EXPLORING REGIONAL GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: PERSPECTIVES FROM AN INTEGRATED AND MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH[1]

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Abstract

As with most concepts in the Social Sciences, *governance* has had to contend with a plethora of challenges, not the least of which covers questions regarding its meaning. This matter is made even more complicated with the fact that by its very nature, the term is, and indeed may be approached from the perspective of various academic disciplines. Not a single discipline can claim a monopoly on its use. However, a great number of the academic and even practical work on the issue has been made using the lenses of Public Administration (PA). In the Philippines, this is best exemplified by the name it has given to its premier PA academic institution – the National College of Public Administration and *Governance* (NCPAG). Yet, the fact remains that other disciplines and areas of interest such as Political Science, International Political Economy, Management, Business Administration, and others make use of the term routinely and has in fact arrogated it to form part of their respective lexicons. While this may be due to PA's long enduring relationship with these fields, as they do in fact share some common interest, it may also be due to the multi-dimensional character of the term itself – immediately conjuring up images that pertain to governments, bureaucracies, institutions and a host of other issues. The discourse however has largely centred on national and sub-national contexts. As globalisation dramatically impacts on almost all facets of human interaction, the governance literature has also articulated frameworks that transcend national boundaries.

Academic interest on Southeast Asia is similarly situated. Universities which have taken a keen interest on the matter have done so under the heading of *Area Studies* consciously making use of an interdisciplinary approach. Scholars who claim expertise on this subject are of varied academic background and training. It is therefore a necessary proposition that a proper understanding of the complexities of Southeast Asia require an interdisciplinary approach.

This paper seeks to problematise *governance* and *Southeast Asia* through the somewhat unifying framework of *regional governance,* used in this paper both as a framework of analysis and as a normative goal. It argues that as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) makes a transition from a norms-based

organisation to one ruled by more formal mechanisms, a corollary framework that meets the concomitant challenges brought forth by the complexities of region-building must be in place and must be strengthened. The paper's objectives include examining how these issues, challenges and prospects impact on ASEAN regional integration and the governance dimension it necessarily touches. The discussion on regional governance is enriched by considering it hand-in-hand with an integrated approach to multi-level governance. It is divided into four parts. The paper begins with an overview of Southeast Asia as a region and a brief historical account of the development of ASEAN. The second part presents a theoretical treatise on governance and regional governance and looks at the issue from a 'multi-level' perspective and an 'integrated' approach. The third part details ASEAN initiatives as they impinge on the strengthening of regional governance mechanisms. Finally, the paper looks at the challenges that a regional governance framework in Southeast Asia has to contend with.

Keywords: Regional Governance, Public Administration, Multi-Level Approach, Southeast Asia and ASEAN.

An Overview of the Southeast Asian Region and the Development of ASEAN

Southeast Asia is fraught with major contradictions. In fact, it is rather difficult to find a distinct characteristic that would separate the region from other similarly situated regional groupings. For one, while there may be pockets of similarities between and among the majority in some countries, such as religion (Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia; Buddhism in Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Burma) the diversity is much easier to spot. The politics of the region also seems to swing from one end of the spectrum to another. The disparity between the Philippines, the oldest democracy in Asia and the totalitarian regime in the military junta-controlled Burma is just an example. Data from the NGO freedomhouse.org on its 2010 Survey of Independent Counties reveal the following:[2]

Freedom of the World Rating: Table of Independent Countries in Southeast Asia

Country	Political Rights	Civil Rights	Freedom Status
1. Brunei Darussalam	6	5	Not Free
2. Burma	7	7	Not Free
3. Cambodia	6	5	Not Free
4. Indonesia	2	3	Free
5. Lao PDR	7	6	Not Free
6. Malaysia	4	4	Partly Free
7. Philippines	4	3	Partly Free
8. Singapore	5	4	Partly Free
9. Thailand	5	4	Partly Free
10. Viet Nam	7	5	Not Free

Source: freedomhouse.org   NB: 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating.

While questions on the methodology used in the analysis of Freedom House do exist, the previous table is made to show the disparities in the level of

freedom (and perhaps democratisation) that exist between and among Southeast Asian countries.

Economically, this dissimilarity is even more pronounced: the level of economic development in countries such as Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore is profoundly different from that of countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Burma.

GNI - Per Capita in US Dollars (Based on Purchasing Power Parity)

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
1. Brunei Darussalam	47,470	50,170	51,200		
2. Burma	1,020				
3. Cambodia	1,390	1,570	1,750	1,870	1,820
4. Indonesia	2,840	3,040	3,310	3,620	3,720
5. Lao PDR	1,570	1,710	1,920	2,060	2,200
6. Malaysia	11,220	12,240	13,360	13,900	13,710
7. Philippines	3,170	3,380	3,690	3,940	4,060
8. Singapore	42,220	46,950	51,070	52,000	49,780
9. Thailand	6,420	6,970	7,550	7,830	7,640
10. Viet Nam	2,100	2,310	2,540	2,720	2,790

Source: worldbank.org

Yet, in the midst of these differences, an apparent common ground that seems to unify the countries in the region is their reliance on the age-old traditions of *musyawarah* (consensus) and *mufakat* (consultation). However, not a few have commented that these same principles may actually hinder the advancement of the region to a higher level of cooperation (Kim, 2007:17).

To get a clearer perspective on the region, it is imperative for one to locate the discussion with the region's colonial experience (with the exception of Thailand). The episode in these nations' history may have pushed post-colonial governments to pursue a foreign policy reflective of regional identification. This was made apparent in the whole of Asia which saw the rise of Pan-Asianic sentiments in the decades immediately following World War II. Eventually, this became the seed of regional cooperation in the continent. As reflected in the declaration of several major meetings of Asian nations right after World War II such as the Asian Relations Conference of 1947, the Pacific Union of 1949, the Baguio Conference of 1950, the Colombo Powers Conference of 1954, the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) of 1954, the Asian-African Conference of 1955, and the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) of 1961, the idea of regional cooperation in Asia was premised on nationalist sentiments of ending the vestiges of colonialism and addressing the concerns brought about by the brewing Cold War between the two superpowers (Acharya, 2000). Unfortunately, all these initiatives ended up without any stable regional formation or organisation that would provide impetus to such lofty aspirations.

The need for establishing a specific regional alignment was made much more pronounced in the context of Southeast Asia. As early as the 1940s, Aung San was one of the first to articulate the need for a specific assemblage among Southeast Asian nations (Vanderbosch and Burtwell, 2001:71). The newly formed states then were greatly motivated by the need to create a forum for the discussion

and resolution of its regional conflicts. This was attested by their previous attempts at forging cooperation in the regional level which unfortunately fell short of any substantial gains.

Originally, ASEAN was composed of only five countries, to wit: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. This was amidst tensions involving the original members mainly triggered by territorial disputes as most of them have just been freed from colonial powers and were starting to define their respective territories. Malaysia and Singapore (because of the nature of their relations) were being challenged by Indonesian territorial incursion. Meanwhile, the Philippine claim over Sabah has been a major strain in its relations with Malaysia. Despite all these, the organisation managed to survive and after four decades, its membership has expanded to include all ten Southeast Asian states as members with the addition of Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (Brunei acceded earlier, in 1984). The condition and degree of cooperation in ASEAN is a copious source of discussion in International Relations particularly among scholars of Regional Integration and quite recently, Regional Governance.

When ASEAN was formed in August 1967, the overriding purpose was to create a condition for Southeast Asian states to ease the existing tensions between and among them and to organise the small states of the region to provide some control over regional affairs (Narine, 1997:965). At the outset, it must be noted that ASEAN's *raison d'être* in the eyes of its five original members was the need to prevent war and manage conflict. Judging from its forty year history, ASEAN has so far been successful in its objectives and as such became the model of other regional groupings advancing similar interests in Asia. At the very least, there has been no actualisation of any major conflict among member states since its inception in 1967.

The formation of ASEAN as a regional organisation was inextricably linked to the security condition of Southeast Asia. It was the height of the Cold War and the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was in the centre stage of all discussions. Fears that the region might be used as a battle ground by both superpowers were substantiated by the occurrence of the Viet Nam War. Furthermore, the threat of the Communist spectre looming over the region has been a source of concern for non-Communist Southeast Asia. Also, the increasing domestic instability laid an intense pressure on the existing power structure of Southeast Asian nations. As explained by Amitav Acharya (2000), the emergence of regional security institutions in Asia fundamentally begins with a convergence of threat perceptions. Such convergence materialises less on the threat posed by militarist actors than the internal challenges to regime legitimacy. This was true in the case of ASEAN. According to him, "the commonly perceived danger of communist insurgency, ethnic separatism and other political challenges to regime survival was a powerful catalyst of ASEAN" (Acharya, 2000).

Corollary to this was the economic conditions of the region. Southeast Asia was just recovering from the devastating effects of World War II and its wars for national liberation. Being agricultural and pre-industrial, the countries in the region were struggling to build up their respective national economies and thus

became heavily dependent upon wealthy First World nations. It was held that the opportunities for economic engagement brought about by the political connections in a regional formation could generate development in the poor economies of Southeast Asian states. Stable political relations between and among member-states nurturing an environment conducive for economic development would greatly ease domestic insecurity as it would lessen the conditions for communist insurrection (Simon, 1989:584). Along with this came the perception that a politico-military security agenda complemented by economic engagement would accrue internal security for each member, making it less susceptible to the manoeuverings of outside powers (Simon, 1989:584).

Some of the most conspicuous challenges then to the existence of ASEAN were the tensions arising from territorial claims of Southeast Asian nations. With no coercive force existing to manage the conduct of state affairs in the region, the prospect of regional peace and stability seemed gloomy. However, the prevailing belief among the decision makers of the period was that "local disputes were wasteful and self- defeating" and that "political consultation to resolve local problems and to present a united front against external challenges would enhance the ability of each state to ensure its own integrity" (Simon, 1989:584). The behaviour these states displayed in the international level lies on the commonly held construction of reality in the region, formed mainly through interaction (Acharya, 2001:47). Recognising a common field for cooperation permitted ASEAN states to behave similarly in areas that are of immediate importance to their survival. This was ensured by the mechanism crafted by the organisation in decision making that went to be known as the "ASEAN Way". It consisted in the beginning of a long and tedious process of confidence building measures that took almost a decade to develop. Eventually, it turned into concepts that form the basis of ASEAN's work and methods of cooperation. As a consequence of the regular engagements and contacts between and among national leaders, they developed a strong sense of personal relationship that served them well in tackling sensitive issues of primary importance. The practicality of such devise paved the way for the operation of the twin principles of *musyawarah* (or consultations), and *mufakat* (or consensus in the decision-making process). Such approach was responsible for the maintenance of unity within the organisation despite standing differences among its members. Veering away from issues that make consensus difficult to arrive at and moving along with the discussion of matters that are more acceptable to everyone considerably eased cooperation and mutual understanding, at least for the time being. The practice ensured that bilateral tensions do not hinder regional peace and economic development. Placing national problems before external problems "led to a stable region that denied the great regional and global powers an excuse for military intervention" (Hernandez, 1999:49). In addition, respect for the domestic affairs of another country couched in the principle of non-intervention is held with utmost esteem. The approach was principally responsible for conflict prevention and has allowed the organisation to endure.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and consequently the end of the Cold War created a tremendous transformation in the regional and global security climate.

This necessitated a radical shift in the security interests of the region and the character of security cooperation in ASEAN. With the Soviet Union offering no potent threat to any of the nations in the region, there was optimism that no communist regime would support local [communist] insurgencies in the region. In addition, any prospective military confrontation in Southeast Asia between the great powers would be unlikely. However, such optimistic forecast was accompanied by uncertainty as the change in the global security environment forced the United States to undergo security policy changes and define for itself a new role in the region.

The changing contours of the post-Cold War landscape of international politics required a recasting of the previously dominant IR theory. Realism's hardnosed distinction between 'high politics' and 'low politics' has encountered major challenges from other mainstream and alternative theories who reject such differentiations as analytically and normatively useless. The end result is a 'securitisation' of issues previously studied using different lenses. As such, Security Studies has expanded to cover issues emanating from non-military sources – what the literature calls 'Non-Traditional Security' (NTS) challenges. These include issues such as climate change, earthquakes, food security, transnational crimes, terrorism, migration, human smuggling, and others. Caballero-Anthony (2008: 1) succinctly argues that

> "[a]side from being non-military in nature, these challenges share other common characteristics: they are transnational in scope (neither purely domestic nor purely inter-state); they arise at very short notice and are transmitted as a result of globalisation and the communication revolution; they cannot be prevented entirely, but can be mitigated through coping mechanisms; national solutions are often inadequate, and thus **multilateral and regional cooperation is essential**" (Emphasis mine).

This so-called shift does not really require an abandonment of traditional military analyses. To a very large extent, they remain the major fare in the states' intra-regional engagement. It is however undeniable that the host of non-military issues identified above has gained headway in being regarded with extreme importance – perhaps treating them as being in equal footing with traditional military issues. Still, the changing landscape in security studies has made a significant dent in the shaping of ASEAN regional governance.

Theoretical Perspectives on Governance and Regional Governance

Governance

Governance has been understood in different ways and in different forms. For a long period of time, it has been used synonymously with government (Carino, 2003:66-67). Government's inadequacies led to problems such as poverty, corruption, and slow economic development. It is within this context that governance gained currency in Social Science discourse.

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) defines governance as the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). According to Kettl, "governance is a way of describing the links between government and its broader environment – political, social, and administrative" (2002). With this definition, the indispensability of institutions and processes in the interaction of the government with various groups supposed to be affected by government operations is emphasised. Moreover, it is believed that the business of dispensing state power is too important to be left in the hands of the government. Governments should not make decisions alone. On the contrary, it must include those agents which lie outside its realm. An inclusive and participatory decision-making process which actively involves local stakeholders ensures successful policy implementation as those involved would be highly supportive of the entire process of implementation. Such being the case, partnership among stakeholders can effectively condition efficiency and dependability of government operations.

It must be noted that the concept of governance puts a premium on the process rather than the decisions. The government's engagement with the citizens through consultations increases its legitimacy and allows opportunities for various interests in society to converge and work out to realise common objectives. Unlike *government* which is concerned more with rules, *governance* sees the primacy of goals (Riley, 2003: 15). As there are many values and interests scattered all throughout society, so too are goals. In this case, engagement among numerous contradicting values and goals is all the more needed to forge and shape a common goal for society. Providing space for the unrepresented and the underrepresented is more of the rule than the exception. By focusing on the goals, democracy is furthered and enhanced.

To some, governance is treating government as if it is business. As such, some of the concepts in business management are being applied in the realm of the government. The public expects the government to be honest and competent, which means that it must ensure customers satisfaction. Competency means 'good services' and honesty means 'acceptable costs' (Riley, 2003: 17-18). In contrast with *government* which measures performance through the adherence to rules and procedures attached to administration, *governance* is more concerned with the question of 'why govern' and not 'how to govern'. Asking the latter question entails a justification of results through proper observance of procedures. This is described as 'procedural rationality'. Critics say that this concept leads to an arbitrary imposition of what the government wants to the citizenry. On the other hand, governance measures performance along the lines of what the public demands and expects. The public mandates governance to be "as productive as feasible while being as unobtrusive as possible" (Riley, 2003: 18).

Although the governance discourse has captured the interest of many scholars, it has largely been treated in the context of national and sub-national levels. The impact of globalisation, however, has inevitably expanded governance's scope to cover institutions that transcend national boundaries. In fact, national and sub-national governance strategies are undeniably informed by the

imperatives of a global [perhaps a supra-national level] ideological framework spawning such terminologies as *marketisation, de-bureaucratisation, decentralisation, etc.* Some scholars have indeed taken this as their research agenda: examining the changing patterns of governance from a focus on Weberian-type formal institutions to the interplay of governments, markets, and civil society, treating as they do, citizens as clients and/or consumers.

At the same time, globalisation has had its own share of critics informed by different theoretical orientations ranging from the conservative right (realists) to the radical left (Marxists). As an alternative, Hettne (1995, cited in Willis, 2005:184) argues that Southern countries should operate in larger regional groupings rather than as individual nations in a potentially hostile economic environment. In more colourful language, Söderbaum (2008) states that "Hettne has powerfully formulated [the importance of regions] as that the regional is just 'right', because the nation-state solution is 'obsolete' and the global is 'premature'." It is within this context that a regional governance framework becomes an alternative (or maybe as an additional perspective) to state-bound governance on the one hand, and hyper-globalism on the other. The next section looks at the theoretical and practical dimensions covering regional governance and offers it as a framework for analysing cooperation among Southeast Asian countries.

Regional Governance

The landscape of contemporary politics has painted an increasing tendency to highlight the roles of regions. There has been a plethora of theoretical work on 'regions' and 'region-building'. Understanding regional governance from an avowedly interdisciplinary approach, So (2008:1) argues that while 'regions' generally refer to a geographical location, the precise boundaries or scales are not settled nor clearly established. Dissecting the issue at length, he points to three classifications of regions: super-region/macroregion, subregion/mesoregion and microregion. He further elaborates that

> [a] macroregion refers to a large territorial unit or sub-system between the state and the global system level, like the Asia-Pacific region or the institution of APEC. A microregion refers to a territorial unit between the national and the local (municipality), primarily within a particular state, but it also includes the above-mentioned cross-country sub-national regions. Between the above two levels, there is a mesoregion — a mid-range state or non-state arrangement and process, like ASEAN and East Asian Economic Caucus (So, 2008:2).

This classification portrays regions as neatly arranged. In reality, it lends itself to possible questions. For example, while ASEAN is presented as an example of a meso-region, it may also be viewed as laying the groundwork to be a macro-

region. This discussion is important to situate Southeast Asia in the wider context of region building.

Admittedly, a great number of treatises on 'regions' have been done using the lenses of International Relations and International Political Economy. However, PA has been inevitably drawn to the debate especially when 'governance' is appended to 'region.' Public Policy Analysis contributes to the conceptual richness of regionalism and builds up measurement standards upon which concrete programs may be assessed and examined. In this sense, an interdisciplinary mode in approaching efforts at region-building and regional integration is created – a synergistic relationship between Social Science disciplines that is comparable to an orchestra producing melodic harmony which has as its disposal, the ability to develop into a thundering crescendo. Hettne (2003) begins with distinctions between 'old regionalism' characterised by traditional top to bottom modes of interaction and 'new regionalism' that highlights a multi-dimensional approach. Caballero-Anthony (2010:2) describes it as being characterised by "1) deeper economic integration with political elements; 2) multi-level governance; 3) devolution within states; 4) a strong international legal framework; and 5) cooperation among many dimensions."

So's (2008:6-7) survey of attempts to create a regional perspective from among different disciplines reveal four approaches: *transnational governance*, usually falling under the rubric of International Relations and International Political Economy and is interested on issues covering regional cooperation and regional integration; *intergovernmental governance*, which focuses on issues such as central-local relationship, and is usually employed in public management studies; *city-region governance*, adopted by geographical/urban studies looks at cities as areas where power and development tend to gravitate; and *multi-level governance* that has become a powerful mechanism in understanding European regional integration.

There is little doubt that the highest level of regionalisation has been reached by the European Union (EU). In the field of International Relations, important discussions on the topic include the work of Ernst Haas (1961), noted for his treatise on *neo-functionalism* which highlights supra-nationalism as the framework for regional integration. In clear realist fashion, proponents of *inter-governmentalism* led by Stanley Hoffman (1966) and Andrew Moravcsik (1995) reject supra-nationalism saying that real power still rests on member-states who make decisions based on international and domestic issues. Robert Putnam's (1988) two-level game exemplifies this school of thought. In the governance literature, worth noting are Simon Bulmer's (1993) emphasis on the role of institutions, structure, and political action; Jeremy Richardson's (2001) comparative public policy, and multi-level governance (Marks, 1996; and Marks and Hooghe, 2004).

Of these many perspectives, multi-level governance offers an interesting dimension in analysing Southeast Asian regional integration, informed as it is by actual experience. The approach has received proper analytical treatment from Marks (1993) who define multi-level governance as "a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers" (See also

Hooghe and Marks, 2004). This departs from traditional modes of approaching region-building as driven exclusively by national governments. Instead of privileging sub-national government units however, multi-level governance emphasises a cross-interaction between and among different levels of government including non-state actors across state boundaries (So, 2008:10). Multi-level governance looks at the process from both a horizontal and a vertical standpoint. "'Multi-level' referred to the increased interdependence of government operating at different territorial levels, while 'governance' signalled the growing interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors at various territorial levels" (Bache & Flinders, 2004:3, cited in So, 2008:10).

Multi-level governance offers a powerful analytical tool in regional governance as it is able to accommodate the complex nature of the relationship between and among actors in the process as well as the issues involved. As with reality, region-building cannot be appreciated as existing in neatly-placed structures or designs. It is most often products of synergies and interactions. Oo Soe Moe (2008), citing Marks (1996) asserts that

> "[t]he vivid point of departure for this multilevel governance approach is the **existence of overlapping competencies among multiple levels of governments and the interaction of political actors across those levels**. The executives of the member states i.e. heads of the governments, while powerful, are only one set among a variety of actors in the European polity. States are not a sole and only exclusive link between domestic politics and intergovernmental bargaining in the EU. Instead of the two level game assumptions adopted by state centrists, advocates of **multilevel governance posit a set of overarching, multilevel policy networks.** Moreover, the structure of political control is variable, not constant, across policy areas." *(Emphasisadded)*

Hooghe and Marks (2004) more recently came up with a typology of multi-level governance: Type I which covers a type of structure that is rigid and with general purpose jurisdictions divided based on a clear-cut delineation of governmental levels; and Type II which details a system that is arranged on the basis of function-specific issues. The decision of which Type a region uses is entirely up to them since both types carry with them advantages and disadvantages. In the case of Southeast Asia, governance structures have largely been Type I. Adopting this multi-governance model, So (2008:11) proposes an 'integrated approach' to regional governance. The proposal highlights three perspectives that offer a powerful analysis and assessment tool in any regional governance project: *politico-administrative, socio-functional*, and *issue.*

The *politico-administrative* dimension reflect the traditional path of regionalisation – what So (2008:11) calls "bring-the-state-back-in" perspective. It views regionalisation as a process driven primarily by the apparatus of the state via a regulatory regime (Bowles, 2002; Jayasuriya, 2004). Understood vis-à-vis multi-

governance, 'state' here is understood not only in terms of the national government but includes those found in the sub-national levels. At a time when non-state actors play major roles in shaping the contours of governance and the regionalisation process, a state-centric approach is offered as one that remains relevant.

The *socio-functional* dimension on the other hand echoes the increasing role of non-state actors. The processes earlier mentioned: marketisation, de-bureaucratisation and decentralisation are seen as the driving forces behind regionalisation. It must be mentioned that the role that civil society plays in the regionalism discourse has caught the attention of many scholars. While there is little debate in accepting that they have a role to play in the governance processes, two opposing views [albeit referring to the ASEM process] need to be highlighted: one which considers civil society as having gained 'parallel summitry' (Gilson, 2002:158) and another which reduces their involvement as 'controlled inclusion' (Richards, 2000:125).

Issue, which is the area given least attention refers to "some unexpected, occasional or seasonal events that make impact upon an indefinite vast area, like cross-border pollution problems, earthquake, typhoon, avian flu and SARS outbreak, and dengue fever contagion (So, 2008:12)."

Implications on ASEAN Regional Governance

Studying Southeast Asia from a regional governance perspective requires that a distinction between 'regionalism' and 'regionalisation' be made. This is necessary in order to situate events in Southeast Asia and ASEAN within the purview of the framework discussed above. Söderbaum (2008) argues that "regionalism refers to the cognitive ideas and policy that are aimed at enhancing cooperation, integration or coordination within a regional space. It is usually associated with a regional programme, and often leads to institution-building." Simply put, regionalism refers to an ideological position that a region takes in order to foster region-building. 'Regionalisation' on the other hand refers to the process of region-building, whether via regionalism as a normative doctrine or one that proceeds absent any ideological framework (Hveem, 2003; Söderbaum, 2008; So, 2008).

By and large, ASEAN's efforts at regional governance have been state-centric and intergovernmental, in support of efforts at regionalism. In terms of structure, ASEAN follows a rather loose form of organisation. The ASEAN Charter signed in November 2007 provides that its highest governing body is the ASEAN Summit, composed of all Heads of State or Government in the ten member-states. Two ASEAN Meetings are held annually, organised and hosted by the country holding the ASEAN Chairmanship. The ASEAN Summit is supported by bodies such as the ASEAN Coordinating Council, ASEAN Community Councils, ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Bodies, and the ASEAN Secretariat. Prior to the passage of the ASEAN Charter, a semblance of this organisational set-up was practised by ASEAN.

ASEAN projects and activities are generally organised along politico-security, economic, and socio-cultural issues. To a certain extent, this parallels So's

characterisation of an 'integrated' approach to regions, albeit without reference to a multi-level governance model. These regionalisation efforts echoed in the ASEAN Charter find fulfilment in the community-building project, culminating in the ASEAN Politico-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

ASEAN's governance framework in the security arena is geared towards engaging more directly with other powers in the region. This is primarily due to the limitations of its security capacity. The post-Cold War security scenario has left ASEAN on a 'strategic uncertainty'. These shared strategic uncertainties, in the analysis of Acharya have become the catalyst for ASEAN security cooperation. He explains that "for states incapable of self-help, strategic uncertainty is often the result of changes in the availability of external security guarantees" (Acharya, 2000). Thus, the more active security engagement of ASEAN immediately following US forces demobilisation in the region by the mid-1990s was intended to seek certainty in regional security cooperation. The condition allowed ASEAN to define and assume for itself a different role and function which was manifested through the establishment of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

The inauguration of the ARF in 1994 ushered ASEAN into a new international status in the global community. Security discussions sought by ASEAN with the 23 participating nations in the ARF including major regional powers such as China and Russia were in consonance with its interest as the region's security was increasingly identified with the peace and stability of the wider Asia-Pacific area. Clearly, by taking a lead role in the ARF, ASEAN was trying to order international environment in accordance with its own principles. It has become a vehicle for the diffusion and communication of its norms and values outside its own subsystem. With this change in role and function, it continuously evolved and created new norms, as these engagements allowed for an additional opportunity to discuss its security concerns and ensure that these concerns were seriously taken by the great powers. At first, the proposal of creating a regional security forum for the Asia-Pacific in the mould of the Conference Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was rejected by ASEAN arguing that the European experience cannot be applied to the conditions of Asia and the Pacific. Nevertheless, since the concept of a regional security forum was gaining ground and the risk of being marginalised was possible, ASEAN was motivated to initiate security meetings using its tried and tested 'ASEAN Way' as the design for the processes in the forum (Narine, 1997:963). Apparently, the success story of ASEAN has allowed it to influence extra-ASEAN affairs and conduct other activities most notably conflict prevention and resolution.

Another major transformation in ASEAN was the admission of Viet Nam (1995), Myanmar, Laos (both in 1997) and Cambodia (1999), in an attempt to bolster its weight and credibility as an association. The inclusion of these states is projected to affect the cohesion and dynamism of ASEAN and the progress of regional cooperation in the region in the near future. Such enlargement carries with it institutional problems as the new members are characterised by a totally different set of political and economic values. However, concerns such as expansion could

very well diffuse international norms as the new members would have to undertake activities toward achieving the goals set by ASEAN and thus be socialised into the value that the community developed and enhanced by the organisation. Through this, the new member-states could assimilate and be assimilated into the existing norms of the international system and are expected to behave according to the shared principles of the organisation.

The slow progress of economic integration in ASEAN for the past decades, together with both exogenous and indigenous factors impressed upon its leaders and policy makers the imperative of rethinking the conduct of regionalism seriously. The most conscious endeavour to move towards economic regionalism in Southeast Asia was the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA). It emerged in the midst of pressures stressed by the declining volume of foreign capital and investments from Japan and the increasing Chinese economic prowess. But the overriding motivation for integration was not just dictated by external conditions. Equally, circumstances internal to the region brought the regional economies to a realisation of the inevitable. ASEAN countries saddled by debt crises during the '80s desperately needed export earnings to sustain their economy. Upon the advice of the International Monetary Fund, it embarked on a series of structural adjustments to facilitate export production mainly along the lines of trade liberalisation (Bowles, 2002). To coordinate this regional effort, ASEAN leaders signed the Framework of Agreement on Enhancing ASEAN Economic Cooperation that became the basis of the AFTA in 1993.

Primarily, AFTA was conceived to "increase ASEAN's competitive edge as a production base geared to the world market" (Centre for International Economics). Given the crises that beset the region, initial steps have to be taken to revitalise the ASEAN market and regain investment confidence in the region. The key aspect of this project is the enhancement of efficiency and competitiveness of vital sectors particularly the manufacturing sector. This has driven ASEAN countries beginning in the early part of the '90s to introduce trade liberalisation in their respective economies for the purpose of reducing and eventually eliminating tariff and non-tariff measures. It is expected that by doing so, intra-regional trade will increase thereby contributing to the expansion of regional markets and growth of regional industries. The realisation of AFTA within the timeframe set by ASEAN is considerably dependent on the implementation of Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT). Through the CEPT, reduction of protective measures as envisioned by the AFTA will be applied on various sectors. For several years now, protectionist measures are on a decline albeit unevenly, among the original members of ASEAN (Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Brunei and Singapore) and the new ones (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam). Following the timeframe set by ASEAN, the original members were expected to remove their import duties in 2010 while the new members would have to do so by 2015 (Dennis and Yusof, 2003:4). To this scheme, concerns are raised by the less developed members as they are wary of its implications on their domestic industries. Implementing tariff reduction in a pace that would not allow domestic producers

to catch up and become as competitive as their more developed counterparts spells disaster to them (Dennis and Yusof, 2003:4).

Initiatives have not been exclusively state-centric and intergovernmental, however. To a great extent, 'regionalisation' involves non-state actors as much as, or perhaps even more than, governments. Civil society groups and academics continue to foster integration efforts through Track II activities. In Thailand for example, CSOs have been very active in this area, funding interaction among peoples in Southeast Asia through conferences such as 'Progress and Learning towards ASEAN' held in December 2010 and several others.

What seems to be resonant in ASEAN initiatives on integration and governance are its reliance on an overly state-centric modality of regional engagement. Situated vis-à-vis the literature on governance, it falls short of recognised standards on good governance. In addition, ASEAN's loose forms of institutional arrangements, perhaps tied with the age-old practices of *mufakat* and *musyawarah* may have impeded the organisation's development to more advanced forms of regimes. At this time, it must be said that it is but inevitable that the EU experience would have to be mentioned. Following the logic of this argument, perhaps it may be worth studying the path that EU took not exactly to copy it, since Europe has its own politico-economic and cultural peculiarities, but to learn from the lessons that the experience offers. What is useful however, which has a direct impact on ASEAN regional governance is the fact that EU is essentially a rules-based regime with clear policies penalising any forms of defection. This modality creates EU institutions, whether functional, issue-based, or otherwise, that are formal and functioning according to their projected objectives.

Conclusions: Challenges and Prospects of ASEAN Regional Governance

Southeast Asian states' intra-regional engagement has been going slowly but surely in the past four decades. The fact that there has not been any war between member states since ASEAN's founding in 1967 is heralded as a major achievement (Tapia, 2009:63). This is anchored on their reliance on consensus and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs. This observation is telling of the organisation's past philosophy. It may have worked for the past forty years, but major developments such as globalisation are pushing ASEAN to look and assess its past practices. If ASEAN wishes to confront issues concerning its relevance, it might do well to re-examine some of its fundamental values: its reliance on the 'ASEAN Way' as the basis of the engagement of member-states with each other (Tapia, 2009:63-64). Indeed, it has been suggested that so-called 'ASEAN Way' has been more of a hindrance in the security community building project (Kim, 2007:17-18).

Although norms may continue to be the basis of regional cohesion and cooperation, relying on them should lead ASEAN to more advanced forms of regional governance. For example, the passage of the ASEAN Charter after more than four decades of the organisation signals a departure, no matter how minor it is, from the age old practice of consensus-building to adopting more formal mechanisms. It is here that a multi-governance approach becomes even more

relevant. Criticisms that this approach exclusively applies to more advanced regional organisations such as the EU may be negated by the fact that ASEAN, consciously or not, is now laying the basis for implementing a multi-level governance approach.

Projects such as the ARF and the APSC, whether anchored in the terms set forth by Acharya (2001) or otherwise, have been indicative of a form of governance regime facilitated by central governments. While still wanting in complete success, state-centric initiatives such as these must continue as a major part in the multi-level governance schema that focuses on the region's *politico-administrative* dimension. Economic integration has been contributing to the *socio-functional* dimension, propelled as it is, not only by state authorities but also by market forces and other non-state actors. As correctly pointed out by So (2008:12) *issue* indeed is the most neglected area in the regional governance project. Ironically, this area may dictate the most fundamental concern that the Southeast Asian region must confront in the days to come. Issues such as "cross-border terrorist activities, trans-national crimes, maritime issues, environmental degradation affecting two or more countries (e.g. haze), spread of diseases (e.g. SARS)" (Tapia, 2009:64), including natural calamities such as earthquakes or tsunamis do not recognise state boundaries. As such, a regional framework that addresses these issues must be in place. Furthermore, the framework need not involve central government authorities alone but those coming from sub-national units as well. More importantly, a vibrant civil society that plays the role of both 'fiscaliser' and enabler will do a lot of good in the fostering of a regional governance framework.

Prescriptions coming from The White Paper on European Governance (2001) find resonance in the Southeast Asian context. The White Paper invokes the need to apply five principles of good governance to different levels of government - global, national, regional and local, adding national, regional and local dimensions. These principles are as follows:

(1) Openness: To be able to articulate the projects of ASEAN by assuming an inclusive and participatory (and therefore multi-level) approach to the organisation's activities;

(2) Participation: Related to the first, ASEAN regional governance will only work if there is a broad base of support from civil society groups;

(3) Accountability: To foster democratisation and respect for human rights, allowing for more government responsibility to the people;

(4) Effectiveness: ASEAN policies must be effective and timely in order to meet its objectives;

(5) Coherence: Policies and actions must be coherent and implied with a consistent approach within a complex system.

Apart from the good governance discourse, ASEAN must strengthen institutions. However, these cannot simply be superimposed upon them. The region's reliance on norms would still be useful in fostering the regionalism discourse and praxis. Nonetheless, these norms would have to be re-examined as the organisation faces new forms of challenges that are non-traditional in nature. Loose forms of institutions operating under flexible, less formal, and non-binding

mechanisms may render ASEAN useless and obsolete. This brand of 'new regionalism' requires stronger institutions with clear-cut policies penalising non-compliance. Prescriptions such as these are of course easier said than done. Setting up the proper organisational and institutional infrastructure for regional governance necessitates a multi-sectoral, indeed multi-governance approach. The top to bottom approach is anachronistic and may stunt ASEAN's opportunity for a more advanced level of regional governance. Although propelled by central governments, sub-national, inter-country dialogues and interaction are both necessary and desirable. Cross-country solidarity between and among civil society groups lend legitimacy to the process by adopting a participatory framework. By doing these, ASEAN is advancing regional cooperation hand in hand with the lofty goals of promoting human rights. Cross-country, multi-level interaction between and among governments and people is the path that ASEAN must traverse if it has any intentions of taking the goals of regional governance seriously.

Endnotes

[1]Paper presented at the International Conference on Southeast Asia 2011, 6-7 December 2011, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

[2]While it is true that the methodology that freedomhouse.org uses is subject to questions and controversies, the same is being used in this paper for purposes of comparative presentation.

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