THE COMMUNITY METAPHOR IN ASEAN DISCOURSE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

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Abstract

The ASEAN Charter, which was ratified in 2008 by its 10 Member States, has provided ASEAN with an institutional framework for integration in the region in various areas. This greater focus on integration would impact on actors in the region, principally the operation of businesses. One way to study the policy of ASEAN on economic integration is to examine the factors for its adoption in the context of how the organization envisions itself. This paper analyzes ASEAN’s discourse on economic integration using frameworks provided by organizational sociology. The paper argues that ASEAN’s discourse on integration is shaped by other aspects of the discourse that have happened within ASEAN. The analysis assumes that ASEAN is an organization, having acquired an organizational culture consisting of shared practices, symbols, and values. It also has a shared way of understanding and articulating reality, that is, a common discourse. Organiza-
Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has recognized the importance of economic cooperation in the region. This is clearly articulated in the ASEAN’s founding document, the Bangkok Declaration, which states that one of the regional body’s aims and purposes is: “To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership...” A similar emphasis on economic cooperation is also seen in subsequent agreements among the Member States of ASEAN.

In 2003, the heads of the 10 ASEAN Member States met in Bali, Indonesia, and their meeting resulted in the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, also known as the Bali Concord II. One of the significant provisions of the Declaration is the establishment of an ASEAN Community, which would comprise three pillars on political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. The Declaration describes these three pillars as mutually reinforcing, such that integration in one pillar strengthens the other pillars. Economic integration is further emphasized in another provision of the Declaration which reads: “ASEAN is committed to deepening and broadening its internal economic integration and linkages with the world economy to realize an ASEAN Economic Community through a bold, pragmatic and unified strategy.” This provision reinforces ASEAN’s objective to create an economic community in the region.

The 2003 Declaration of ASEAN Concord II or Bali Concord II inspired the crafting of the ASEAN Charter, arguably one of...
the most important ASEAN documents to date that provides for the legal and institutional framework for ASEAN’s programs and activities. The ASEAN Charter was completed and signed by the heads of the ASEAN Member States in 2007 and ratified and implemented in 2008. The Charter mandates the establishment of a structure for each of the three pillars of cooperation espoused in the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II. The structure is referred to in the Charter as Community, with each Community having its own objectives to fulfill. Under the pillar on economic cooperation, an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) will be established, with the goal of making ASEAN “(a) a single market and production base, (b) a highly competitive economic region, (c) a region of equitable economic development, and (d) a region fully integrated into the global economy.” It is envisioned that a highly competitive and integrated ASEAN would contribute to the development of its Member States. It is thus expected that this vision of ASEAN would influence the way business entities and other agents of economic activities in the region would operate.

Meanwhile, reading closely the ASEAN Charter and Declaration of ASEAN Concord II reveals a change in ASEAN’s discourse on economic integration. It is also observed that this development has coincided with a change in the ASEAN’s view of its identity and role in the region. This paper analyzes ASEAN’s approach to economic integration from a sociological perspective, using the concepts of organizational culture and discourse. In the past, ASEAN’s discourse on economic integration was vague and indirect; now, it is much more direct and clear, being articulated in the ASEAN Charter. It is argued that ASEAN’s current discourse on economic integration is a result of a change in the way it perceives itself—from a vague understanding of its purpose to a much more clearly defined vision of its role in ASEAN.

Conceptual Framework

This paper adopts a sociological framework to analyze the ASEAN policies on economic integration. One advantage of using this framework is that it permits making an assumption that ASEAN is a type of an organization. And as such, it could be examined using concepts used by sociologists in studying organizations, one of which is organizational culture. Studies linking cultures and organizations gained prominence in the past two decades, following works that focused on rationality in organizations and on increasing worker productivity and well-being. These approaches were critiqued in recent years for being too focused on modern assumptions and goals. In the past, organizations were characterized as hierarchical and a single agent in the organization commands subordinates. It is argued that this is no longer applicable since “the capacity of central authority to maintain intelligibility, command authority, act rationally, possess superior knowledge and make autonomous decisions are all diminishing” (Gergen, 2001, p. 220).

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1 Weber (1978) looked at the way that organizations are most efficient when they are rational bureaucracies. He described rational bureaucracies as characterized by seven characteristics: (i) a continuous rule-bound conduct of business; (ii) a specific sphere of competence; (iii) a hierarchy of offices; (iv) the use of technical rules or norms to regulate conduct; (v) a separation between administrative staff and ownership of the means of production and administration; (vi) an absence of appropriation of his official position by the incumbent; and (vii) the use of writing to communicate administrative acts, rules and decisions. He argued that the “rational... is capable of application in all kinds of situations and contexts. It is the most important mechanism for the administration of everyday affairs” (Weber, 1978, p. 220). The advantage of rational authority, compared to traditional and charismatic authority, is its consistency, which is due to its reliance on abstract rules.

2 The main starting point in sociological literature on organizations is the scientific management perspective of Taylor whose preoccupation was with raising productivity of organizations. His belief was that optimum productivity could be achieved by focusing on the individual worker. Another element of scientific management includes “inducing and then training and helping the workman work according to the scientific method” (Taylor, 2005, p. 44), which entailed providing proper incentives and proper working environment so that the worker would be able to work at optimum efficiency. The scientific management approach was later replaced by the human relations approach to organizations, which rejected the principles of scientific management and focused instead on the study of informal groups and workers’ needs and advocated consultation among managers and workers to make the workers more comfortable in the workplace.
due to global expansion and the spread of information and communication technologies. As an alternative, some scholars began studying the cultures of organizations, focusing on the symbols, practices, and meanings commonly used in this area (Thatchenkery, 2001).

Different definitions of culture have emerged; however, the definitions seem to revolve around what G. Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) referred to as the “software of the mind.” They used computer analogy to describe how culture affects the way that people perceive and react to the world around them in a manner that is programmed into them. Being a type of software, culture is intangible, but it allows for differences among people who have more or less the same “hardware,” which is derived from biological factors that define human beings.

Hofstede et al. categorized studies linking cultures and organizations into those which “see culture as something an organization has and those who see it as something the organization is” (emphasis not mine). The former is the preferred approach of managers who see culture as a tool for achieving goals, while the latter is the position taken by academics studying culture. Studies in organizational culture have been driven by culture as tool assumption, which was first popularized by Peters and Waterman (1982) who discussed culture as “an essential quality of... excellent companies.” This trend was continued by Soeters (1986) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) in their studies of corporate cultures. They viewed culture as a mechanism and a changeable aspect of organizations that can be harnessed by managers to instill beneficial values that will help organizations achieve their goals.

The works of Gregory (1983) and Martin and Siehl (1983) have taken another perspective in examining cultures as part of an organization’s identity. In their works, organizational cultures were seen from an anthropological perspective, where the goal was more to describe the culture than to change it. This is also an assumption that underpins this paper, though unlike their works, this study uses discourse as a way to understand an organization’s culture. This study further follows in the tradition of structuralists and semioticists who became popular after the Second World War. One of them is de Saussure who argued that the main approach to understand culture in any setting is through the study of language since it is the medium through which interaction occurs (de Saussure, 1959). A study of language reveals what ideas a culture highlights, and what ideas it marginalizes. Poststructuralists, such as Foucault (1977) and Laclau and Mouffe (2001), critiqued some of the assumptions of scholars of semiotics, but they also carried on the task of studying culture through the concept of discourse.

Discourse has been articulated in different ways, and a broad definition of discourse is that it is “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Some studies on the different approaches to discourse conclude that discourse shapes social reality, to some degree. In addition, there is an assumption that a dialectic relationship exists between discourse and social reality.

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1 One may argue that this distinction is rooted in the two contrasting ways of understanding culture, as discussed by Alexander (2000), such that seeing culture as a tool reflects the mechanistic view of culture, while the opposite represents the more subjective view of culture.

2 The literature on discourse and organizational culture is further discussed in the section on discourse and regional blocs.

3 This terminology is borrowed from Alexander (2000) who described semioticists and structuralists as working within the same tradition. Their only difference has to do with the academic discipline under which they fall. The former is most strongly associated with studies in sociology while the latter is used by anthropologists.

4 Discourse, defined as a particular way of talking about and thinking about the world (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002), is still related to language.
Discursive practices reproduce or change other dimensions of social practice just as other social dimensions shape the discursive dimension. Together with other aspects of the social world, discursive practice constitutes social reality. In the past decade, scholars of regional integration have examined the culture of regional blocs by analyzing their discourse. To name one, Diez (2001) discussed the notion of “Euro-speak.” His starting point was “institutions cannot be separated from the discourse they are embedded in” (Diez, 2001, p. 97). This means that in order to understand an institution, such as the European Union (EU), one needs to examine the common language that is used by the people within it. Euro-speak is a language that “defines the space for political action within the EU” (Diez, 2001, p. 91). He argued that a single EU identity is possible because they have a common discursive language to use in discussing with one another.

Following the work of Diez, Drulák (2006) studied regional blocs in terms of metaphors. In studying metaphors, he followed in the tradition of Lakoff (2008) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who argued that metaphors are the main ways by which people articulate complex ideas. Love, for example, is expressed metaphorically, in that one can “give love,” thereby equating it to a gift. One can also express love as a journey taken by a couple. Drulák believed that metaphors can also be used to describe the workings of such complex entities as regional blocs.

Drulák argued that “what tends to be perceived as common sense about international politics are in fact sedimented metaphorical structures...most of international thinking is embedded in the metaphorical belief that states are persons.” He demonstrated these metaphors by looking at statements, such as “France decided to go to war” and ‘Germany is our ally’...two different metaphorical expressions but both refer to the same conceptual metaphor of states as persons” (Drulák, 2006, p. 5). However, Drulák further argued that these expressions do not seem strange when heard by people because they have gained a literal quality or meaning, despite being metaphors.

ASEAN may thus be considered in the same way as the EU, as an organization with a culture that produces a discourse which is a particular way of talking about the world. There are speech patterns that are common to people in ASEAN, such that certain words and ideas recur in the organization’s documents or in speeches delivered by its officials and constituents. A term that recurs in ASEAN discourse is “ASEAN Way,” which refers to a style of decision making and at times articulated to refer to the manner by which ASEAN appropriates practices from other regions and localizes it in the Southeast Asian context (Vayrynen, 2003). It is a term that has many definitions in ASEAN, but it is more meaningful to those who have been integrated into the organization’s culture.

This paper argues that elements of ASEAN discourse can influence the way that the organization defines its identity and, by extension, the way it formulates policies, such as on economic integration. One significant discursive element referred to earlier is conceptual metaphors, which is defined as metaphors that have lost their metaphorical meaning in people’s minds and have become acceptable common sense synonyms of whatever they refer to. On seeing states as people, there is a metaphor that is equated with ASEAN which influences the organization’s behavior.
Methodology

This research links ASEAN policies on economic integration with discourse, and, thus, employs discourse analysis to understand the phenomenon. However, the discourse analysis used in this paper differs to some extent from that used by other scholars who have examined the same phenomenon (Trice & Beyer, 1984; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983; Mileti, Cress, & Darlington, 2002). While organizational sociologists have tended to favor participant observation and face-to-face interviews in building their data sets, this study uses textual analysis as the primary method. The difference in the method adopted in this study is attributed to the use of discourse as a medium for understanding culture. Another factor is the nature of ASEAN as an intergovernmental organization, which, as needed in its operations, produces many documents that are available for public consumption. The ASEAN discourse is manifested in these documents and other information materials, such as speeches and interview statements of its officials and constituents. Hence, these textual documents and materials were collected for this study.

Key informant interviews were also conducted and their responses were transcribed and analyzed, together with the textual materials collected, to identify patterns in discourse. Documents were scrutinized for recurring signs, which included words, metaphors, or phrases that would always appear in the documents. Apart from coding signs into categories, the research also sought out signs that connected different themes together. Originally, the intention was to identify signs that served as nodes, but later examination indicated that there were more complex dynamics among signs and discourses than simple grouping around nodes. This reflects what Fairclough (1992) referred to as interdiscursivity, or the manner by which seemingly disparate discourses can be articulated together in certain situations. Conceptual metaphors were also coded, and references to them were sought in the different documents examined.

This paper also compares the articulation of the conceptual metaphor of community by the ASEAN and EU, and examines the metaphor’s influence in their policies and practices.

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7 The word “sign” follows the definition used by de Saussure (1959), which was discussed in an earlier section.

8 This term is used by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) in their theory of discourse.
This paper broadly argues that a change in ASEAN discourse has influenced the change in the articulation of its policy on economic integration. This section begins by discussing how the articulation has changed over the past years. At the beginning, the policy on economic integration was articulated in a vague manner and usually subsumed under military and security issues. Now, it is considered as a unique aspect of integration in the region. The section then discusses the change as a reflection of a larger change in the way that ASEAN has viewed itself and its purposes. Over the past 40 years, ASEAN has been transformed from a vague organization without a clear purpose, to a more well-defined organization with clear goals and institutions.

### Over the past 40 years, ASEAN has been transformed from a vague organization without a clear purpose, to a more well-defined organization with clear goals and institutions.

Economic cooperation is an issue that has been repeatedly mentioned in many of ASEAN’s most important documents, including the Bangkok Declaration (1967), the ASEAN founding document; the 1971 Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration; the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia; and the 2003 Declaration of ASEAN Concord II or Bali Concord II. Economic cooperation is mentioned in these documents, but, broadly; or it is articulated as part of other issues, such as peace, security, or culture. These treatments of economic cooperation in the documents suggest that it is not seen as a significant issue during those times. To illustrate the changes that have taken place, in the 1967 Bangkok Declaration, the first clause merely provides a hint of economic cooperation in ASEAN. The clause states: “To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership...” Four years later, in the 1971 Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration, the ASEAN Member States had expressed their firm belief in “the merits of regional cooperation which has drawn our countries to cooperate together in the economic, social and cultural fields in the Association of South East Asian Nations.” From this provision, it can be seen that economic cooperation gained priority alongside social and cultural fields. However, it does not clearly define the path that will be taken in order to achieve economic cooperation among the ASEAN Member States.
Five years after, in 1976, the articulation of economic cooperation in ASEAN had changed, in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, referred to as TAC. And after 27 years, a major redefinition of economic cooperation occurred in 2003, in the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II. In these documents, economic cooperation has been defined and articulated as a mutually exclusive category and in a much more detailed manner. In particular, Article 6 of the TAC states:

"The High Contracting Parties shall collaborate for the acceleration of the economic growth in the region in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of nations in Southeast Asia. To this end, they shall promote the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade and the improvement of their economic infrastructure for the mutual benefit of their peoples. In this regard, they shall continue to explore all avenues for close and beneficial cooperation with other States as well as international and regional organisations outside the region."

The statement includes a provision that is devoted to economic issues, stating the importance of region-wide cooperation in agricultural, industrial, and trade issues, and with organizations within and outside the region. As evidence by these documents, ASEAN had recognized the need to articulate economic cooperation as a separate category. The Declaration of ASEAN Concord II has defined the different areas where economic cooperation will take place. The priority areas of cooperation include basic commodities, particularly food and energy; industry; trade; and joint approach to international commodity problems and other world economic problems. The machinery for economic cooperation is also spelled out in the Declaration. Hence, after almost 4 decades, a clearly defined economic cooperation discourse for ASEAN has emerged, in the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II.

The TAC and Declaration of ASEAN Concord II are recognized as important documents in the transformation of ASEAN's discourse on economic cooperation. These documents have inspired later generations of documents, such as the Bali Concord II, The ASEAN Charter (2008), and the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community 2009-2015 (2009), which contain the most detailed articulations of ASEAN's economic integration policy. One notable point to make is that these three documents only came about after the year 2000, which means that for about 40 years since its establishment, ASEAN operated on relatively vague articulations of economic integration.

And in the ASEAN Charter, which was ratified by the Member States in 2008, the strategy to carry out economic integration in the region was spelled out. The Charter mandated the adoption of a 3-pillar framework for economic cooperation and provided for the establishment of a structure for each pillar. The framework divided ASEAN's programs and activities into three areas, or Communities: the Political-Security Community, the Socio-Cultural Community, and the Economic Community. The aims, purposes, and strategies of each Community are elaborated in detail in the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community, which was affirmed by the heads of the ASEAN Member States in 2009.

The economic integration aspect, referred to as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint, focuses on four areas: a single market and production base, a competitive economic region, equitable economic development, and integration into the global economy. Each area is further elaborated into sub-foci, each with a corresponding set of strategies. The single market and production base focus, for example, contains strategies on the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labour; and on
the priority sectors for integration, such as food, agriculture, and forestry.

The competitive economic region focus includes competition policy, consumer protection, intellectual property rights, infrastructure development, taxation, and e-commerce. The lists of areas given focus indicate the breadth and detail of ASEAN’s current economic integration discourse, all contained and presented in 46 pages in the AEC Blueprint.

The current manifestation of ASEAN economic integration may thus be thought of as a relatively new phenomenon. Well-defined and detailed articulations of economic integration did not exist in ASEAN’s early documents; now, a more elaborate articulation is found in recent ASEAN documents. This paper argues that the current articulation of ASEAN economic integration was influenced by a change in the way the entire organization has understood its identity and raison d’être.

The increased detail in the economic integration discourse of ASEAN corresponds to a transformation in the way that it has defined “what it is” and “what it is capable of doing.” This change is manifested in the discursive shift from calling itself a community, with a small “c,” to Community, with a capital “C.” In order to discuss this fully, ASEAN’s experience of the community metaphor is compared with that of the EU’s experience.

ASEAN and the EU are similar in their use of community as a metaphor to refer to themselves. By calling themselves as a community, despite the fact that they possess the attributes of bureaucratic organizations, they both invoke the idea of community in the metaphorical sense. This implies a sense of togetherness among their constituent states. Another similarity between ASEAN and the EU is that they articulate two forms of community—one that begins with a capital “C” (Community), and one with a small “c” (community).

In his address at the Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany, on 28 April 1951, the State Secretary of the Federal Republic of Germany’s Foreign Office, Walter Hallstein, said:

_I will now attempt, as concisely as possible and in broad outline, to give you an idea of how this European Community is organised … its legal nature can be said to be that of a_
The text of the speech clearly shows the use of a capital “C” in its reference to the Community formed by the Treaty of Paris, which established the European Coal and Steel Community, as a preliminary step toward forming a Europe-wide community. At the same time, Goethe underscored that the newly-formed entity would be a community, not a cartel or concern. The speech thus demonstrates two ways of articulating the community metaphor. In the first case, the speech referred to Community, as one that carries out a very specialized role. This is similar to the way ASEAN has used “Community” in its Charter. The second case refers to community as a subjective identification of individual units with one another, a definition that is more fluid and metaphorical than the first case.

By using Community in the Treaty of Paris, one may argue that the EU’s founding fathers saw their Community as carrying out a specific role. This role generally is focused on economic matters. The use of Community, with a capital “C,” has a long history in the EU and has had different manifestations, such as the European Economic Community or European Community.

The EU experience may be differentiated from that of ASEAN. In its founding document, the Bangkok Declaration, ASEAN used the term community, with a small “c,” that focuses on economic growth, social progress, cultural development, and peace and stability. This focus of the ASEAN community is relatively wider as compared to that of the Treaty of Paris, which primarily sought to bring together the coal and steel industries of the signatory countries and was very specific on how the member countries would interact with one another.

One may argue that this is the reason why community in ASEAN was initially articulated using a small “c,” as in “community of South-East Asian Nations,” instead of Community as was used in Europe. It was only in 2003, in the Bali Concord II, when ASEAN officially began using Community, or Communities, with a capital “C.” And it was only in 2008, when the ASEAN Charter was ratified by its Member States, that Community was used in a document that bind the Member States of the region. Thus, before, ASEAN was envisioning itself in terms of a generalized and fluid notion of community.

From the ASEAN and EU examples, it can be observed that a single metaphor can be applied differently in specific contexts. The EU thinks of itself as a Community, but one that is concerned mainly with economics. The countries that comprise it have come together for mutual economic gains. ASEAN, for its part, looks at itself as a community with much more diverse purposes. Co-existence and cooperation, or “caring and sharing,” to use ASEAN’s words, are the important values in its community. It is only recently that a sense of being Community, capital “C,” has emerged in ASEAN toward achieving economic goals.

From the articulation of economic cooperation in ASEAN over time, it can be observed that a shift in its organizational identity has similarly led to a shift in its economic integration discourse. A vague discourse of economic integration 40 years ago has now developed into a clear and well-defined policy, accompanied by the strategies for achieving it. ASEAN was vague about economic integration because it valued togetherness and harmony of its people as a community, with a small “c.” It became Community when ASEAN articulated more clearly its economic integration strategy and in a detailed manner, as seen in the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community.
Conclusion

In studying the policies of a regional bloc, as in the case of ASEAN, one element to consider is the culture and discourse of the organization that produced it. Underlying the argument in this paper is the notion that ASEAN is not just an intergovernmental organization that creates and implements policies that bind actors in the region. It is an organization comprising people sharing practices, meanings, and discourses; and these shared aspects influence the way the organization works. ASEAN has adopted a comprehensive economic integration policy that would ultimately affect actors in the field of business operating in the region. And although it is important to understand the challenges that such new policies may pose, it is also necessary, from an academic perspective to understand how such policies have developed and what factors have influenced the formulation of the policies.

References


Manuel Enverga III is a faculty member of the European Studies Program of the Ateneo de Manila University, where he also serves as Lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Political Science Department. Therein, he teaches courses on Theories of European Integration, European Comparative Politics, Europe and Global Popular Culture, European Diplomacy and Cross Cultural Communication. He has presented papers and published articles and book chapters related to his research interests, which are: regionalism, diplomacy, leisure and popular culture. At present, he is completing his Doctorate in Sociology, with a dissertation that examines the evolution of discourse, and the way that it is produced, in the ASEAN organization.