

The Road to Rivalry? Security Challenges in Asia

Brig Arun Sahgal, PhD

Deputy Director & Head Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation

United Service Institution of India

Understanding Rivalry and Conflict

- Asian history
- Unravelling of World Order
- Rising Asia
- Contemporary dynamics
- The view from India
- Prognosis

Asian History

- Cultural glory – Japan, China, India
- Empires and “imperial memories”
- Colonial period – China, India
- Cold War and the New Deal
 - Rise of Japan (lopsided?)
 - Insular China
 - Ideology - bound India
- Globalization
 - Rise of China and Southeast Asia
 - Currency of Technology and Information
 - India’s arrival

Unravelling of World Order

- Break up of USSR
- The “End of History” paradigm
 - The American Century
 - Decline of global multilateralism, new regional groupings
- Regional conflicts
- China’s “24 Character Strategy”
- West Asian muddle
- Geo-economics over geo-politics
- New ideological boundaries
 - Markets versus people
 - Political Islam, Jihad, Crusades
 - Democracy versus Controlled systems
- US strategic overreach

Rising Asia

Rising Asia

- China
 - Relentless economic growth
 - Relatively stable periphery
 - Increasing integration
 - Military expenditure and modernization
 - Potential consumer economy
- Japan
 - Economic revival
 - Decline of pacifism - attempt at chartering independent course
 - Economic embrace with China, ASEAN, South Korea
 - Developing strategic equation with India

Rising Asia

- ASEAN
 - Fading away of financial crisis
 - Success of geo-economics over geo-politics
 - Geographically and politically in the centre of the Asia Pacific – attempts at strategic hedge.
 - Chinese economic entrapment?
- Australia
 - Natural resources
 - Integration with the West, technology
 - Increasing alignment with Eastern Asia.

Rising Asia

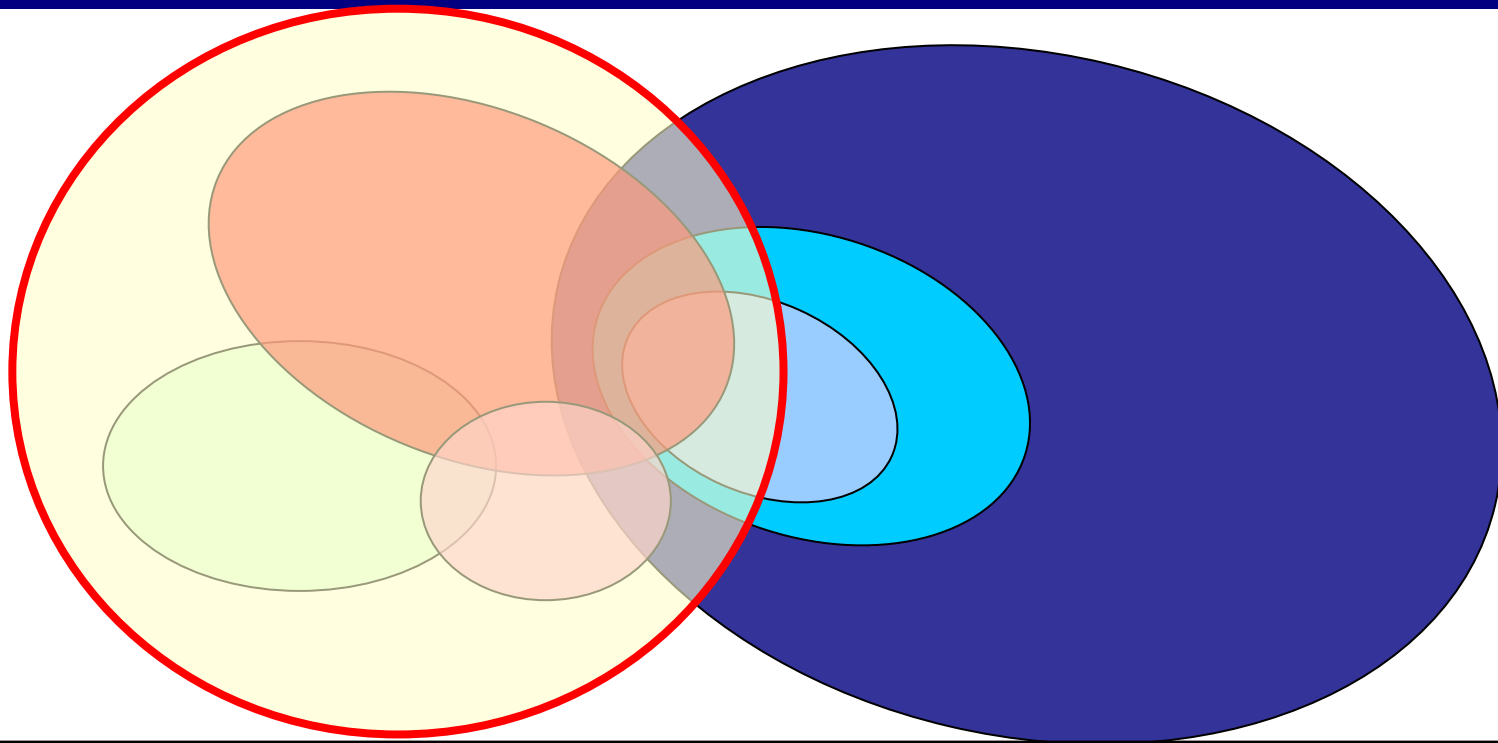
- India
 - Economic growth
 - Consolidation of the political Centre?
 - Strategic awakening
 - Favourable demographics
 - Potential transformation leveraging language, education and technology

Rising Asia

- Russia
 - Economic revival
 - Oil and gas
 - Arms industry
 - Re-assertion against Western “expansionism”
 - “Return” to Asia
- US
 - Narrow focus on GWOT?
 - Embroiled in Iraq-Afghanistan-Iran
 - Eroding domestic consensus
 - Eroding international consensus
 - “Decoupling” of economy
 - Dollar as global currency?
 - Biggest player in Asia
 - **Perception** of decline
 - Need to reestablish strategic salience

Contemporary Dynamics

Asian System of Systems



West Asian System

Traditional East Asian System

Eurasian System

ASEAN Plus System

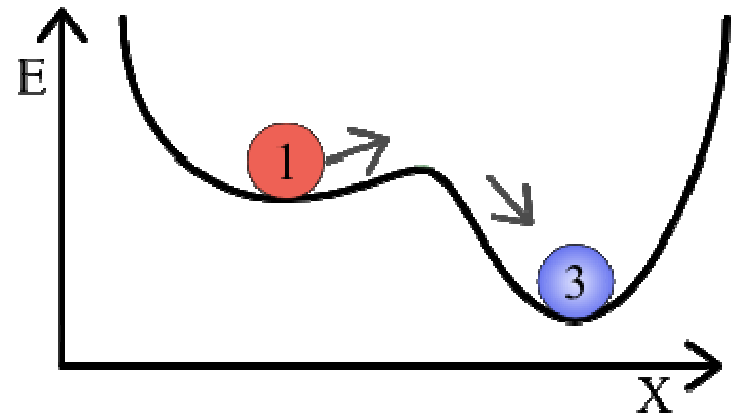
South Asian System

Asia Pacific System

Asian System of Systems

- A Complex System of Systems
 - Constituent systems extend beyond Asian System
 - Each system has own distinctive dynamics
 - Scope and power of each system varying dynamically
 - A “Metastable” System
 - Susceptible to external stimuli
 - “Push - Pull” effects within constituent systems
 - Could remain metastable for long time
 - For stability would need to transit through more unstable state?

Metastability is the ability of a non-equilibrium state to persist for some period of time.



A metastable system with a weakly stable state (1), an unstable transition state (2) and a strongly stable state (3)

Asian System of Systems

- **Competitive Forces**
 - Geo-politics
 - Economics
 - Social, cultural
 - Technology
- **Cooperative Forces**
 - Trade
 - Development
 - Geo-politics
- **The Landscape**
 - Global and regional structures
 - Ideologies
 - Environment
 - Peoples

Competitive Geopolitical Forces

- Historical legacies without “closure”
 - China-Japan
 - China-Taiwan
 - Japan-Korea
 - India-China
 - India-Pakistan
- Exclusivist urges in regional equations
 - China in South Asia
 - East Asian Trilateral/Quadrilateral
 - SCO, CSTO
- Visions of “Empire”
 - Pre-eminence of any other not acceptable
 - The rise of “nationalism”

Competitive Geopolitical Forces

- Linkage beyond Asia-Pacific
 - Eurasian System
 - Improvement in China's competitive position being large consumer
 - Russia's pre-eminence gives it leverage in the East
 - South Asian system
 - Chinese need for direct access to Indian Ocean versus Indian need for land access to East and West – natural competition in Myanmar and ***Pakistan***
 - Afghanistan – link with Eurasian System
 - Chinese willingness to get involved in South Asian issues (deviates from 24 character strategy)

Competitive Geopolitical Forces

- Linkage beyond Asia-Pacific
 - West Asian System
 - Indian access to Central Asia
 - Chinese access to Gulf
 - Vulnerable flank of Eurasian System
- Internal issues
 - Legitimacy of regimes
 - Centrifugal tendencies

Competitive Economic Forces

- Energy
 - Gross importer + high growth
 - Competition extends well beyond Asia-Pacific
- Quest for control over access
 - Strategic Land Bridges
 - SLOCs – extra-regional players as stakeholders
- Vulnerability of economic growth
 - Internal and regional disparities
 - Perceived threats within the region
 - Perceived threats from extra-regional actors

Competitive Socio-cultural Forces

- Distinct cultural identities
- Social systems with distinctive features
 - China – authority
 - Japan – tradition
 - India – status
 - Difficulties in relating to other systems
- Internal stability issues
 - Affiliations across borders
 - Communities not empowered

Competitive Technological Forces

- Information = Power
- Technology spanning across borders, threatens geo-political order
- RMA and military transformation
 - Selective sharing
 - Denial regimes

Cooperative Forces

- Trade
 - Intra-regional trade
 - Solid growth, except South Asia
 - Intra-regional resources, production and consumption
 - Strong links to capital, markets, resources and entrepreneurship outside the region
- Development
 - Capacity to absorb strong growth for decades – clear gap with developed world
 - Political commitment to development favours “harmonious world”

Cooperative Forces

- Geo-politics
 - Expanding membership of regional groupings
 - Observer status for other stakeholders
 - Long term commitment to representative governments with “unique characteristics”
 - Less risk taking behaviour
 - Addresses internal fault-lines

Landscape

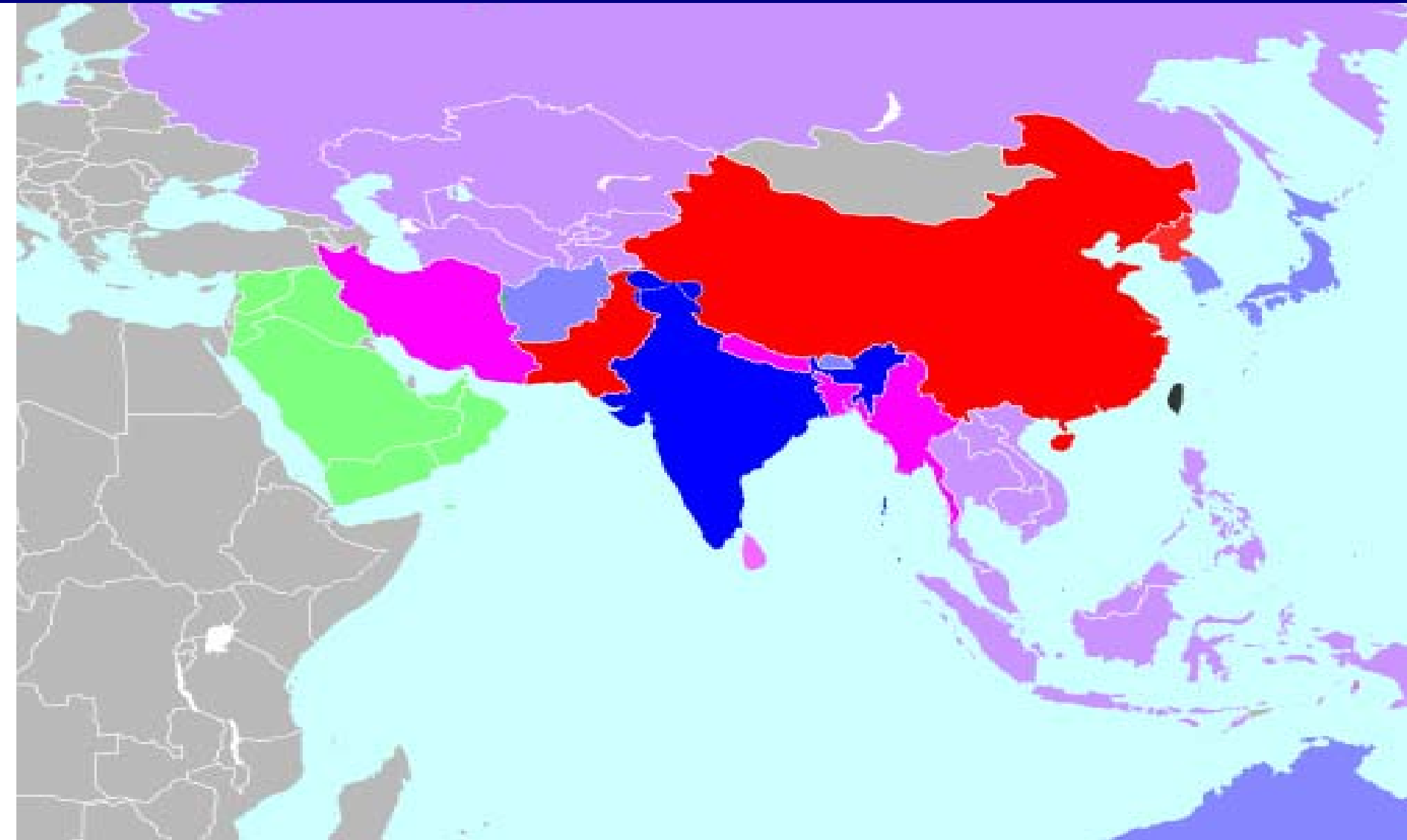
- Stressed land availability
 - Arable
 - Per capita
- Water stress
 - Snow-fed river systems, cut across political boundaries, China only upper-riparian state
 - Climate change
- Impact on food security

Landscape

- Global multilateral structures
 - Older ones hamstrung
 - New ones too young to be effective
 - Fatigued by GWOT
- Ideologies
 - Old ones in decline
 - New ones without adequate mooring
 - Unpredictable
 - Deniability
 - Explosive mix with religion
- Peoples
 - Aspirations
 - Seeking mobility

The View from India

A Multi-hued Context



View from India

- Immediate land periphery
 - Instability and conflict – Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar
 - External political influences having little moderating impact, risk taking vis-à-vis India accentuated, particularly Pakistan
 - Lingering historical baggage
 - Cooperative potential
 - Trade – very limited (economic profile similar, political reservations, jockeying by other actors)
 - Development – Overcome by fissiparous issues
 - Geo-politics – SAARC a non-starter, bilateral promise, Chinese political and strategic barricade

View from India

- Immediate maritime periphery
 - More benign environment
 - Global access and stakeholders – potential to play by rules
 - Many partners beyond South Asia or even Asia-Pacific
- Immediate space periphery
 - Medium of the future
 - Not enough rules
 - Military threats accentuated

View from India

- Extended periphery
 - More benign than immediate periphery
 - Resources, markets, capital and technology
 - Still more from beyond Asia-Pacific
 - Tremendous scope in Asia-Pacific
 - “Soft Power” options
- US
 - A major Asia-Pacific stakeholder
 - Presence brings stability and leadership
 - Engagement model
 - Tactical (Trader) in South Asia
 - Strategic (Investor) in rest of Asia-Pacific

View from India

- Japan
 - Tremendous potential for multi-layered engagement, necessary to play bigger role in South Asia
 - Upgradation of political, technological and military roles good for Asia-Pacific
- Australia
 - Resource base complements growth in rest of Asia-Pacific
 - Cultural link to the West
 - Natural leadership in Southern Pacific and Indian Ocean

View from India

- China
 - Need to match actions with “harmonious world” proclamations
 - Need to shed suspicions and show confidence in leadership
 - Need for openness of systems and thinking
 - “Bide our time” – till when? What then?
 - Transparency in military capability
 - Integration with the world. “Make some contributions” not as afterthought

View from India

- ASEAN
 - Master key to the Asia-Pacific
 - Physical connectivity
 - Economy
 - Culture
 - Politics
 - Must continue multi-dimensional engagement with all for stability
 - Environmental degradation impacts severe – can provide leadership

Prognosis

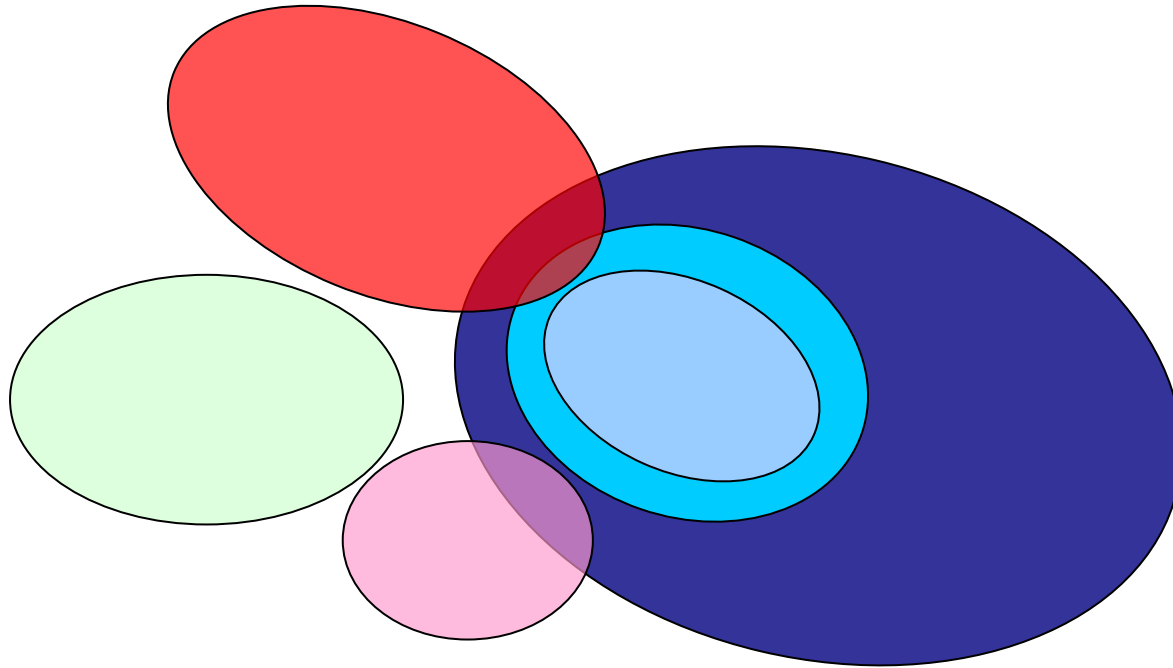
Prognosis

- Context
 - Metastability can be prolonged
 - Possible to transition to stability without instability
 - Landscape can be transformed
- Actors
 - States have even greater capacities (unlike some other regions of the world)
 - Trust deficit can be overcome
 - Failure of states = Non-state actors
 - Extra-regional players can play stabilising roles (entropy of a closed system will always increase)

Prognosis

- Issues
 - Can sustain growth over the long term
 - Hope over Fear
 - Development over Ideologies
 - Cooperative solutions
 - Energy
 - Environment and Warming
 - Maritime domain
 - Space
- Strategies
 - Avoidance and Denial are not options
 - Win-win strategies possible

Low Trust System



West Asian System

Eurasian System

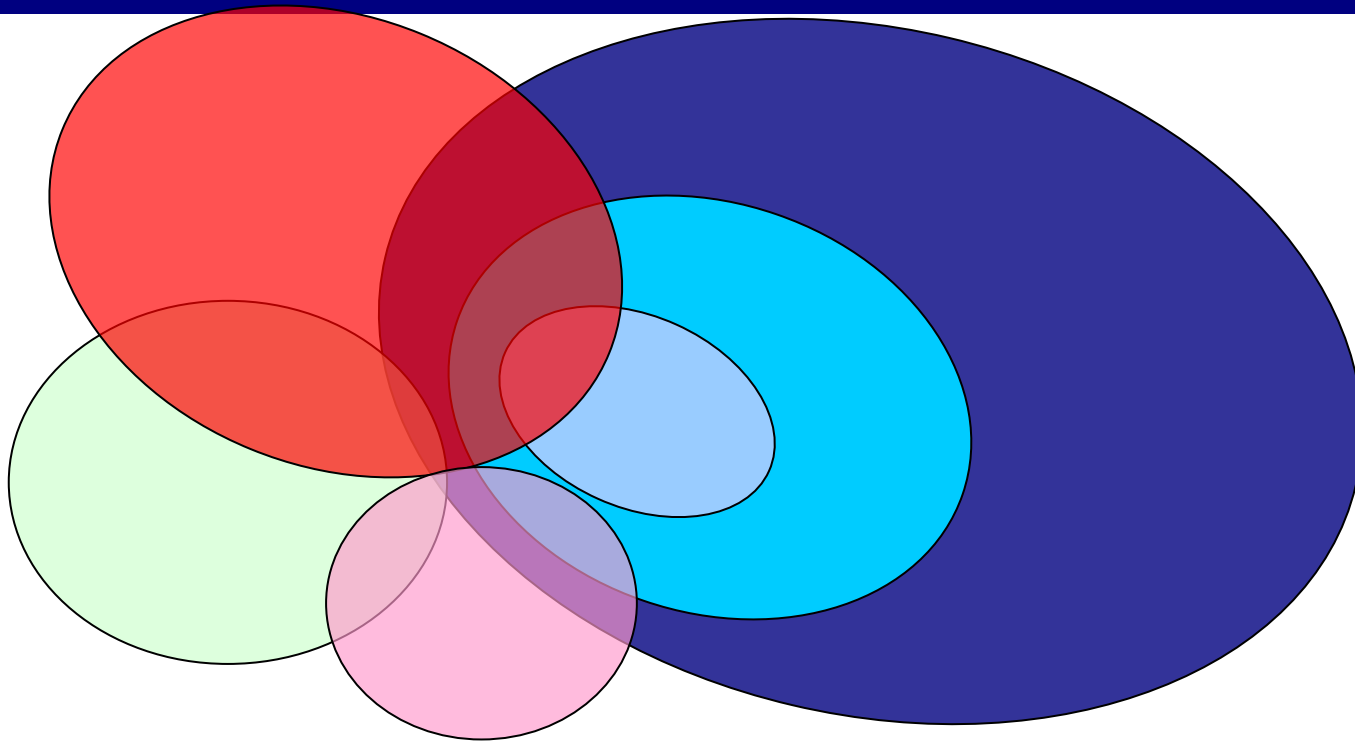
South Asian System

Traditional East Asian System

ASEAN Plus System

Asia Pacific System

High Trust System



West Asian System

Eurasian System

South Asian System

Traditional East Asian System

ASEAN Plus System

Asia Pacific System

Thank You