

27th SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE POLICY, REGULATIONS AND ECONOMICS (E3)  
Regional cooperation in space: policies, governance and legal tools (1)

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SPACE COOPERATION IN ASIA: A MYTH

**Abstract**

Due to the historical complexities and geopolitical rivalries in Asia, the establishment of a space organization similar to ESA is a goal too ambitious to be realized in the near future. Yet it is interesting to note that there are two distinctive organizations in this region, APSOC and APRSAF working on regional collaboration. The success of APSCO is not a new story. The cooperative projects carried out so far include the data service platform, the applied high-resolution satellite project, and the ground based optical space observation system. It is also referred as a model in the discussions of the establishment of an African Space Agency. Yet the effectiveness of APSCO is doubted in terms of the exclusion of India, Japan, South Korea and the dominant role played by China in the organization. This skepticism would look less striking if considering the fact that there has almost been no cooperation among these space-faring nations in this region. These space-faring nations do have common concerns, such as issues related to the safety and security of outer space, which, however, are better to be addressed in the multilateral forum. Another possible reason might be that India, Japan, and South Korea lag behind China in terms of the progress in space projects, such as GNSS and the human space flight. More importantly, it interests China much more to seek possible cooperation with Russia, the EU (Sino-U.S. cooperation is much less pessimistic) in these projects. Unlike APSCO, APRSAF is not driven by member states but the voluntary space agencies so that it is more flexible. And the space agencies of several members of APSCO have also been involved in it. APRSAF has carried out the project on disaster management. From the hypothetical perspective, this paper will explore the challenges faced by both sides if APSCO will take in new member state that possesses considerable space capability. Alternatively, this paper proposes that a window should be kept open between APSCO and APRSAF.