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How Can ASEAN Centrality in East Asian Community Be Maintained?

Heng Sarith, Research Fellow

Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

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Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, CICP

Pum Paung Peay, Sangkat Phnom Penh Thmey, Khan Sen Sok,

Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia

P.O.Box 1007, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Phone: (855)12 819 953

Tel: (855) 16 98 25 59

Email: cicp01@online.com.kh

Website: <http://www.cicp.org.kh>

About the author

Heng Sarith is currently serving as a Cambodian diplomat to Indonesia and a non-resident research fellow of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP). He got Master of Public Policy from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo, Japan.

Abstract

Although ASEAN is the hub of regionalism in East Asia, ASEAN centrality is under pressure of this regionalization process. It could be weakened under the transformation process of institutional building of the evolving regional architecture, East Asian Community (EAC), such as ASEAN Plus Three, East Asian Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and ADMM Plus.

Taking into account of the roles power and conflict in regionalism, ASEAN way and balance of power are the two main elements of ASEAN centrality which contribute to ASEAN's success, as a salient regional organization, in strengthening its cohesiveness, and also in maintaining its role as a driving force of East Asian regionalism, which is likely preventing hegemony within the group. So far, the achievements made by ASEAN have been obtained through slow and gradual process of regionalization and through the concept of promoting habit of cooperation rather than interfering on members' sovereignty, which is harming the grouping. Both elements (ASEAN way and balance of power) are put at the heart of ASEAN's political consideration. In so far as nationalism in Asia remains strong, it seems that ASEAN would maintain the same strategy for East Asian regionalism in the future.

ASEAN way is the only game in town for contemporary East Asian regionalism, whether it is a matter of survival or not for the grouping. If ASEAN wishes to continue and also enhance its centrality in regional grouping, ASEAN need to promote its political leadership in regional community building, regional dispute settlements, and also overcoming regional barrier. Last but not least, ASEAN needs to enhance human resource development to sustain this leadership by leading in policy initiatives in the future.

Introduction

In recent years, ASEAN has been recognized as a successful regional organization for developing countries. Starting from a modest inauguration in Bangkok in 1967 with only five members, namely Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines, ASEAN has successfully achieved its political, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation through the period of Cold War and Viet Nam war, which had destabilized Southeast Asia for decades. This achievement is seen through the ASEAN's expansion to cover the ten countries in Southeast Asia (including the five additional members, namely Brunei, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia). Not only satisfied in its own integration, ASEAN actively makes significant regional grouping with Japan, China, and South Korea in 1997 to form ASEAN Plus Three cooperation. In November 2011 in Bali, East Asian Summit (ASEAN+3, India, Australia, and New Zealand), which was established in 2005 by ASEAN, has been upgraded into an expanded East Asia Summit by including two superpowers (United States and Russia). In combination, ASEAN Plus Three and East Asia Summit has been officially recognized as the core of East Asian Community (EAC).

Officially, ASEAN is recognized as the hub of East Asian Community building. What factors contribute to the formation of ASEAN centrality? This question has been left untouched by previous studies and researches. This article will look into the internal dynamics of development in ASEAN and East Asian regionalism to analyze policy implication for ASEAN centrality.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the impact of political, security, and economic cooperation on ASEAN centrality in East Asian cooperation by looking for policy impact between the two regional organizations (ASEAN & EAC), and to explore strategies to maintain and enhance ASEAN's leading role in East Asia regionalism (ASEAN+3 Summit, East Asia Summit, and ASEAN Regional Forum). It will look for policy implication for addressing the ASEAN centrality and future leadership of ASEAN in East Asian regionalism. In doing so, on the one hand, the issue of ASEAN's attractiveness for other countries in East Asia will be taken into account as well as the issue of ASEAN's efforts to overcome its own internal problems such as human rights issue and narrowing development gap between the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Viet Nam) and the ASEAN-6 countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). On the other hand, since ASEAN wish to take leadership in this evolving regional architecture, the impact of integration between China, Japan, and South Korea (the Plus Three countries) and ASEAN, and inclusion of Russia and United States in the East Asia Summit will directly affect ASEAN centrality in either form of undermining or strengthening it. So, how and why EAC may undermine or strengthen ASEAN centrality will be the central issue of discussion in this paper. To answer the main question of

this paper, it is better to answer this opposite question (counter-argument) to consider the cause and effect relationship. In order to complete objectives as stated above, the main question of this article “How can ASEAN centrality in East Asian Community be maintained?” is divided into three sub-questions:

- (1) What is ASEAN centrality?**
- (2) How and why it has been losing its attractiveness?and**
- (3) How and why EAC may undermine ASEAN centrality?**

Literature Review

Regional integration has strategic importance for ASEAN and East Asia region as a whole, but ASEAN role and leadership to accelerate regional integration in EAC has been under question and criticism. Jones and Smith (2006) are skeptical of ASEAN’s ability to expand “its institutional framework into the broader East Asian Region, to the view that ASEAN’s economic and political failure after the 1997 [this failed model] equally validated the projection of its managerial way into the wider region?” (p.146). From this skepticism, ASEAN centrality has been viewed as an issue that need to be reviewed to adapt to new environment in East Asia. However, ASEAN has been able to manage to form and expand its regional cooperation without changing its norms and values. After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, ASEAN’s principle has been under pressure with regional crisis and membership expansion (Kao, 2000, p.18-19). According to Capie and Evans (2003), ASEAN’s norms and values have been considered as “ASEAN Way” which includes preference for informality, the principle of inclusivity, consensus, and non-interference (p.46-49). In addition, it is ASEAN way that maintains cohesiveness and has made ASEAN successful in uniting all the 10 countries in Southeast Asia since the norm of non-interference promotes trust and reduce suspicion among member states (Collins, 2000, p. 128-129). For example, since the creation of ASEAN+3 Summit in 1997 and East Asian Summit in 2005, ASEAN has been considered as the driving force in evolving regional architecture, EAC, and ASEAN+3 framework as the main vehicle, and East Asia Summit (EAS) as the complementary element to ASEAN+3 for building EAC (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009).

However, the issue of ASEAN’s leadership has not been taken for granted. Hernandez (2008) argued that the fact that ASEAN is needed to be the driver of any regional community-building efforts [EAC] has been resulted from the rivalry between China and Japan who cannot accede to each other. In addition to its *de facto* leadership, Hernandez pointed to the need for ASEAN to address its own dynamics. Since ASEAN’s economy contribute to only 10% of the total East Asian economy, Wanandi (2009) shared the same concern and stressed the need for ASEAN to strengthen its capacity in order to push forward the community-building process. From these

viewpoints, ASEAN centrality rest on its own dynamics and its capacity to lead regional integration in East Asia. This will surely depend on how attractive ASEAN is to other countries in the region to follow ASEAN's leadership. So, a fully-integrated ASEAN Economic Community significantly contributes to ASEAN's attractiveness. However, ASEAN is facing its own challenge in trying to make a full economic integration in itself due to a big development gap between CLMV countries and the ASEAN-6 countries. Nevertheless, to explain why ASEAN is still considered a successful regionalism in Southeast Asia despite its loose integration, there is a need to understand the internal dynamics of this "new regionalism".

The concept of regionalism started soon after the end of World War II in Western Europe where some states formed a regional association, the European Coal and Steel Community and European Atomic Community. The supranational organization, the European Union, is the product of a long evolution of this strongly integrated association. However, regionalism in Asia is a new and loose approach, "new regionalism." Also, Beeson (2009, p.17-36) is of the views that ASEAN is "Asian way" of institutionalization, which is different from that of the European Union (EU) in Europe. Although the EU is a successful supranational organization which member states have to relinquish some parts of their own sovereignty, it does not necessarily mean that this model would be successful for Asian countries, all of whom consider sovereignty is the precious element since most of them just got their independence from colonialism in the early and the middle of 20th century whereas the European states are more matured and had been the global powers until the same period. However, Beeson argues that ASEAN needs to be improved politically by not just only for its own survival through ASEAN way.

According to Camilleri (2003, p. 1), regionalism in Asia is different from the notions of supranational organization and is more inclined to the importance of loose regional linkages and exchanges. Through regional interaction, material and ideational processes and exchanges can contribute to establishment of regional identity, regional patterns of economic and social activity, and regional forms of organization (p.6). Furthermore, in regionalism, he points out the roles of power and conflicts, which also exert influence in the process of regionalization (p.15-23). For the role of power, regionalism is formed in response to hegemonic power through which the balance of power has been used by smaller states against bigger states in regionalization. For example, he gives the case of ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum, and ASEAN+3, are seen as responses to diminished US hegemony after the end of the Cold War. Regarding the role of conflict, internal conflicts and international conflict or even crises can have deep impacts for regional identity and institutional building. From this view, the 1997 Asian financial crisis has formed an Asian identity as explained by Nabers below.

The institutional building also has important role in shaping new identity and interest and to some extent it also affect foreign policy of member states of that grouping. Common identity, interest, and expectation are emerging and have influence toward states during process of interaction in the institution building, called “institutional discourse”. In this sense, ASEAN centrality may be undergoing transformation process in ASEAN+3 “institutional discourse”. Nabers (2003) conducted a study on “The social construction of international institutions: the case of ASEAN+3.” His main argument is that “not only states influence the development of international institutions, but, in return, that institutions can also exert influence on states’ foreign policy behavior.” The social interaction approach which is used for the explanation of the initiation and subsequent development of an institution recognizes the existence of both material and normative grounds of foreign policy action. He supposes that the institutional discourse, ASEAN+3, eventually produces new identity and interest since existing values and norms are influenced by continuous cooperation. Furthermore, he argues that it is the 1997 Asian financial crisis that led to the institutionalization of the Asian idea, the Chiang Mai Initiative. In case of ASEAN+3, his main finding is that:

Eventually a fundamental reconstruction of existing values and identities became visible. New identities generated new kinds of political action along the lines of the established institution – ASEAN + 3. (Nabers, 2003, p. 133)

In fact, regional community building in East Asia is a discouraging task, which requires strong political commitment in institution-building and in overcoming barriers to regional integration. Institutional works range from sectoral cooperation, and monetary & financial cooperation, which may involve into economic cooperation (East Asia Free Trade Area), and finally into political and security cooperation in the future. Impediments to regional integration in East Asia include growing nationalism, which bears distrust in some countries, and regional diversity, in which most countries in East Asia have different political systems, level of economic development, and cultures (Otsuji&Shinoda, 2008, p. 217-218). However, it is very difficult when regional cooperation starts to involve state’s sovereignty and non-interference issue. In addition, Leifer (2000) and Mayall (2000, p. 187-196) draw our attention to “Asian nationalism” in East Asia where historical legacy, border disputes, colonialism, ethnic conflicts, and political chaos are still lingering in most countries and continues to have consequence on international relations in the region. Therefore, Asian nationalism is a major obstacle for East Asian regionalism since no country is willing to give up some of its sovereignty as like the EU member states. Both ASEAN and other countries in East Asia such as Japan, South Korea, and China are very sensitive to sovereignty issue. According to Yaqing (2008, p. 53-71), if we wish to have a successful regional community building in East Asia, we have to overcome the issue of Westphalian culture in this region or at least try to reduce its intensity. This culture is referred to the issues of sovereignty and territoriality, which are so sensitive to Asian countries and also hampering regional community building efforts.

However, there are many optimistic views that, functional cooperation, especially economic and financial integration, and enhancement of habit of cooperation are the best way for East Asia regionalism at the time being, given persisting Asian nationalism in the region.

However, Yamamoto and Gannon (2008, p.18) argue that, given persisting Asian nationalism in the region, functional cooperation and enhancement of habit of cooperation are the best way for East Asia regionalism at the time being. So, the issue of Asian nationalism would be discussed and how can we apply ASEAN centrality to deal with this matter. In addition, most of the literatures have not looked into the underlying force of the inner development of ASEAN which helped establish its centrality and whether EAC may undermine or strengthened ASEAN centrality or not. These issues will be discussed in the next section.

Methodology

ASEAN centrality means that it is the driving force or taking leading roles in its engagements for wider regional integration, such as ASEAN Regional Forum, established in 1994, ASEAN+3, and East Asia Summit (EAS), which eventually form the East Asian Community. ASEAN integration and its target by 2015, Political initiatives, Chairmanship and Host of regional summit-level meetings such as ASEAN+3 Summit and EAS, the achievement of ASEAN Regional Forum, and ASEAN's performance with the Plus Three countries (ASEAN+3 Summit) and with India, Australia, and New Zealand (East Asian Summit framework) will be reviewed.

This paper will use the qualitative method based on the theoretical framework of the previous researches on East Asian Community, theory of regionalism, and balance of powers. The scope of this research is focused on political and economic perspective only in analyzing direct impacts on ASEAN centrality. Information and data will be used from ASEAN Secretariat, its publications, and official websites of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of some countries, and other independent sources in order to make an unbiased analysis and to explore strategies to maintain ASEAN centrality in the context of political and security, and economic integration in East Asia. Various official documents such as joint statements and declarations, blueprints, work plans, agreements, and each country's views as indicated by speeches of country leaders will be reviewed and analyzed for the purpose of this study.

(1) What is ASEAN Centrality?

The issue of ASEAN centrality has been the major concern for ASEAN itself, its dialogue partner countries, and the academia since regional integration began to take place such as ASEAN+3 Process in 1997 and the first East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005. So far, Regional integration in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific are seen through several regional mechanisms such as ASEAN+3 Summit, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM Plus (ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting with its eight Dialogue Partners such as South Korea, China, Japan, India, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, and United States, and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). At the 4th East Asia Summit in 25 October 2009 in Thailand, Australia also proposed the idea of Asia Pacific Community by stating that ASEAN is the core of this newly-proposed regional architecture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2009). So, in general, whatever proposal on regional integration in East Asia or in Asia Pacific, ASEAN is put on the central hub. Furthermore, besides political cooperation, Corbett and Umezaki (2009), in their executive summary, conclude that ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is also at the hub of economic integration in East Asia. Therefore, ASEAN is the hub of both political and economic cooperation in the region. However, there are many challenges and some reasons for this. ASEAN is needed to be the driving force of the regional community building efforts due to rivalry between China and Japan in the region. In other words, ASEAN is just “the driving force by default” while other key regional players are competing with each other for influence and future leadership in the region.

Nonetheless, as for ASEAN itself, there has been no official definition on the word “ASEAN centrality” and a clear-cut approach on how to promote it. According to ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprint (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009), in order to strengthen ASEAN centrality in Regional cooperation and community building, ASEAN shall initiate, host, chair and/or co-chair activities and meetings with Dialogue Partners within the context of ASEAN+3, EAS, and ARF; initiate and implement concrete cooperation activities; advance ARF towards Preventive Diplomacy; and enhance coordination in ASEAN’s external relation and regional and multilateral fora. For instance, ASEAN has been chairing and hosting those kinds of regional meetings since 1994. In addition, ASEAN leaders at the 16th ASEAN Summit in Hanoi on 8-9 April 2010 agreed to adopt a “two-prong approach” for maintaining ASEAN centrality by acceleration of ASEAN integration and intensification of ASEAN’s external relation with ASEAN as the driving force in regional community building (ASEAN Secretariat, 2010). However, we should look at internal dynamics in the development of ASEAN to understand why it has been so successful and attractive thus far.

So, the question is what underpins the inner development of ASEAN itself? We should look into the role of power, as argued by Camilleri (2003), in the internal dynamics of regionalism. According to Yahuda in his foreword for Emmers (2003), the concept of balance of power has been central to the inner development of ASEAN and is also the underlying force for driving security cooperation in ARF. He notices the importance of using balance of power concept by Emmers to explain how ASEAN manages security relations between great powers to prevent the emergence of regional hegemony (US and China) and maintains the independence of the smaller states. Emmers' thesis is quite amazing and could be considered as an exceptional finding of ASEAN's development. He argues that "ASEAN and ARF were established with the denial of hegemony in mind, but not in a conventional sense..... the balance of power factor has influenced the creation and institutional evolution of ASEAN by constraining intra-mural hegemonic dispositions and providing some member states with an additional incentive to cooperate" (p.162). According to his analysis, the balance of power has been used by ASEAN to prevent internal hegemony among member states and also to avoid and constrain external hegemony in the region, US and China. In so doing, ARF has been used as cooperative security regime in the Asia Pacific to maintain peace and stability through confidence building measures in the present time and also preventive diplomacy in the future. So far, three regional players, US, China, and Japan, are the main concern for ASEAN in terms of balance of power calculation. However, ASEAN's ability to manage its relations with the three major players seems to be limited. In addition, ASEAN's prosperity also depend the good relations between the three. According to Weatherbee (2005, p.292), ASEAN is facing potential risk in its great power equation through which the region's economic and political stability depends better relations in the China-Japan-United States triangle. From this view, the balance of power alone is not enough in managing ASEAN's external relations. Furthermore, ASEAN might be at risk to become victim of its own strategy. Also, there should be solid approaches in dealing with this critical and sensitive issue.

Without its own norms and values, development in ASEAN cannot be achieved in terms of political, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation. In this context, "ASEAN way" has been viewed by many scholars as the promoting force for ASEAN to expand and unite all of its members in Southeast Asia and also engage in regional community building, East Asian Community. In general, ASEAN way consists of preference for informality, the principle of inclusivity, consensus, norm of non-interference (Capie and Evans, 2003, p.46-49). Furthermore, according to Weatherbee (2005, p.121), ASEAN way is claimed by ASEAN leaders as the region's distinctive approach to interstate relations. He explains that mutual respect for sovereign authority and the non-use of force are the central elements of ASEAN way. In addition, he also argues that by applying ASEAN way to deal with conflict within ASEAN and its external relations, bilateral disputes between its member states is not allowed to disrupt the wider regional stability and functioning of ASEAN itself, and the conducts of

external relations is not allowed to affect intra-ASEAN relations. In this context, besides using balance of power, ASEAN apply its own norms and values, ASEAN way, to prevent escalation of conflict in the region and external interference into ASEAN affairs. Furthermore, norm of non-interference also raise trust among ASEAN members state and maintain its cohesion. This norm also builds trust between ASEAN and its dialogue partners, especially China, South Korea, and Japan.

In short, through balance of power and ASEAN way, the core of attractiveness has been formed for ASEAN in order to pursue wider regional integration in East Asia. Therefore, from my point of view, balance of power and ASEAN way are main components of ASEAN centrality which is driving force in EAC, at least for this present time. Please see Figure 1.



Figure 1: Components of ASEAN Centrality

(2) How and Why ASEAN Centrality is losing its Attractiveness?

Development and progress in ASEAN have not been taken for granted since there have been several failed attempts for regionalism before the birth of ASEAN such as Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), dissolved in 1977, and Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), founded in 1961 and dissolved soon later. Although with many criticism and obstacles since its establishment, ASEAN is still an example of successful regionalism of developing countries in the world today since it could manage to keeping the cooperation loose and informal for more than four decades based on the “ASEAN Way” of consensus and non-interference, while at the same time achieving notable progress in maintaining peace and security in Southeast Asia and succeeding in grouping all countries in the region (Except East Timor). For example, main political achievement such as Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), the Treaty of

the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ), and, currently the ASEAN Charter, which make ASEAN as a rule-based inter-governmental organization, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Minister Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM Plus, the ASEAN Plus Three Summit, and the East Asia Summit, are all important contributions of ASEAN to regional peace, stability prosperity, economic integration in wider region. From these accomplishments, ASEAN has been considered as the attractive model of new regionalism which started first in Southeast Asia and continues to extend to wider region in East Asia and in the Asia Pacific. However, ASEAN centrality in the regional community building is under pressure of adapting to new dynamics of regionalism, ASEAN+3 mechanism.

Since ASEAN has begun deeper integration within itself and extension into ASEAN+3, its norms and values are under pressure to change in order to deal with regional issues. From time to time, ASEAN way, especially its main component of non-interference, has been under criticism for its inflexibility and ineffectiveness in dealing with regional issue, especially for the case of Myanmar and the recent South China Sea issue at the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in July 2012, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where the traditional joint communiqué could not be issued due to no consensus among ASEAN countries. Within ASEAN, Myanmar issue has continued to be a sensitive point where Western countries have strongly criticized ASEAN for inaction to deal with Myanmar on its human right issue. Even though ASEAN has recently established its human right body, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), to protect and promote human rights in the region, there are still so many criticisms on this newly-born institution regarding its weak responsibility and lack of enforcement mechanism.

ASEAN way also has its own disadvantages for regionalism. According to Emmers (2003, p.23), national interest seems to dominate over ASEAN, i.e. consensus building and non-interference which ensure sovereignty of member states. Thus, he concludes that the constant pursuit of consensus and solidarity appears to be sign of weakness in ASEAN which prevent it from discussion on sensitive issues. Beeson (2009, p.100) also concludes that “ASEAN way seem intended to thwart rather than encourage decisive regional interventions and cooperation at times. In addition to the preponderance of national interest and sovereignty, Acharya (2001, p. 200-201) also noticed that “ASEAN has made no effort to develop sanctioning mechanism. Instead, ASEAN has worked by focusing, in a more positive manner, on the task of defining and redefining Southeast Asia’s regional identity and developing norms of collective action”. All of these efforts by ASEAN are just to promote habit of cooperation rather than political commitment on joint enforcement measure, such as dispute settlement mechanism and enforcement mechanism, which would require member states to relinquish some parts of their sovereignty like the European Union.

On economic perspective, ASEAN has not yet succeeded in narrowing development gap between its old members (ASEAN-6) and the new members, the CLMV countries. Recently published data by ASEAN Secretariat shows that the economy size of the CLMV countries in 2008 is less than 9% of the total GDP of ASEAN which is mostly dominated by ASEAN-6 countries (ASEAN Secretariat, 2010). In addition, there is still a big difference between the two sides in terms of economic infrastructure development, human resource, and per capita national income. Although Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) phase I (2002-2008), with a total funding of 191 million USD from ASEAN-6 and 20 million USD from its dialogue partners and development agencies, has been completed (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009, p.96), little has been achieved on narrowing development gap between the two blocs in ASEAN. Thus, the vision by ASEAN leaders to achieve an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 may not be realized as expected. If these two main problems, norm of non-interference and big development gap, could not be dealt successfully by ASEAN, it seems clear that ASEAN's attractiveness would be declined.

Furthermore, ASEAN's expansion to include the ten countries in Southeast Asia and its extension to integrate with China, South Korea, and Japan to form ASEAN+3 and other countries in the Asia Pacific for a wider regional integration will put ASEAN way in the crossroad – a weak regional organization due to non-interference or a powerful one like the EU, but with possible breaking in ASEAN due to change of the norms of non-interference. However, ASEAN is still choosing the first option (maintain the norm of non-interference) to keep its status quo. According to Collins (2009, p. 129), the continuing validity of ASEAN's norms has been under doubts due to its expansion to unite the ten countries and the 1997 economic crisis. Furthermore, some ASEAN member states demand the reinterpretation of principle of non-interference since there have been some talks on constructive intervention and flexible engagement in ASEAN already. However, he points out the warning of the former ASEAN Secretary-General, Tan Sri Ajit Singh, that removing the principle of non-interference would be detrimental to the grouping. From this warning, it is understood that ASEAN would face the breaking down of its grouping since some members will leave the group if ASEAN affairs is considered to be interfered with their domestic affairs due to the change of the norms of non-interference.

However, it seems that the best way to maintain ASEAN centrality is to preserve the “ASEAN way” which has secured cohesiveness in ASEAN and in conducting external relations with the regional powers and the great powers. With ASEAN Way, the environment of mutual trust among member states increase significantly due to non-interference on each other's affairs. Given Asian nationalism, ASEAN way promotes trust and the habit of cooperation for all countries in the region at the present time, and probably in the future. However, there is still the possibility of political and economic integration in the long-run. In economic perspective,

it is of utmost importance that ASEAN should accomplish its goal as an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 through economic integration, narrowing development gap, and human resource development. This will depend on political commitment of ASEAN leaders, assistances from major dialogue partner countries, and the successful implementation of IAI Work Plan II (2009-2015) and other relevant roadmaps that will bridge the development gap between the CLMV countries and the ASEAN-6. By achieving full integration in itself, ASEAN Economic Community will be seen as a market niche with total population of more than 500 million. Therefore, the accumulation of economic attractiveness will generally enhance ASEAN centrality in the wider regional framework. However, lack of political leadership from ASEAN has caused its centrality under question since human resource development in ASEAN is very limited in comparison to China, Japan, and South Korea. So, human resource development, especially in the CLMV countries, should be strongly promoted to sustain ASEAN's leadership.

(3) How and Why EAC may undermine ASEAN Centrality?

The possible negative impact on ASEAN centrality in the emerging regional architecture, East Asian Community, is inevitable with the recent development in the expanded EAS (ASEAN+8) framework. The establishment of East Asian Community (EAC) looms large in the long-term future after the coming into effect of Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM) with total funding of 120 billion USD as announced by ASEAN Secretariat on 24 March 2010. At least, the first step of monetary and financial integration in ASEAN+3 countries has been achieved through the entry into force of the CMIM. Recently, East Asian Community building is gaining a robust momentum again with the doubling of the amount of original fund of CMIM to 240 billion USD as declared by ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting (AEMs) in Yangon in March 2012. So, ASEAN coordinate all economic and financial initiatives, like CMIM, through its AEMs and AEM+3, and other sectoral bodies, such as ASEAN Central Banks' Governors' Meeting. By seeing success of using the Euro currency in the EU, the idea of common currency basket in East Asia, Asian Currency Unit, become a hot topic for discussion as the next move for economic integration in the future for East Asia by the private sector and the academia (Kawai, 2009, p. 74). In this context, with the new regionalism in place, it is certain that the new institutional dynamics and reforms will emerge and the existing norms and values may decline or might be adapted during the process of institution-building for EAC. Then, ASEAN centrality is under pressure and reaches the crossroad whether it may be weakened with the recent dynamics or be strengthened during institutional discourse of EAC:

Key consideration is whether East Asian regionalism will strengthen or weaken ASEAN solidarity and cohesiveness. Whether ASEAN would be strengthened by

an East Asian economic community will depend on whether ASEAN has realized its own economic integration before becoming part of the larger East Asian Community (Chia, 2003, p.77).

So, one question with two prongs arises with this issue. How and why EAC may undermine ASEAN centrality? In regional community building, according to Nabers (2003), institutional discourse, which consists of new identity and interests formed by institutional building of EAC, will indirectly affect ASEAN centrality. When institutional building develops, economic integration also pushes political integration and security cooperation (Ballasa, 2003, p. 181). In security implication, it will undermine EAC itself due to rivalry between China and Japan in East Asia and the friction between the rising China and the current US security umbrella in the region (Japan and South Korea). The current flashpoint is the issue of South China Sea in which Viet Nam and the Philippines, who are returning to the US for help, and other two claimant states in ASEAN (Brunei and Malaysia), are competing with China for territorial claims in the Sea. Since Japan is suspicious of China's hidden plan in EAC for becoming a regional hegemon, it may give less priority for EAC and, in return, promote other proposals, for example US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which adopt even wider regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, to counter-balance with China. In this context, EAC, in which ASEAN is at the center, may be less desirable by regional players.

In answering whether or not EAC may undermine ASEAN centrality, it depends on ASEAN itself whether ASEAN can have sufficient capability for leadership in EAC. From this point of views, no political leadership has been found in ASEAN regarding EAC building for the time being. Recently, no ASEAN member state has any new proposal or initiative on how to accelerate regional community building. So, lack of initiatives from ASEAN side could be seen as its weakness in comparison to China, South Korea, and Japan, who have been very active in promoting new initiatives and proposals on EAC. With this reason, it is no doubt that the in future, ASEAN centrality would be declining if it could not take political leadership and initiatives in East Asian regionalism. Therefore, in answering to the above question, the institutional discourse and security implication of EAC shall be analyzed on how it would undermine ASEAN centrality while ASEAN's strength and its political leadership should be addressed if it is serious in maintaining its centrality in the future. I shall elaborate the three factors (ASEAN's strength, new institutional discourse, and security implication of EAC) as follows:

In institutional discourse, Nabers (2003, p. 133) argues that a fundamental reconstruction of existing values and identities in ASEAN+3 seems inevitable during the process of institutional building in which more innovative discourses are proposed and the existing structures is seen as an obstacle to crisis solution. In his views, the evolving hegemonic discourse, ASEAN+3

process, which was created by 1997 Asian financial crisis, would offer alternative identity concepts for ASEAN, China, South Korea, and Japan, as one political group in the future. Today, economic interest has replaced Cold War concept such as containment of communism and ideological conflict. Most Asian countries give priority to economic and financial cooperation for mutual benefit and prosperity. Therefore, the new common identity and interest of EAC will exert pressure on ASEAN centrality, especially on its norms and values which serve as a magnet for decades to attract other countries in East Asia to support its leadership in regionalism. In this context, the norms of non-interference and its balance-of-power strategy in the region is less effective since ASEAN+3 countries become more interdependent on each other economically and financially, especially through CMIM while, at the same time, trust and confidence is being built based upon common interest of the group, EAC. So, the suspicion of hegemony is waning among the member states and the balance of power approach is no longer use in regional affairs. At the same time, new identity, interests, norms, and values will be created in institutional development of EAC and they may gradually replace ASEAN centrality in the future.

On security implication, when it comes to the issue of security cooperation in EAC, the existing security structure in the Asia Pacific with the US as the hub will be strongly affected due to the friction between US's security umbrella and the rising China, and the rivalry between Japan and China, as the regional powers, might be boiling. Recently, the rise of China as a military and economic power has brought deep concern for the world, especially in East Asia (the conflict between some ASEAN states and China in South China Sea and the territorial conflict between China and Japan in the East China Sea), and many suspicions have been raised that China wishes to become a regional hegemon especially with the establishment of EAC without United States. The recent tension in the South China Sea at the 45th AMM/PMC/ARF in July 2012 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, is a good reflection of this friction between the two security structures even though the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in Bali in July 2011 has tried to defuse the problem with the adoption of the long-awaited Guidelines for implementation of Code of Conducts in South China Sea. As a result, ASEAN has failed to issue a traditional joint communique since it could not find consensus on South China Sea issue. Due to this reason, ASEAN centrality and unity is strongly impacted by this incident at the 45th AMM. In the East Asian regionalism, EAC may be less desirable since Japan and other countries may embrace new proposals on regional architecture, like Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Concerning the rise of China, Weatherbee (2005, p. 292-93) argues that based on its growing economic presence in Southeast Asia, China has multi-purpose diplomacy to supports its political advances in the region:

One goal appears to be to supplant the United States in giving the lead on important regional and global political issues. A second goal is to ensure that no

regional security framework emerge that do not include China. A third goal is to carve out in Southeast Asia, just as Japan did a generation earlier, a secure economic hinterland (Weatherbee, 2005, p. 292).

In responding to this concern, the East Asian Community building seems to be dragged and complicated by Japan's strategy as it invites more countries in the Asia Pacific, especially the US, to join this grouping, which have expanded from ASEAN+3 to ASEAN+6 process (East Asia Summit). Therefore, Japan has chosen a "two-tire approach to regional community building", through which the core group of EAC is still the APT countries, but in addition, Japan has pursued on a wider regional forum, EAS which also include India, Australia, and New Zealand, in order to offset China's weight and to have more democratic values in the community-building process (Tanaka as cited by Mochizuki, 2007, p. 19). Furthermore, Mochizuki also asserts that, by the end of the 1990s, Japan's policy had clearly shifted to a mixed approach of both engaging and balancing against China (p. 251). So, Japan is still reluctant in East Asia regionalism without involvement of the US and other countries since it is concerning over entering into China's camp and influence, especially in political and security cooperation.

For the rivalry between China and Japan in EAC, from the Japanese point of views, Noble (2008, p. 261), outlines two contrasting views "the skeptics on the right [pessimists] warns that efforts to move forward to a regional community building would not only fail, but also constrain Japanese sovereignty, weaken the US-Japan alliance, undermine universal values, and cede regional leadership to China. Optimists on the left, while acutely aware of the barriers to cooperation, counter that regional cooperation holds out the only hope for ameliorating nationalist conflicts and moving toward a solution to the tension on the Korean peninsula." However, despite Asian nationalism, the optimist views that favor the habit of cooperation among states and people-to-people interaction in the civil societies among the member countries, which is the important building block of EAC, will release a new driving force that eventually overcome this kind of nationalism (Hernandez, 2008, p. 52). Nevertheless, this process would require a long time to develop while economic progress occurs in EAC. Please see Figure 2.

On ASEAN's strength and political leadership in EAC, if ASEAN could not achieve its own economic integration, ASEAN Economic Community, by 2015, through a successful narrowing development gap between old members and the CLMV countries by that time, ASEAN's attractiveness would be declining as it is considered by other countries, especially its dialogue partners, as an unsuccessful community. So far, narrowing development gap in ASEAN is not successful as expected since the CLMV countries are still lagging behind the ASEAN-6. Furthermore, combining with its lack of initiatives and political leadership in East

Asian regionalism, ASEAN centrality could not be sustained and new institutional dynamics in ASEAN+3 would replace it in the future. So far, no ASEAN member state has offered any proposal on EAC except Malaysia under the leadership of former Prime Minister Mahathir which proposed an East Asian Economic Caucus in the early 1990s. Furthermore, ASEAN's bid to maintain its centrality in EAC building will not be secured due to lack of political leadership (Hernandez, 2008, p.44). This is why EAC may undermine ASEAN centrality since China, Japan, and South Korea would finally compete for leadership in regional integration proposal and initiatives, and ASEAN would be just the follower. In this context, Calder & Fukuyama (2008, p.263-264) argues that "political leadership has also been an important catalyst in determining patterns of regional integration, both in crisis situations and in instances of more incremental policy innovation." They positively point out the political leadership and policy innovation in regionalism demonstrated by former President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea who proposed the establishment of East Asia Vision Group and the trilateral Korea-China-Japan summit.

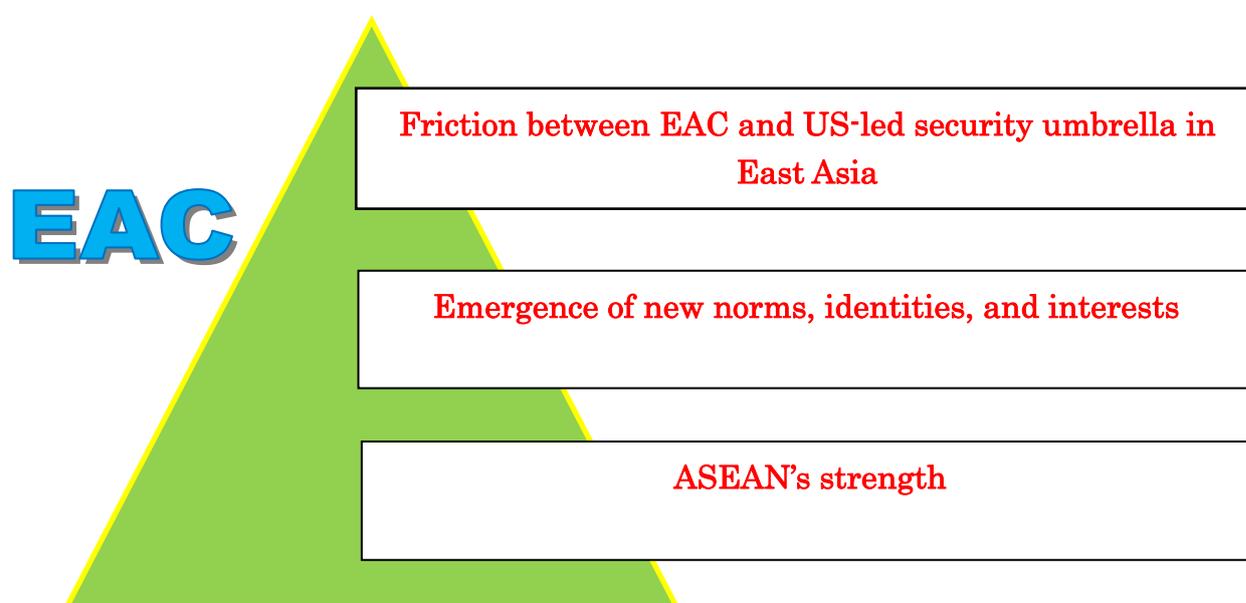


Figure 2: ASEAN Centrality under pressure

Furthermore, in practice, ASEAN often take lead in infrastructure development initiatives while the APT countries take lead in policy proposals for regional community building. Calder & Fukuyama notices the idea by some analysts on the importance of "infra-regionalism" which refers to connection of infrastructures such as roads, airports, and pipelines, in the region, which does not require any legal framework to do so. ASEAN also adopt the proposal of ASEAN connectivity which can also enhance East Asian connectivity as stated in the Chairman's Statement of the 15th ASEAN Summit in Thailand on 23-25 October 2009:

Intra-regional connectivity would benefit all AMS and their peoples, contribute to promoting ASEAN centrality in the regional architecture, facilitate the building of an ASEAN Community that is competitive and increasingly interlinked with the Asia-Pacific region and the world, and serve as a foundation for a more enhanced East Asian connectivity.

In addition, ASEAN leaders also agreed to establish ASEAN infrastructure development fund and adopted Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) in 2010. In fact, this initiative is just for the connection of hard and soft infrastructure in ASEAN. However, if infrastructure in ASEAN member states is connected and well developed, it would also be directly beneficial for China, and other manufacturing companies owned by Japan and South Korea in China to get access to ASEAN's market. This is the flagship initiative which ASEAN has made regarding the "infra-regionalism" which contributes to East Asian regionalism. Lack of regional initiatives from ASEAN may also be a result of limited human resource development in comparison to high-level human resource development in the Plus Three countries.

Therefore, to take leadership role in EAC, it is compulsory that ASEAN have to come up with new policy initiatives on regional cooperation, not only just host and chair regional meetings. To have specific initiatives, it needs to have a resilient and flexible political leadership and also strong research and development on policy issues which require good human resource development. Furthermore, ASEAN awareness should be strongly promoted among civil society, academia, and the business sector in ASEAN countries, and its dialogue partner countries. So, to maintain its centrality in EAC, promotion of human resource development in ASEAN and bridging development gap through regional integration will contribute to ASEAN centrality in EAC.

Conclusion and Outlook for ASEAN

ASEAN is not only the political hub of East Asian regionalism, but it is also the hub of economic integration in the region. ASEAN centrality has maintained its status quo in EAC since the Plus Three countries (China, Japan, and South Korea) are denying anyone in the group to take supremacy or regional dominance. However, as the institution building in EAC develop, especially in ASEAN+3 and EAS (ASEAN+8) frameworks, it is inevitable that ASEAN centrality would be affected negatively. This will depend on ASEAN itself whether ASEAN is strong or weak in term of its own regional integration, also on new institutional discourse, and the pace of the development process of East Asian Community building.

The architectural roles of ASEAN in EA regionalism is seen through its centrality as the driving force. Through formal procedures and arrangements of ASEAN regional meeting, ASEAN assumes leadership by making decision on meeting agenda, programme of activities, venue of meeting, and membership's expansion. By default, formal arrangement comes from ASEAN and is directed to its dialogue partners for consideration. However, ASEAN lacks of political leadership in its own regionalism since most of regional policy initiative, both economic and political, almost comes from its dialogue partners, especially Japan, China, and South Korea.

On ASEAN itself, I conclude that ASEAN centrality has two main elements: ASEAN way and balance of power, which are the underlying forces for development in ASEAN and East Asian regionalism. So far, ASEAN has maintained the balance of power in itself and in external relations. Thus, ASEAN needs to act neutrally and actively as the driving force in East Asian regionalism. It seems that the best way to maintain ASEAN centrality is to preserve the "ASEAN way" which has secured cohesiveness in ASEAN and in conducting external relations with the regional powers and the great powers although the concept of constructive engagement is becoming more acceptable to ASEAN, as seen in the case of Myanmar. With ASEAN Way, the environment of mutual trust among member states increase significantly due to non-interference on each other's affairs. Given Asian nationalism, ASEAN way promotes trust and the habit of cooperation for all countries in the region at the present time, and probably in the future. However, there is still the possibility of political and economic integration in the long-run. In economic perspective, it is of utmost importance that ASEAN should accomplish its goal as an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 through successful economic integration, narrowing development gap, and human resource development. By achieving full integration in itself, ASEAN Economic Community will be seen as a single market and production base with total population of more than 600 million. Therefore, the accumulation of economic attractiveness will generally enhance ASEAN

centrality in the wider regional framework. However, lack of political leadership from ASEAN has caused its centrality under question since human resource development in ASEAN is very limited in comparison to China, Japan, and South Korea, and other dialogue partners. So, human resource development, especially in the CLMV countries, should be strongly promoted to sustain ASEAN's leadership by coming up with its own regional policy initiatives.

For institutional discourse and the pace of regionalism in EAC, ASEAN centrality may be gradually downgraded by the emergence of new norms and values, identity, and common interests in EAC building process, in which all these new elements may affect the foreign policy behaviors of the member states. When the development process involves quickly political and security integration in EAC, there may be friction between the current US-led security structure in East Asia and EAC, as witnessed by the current tension on the issue of South China Sea. This problem would hamper regional community building efforts. Therefore, in order to maintain ASEAN centrality, the pace of East Asian regionalism should be slow and based on step-by-step basis.

Finally, Asian nationalism is a major obstacle for East Asian regionalism and continues to have significant influence on international relations in South East Asia and East Asia as a whole. Although it is very difficult for overcoming the regional barriers, especially Asian nationalism, there is still optimism for the future of East Asian regionalism. In light of this, ASEAN and its dialogue partners need to strongly promote all short-term and medium-term measures for East Asian regional community building such as promotion of political, security, economic and financial cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. In this regard, it is vital that the momentum in regional community building should be kept in good pace with special attention to changing regional and global environment. In addition, mutual understanding and trust, cultural and social cohesiveness, and ASEAN awareness between ASEAN and its dialogue partners should be strongly promoted in order to build trust among all countries in the region and to ensure the success of political and economic cooperation. Such cooperation would create a new social dynamics and emergence of new identities and interests, which act as a catalyst for political transformation in the future.

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