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APSCO AND THE POTENTIAL MEMBERSHIP OF INDIA, JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

**Abstract**

The Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) is an intergovernmental organisation operational since 2008. It aims at fostering space cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region and joint capacity building in space science and technology as well as their application among its members, especially to advance socio-economic development. However, despite its ascribed beneficial purposes, its membership has not expanded since Turkey ratified its convention in 2011 and became only its eighth full member alongside Bangladesh, China, Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan, Peru and Thailand.

In light of this limited progress in attracting new members and APSCO's ten year anniversary as an operational organisation in 2018, this paper analyses the current political and legal potential to expand APSCO's membership by India, Japan and South Korea. Together with the APSCO members China and Iran, these three states have the most ambitious national space programmes and most advanced space capabilities in the region. It is reasonable to argue that any or all of these three states entering APSCO can considerably advance its members' space-related capacity building and socio-economic development, especially of its developing state members like Bangladesh or Mongolia. Also, these three states' participation might attract additional emerging space nations to join APSCO, ultimately expediting the process of intergovernmental space cooperation and the application of space technology and science for national development.

The paper draws heavily on the author's PhD thesis discussing intergovernmental cooperation in Asia from a political and legal perspective. Overall, it identifies a set of commonalities between APSCO's objectives and undertakings and the Indian, Japanese and South Korean space programmes, which indicates a potential to expand the organisation's membership by these three states. Based on APSCO's and these programmes' political and legal status quo, all advocate international cooperation and involve space-related capacity building and the application of space science and technology for socioeconomic development. Yet, the article also finds that each of these three states has a problematic, sometimes conflictual relationship with one or more current APSCO members that apparently encroaches on their readiness to join the organisation and to contribute to its space-related capacity building activities. Moreover, the paper argues that the general perception of Chinese dominance in APSCO hampers other states' willingness to affiliate themselves with the organisation. In the end, the author provides recommendations to overcome these impediments.