, despite burgeoning trade with both Australia and ASEAN. Unlike for Australia, contemporary Chinese ideas of regionalism are primarily economy-focussed, because economic performance is vital both to its long term strategic objectives and to its internal social stability (Wang, 2011).

Australia finds itself in a distinctive position in the Asia Pacific region. It is a part of the English-speaking world and has developed and maintained close ties relations with the UK. Yet those ties have diminished since UK accession to the EU and its forging of stronger ties within the EU, as Australia has become more embedded in trade relations with its Asian neighbours - as well as increasingly with the EU and its member states, major trading partners along with China, Japan and South Korea. Yet its economic priorities are in Asia, a point made repeatedly in Gillard's speech of September 2011.

Security

While Australia is heavily dependent upon China and other Asian countries for trade, it relies on the US as its security guarantor. Australia's position has recently been as framed by some observers as a choice between China (its major economic market) and the US (its security provider). Although Rudd's APC proposal comprehends the idea of a security community, the more recent Gillard speech recognises that the US and Australia are part of a loyal alliance. It seems that China constitutes both a challenge and opportunity. Security dilemmas can perpetuate splits in the politics of Asian regionalism. Further, close economic relations between China and Australia overlap with security concerns, as Australia and the US must consider the security implications of China's growing economic influence over Australia and China's influence on security threats in the region, such as the South China Sea.

Domestic Politics

When in the 1990s, then Prime Minister Paul Keating dubbed Australia an 'Asian' country, emphasizing Australia's double identities, it also came at a cost – there was a backlash from sections of Australian society to the idea of Australia having an Asian identity, as evidenced by the rise of the One Nation Party. The idea of an 'Asianization' of Australia is considered in government circles to be both dangerous and divisive, although it is politically safe to emphasize the need for an increase in Asian literacy levels in Australia - and to phrase it as a 'national skill' issue, not an identity issue (Rudd, 1995). Unlike Europeanisation, the term Asianisation does not have common acceptance as identity politics or as a political or administrative or policy process. Keating lost the argument when he stressed that Australia must become a part of Asia. Taking a lesson from Keating, Rudd and Gillard avoid the question of Australian identity.

Ideational Factors

Identity

Most Australians see no need for Australia to change its cultural tradition and adopt cultural features common to Asia. Within Asia, Australia is not perceived as an Asian country, but rather as belonging to the English-speaking world, a middle power player within the global North.

Some regional countries, then, still regard Australia as an 'outsider', for at least two reasons - it is not necessarily regarded as Asian, and it is perceived as being closely aligned with the US (Murray, 2010b). Some view Australia as a potential rival and not an ally. In this regard, as former Indonesian Prime Minister Mahathir said, 'If you want to become Asian, you should say we are Asian because we have an Asian culture, an Asian mentality' (cited in Milner 1997: 39). While just how many Asian countries and people hold such a view needs to be investigated empirically, the question itself underscores the importance of the cognitive and normative elements of regionalism.

Vision

Australia's regional vision is Asia-Pacificism, which acknowledges the important role of the US, but avoids the sensitive question of Australia's identity in the region. This awkward situation is characterised by Australia's relationship with the US, despite being geographically part of Asia, and inevitably raises the question of how to deal with indigenous ideas of Asianism.

Australia seeks to maintain and build alliances with Asia and America. Nevertheless, most Asians implicitly hold a continental notion of regionalism despite different versions of Pacificism having been held by many leaders and scholars in Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Singapore (Hook 1996;

Hundt and Kim 2011). For most Asians, notions of an East Asian Community are indigenous, emanating from Asia and advocated by Asians. It has historical origins and is supported by some contemporary cultural and economic dynamism (He 2011b). And Australia is not a natural part of it, given its Asia Pacific orientations.

COMPARISONS AND DISCUSSION.

It is difficult to separate the material and the ideational aspects of key analytical factors when assessing UK and Australian awkwardness in regional integration. For instance, material concerns with the use and constraints of state power are bound up with norms of sovereignty and autonomy. Consequently, our discussion of the seven analytical factors that we grouped into 'material' and 'ideational' clusters in the Introduction, intends these categories as heuristically useful if porous devices. Table 1 summarises the discussion.

---TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE---

Power Relations

Both the UK and Australia have a special relationship with the US; the ideational factors and security concerns differ, yet each regards the US as a partner, or, in the case of Australia, as a 'great and powerful friend'. Each is so close to the US that they have been regarded, in the past, as advancing more of a US agenda in regional relations than an independent one. Neither is accepted as fully part of their region, in part due to these close links with the US, and in part due to their pragmatic view of society, governance and

regulation. For the UK, the role of the US in shaping Britain's participation was fundamental. Indeed, Washington essentially saw UK participation in European integration as a means to influence that process indirectly, and there is evidence that this agenda was not unwelcome in London (Young 1999). Similarly, the US' Asia Pacific regionalism policy has largely shaped Australia's role in the region. Australia followed Washington in advocating the idea of an Asia Pacific Community rather than an Asian vision of regionalism. Australia's membership of the East Asia Summit is a key to it playing a countervailing role against the rise of China on behalf of the US.

Institutions and Policies

In terms of institutions and policies, the UK has not been a driver of integration within the EU. In comparison, Australia has been a driver of regional architecture in the Asia Pacific. The changing relationship between the UK and the Commonwealth altered British perceptions of its foreign policy choices as well as Australian foreign policy choices and trading orientations (Benvenuti, 2008). Indeed, Australia re-oriented its trade towards Asia as early as the 1950s and deepened its economic engagement with the Asia Pacific after the British accession to the then-EEC in 1973 (Benvenuti, 2008; Murray, 2005). Whilst the British default position has been that of Euroscepticism and a perception of the costs of integration, in Australia there has been a turn towards Asia especially over the last two decades, based on the desire both for market access in Asia and to be an active leader in the design of the regional architecture.

Australia has sought to play an activist role in the region as a past founder of APEC, promoter of peace-building in the region (e.g. East Timor

and the Solomon Islands) and a major development assistance contributor. It is strongly embedded in the region through agreements such as the FTA with ASEAN and a committed diplomatic presence.

London's insistence upon institutional minimalism has not prevented either the deepening of the EU political system or the creation of practices such as qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers. Indeed, and *pace* the 2011 EU Bill, London has sought rather to secure opt-outs from certain institutional and policy changes rather than to oppose them.⁹ This is a form of limited awkwardness – the UK does not take part in policies such as the Schengen area of passport-free travel, but did not prevent others from doing so. Indeed, at intergovernmental conferences which decide the contents of new EU Treaties, other states are just as active as the UK in defending their 'red lines'.

Economics

Both Australia and the UK are keen to be entrenched in their region in economic terms, in relation to both trade and investment links. Each has different perceptions of the benefits and losses associated with membership of a regional entity. The benefits of the UK's EU membership – economic and otherwise – are evident in a government report (<http://www.dti.gov.uk/ewt/tenyears.htm>).

However, economic factors have been key drivers of UK awkwardness. The UK's preference for free markets and neoliberalism has historically placed it outside the continental mainstream, even if the gap has closed since the enlargement of 2004. The UK's insistence on 'getting its money back' demonstrated a wish to keep the EU budget to a minimum that continues to this day, and the choice to opt-out of the Euro demonstrated a clear preference to preserve national sovereignty.

The benefits to Australia of a closer regional architecture are primarily based on security and trade as priorities. Australia is currently actively engaged with the Asia Pacific region in trade and security, and in a deepening relationship with the EU. This is an aspect of Australian foreign policy that is not mirrored in the UK context. The Asia Europe Meeting, which Australia recently joined, provides an opportunity for Australia and the UK to interact in a single forum with key partners in each region, and to influence agendas and deepen relations with both sets of interlocutors. Yet this engagement is not without its challenges. The benefits of Australia's ASEM membership include the development of close relationships with Asian partners and the lessening of potential tensions with both EU and Asian partners, whether on agriculture with the EU or on the sensitivities of regional architectural design with some Asian partners.

Security

Security is related to the power relations discussed above. Australia shares common security interests with the US and Europe. Historically Australia first relied upon the UK for its security and later looked to the US for protection. While the American influence is important and the link between the two states is strong, the contemporary history has been counter-balanced by an Australian commitment to the Asian region. Australia has signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN and has been an active participant in the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit.

Security concerns were a key factor in persuading the UK to apply to the then-EEC. Security policy also offers the UK an opportunity to lead the EU. This opportunity has to some extent been taken, and while the UK's persistent Atlanticism often frustrates certain EU member state governments, it is more in tune with the policies of others.

Domestic Politics

Many domestic factors come into play. In Australia the Coalition government under Howard and the Labor government under Rudd and Gillard have had different preferences towards Asia. The two-party system in Australia has impacted on ideational choice. Debates over Australian identity have played a part in shaping its approach to ideas of Asian regionalism and these debates are largely constrained by political culture and the preference of the majority of Australians (He, 2011b). No political party dares to talk about the Asianization of Australia nowadays.

Similarly important regarding UK awkwardness are matters of domestic politics. UK leaders and elites tend to present the EU as a matter for opposition or victory by restraining their partners far more regularly than those of other member states, with particularly clear evidence being the reaction to the Maastricht Treaty negotiations (Wall 2008). Public opinion remains opposed to deeper UK involvement in the EU, with Euroscepticism the default position of many voters. This both reflects and entrenches a context in which 'awkwardness' is difficult to eschew in domestic politics, and also played up in the media.

Identity

Both states are usually considered part of the Anglo-sphere in cultural and linguistic terms. This sets them apart from the 'mainstream' in their respective regions, which generally do not have this cultural and linguistic heritage – Ireland and New Zealand notwithstanding.

Australia faces a dilemma in developing a fully integrated approach to Asian regionalism. As long as it fails to engage Asia in substantive cultural terms, it lacks *cultural* legitimacy for a greater role in Asia. Its political legitimacy is not strong, given its different governance norms from those of most of its neighbours. If Australia moves away from the West and toward Asia, this poses ideational and identity problems – and potentially alienates Australians as well as the US.

Senses of cultural difference, and even superiority, help drive UK awkwardness in the EU. The ‘special relationship’ with the US retains a discursive allure that relations with the EU have never had, and a view set out in the 1940s, according to which Britain is not only different from, but better than, other European countries persists.¹⁰ Such a situation reinforces the lack of British popular socialisation into the EU; differences in policy preferences between the UK and other members states are frequently cast in ‘all-or-nothing’ terms in public debate; policy differences are quickly constructed in much of the media as yet another reason for the UK to leave the EU, or at least as evidence of the latter’s essential unacceptability.¹¹

In addition, there are comparable but very different normative elements and tensions between European and East Asian regionalism: the EU’s normative foundation is democracy, human rights, individual liberty, the reduction of national sovereignty, and the creation of at least partially autonomous regional organisations, while the normative foundation of Asian regionalism is nationalist doctrine, statist power and Asian culture or values (He 2004:107; Murray, 2010b). Nationalism is the driving force behind East Asian regionalism and states are generally unwilling to surrender some sovereignty to regional organisations in order to make them more effective. An East Asian commitment to sovereignty is thus arguably an important impediment to the development of an organisation to tackle common intraregional issues (He 2004:122). Australia must accept this reality just as the

UK has accepted that the EU structure is a useful means to tackle common transnational problems and to pursue economic interests.

CONCLUSION – COMPARING AWKWARD PARTNERS

Despite significant differences existing between the UK and Australia, they are not incomparable “apples and oranges” as far as their participation in regional integration is concerned. Rather, they are similar “fruits” growing out of the same “tree” of culture and language, compounded by the fact that both are involved with regional integration processes that they find problematic and in which their partners often find *them* so. This awkwardness is due to certain isolationist experiences, both geographic and historical, and to the security relationship with the US. In both the UK and Australia the close security relationship with the US, the Anglo-sphere’s cultural traditions and identity, and domestic politics all interact and produce the same problem of awkwardness in their engagement with regional processes.

An analysis of awkwardness problems developed by this paper lays down the foundation to suggest three hypotheses regarding why certain middle-power states find participation in regional integration awkward, which future comparative work by both comparative politics and IR scholars could helpfully test empirically. We close by stating these.

Hypothesis 1: Strong security links to an extra-regional power leads states into awkwardness in regional integration, since such links both create policy dilemmas for the state in question and undermine trust in this state by its partners;

Hypothesis 2: To avoid being considered an ‘awkward partner’ in regional integration, states must explicitly align themselves with key norms and values of that region;

Hypothesis 3: Seeking a regional leadership role in institutional or policy terms is not sufficient to overcome the label of ‘awkward partner’.

REFERENCES

- Acharya, A and Johnston, A (2008): 'Conclusions: Institutional Features, Cooperation Effects and the Agenda for Further Research on Comparative Regionalism', in A Acharya and A Johnston (eds) *Crafting Cooperation – Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp 244-78
- Armstrong, K and Bulmer, S (2003): 'The United Kingdom: Between Political Controversy and Administrative Efficiency', in W Wessels, A Maurer and J Mittag (eds) *Fifteen Into One? The European Union and its Member States* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp 388-410
- Bache, I and Jordan, A (2006a): 'Britain in Europe and Europe in Britain', in I Bache and A Jordan (eds) *The Europeanisation of British Politics* Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp 3-16
- Bache, I and Jordan, A (2006b): 'The Europeanization of British Politics', in I Bache and A Jordan (eds) *The Europeanisation of British Politics* Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp 265-79
- Beech, M (2011): 'British Conservatism and Foreign Policy: Traditions and Ideas Shaping Cameron's Global View', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13:3, 348-63
- Bulmer, S and Burch, M (2006): 'Central Government', in I Bache and A Jordan (eds) *The Europeanisation of British Politics* Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp 37-51
- Calder KE, Fukuyama F (eds) (2008): *East Asian multilateralism: prospects for regional stability*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- Carey, S and Geddes, A (2010): 'Less is More: Immigration and European Integration at the 2010 General Election', in A Geddes and J Tonge (eds)

- Britain Votes 2010* Oxford: Hansard Society/Oxford University Press, pp 264-80
- Frost EL (2008): *Asia's new regionalism*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado.
- Geddes, A (2002): 'In Europe, not interested in Europe', in A Geddes and J Tonge (eds) *Labour's Second Landslide: The British General Election 2001* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp 144-63
- George, S (1998, 3rd ed): *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gillard, Julia (2011) Speech to the AsiaLink and Asia Society Lunch, Melbourne, 28 September 2011
- Hayes, J (2005): *Comparative Politics in a Globalizing World* Cambridge: Polity
- He, Baogang (2004), 'East Asian Ideas of Regionalism: A Normative Critique', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 58(1): 105-25.
- He, Baogang (2011a), 'Kevin Rudd's Proposal for an Asia-Pacific Community', in Li Xiangyang (ed.), *Annual Report on Development of Asia-Pacific*, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, January, pp.103-19.
- He, Baogang (2011b), 'The Awkwardness of Australian Engagement with Asia: The Dilemmas of Australian Idea of Regionalism', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 12(2):267-85.
- Hettne, B and Söderbaum, F (2000): 'Theorising the Rise of Region-ness', *New Political Economy* 5:3, 457-73
- Higgott, Richard (2007), 'The Theory and Practice of Regionalism in East Asia: Peter Katzenstein's Value Added', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 7: 382-3.
- Higgott, Richard and Kim Richard Nossal (1997), 'The International Politics of Liminality: Relocating Australia in the Asia-Pacific', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 32(2): 169-85.

- Hook, Glenn (1996), 'Japan and the Construction of Asia-Pacific', in Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne (eds.), *Regionalism and World Order*, New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 189-190.
- Hundt, David and Jaechun Kim (2011), 'Competing Notions of Regionalism in South Korean Politics', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 12(2): 251-266.
- Jain, Rajendra K. (2011), 'From Idealism to Pragmatism: India and Asian Regional Integration', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 12(2): 213-231.
- James, S and Opermann, K (2009): 'Blair and the European Union', in T Casey (ed) *The Blair Legacy: Politics, Policy, Governance and Foreign Affairs* Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp 285-98
- Janning, J (2005): 'Leadership Coalitions and Change: The Role of States in the European Union', *International Affairs* 81(4), 821-34.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. (2000), 'Regionalism and Asia', *New Political Economy*, 5(3): 353-68.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. (2005), *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Lundestad, G. (1986): 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952', *Journal of Peace Research* 26:3, 263-77.
- McKenzie P, Horne R, Dowling A, Beavis A (2008): Harnessing educational cooperation in the EAS for regional competitiveness and community building, report to the ASEAN Secretariat, Regional Economic Policy Support Framework II Project 07/006, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.
- Mediansky, Fedor (1997), 'Into the New Millennium', in Fedor Mediansky (ed.), *Australian Foreign Policy: Into the New Millennium*, Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, pp. 287-289.

- Milner, Anthony (1997), 'The Rhetoric of Asia', in James Cotton and John Ravenhill (eds.), *Seeking Asian Engagement: Australia in World Affairs, 1991-95*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Murray, P (2010a): 'Comparative Regional Integration in the EU and East Asia: Beyond Integration Snobbery', *International Politics* 47: 3-4, 308-23
- Murray, P (2010b): Regionalism and Community. Australia's Options in the Asia-Pacific, Strategy Paper for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, November.
http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=273&pubtype=5
- Murray, P. (2005): *Australia and the European Superpower: Engaging with the European Union*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press.
- Ougaard, M (2002): 'Global Polity Reseach: Characteristics and Challenges', in M Ougaard and R Higgott (eds) *Towards a Global Polity* London: Routledge, pp 23-39
- Parsons, C (2006): 'The Triumph of Community Europe', in D Dinan (ed) *Origins and Evolution of the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, N and Warleigh-Lack, A (2011): 'Conclusions: Learning or Comparison in the Study of Regions? Fruitful Dialogues and Future Research Directions', in A Warleigh-Lack, N Robinson and B Rosamond (eds) *European Studies and the New Regionalisms: Comparisons, Dialogues and New Research Directions* London: Routledge, pp 257-70
- Rudd K (2008a): 'Its time to build an Asia Pacific Community', address at the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre annual dinner, Sydney, 4 June 2008.
- Rudd K (2008b): 'Building on ASEAN's success—towards an Asia Pacific century', The Singapore Lecture, Singapore, 12 August 2008, available from <http://www.pm.gov.au/node/5643> [accessed 6 January 2010].

- Rudd K (2009a): Keynote address to the 8th International Institute for Strategic Studies Asian Security Summit, the Shangri-la Dialogue, Singapore, 29 May.
- Slaughter, A-M (2004): *A New World Order* Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Sørensen, G (2002): 'The Global Polity and Changes in Statehood', in M Ougaard and R Higgott (eds) *Towards a Global Polity* London: Routledge, pp 40-57
- Thayer, Carlyle (1997), 'Australia and Southeast Asia', in Fedor Mediansky (ed.), *Australian Foreign Policy: Into the New Millennium*, Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, pp. 251-266.
- Wall, S (2008): *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU From Thatcher to Blair* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Wang, Yuzhu (2011), 'China, Economic Regionalism, and East Asian Integration', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 12(2):
- Warleigh-Lack, A and Rosamond, B (2010): 'Across the EU Studies-New Regionalism Frontier: Invitation to a Dialogue', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48:4, 993-1013
- Warleigh-Lack, A and Van Langenhove, L (eds) (2010): 'Re-thinking EU Studies: The Contribution of Comparative Regionalism', *Journal of European Integration* 32:6, 541-62
- Weigall, D and Stirk, P (eds) (1992): *The Origins and Development of the European Community* Leicester: Leicester University Press
- Wesley, Michael (1997), 'The Politics of Exclusion: Australia, Turkey and Definitions of Regionalism', *The Pacific Review*, 10(4): 523-55.
- Wesley, Michael (2009), 'Asia, America and Australia: the Art of Keeping (Each Other At) a Safe Distance', *American Review*, 1: 53-62.

- White, H (2011) Power shift: rethinking Australia's place in the Asian century,
Australian Journal of International Affairs Vol. 65, No. 1, pp. 81-93,
February 2011
- Young, H (1999): *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*
London: Macmillan.

Table 1: Comparing British and Australian 'Awkwardness'¹²

ISSUE	MATERIAL/ IDEATIONAL?	UK EXPRESSION (SALIENCE)	AUSTRALIA EXPRESSION (SALIENCE)	COMPARATIVE IMPLICATIONS
Power relations	Material	Reluctant membership bid; Atlanticism (4)	Keen membership bids. Alliance with US (5)	Differ on membership perceptions. Alliance with US crucial.
Institutions and Policies	Material	Minimalism, emphasis on economics/trade (5)	Large emphasis on security and economics, FTAs , Asia Pacific institutions (5)	Economic regionalism/integration important.
Economics	Material	Neoliberalism; Budget contribution and restrictions; Non-participation in €-zone (4)	Neoliberalism. FTA with ASEAN, possibly with China (3)	Economic benefits of regional belonging for both. Economic interdependence.
Security	Material	Atlanticism; catalyst in ESDP (3)	US link. Activist in security forums (3)	US security support for both. Strategic alliances.
Domestic Politics	Material	Popular Euroscepticism as constraint (5)	Little sense of Asian identity. Emphasis on economic ties (4)	Lack of sense of regional identity a constraint for UK and Australia
Identity	Ideational	Sense of cultural difference; Atlanticism (4)	Sense of cultural difference. US link (4)	Sense of cultural difference common to UK and Australia. Identity linked to special relationship with US.
Vision	Ideational	Further	Regional	Different end goals.

		enlargement, minimalism, inter- governmentalism (4)	architecture (APC, APEC). (4)	

Source: Authors. 'Saliency' here means how important a factor is in shaping the regional awkwardness of the UK or Australia.

Word count: 8,381

NOTES

---

¹ The terminology is of course Stephen George's (George 1998). George does not define 'awkwardness' in his book, and, although we follow his lead in this paper by relying on a jargon-free definition, we suggest that awkwardness is a mixture of obstructiveness and maladroitness, and of liminality – being both of the region, and also not of it, simultaneously.

² For a discussion see Ougaard 2002 and Sørensen 2002.

³ The EU, on this typology, is best considered as a *region-state*; ASEAN could be considered a *regional community*; and APEC fits best with the *regional complex* category.

⁴ For instance, Germany has often been more Atlanticist than France. Other member states have seen UK involvement and policy preferences as helpful to balance French interests. See Parsons 2006, Janning 2005.

⁵ In the past, this state of affairs has prevented the EU being considered a significant issue by voters at UK general elections; despite widespread popular Euroscepticism, the Conservative Party did not reap the rewards of a heavily anti-EU election campaign in 2001 (Geddes 2002).

⁶ Eurobarometer, the EU's regular opinion survey, shows that fewer UK citizens think the EU is beneficial for their member state than those of any other (27%), and also display the highest level of distrust of the EU overall (64%). Standard Eurobarometer 74, published February 2011; see http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb74/eb74_en.htm, accessed 28/9/11.

⁷ The ARF consists of the 10 ASEAN member states (Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam); the 10 ASEAN dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, the EU, India, Japan, New Zealand, ROK, Russia and the United States), one ASEAN observer (Papua New Guinea) and the DPRK, Mongolia, Pakistan, East Timor, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

⁸ The EAS consists of the ten ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam), Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea. The US and Russia will formally join in 2011.

⁹ The EU Bill includes a so-called 'referendum lock' on any future EU Treaty change which transfers significant powers from the UK to the EU.

¹⁰ The former Labour Security Minister Lord West caused a furore with his September 2011 remark about the UK's global status that 'We are not bloody Belgium or Denmark'. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-15021503>, accessed 28/9/11.

¹¹ The *Daily Express*, for example, runs an overt campaign for the UK to leave the EU.

¹² We rate the salience of each factor on a scale of 1-5, with 1 the lowest and 5 the highest.