

Research Statement – Mikael Weissmann

Project title:

The Role and Impact of Informal Processes, Structures and Institutions in East Asian Peacebuilding.

Host Institution:

Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, CSGR
University of Warwick

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Research Project

The idea for this dissertation project was sparked by the observation of paradoxical findings in regard to the East Asian security setting (China, Taiwan, Japan, ASEAN and the two Koreas). Albeit a high and rapidly increasing military spending, a high level of intraregional distrust, strong nationalistic tendencies and in numerous conflictual issues and tensions seemingly ripe for violence between the states in the region, there are no violent interstate conflicts. The relative peace – often referred to as the “Asian Peace” - exists despite East Asia being a region with no security organisation or other form of formalised mechanisms to build peace and prevent the existing issues from escalating into violence.

In this dissertation project a case study based research approach will be used to identify and develop an understanding of the underlying factors and dynamics that can help understand and explain the “Asian Peace”:

- Why the East Asian regional security setting which is most unstable, containing in numerous conflictual issues, do not escalate beyond a certain point despite a lack of security organisations?
- Are there forms of underlying structures, institutions, and processes that can explain these empirical paradoxes, and if so, what are they and how they work?

The project’s focus is on peacebuilding in the medium and long term perspective and the cases used are the Mainland China - Taiwan (Taiwan Issue), China – ASEAN (South China Sea), and China North Korea (Korean Peninsula) relations.

More specifically the project will develop an understanding of the role and impact of the cross-border interactions that goes beyond the formal peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict management mechanisms. The aim is to identify and

understand the informal processes and the related structures and mechanisms (hereafter informal processes), which have helped prevent and manage the existing conflicts and which are the key for the creating of a continuing peace in East Asia. The main question asked is: "How and to what extent do informal processes and their related structures and institutions play a role in- and have an impact on peacebuilding in the East Asian regional security setting?".

Peacebuilding is an inclusive concept, which refers to the overarching ability of a particular society to hinder conflictual contexts to escalate towards open violent conflicts, as well as creating conditions for moving towards a self-sustainable peace. Informal processes are non-codified series of events of cross-border interactions and exchange.¹ These are to be contrasted to formal processes in that they are non-codified; they have no formal or written rules or structure. Informal processes are instead institutionalised through patterns of social practices and norms. The relationship between informal- and formal processes is however not dualistic, as they are often mutually reinforcing and sometimes even overlapping. It is for example possible for informal processes to exist within formal structures, such as international and regional organizations and forums.

Expected findings

The preliminary findings indicate that the driving force and common denominator behind most informal processes can be found in the web of cross-border micro- and macroregionalisation in East Asia. In particular four informal processes manifesting from regionalisation seems to be of importance for peacebuilding: 1. cultural and social regionalisation; 2. economic integration and interdependence; 3. cross-border microregionalisation; and 4. people-to-people contacts and personal (informal) networks. Also 2nd & 3rd track diplomacy is of importance, although its link to regionalisation is less clear.

In the case of the Taiwan Strait it is expected that the driving force is the cross-border microregionalisation process, with economic integration and interdependence as the engine. Second and third-track interactions and people to people contacts- and networks are here expected to be of foremost importance, as there is a political resistance in going too far with cross-strait integration. In the ASEAN+3 case economic regionalisation is also expected to be a driving force, but the independent role of social, cultural regionalisation are expected to be more important due to a stronger political will to promote this regionalisation process. Informal processes are in general expected to be important, not least, as they are in inherent part in the so-called "ASEAN-way". In the North Korean case it is expected to be more problematic to identify the relevant processes due to its lack of interaction with the outside world. However, it is expected that existing, albeit limited, interactions in the economic field in combination with ongoing informal meetings and interactions with, in particular, Chinese elites will be a key for peacebuilding.

¹ Related to informal processes are informal structures and institution. Both of these are aspects- or results of informal processes. Informal structures are another perspective on the same aspects of society, focusing on understanding the features and effects of the structural arrangement and relation between the parts. Informal institutions are in short established regularities principles or conventions subservient to the needs of an organised community, such as custom, usages, practices, organisations, or other element in the political or social life of a people.

Informal processes are expected to have a peacebuilding function through a number of different mechanisms. These are expected to include, but not be limited to:

1. Increased trust and understanding (through long term interaction);
2. Changed perception and understanding of self and other;
3. Altering of own norm system, increased understanding of others norms and a development of shared norm systems;
4. Increased interdependence (de-facto and perceived);
5. Over time contribute to a re-interpretation of own interests through the above mechanisms.

Purpose of the Mobility

The purpose of my stay at CSGR is to draw together the empirical findings of one year's fieldwork in East Asia and to develop and elaborate on the theoretical framework of my dissertation. Specifically, the dissertation's empirical chapters will be finalised and a draft will be made of the concluding theoretical chapters. I will also try to contribute to CSGR and GARNET's understanding of regionalism, East Asian regionalisation as well as the link between the European and East Asian experience.

While at CSGR a number of dissertation chapters will be written. The empirical chapters will be finalised, the theoretical chapter on understanding the link between informal processes/regionalisation and peacebuilding in East Asia will be drafted and the chapter developing a general theoretical framework will be started. Eventually these chapters will also be submitted to peer-review journals, or published as CSGR or GARNET Working Papers. I will also present my findings in different forum in the UK, both at CSGR and other institutes. The mobility will also add to the inter-departmental cooperation between Göteborg and CSGR.