

An Asian Journal of International Law

For centuries prior to the era of colonialism, Asian peoples were linked by trade, waves of migration and religion, and other interests—even as some kingdoms and societies sought to establish their centrality. The period of European colonialism saw many Asian peoples subjugated or weakened, and isolated from one another. Following World War II, the United States emerged as the pre-eminent power in Asian affairs. Recent decades have seen the continent of Asia awaken, with increased co-operation between states and peoples of the region in the face of global challenges, and a revival of interest in their pre-colonial traditions—even as Asian societies move forward and grapple with modernization.

Many now predict the rise of Asia to equality with the West, or even to displace the United States and Europe in economic development and political influence. Looking through a longer historical lens, however, we can recognize that the efforts in this direction began during the colonial period itself. Leaders of the continent understood the need for co-operation among their peoples to overthrow the yoke of imperialism and open a new era for themselves. This period saw representatives of Asian peoples meet with those of other regions in Brussels in 1927 at the first conference of the League against Imperialism. The attempts at pan-Asianism also began in the first half of the twentieth century; conferences were convened in Nagasaki (1926) and Shanghai (1927) with the themes of anti-colonialism and the unity of Asian peoples as the dominant motifs. In 1947 the Asian Relations Conference was held in Delhi, followed by a government-level Asian Conference in 1949. At both these conferences the need for greater co-operation between Asian states, especially within the United Nations, was stressed.

The spirit of these efforts was carried forward to the landmark Bandung Conference in 1955. The leaders of Asian states at Bandung, in Indonesia, were aware that if the objective of building a new Asia (and Africa) was to be achieved, there was a need to understand each other better—for the continent of Asia had its share of tensions, disputes, and conflicts. Subsequent efforts at co-operation among Asian states and peoples led to the creation of subregional organizations, such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). The drivers were immediate political and economic needs, though such developments can also be linked to greater cultural exchange between Asian countries. The vision behind this was not parochial, rather it was informed by the spirit of internationalism that calls for co-operation among all regions and peoples of the world.

The late twentieth century saw the re-emergence of Asia as an economic and political powerhouse; this continued into the twenty-first, even amidst global economic

turmoil. The transformation and rise of Asian states has meant an increased role in, and influence on, international relations. There is no question that Asia can and must play a key role in shaping responses to global challenges—from climate change and the creation of a new global financial architecture to the reform of the United Nations and other international organizations; from ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making to ensuring the opportunity for the sustainable and equitable development of all countries.

In this context the Asian Society of International Law was established in 2007 as an international non-partisan, non-profit, and non-governmental organization. Its objectives are to promote research, education, and the practice of international law by serving as a centre of activities among international law scholars and practitioners in Asia and elsewhere. It also seeks to foster and encourage Asian perspectives on international law, and to promote awareness of and respect for international law in Asia. The Society's flagship publication, the *Asian Journal of International Law* (*AsianJIL*), hopes to provide a forum for debating the world of international law and institutions by publishing articles on a variety of topics, particularly those of concern to Asian peoples and states. Since state practice is a key to the making, interpretation, and implementation of international law, the *Journal* will also seek to publish scholarly work analysing the practice of Asian states on a range of international issues.

There is, of course, no monolithic Asian understanding of international law and institutions. Nevertheless, given that a majority of Asian countries are developing countries, we invite contributions that reflect their approach to contemporary international law and institutions, including articles that ponder the commonalities and differences between states from different regions of the world. The *Journal* does not endorse any particular approach to international law, however, and will seek to publish articles and views from diverse perspectives.

Other themes that might be explored include the history and impact of colonial international law on the states and peoples of Asia; the contribution of Asia over the ages to the evolution and development of international law; the central issues of international law and regional co-operation that engage Asian states and peoples; the alternative visions of a future world order that can be retrieved from Asian history and civilizations; and the struggles of Asian peoples, in particular the subaltern groups, to bring about an inclusive system of international law and institutions.

Finally, even while there are reasons for a growing confidence in Asia, the *Journal* will seek to avoid hubris concerning Asian ways and values. We therefore welcome critical views about current Asian practices in comparison to international norms and expectations.

In this way, the *Asian Journal of International Law* aspires to cultivate a conversation between scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers located in or interested in Asia. Such conversations may contribute, in a small way, to the common efforts of the international community to build a secure and just future for all peoples of the world.

The Editors