Unraveling the Logic of ASEAN’s Decision-Making: Theoretical Analysis and Case Examination

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Abstract: Throughout its history the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has based decisions on consensus and consultation, producing a loosely defined, weak regional organization. The results of non-binding and watered-down resolutions make substantial progress for ASEAN difficult. This article explores the logic of ASEAN’s decision-making by applying rational choice theory. It argues that the characteristics of ASEAN’s decision-making mechanism allow member states to base their actions on how individual nations perceive their interests to be best served by group resolutions. By constructing a series of hypotheses to pattern ASEAN’s decision-making, this article examines four cases and how players resolved each. The findings suggest that the constraints of group decision-making and divergent interests between member states play a major role in shaping the effectiveness of resolutions.

Key words: ASEAN, decision-making process, rational choice theory, game theory

Introduction

In August 2007, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) celebrated its 40th anniversary and in November 2007 at the 13th summit in Singapore, the heads of member states signed the historic ASEAN Charter. The Charter not only stipulated the commitments of participating states to democracy, good governance, rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedom (ASEAN Secretariat 2007), but also declared its intent to establish the ASEAN Community by 2015. Sadly, this remarkable achievement was overshadowed by worldwide attention to Myanmar’s bloody crackdown on monk-led peaceful protests that fall. Myanmar’s suppression of democracy not only invoked global condemnations, but also embarrassed ASEAN. Myanmar’s human rights violations ironically contrast with the commitment to democracy in ASEAN’s Charter, revealing a significant gap between the ideal of what the organization plans to achieve in the future and its present reality.

ASEAN’s practices and achievements have long diverged, and scholars of the field have repeatedly debated whether the organization is a powerful international actor with real political clout or merely a weak intergovernmental organization with only ostensible influence (Eaton and Stubbs 2006; He 2006). Different assessments of ASEAN seem to derive from various analytical
approaches taken by scholars. Specifically, three perspectives of neo-liberalism, constructivism, and neo-realism have been used in the literature to analyze ASEAN (Simon 2008). Generally, neo-liberalism (or liberal-institutionalism) and constructivism hold a positive evaluation on ASEAN’s performance, but neo-realism maintains a skeptical view. The core of this debate stems not only from disparate perspectives, conceptual definitions, and measuring criteria used by researchers, but also from various issues examined by scholars with unequal depths, scopes and time-spans. Thus, investigating ASEAN becomes similar to the proverbial measurement of an elephant by several blind men, because scholars not only use different tools, but also measure different portions of the elephant. Similarly, scholars rarely agree on what the Association actually is.

The aforementioned three approaches have dissimilar views on ASEAN in terms of its essence, internal capacity, and efficacy of maintaining regional peace and stability. Neo-liberals argue that as an evolving multilateral institution, it facilitates cooperation among Southeast Asian nations by reducing transaction costs and uncertainty, as well as by enhancing credibility of commitments. ASEAN is capable of using various multilateral frameworks (e.g., the ASEAN Regional Forum, ARF, and the East Asian Community, EAC) and peaceful norm-binding agreements (e.g., the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, TAC) to engage extra-regional powers (e.g., China) to ensure regional peace and stability.

By focusing on ideational elements (e.g., ideas, norms, and identity), constructivists contend that ASEAN is an emerging “nascent security community” or “de facto” security community (Acharya 1991; 1998; 2001; Chin 2007; Kuhonta 2006). According to constructivists’ perspectives, ASEAN’s practices have not only facilitated socialization among its member states, but also promoted identity-building. Constructivists argue that the efficacy of ASEAN in maintaining regional peace lies in its capacity of socializing great powers and eliciting their acceptance of conflict-avoiding norms that the Association prescribes (Acharya 2004; Cruz de Castro 2000; Katsumata 2006; Severino 2007).

The third perspective of neo-realism points out that ASEAN is a weak and loose regional organization composed of small and middle-sized states. Neo-realists argue that the organization is, at best, merely an instrument for serving the interests of individual states (Narine 2002). By placing emphasis on the balance of power, neo-realists contend that regional stability in Southeast Asia relies more on the distribution of military capability among great powers than on
the ASEAN institutional arrangement (Alagappa 2003; Emmers 2003; Ikenberry and Tsuchiyama 2002; Leifer 1986; 1996). The Association’s “consensus-driven, conflict-avoidance formula leads itself increasingly to more powerful actors outside the region shaping ASEAN’s destiny” (Jones and Smith 2007, p.150).

The three approaches derive contradictory assessments about the efficacy of ASEAN because they evaluate the organization with different analytical lenses. Neo-liberals make a convincing argument that ASEAN has become more institutionalized. Nevertheless, the actual achievement of those functional, cooperative programs remains questionable. Constructivists argue that ASEAN nations have generated a certain measure of shared identity and that institutional norms have been accepted by great powers. However, contentions that a shared identity eliminated military clashes between member states die quickly in light of 2008 border conflicts between Thailand and Cambodia.¹ What constructivists praise as the acceptance of ASEAN norms by great powers may be overrated given that those powers had already embraced similar principles in their own countries.² Finally, while neo-realists correctly point to ASEAN’s institutional frailty and its marginal role in East Asian security, their bias in overemphasizing the importance of tangible power (e.g., military capability) prevents them from appreciating the pivotal role played by the Association in East Asian issue-framing and confidence-building (Ball and Acharya 1999; Stubbs 2002; Yuzawa 2006).

To summarize, the three perspectives have different strengths and weaknesses. Despite a wide application of these approaches in ASEAN studies, no single perspective provides a satisfactory explanation of why the Association has made remarkable progress in some areas, while not facilitating change in others. The primary goal of this article is to illustrate these variations by unraveling the logic of ASEAN’s decision-making with an application of the rational choice approach. By focusing on decision-making, I argue that the convergence or divergence of interests among ASEAN states is a key factor in determining whether ASEAN can either take collective action or not. In this regard the rational choice approach, with its ability to generate logical, consistent and systematic explanations, provides a useful framework to investigate ASEAN. Furthermore, since the rational choice approach is rarely used in Southeast Asian studies,³ this approach will generate new findings and inspire different directions of research distinct from the preceding three perspectives. The application of the rational choice approach aims to achieve three goals: 1) to specify the interests of individual ASEAN states, 2)
to spell out the logic of ASEAN’s decision-making, and 3) to provide explanations for behaviors of member states by linking the preceding two factors.

The following analysis consists of four sections. The first section illustrates the features of ASEAN’s decision-making, the disparate interests among member states, and hypotheses about behaviors of ASEAN states based on rational choice theory. The second section introduces some simple game theoretical models to formulate possible patterns and outcomes of ASEAN’s decision-making. The third section examines the proposed hypotheses and models with four case studies. The concluding section sums up findings and directions for future research.

ASEAN’s Decision-Making and the Application of Rational Choice Approach

1) ASEAN Way and ASEAN Decision-Making

What makes the Association of Southeast Asian Nations a long-lasting regional organization is the way member nations implement the organization’s principles. These principles, which directly link to ASEAN’s decision-making process, lead its members, despite their divergent interests, to unite as one organization and generate a collective diplomatic position.

The principles guiding the Association’s operations are the so-called ASEAN Way. The ASEAN Way refers to applications of the following three elements: norms, forms of communication, and decision-making methods. The combination of these elements has kept the organization as loosely institutionalized as possible, preventing union prerogative from overriding the sovereignty of individual states (Leifer 1999). Nevertheless, critics argue that the ASEAN Way leads the union to become just an “intergovernmental organization,” due to the limited power and resources of the ASEAN Secretariat (Simon 2008).

Despite inherent weaknesses, the ASEAN Way maintains critical guidelines in how member states interact. In terms of norms, the ASEAN Way enshrines principles of sovereign equality, non-interference, and non-use of force. Among these norms, sovereign equality is ranked highest, revealing that from the onset, the original member states intended to protect each state’s sovereignty and never wanted ASEAN to become a supra-national entity (Simon 2008). The acceptance of sovereign equality leads states to embrace the principle of non-interference, which is closely linked to the background and timing of ASEAN’s formation. It is no coincidence that ASEAN was established in 1967, in the aftermath of the confrontation (konfrontasi) between...
Indonesia and Malaysia during the early 1960s. Both intra-regional tensions and interventions by extra-regional great powers made ASEAN states prioritize sovereign independence as its way of maintaining national survival.

Against this backdrop, the original goal of ASEAN was, internally, to manage intra-regional conflicts between member states, and, externally, to use the collective weight of ASEAN to protect each state’s sovereignty and integrity of territory from external intervention. These norms have set common goals and basic rules for member states to pursue and by which they must abide. For instance, the norm of non-interference becomes a legitimate reason for states to preclude domestic issues from being discussed in formal meetings, although the absolute practices of this norm have fluctuated over time (Kao 2000; Katanyuu 2006).

The second element of the ASEAN Way, forms of communication, emphasizes the use of both informal and conventional communications between officials of states to improve a mutual understanding and facilitate confidence-building between members. In ASEAN’s first two decades, its highest level meeting remained at the Foreign Minister level. Before long, the ASEAN Economic Minister meeting (AEM) was initiated to deal with the issues of regional economic cooperation. Not until the fifth summit in Bangkok in 1995, did ASEAN decide to hold the conference annually. Now, the Association holds an annual summit and more than 400 meetings per year (Chin 2007). For constructivists, these meetings are an important process of socialization, facilitating the formation of a shared ASEAN identity among member states. Acharya argues that one aspect of the Way is a “process of identity building which relies on conventional modern principles of interstate relations as well as traditional and culture-specific modes of socialization and decision-making” prevalent in Southeast Asia (2001, p.28). This feature has made contacts between governmental elites from different states possible, which helps nurture friendship between the top officials and, therefore, reduces the chance of misunderstanding.

The third element of the ASEAN Way is the decision-making methods of ASEAN. ASEAN states reach a collective decision by consensus and consultation, which not only has been ASEAN’s tradition, but also has been prescribed in the ASEAN Charter (ASEAN Secretariat 2007). Narine argues, “[t]he ASEAN way involves the use of extensive consultation and consensus-building to develop intramural solidarity…” (1997, p.965). Using consultation and consensus as a method of decision-making is due to the constraints of ASEAN norms. This
method can prevent direct conflict caused by a divided voting result among members, ensuring that the voices of small and weak states are heard. Both advantages help maintain ASEAN’s harmony and solidarity.

Another important aspect of decision-making is the practice of *flexible consensus* (Acharya 1999). First, this practice implies that an ASEAN decision does not require a unanimous agreement among states for the organization to maintain unity, as long as no member state openly voices an objection. Second, “the dissenting state does not have to comply with the collective decision in the process of implementation” (Kawasaki 2006, p.223). As Narine (1997) points out, if ASEAN states cannot obtain an agreement on a certain policy, they are allowed to go different ways. Third, the application of “flexible consensus” is mostly applied to economic decisions or on less politically sensitive issues. Although the flexible consensus allows states to agree to disagree, ASEAN still strives to smooth out the differences among member states by creating an ambiguous language to maintain the illusion of solidarity. Any decision made in the name of ASEAN shall not undermine the interests of any member (Chin 2007).

Thus, ASEAN is like an instrument for its members to foster their individual interests. Member states rarely allow ASEAN to constrain their self-interested behaviors (Narine 2002). The existence of ASEAN is to serve the interests of member states, but member states are not expected to sacrifice their individual interests in exchange for the collective interests of ASEAN. Additionally, although flexible consensus allows for easier decision making for the Association, these collective resolutions are not effective since they are not legally binding on the individual dissenting states.

**2) Divergent Interests among ASEAN States**

Over the past decades, the differences among ASEAN states have significantly increased. Four prominent fault lines among ASEAN states deserve attention.

1) The divide between the original members and the new members. From 1995 to 1999, ASEAN accepted Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (CLMV) as new members. By acceding to the entries of new members, the original ASEAN states not only hoped to boost their collective influence on the global stage, but also to utilize their institutional framework to socialize new members and improve regional stability. Hence, the original members tended to have a more ambitious blueprint for the enlarged ASEAN. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the new members, ASEAN serves as a mechanism of maintaining political status quo in the region (Emmers 2005).
For them, the principle of non-interference and ASEAN norms (e.g., non-use of force) are attractive since these normative restrictions imply that their domestic affairs cannot be intervened by other members. Territorial disputes among ASEAN states can be contained and, therefore, are less likely to escalate into military conflicts. For weak and small states, like Laos and Cambodia, ASEAN membership creates a measure of protection against Vietnam encroaching on their territory (Simon 2008). Economically, new members hoped that joining ASEAN could help them obtain capitals, technologies, and access to foreign markets. Thus, these two groups of states have disparate visions about the enlarged ASEAN. The original members tend to have a bolder prospect of the future Association than the newer members. As a result, the cleavage between states developed, with the former maintaining high hopes of the future ASEAN and the latter expecting nothing more from the Association than a means of maintaining the status quo.

2) The divide between pro-democracy states and authoritarian states. On the political spectrum, ASEAN states range from developing democracies (e.g., Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand), soft-authoritarian regimes (e.g., Singapore and Malaysia), a transitional state (Cambodia), to an authoritarian regime (Vietnam) and a military dictatorship (Myanmar). In recent years, on the democracy and human rights issues, the political divide has become conspicuous in ASEAN. Indonesia’s successful democratization in the past decade has significantly boosted voices from the pro-democracy states, including Thailand and the Philippines. In contrast, Malaysia, Singapore, and the CLMV countries form an opposite front and keep a conservative position on these issues. The divide between these two groups later became conspicuous on the issue of modifying the principle of non-interference.

3) The divide between advocates who support the acceleration of economic integration and economic nationalists who oppose it. This divide existed among the original members and continued after the enlargement of ASEAN. Economically advanced states, like Singapore and Thailand, are more eager to promote regional economic integration and speed up free trade. By contrast, economic nationalist states, like Malaysia and Indonesia, hold a more reserved attitude on the pace and scope of economic integration. Although the new members (CLMV) are subjected to different rules in the framework of ASEAN economic integration, these members are generally more conservative due to their economic weaknesses.

4) The divide on the China policy and the South China Sea disputes. Among ASEAN’s external relationships, the policy toward China and the South China Sea disputes turned out to be two
critical issues that not only challenged the cohesion of ASEAN, but also tested the Association’s ability to resolve internal discords. Since not all ASEAN members are disputants on the South China Sea issue, it has been extremely difficult for the Association to take a collective stance toward China. This divide between claimants who call for assertive collective action to resist China’s growing military influence, and non-disputants who want to facilitate good relationship with China for economic interests, not only reveals disparate security interests among ASEAN states, but also discloses the fact that the Association has failed to generate a collective security policy that prioritizes collective security interests over interests of individual states.

(3) Application of Rational Choice Approach and Assumptions of ASEAN States’ Behaviors

Rational choice approach adopts a simple assumption: “actors have goals and make choices in order to achieve these goals” (Morton 1999, p.75). Actors have multiple, competing interests and preferences between these interests. Actors make decisions based on their preference ordering, aiming to maximize their overall payout. I argue that rational choice approach provides an effective instrument in analyzing and understanding the behaviors of states. Since states’ decisions have political effects and consequences, rarely will political leaders make an irrational decision that leads to political suicide. Although theorists of the rational choice do not claim that every political leader actually makes sophisticated calculations before making each decision, as game theoretical models illustrate, advocates of this approach assume that “individuals behave as if they made the calculations” (Morton 1999, p.77).

Two reasons explain why rational choice approach is appropriate for analyzing ASEAN’s decision-making: First, the institutional design of ASEAN and its decision-making mechanism are essentially the results of rational calculation. The rules and tacit understandings underpinning the operations of ASEAN are stemmed from rational calculations. For instance, the emphasis on not discussing members’ bilateral disputes in the agenda reflects that the Association does not have the capacity to resolve these disputes. The establishment of the preceding rule also avoids its internal discord from sabotaging the solidarity of ASEAN toward external powers. Second, the characteristics of the interactions of national interests between ASEAN and its member states are suitable for rational choice analysis. As noted, the interests of states are diverse in many aspects and the union does not require members to sacrifice individual national interests for the sake of collective interests. How those various interests collide and interact among those members and eventually merge and become the collective stance of ASEAN remains an unsolved
puzzle. The strengths of the rational choice theory on analyzing the convergence of disparate interests make itself a promising approach to unravel the logic of ASEAN decision-making.

Before addressing the hypotheses, it is important to indicate some prerequisite propositions (PreProp) that specify the rules underpinning the behaviors of ASEAN states:

**PreProp 1.** The primary goal of political leaders is their political survival (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003).

**PreProp 2.** Political decisions are based on self-interested calculations by political leaders. This calculation is usually affected by their perception and understanding of national interests.

**PreProp 3.** A state joins a group of states (i.e., ASEAN) for the sake of its national interests.

**PreProp 4.** A state joins a group, so it can share the collective interests.

**PreProp 5.** Once joining a group, it is better for a state to stay in, if the cost-benefit calculation (i.e., the gains minus the cost of joining) is greater than the consequences of leaving (i.e., the opportunity cost of not being in a group).

Once a state joins a group, there are some general in-group patterns (InGrp) regarding the behaviors of a state and dynamics of the whole.

**InGrp 1.** Each state seeks to satisfy its interests via a group, if it considers a union as a more efficient means to achieve its goal via collective influence.

**InGrp 2.** The decision-making mechanism of a group affects how a state takes action to pursue its interests. To achieve its goal, the state may either go via a group or decide to choose outside alternatives.

**InGrp 3.** A state prioritizes its national interests over collective interests, unless there is a legal or effectively normative binding preventing it from doing so.

**InGrp 4.** When a state cannot satisfy its interests within a group, it will seek alternatives outside the union, if doing so is not prohibited by preceding constraints.

**InGrp 5.** Within a group, these states that are similar-minded or share more common interests tend to form a coalition to defend their position and pursue common interests.

The above general patterns pave the way for modeling an ASEAN decision-making mechanism. The behaviors of states are constrained by the rules of game in a group and by the interacting dynamics of a group. Based on the preceding discussion, I propose the following hypotheses concerning how ASEAN states behave within a group and outside the group:

**H1:** If a proposal possesses prevailing common interests over each member state's individual
interests, it is likely to become the decision of ASEAN consensus.  
H2: To cover divergent interests (or positions) among member states, the decision made by  
ASEAN tends to be a diluted version of the original proposal.  
H3: If the divergence among members is hard to bridge, the member states who are dissatisfied  
with the outcome of ASEAN consensus (either a diluted decision or no decision at all) will seek  
alternatives.  
H4: On certain issues concerning extra-regional players, if a member state perceives that the  
benefits it can get by supporting the collective decision are less than the benefits it may gain  
from outside players by adopting opposition against ASEAN’s collective decision, the state will  
prefer to obstruct the decision rather than to support it.  
H5: If a member state accepts or does not openly oppose the ASEAN decision which poses a  
negative impact on itself, it is because that decision has loopholes for the dissenting state to  
escape from implementing it.  

The first hypothesis indicates the best scenario of ASEAN’s decision-making, when  
different interests among member states are negligible and can be overcome by collective  
interests. The second hypothesis suggests that decisions tend to reduce the level of controversy in  
order to gloss over various interests of each member state. The third hypothesis, corresponding to  
PreProp 3 and InGrp 3 and 4, suggests that a state prioritizes its interests over collective interests  
of a group. The fourth hypothesis points to the possibility that a member state may have  
incentives to collude with outside players by opposing the group decision in order to maximize  
its own interests. The fifth hypothesis proposes the possible rationale of why a state accepts a  
group decision that may be detrimental to itself.  

**Modeling of ASEAN Consensus-Seeking**  
To explore the mechanism of consensus-seeking, I assume that different ASEAN states have  
divergent interests and different preferences on the same issue. A proposal (or issue) enters the  
decision-making process (i.e., enters a game) when a member raises it. I adopt a simple two-  
player game to model the interactions of ASEAN states by assuming that ASEAN states are  
likely to become two groups of states holding different views on one particular issue. Since  
ASEAN adopts consensus as its decision-making rule, any decision has to be accepted by both  
groups (or at least not be publicly opposed by one group, which I count as an implicit assent)
before becoming a formal decision. The structure of consensus-seeking is similar to a cooperation game, since both sides need approval from the other. However, ASEAN’s consensus-seeking does not have Prisoner’s Dilemma (PD), as Figure 1, since the condition of the PD that one player is unaware of the other’s interests and strategy does not exist. Moreover, in this game each player prefers to reject (defect) than to approve (cooperate) a proposal. If so, no state will have an incentive to raise a proposal/issue at the onset.

Figure 1. Intra-ASEAN Game (Deadlock)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Approve</th>
<th>Reject</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>2, 2</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>4, 1</td>
<td>3, 3*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the asterisk (*) indicates the equilibrium of the game.

In other words, if the proposal does not have support by at least one state, that proposal will never enter the agenda in the first place. This means that at least one player must approve the proposal for it to enter ASEAN’s decision-making process. Hence, the following conditions should be held: 1) each game represents the showdown of approval or rejection by two groups on one particular proposal/issue; 2) only the proposal obtaining the approvals from two groups can become ASEAN consensus; 3) it is a game of complete information because ASEAN emphasizes frequent consultation and each player has chances to know the counterpart’s payoffs and strategies. Based on various payoff structures, the following games specify different patterns of ASEAN’s consensus-reaching.

Figure 2. Intra-ASEAN Game (Stag Hunt)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>4, 4*</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>3, 1</td>
<td>2, 2*</td>
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</table>

Note: the asterisk (*) indicates the equilibrium of the game.
Figure 2 is the game of Stag Hunt. In this game, each group’s preference ordering is mutual cooperation \((A_{\text{approve}}, B_{\text{approve}})\) > unilateral defection \((A_{\text{reject}}, B_{\text{approve}})\) > mutual defection \((A_{\text{reject}}, B_{\text{reject}})\) > unilateral cooperation \((A_{\text{approve}}, B_{\text{reject}})\). There is no dominant strategy for each group. Since it is a game of complete information, both groups will choose to approve the issue in order to maximize their payoffs (Oye 1985). This implies that for maximizing the payoffs, two groups decide to hunt stag together, instead of chasing rabbits, respectively. Figure 3 is a variation of Stag Hunt. For both groups, the strategy of approving a proposal is strictly dominant, which further increases the odds of the proposal to become ASEAN consensus.

Figure 3. Intra-ASEAN Game (Hybrid Chicken-Stag Hunt)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>4, 4*</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>3, 2</td>
<td>1, 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the asterisk (*) indicates the equilibrium of the game.

However, it is possible that one group strongly prefers to approve the proposal, but the other group is strongly opposed to it. Figure 4 illustrates this situation. Group A has a strictly dominant strategy to approve the proposal, but Group B has a strictly dominant strategy to reject it. Under this situation, consensus cannot be reached.

Figure 4. Intra-ASEAN Game (Asymmetric Trade)

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<th>Approve</th>
<th>Reject</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>4, 2</td>
<td>2, 4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>3, 1</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the asterisk (*) indicates the equilibrium of the game.

Figure 5 is a variation of Stag Hunt. In this game, the condition of reaching consensus is mutual cooperation \((A_{\text{approve}}, B_{\text{approve}})\). Nevertheless, since Groups A and B have different preferences on one issue, the outcome of a mutual acceptance cannot be achieved. Eventually,
two groups end up chasing rabbits, instead of hunting a stag.

**Figure 5. Intra-ASEAN Game (Chasing Rabbit)**

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<th>Approve</th>
<th>Reject</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>4, 2</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>1, 1</td>
<td>3, 4*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the asterisk (*) indicates the equilibrium of the game.

The above games suggest that the only condition to reach consensus relies on two groups prioritizing mutual cooperation (i.e., approval) over other options. However, the game of a sequential bargaining can lead to consensus even when two groups have different priorities. To illustrate, the game in Figure 5 is assumed to be the showdown of opinions by two groups regarding two proposals on one issue. The mutual cooperation ($A_{approve}$, $B_{approve}$) implies the approval to the original proposal, but mutual defection ($A_{reject}$, $B_{reject}$) indicates two meanings: a rejection of the original proposal and an approval of the alternative proposal.

In this game, Group B not only has a strictly dominant strategy of rejecting the original proposal, but also considers that it can be better off if both groups accept the alternative proposal by rejecting the original one. By contrast, Group A considers that it can maximize payoff if both groups accept the original proposal. Nonetheless, it is willing to accept the alternative proposal, since the payoff of the alternative proposal for Group A remains higher than that of no consensus. Hence, the final outcome will be mutually rejecting the original proposal in order to accept the alternative proposal. Under this iterated consensus-seeking process, the game becomes a sequential bargaining with complete information. Figure 6 is an extensive form of Figure 5 by taking the alternative proposal (i.e., counteroffer) into account. Assuming that Group A proposes the original proposal to Group B, then Group B either accepts the original proposal, or rejects it and offers an alternative proposal. Since consultation continues, Group B’s rejection is viewed as the precondition of its counteroffer. Then, Group A decides whether to accept Group B’s proposal or make a counteroffer. If Group A accepts Group B’s proposal, two groups reach an agreement. If not, Group A continues to make a counteroffer and this game continues.
Figure 6. Sequential Bargaining

Theoretically, this game can continue infinitely. Group A as an initiator will not expect a bigger payoff in Group B’s counteroffer (for A, p: 4 > q: 3). Group B must ask a better payoff in its counteroffer after rejecting Group A’s first proposal (for B, p: 2 < q: 4). In practice, this game cannot continue indefinitely, due to a considerable opportunity cost (Gardner 2003). During this process, Group A’s payoff gradually decreases. When Group B has a ceiling of minimum payoff and refuses to compromise, for reaching consensus, Group A may have to accede to Group B’s proposal. Ultimately, a compromised result may emerge during this sequential bargaining.

Based on the preceding discussions, the features of games and their implications are summarized in Table 1. It is important to note that although the formula of flexible consensus makes consensus easier to reach, the dissenting states retain three options to obstruct the decision they dislike. First, the dissenting states can openly oppose it, if they feel strongly disadvantaged on a certain issue/proposal. Second, they can prolong the bargaining process to pursue their desired outcome. Third, even under peer pressure in which the dissenting states cannot openly voice an objection, they can choose to default by not implementing the decision, since ASEAN decision is on a non-binding basis. To different extents, the voice of dissenting state(s) may appear in various types of games, as indicated in Table 1.
Table 1. Types of Games and Their Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of games</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Implication</th>
<th>Voice of dissenting state</th>
<th>Corresponding hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deadlock</td>
<td>Mutual defection</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stag Hunt</td>
<td>Mutual cooperation</td>
<td>Collective interests prevail</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>H1, H5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid Chicken-Stag Hunt</td>
<td>Mutual cooperation</td>
<td>Collective interests prevail</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>H1, H5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetrical Trade</td>
<td>Defection by one party</td>
<td>Individual interests prevail</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>H3, H4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasing Rabbit</td>
<td>Defection by one party</td>
<td>Individual interests prevail</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>H4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequential Bargaining</td>
<td>Compromised cooperation</td>
<td>Seeking the common ground</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>H2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the connections between games and hypotheses, the payoff structures of Stag Hunt and Hybrid Chicken-Stag Hunt facilitate states to agree on one issue, which accord with Hypothesis One. By contrast, the outcome of the Asymmetrical Trade game results in the scenarios of Hypotheses Three and Four. The dissenting states strongly opposing the original proposal are likely to seek alternatives, which fits the prediction of Hypothesis Three. By rejecting the proposal, the dissenting states may obtain a higher payoff as Hypothesis Four prescribes. Similarly, the game of Chasing Rabbit fits Hypothesis Four. Nevertheless, the outcome of sequential bargaining matches the prediction of Hypothesis Two because the dissenting states have higher interests in rejecting the first proposal. Hypothesis Five is related to the content of ASEAN’s decision. Although the outcome of ostensible cooperation may occur in the scenarios of Stag Hunt and Hybrid Chicken-Stag Hunt, the examination of this hypothesis requires an investigation on the substance of these decisions and the actual implementation of ASEAN states.

Case Examination and Analysis

Four cases are selected to examine the previous models and hypotheses, which respectively stand for four different aspects of ASEAN cooperation: economic, security, political, and internal issues. Three criteria are employed to select these cases: First, these cases possess an overall importance for ASEAN as a group. Second, these cases represent strategic significance for ASEAN’s internal interactions. Third, these cases serve as appropriate illustrations for the rational choice approach.
ASEAN Free Trade Area (Covered Period: 1991-1992)

Scenario: At the 4th ASEAN Summit in 1992, the heads of union states signed an agreement to establish the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) within fifteen years. Despite an unsuccessful record of economic cooperation in its history, ASEAN leaders reached a consensus in strengthening economic integration. During this decision-making process, it was widely recognized that the Thai Prime Minister Anand played an important role in promoting the idea of AFTA (Financial Times 1992; Stubbs 2004). Anand first raised this proposal in the 1991 ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, where he obtained support from most ASEAN leaders. As numerous studies indicate, concerns over the fierce economic competitions with China, Vietnam, and Eastern Europe, the trend of rising protectionism in developed countries, and the delay of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations, had forced ASEAN leaders to build a united front by establishing AFTA to deal with the preceding challenges (Bowles 1997; Ravenhill 1995; Stubbs 2004; Tongzon 2002).

Although ASEAN states may enjoy the collective interests of AFTA in terms of bargaining with extra-regional players, it does not mean that the economic benefits of AFTA will be equally distributed among union states (Park 1995). Considering the fact that ASEAN states are in different stages of economic development, the AFTA agreement, therefore, provides some flexibility for states to adjust. For instance, by stipulating “general exceptions,” the agreement allows states to take protective measures when necessary. Furthermore, the pace and the scope of items applied to tariff reduction are on a voluntary basis, hinging on individual states’ discretion. Nevertheless, these considerate designs actually undermine the effectiveness of AFTA. For example, intra-ASEAN trade has fluctuated around 20% of total ASEAN trade since the early 1990s, revealing that the goal of ASEAN economic integration has yet been achieved (Severino 2007). As a consequence, the states dissatisfied with AFTA have taken individual actions and signed free trade agreements with extra-regional countries.11

Analysis: The case of AFTA corresponds to the game of Hybrid Chicken-Stag Hunt and Hypotheses One and Five. First, the establishment of AFTA is motivated by the new challenges in the global economy. It is more effective for ASEAN states to unify together to handle economic challenges than to do otherwise. Hence, each state has a strictly dominant strategy to approve AFTA, corresponding to the structure of the Hybrid Chicken-Stag Hunt game and fits Hypothesis One. Nonetheless, although ASEAN states enjoy common interests from AFTA in...
terms of negotiating with extra-regional states, these collective advantages do not guarantee that AFTA can lead to an equal distribution of economic benefits among members, nor does it promise that AFTA can satisfy different economic demands and expectations of each state. To alleviate each state’s different concerns, AFTA offers flexibility and loopholes for member states to decide the extent of implementation, which makes the collective interests of AFTA become more appealing than the potential negative impacts of AFTA on each member. This explains why no ASEAN state openly opposes AFTA and fits the prediction of Hypothesis Five.

(2) The South China Sea Disputes (Covered Period: 1992-1995)\textsuperscript{12}

Scenario: The issue of the South China Sea disputes is not just the territorial disputes between ASEAN members, but also relates to outside players. Totally, five ASEAN states claim sovereignty of different but overlapping territory in this region. As a major outside claimant, China’s growing military capabilities and assertive actions in this contested region have been seen as an emerging threat by most ASEAN states. There were several small scale military conflicts between China and Vietnam in 1974, 1988, and 2007. China and the Philippines also had collisions in the disputed area in 1999.

ASEAN took its first collective action in the contested area by announcing the ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea (i.e., the Manila Declaration) in 1992, in response to China’s “Law on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone,” which delimited the South China Sea into its territory. The Declaration urged the claimants to “resolve all sovereignty and jurisdictional issues by peaceful means, without resort to force…to exercise restraint...” (ASEAN Secretariat 1992). Nevertheless, this declaration was a “watered-down version of what ASEAN had in mind” (Lee 1999, p.25). Originally, the Philippines intended to hold an international conference to resolve the South China Sea disputes.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, that proposal was not supported by most ASEAN states for fear that taking a tough position on China would trigger China’s retaliation on the Cambodian issue.\textsuperscript{14} Ultimately, ASEAN only issued a toothless declaration to respond to China’s legal claim in the South China Sea. Later, the 1995 Mischief Reef incident was another test that challenged ASEAN’s solidarity on the South China Sea disputes.\textsuperscript{15} This incident invoked the Philippine’s anxiety about China’s “creeping assertiveness” (Buszynski 2003; Storey 1999). In response, the Philippines not only called for other ASEAN states to support its stance on the South China Sea issue, but also intended to discuss this issue at the ASEAN Regional
Forum (ARF) Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in May 1995, which included China, Japan, and the United States. However, China has been strongly opposed to any of its territorial issues being discussed beyond bilateralism for fear of inducing intervention from other great powers (Buszynski 2003, p.352).

From ASEAN’s perspective, ARF-SOM would have provided a great opportunity to compel China to address the South China Sea issue at the multilateral meeting, and the Philippine proposal would have helped constrain China’s military aggression, if it had been accepted by all ASEAN states. Unfortunately, some ASEAN states, like Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia, were afraid of offending Beijing. They prioritized their individual relationships with China over the long-term interests of regional security (Buszynski 2003). Eventually, “senior officials of ASEAN members rejected a Philippine proposal to present a collective position on the Spratly issue, because of Chinese sensitivities” (Lee 1999, p.35). However, at the later ARF meeting held in Brunei in July 1995, China changed its previously adamant position on not discussing the Spratly issue at the ARF meeting (Kuik 2005). The ARF Chairman’s statement on August 1st 1995 “did touch on the South China Sea specifically for the first time in the ARF” (Lee 1999, p.36). Nevertheless, the two articles in the Chairman’s statement that mentioned the South China Sea were vague and hollow (ASEAN Secretariat 1995). In the end, no effective measure was taken at the ARF meeting to deter China’s military action.

Because of this disappointing result, some states were forced to reinforce military relationships with the U.S in order to balance China. The Philippines not only increased its military spending, but also signed a Visiting Force agreement with the U.S. in 1998 (Cruz de Castro 2007). Even Vietnam has increased its military exchanges with the U.S. Additionally, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei were eager to provide naval bases for the U.S. navy (Roy 2005; Storey 2007). The failure to generate a strong ASEAN front toward China on the South China Sea issue has led each ASEAN state to pursue its security separately.

**Analysis:** The above scenarios indicate that the 1992 Manila Declaration corresponds to the game of Sequential Bargaining and Hypothesis Two, but the failed attempt by the Philippines at the ARF-SOM in May 1995 corresponds to the game of Chasing Rabbit and Hypothesis Four. In the first case, although ASEAN reached a consensus, the 1992 declaration was a diluted version of the Philippine proposal and the compromised result of a sequential bargaining among member states. In this game, despite common concerns over China’s increasing military clout in the
region, ASEAN states bear different amounts of security interests on this issue. The shared
concerns but disparate strategic interests among ASEAN states explain why no state rejected the
diluted declaration and why a stronger action failed to take place. By contrast, the 1995 ARF-
SOM case reveals that some ASEAN states had strong incentives to oppose the Philippine
proposal in exchange for benefits from China. As a result, those dissenting states were forced to
seek other recourses for strengthening their security. This scenario fits what Hypotheses Three
and Four and the Chasing Rabbit game prescribe. Even after the ARF Chairman’s statement in
August 1995, ASEAN states did not relax their security concerns. Conversely, they fortified
defense capabilities in different ways. This implies that they also doubted how much actual
impact that non-binding statement could constrain China’s military actions.

(3) ASEAN Charter (Covered Period: 2007)

Scenario: The ASEAN Charter was proposed at the 2005 Foreign Minister meeting in Vietiane.
It aimed to revamp ASEAN from a loose intergovernmental organization to a rules-based regime.
The idea of the Charter stemmed from an Indonesian proposal in 2003. The substance of the
Charter was embodied by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG). After consultations among member
states at the 2007 ASEAN Summit meeting in Cebu, ASEAN leaders approved the final version
of the ASEAN Charter, which was revised from the original draft the EPG recommended. The
significance of the Charter lies in its commitments to democracy, good governance, the rule of
law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, although the principle of non-interference remains
unchanged (ASEAN Secretariat 2007). Additionally, the Charter has no clause specifying any
consequence or punishment for non-compliance, even though it does give the ASEAN Secretary-
General a responsibility to monitor the implementation of ASEAN’s decisions and compliance.
He is also asked to submit a report to the ASEAN Summit. Given that the ASEAN Summit is the
unit which makes the final decision, this monitoring mechanism is likely to be futile eventually
because the rule of consensus, prescribed in the Charter and adopted by the Summit, allows each
state to veto any detrimental decision (Simon 2008).

In short, the ASEAN Charter prescribes self-defeating goals: the maintenance of non-
interference principle and the commitments to democracy and human rights. The former
insistence allows non-democratic members to sign the Charter without feeling threatened; the
latter commitments satisfy the desires of newly democratic members for moving ASEAN toward
the universal values of human rights and democracy. States, like the Philippines and Indonesia, which insist that democracy and human rights be addressed by the Charter, distinguish themselves from the other states that prioritize the sovereign independence and non-interference principles. Ultimately, the views from both groups were adopted, although the Charter subordinates human rights issues to the principle of non-interference.

**Analysis:** The case of the ASEAN Charter reflects a significant ideological divergence in the Association. This cleavage comes from the reality that ASEAN is composed of states in different stages of political development. The democratic members, hoping to create a new image for ASEAN, strongly advocate the universal values of human rights and political freedom. For instance, Indonesia, aspiring to regain its leadership in ASEAN, has ardently embraced these values and promoted its recent democratization experiences to other countries (Chalermpalanupap 2008; Simon 2008). Nonetheless, since the majority of ASEAN states are non-democracies, they feel uncomfortable embracing these value-laden clauses in the Charter (Sukma 2008). As a result, the pro-democracy camp’s proactive proposal of relaxing the principle of non-interference was rejected, but its intent of addressing democracy and human rights were kept in the Charter. Hence, this case matches the Sequential Bargaining game and Hypothesis Two. On the other hand, since the Charter did not explicitly spell out the consequence of non-compliance, non-democracies felt safe to sign it without placing themselves in disadvantaged position in the future. This institutional loophole accords with the explanation of Hypothesis Five.

(4) Myanmar Issue (Covered Period: 2003-2008)

**Scenario:** Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997. Since then, Myanmar has been a thorny issue for two major reasons. First, Myanmar’s awful record in human rights and its suppression of democracy have resulted in much criticism on ASEAN from international society. Second, Myanmar’s domestic condition has invoked social and security concerns by its neighboring countries, especially Thailand. The Thai government has complained about the refugees, drugs, crimes, and illegal immigrants problems from its Myanmar border (Katanyuu 2006; McCarthy 2008; Simon 2008). For dealing with these cross-border issues, Thailand took the lead and advocated relaxing the principle of non-interference to engage Myanmar in 1998. However, this proposal was opposed by Myanmar and other members, except the Philippines (Katanyuu 2006;

In July 2003, Thailand proposed a “road map” to persuade the junta to move toward national reconciliation and democracy. Instead, Myanmar proposed a seven-point road map itself for its “disciplined democracy.” Nevertheless, the political purge of Myanmar’s Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt in October 2004, the continued house arrest of Suu Kyi, and lack of tangible progress in democratic reform deepened ASEAN’s concerns regarding the approaching Myanmar’s chairmanship in 2006. Furthermore, intensive pressures came from the U.S. and the EU threatening to boycott the ASEAN meetings if Myanmar took the chairmanship. As a result, some ASEAN states, like Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, vocally expressed concerns over Myanmar’s chairmanship and its lack of substantive progress in political reforms. Domestically, many of these countries also experienced debates over the Myanmar issue in their parliaments (Katanyuu 2006). Against this backdrop, ASEAN made clear to Myanmar that Myanmar’s chairmanship “could severely affect the organization’s international credibility” since the Association had argued that adopting an engagement policy toward Myanmar could lead to political reforms that sanctions could not (McCarthy 2008, p.923). In July 2005, Myanmar decided to “relinquish its turn to be the Chair of ASEAN in 2006” and ASEAN “express[ed] [its] sincere appreciation to…Myanmar for not allowing its national preoccupation to affect ASEAN’s solidarity and cohesiveness” (ASEAN Secretariat 2005). Ultimately, ASEAN successfully utilized “the collective pressure that compelled Burmese officials to forgo the chairmanship in July 2005” (Katanyuu 2006, p.839).

Afterward, ASEAN continued to express its discontent on Myanmar’s situation. At the 2005 ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, the Association publicly urged Myanmar to release political prisoners and accelerate democratic reform. In September 2007, in response to Myanmar’s crackdown on peaceful protests, a statement issued by Singapore as ASEAN Chair clearly expressed “their [Foreign Ministers] revulsion…over reports that the demonstrations in Myanmar are being suppressed by violent force…” (ASEAN Secretariat 2007). In July 2008, the
ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore issued a statement expressing their “deep disappointment that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s detention under house arrest had been extended by the Myanmar government” (ASEAN Secretariat 2008).

**Analysis:** The Myanmar issue poses a significant challenge for ASEAN to consider how to deal with a member who causes problems for other members and the Association, without violating the principle of non-interference. In this case, the non-interference principle was submitted to the intra-ASEAN and extra-ASEAN pressures that called for blocking Myanmar from the ASEAN chairmanship and releasing its political detainees. The ASEAN consensus on Myanmar can be attributed to each state’s calculation of its political reputation, economic interests, and the possible consequences of international responses, if ASEAN states fail to react appropriately on this issue (Katanyuu 2006). To alleviate the negative impact on ASEAN, all member states, except Myanmar, agreed to take a collective action on denouncing Myanmar for securing their individual national interests. Hence, this case matches the game of Hybrid Chicken-Stag Hunt and Hypothesis One. More importantly, ASEAN’s statements on Myanmar issue from 2003 to 2008 also reveal that these toothless statements have no significant impact on changing the junta’s behaviors, which corresponds to the explanation of Hypothesis Five.

Nevertheless, why did Myanmar fail to openly oppose ASEAN’s joint criticisms on itself?¹⁸ In this regard, while Hypothesis Five highlights the non-binding feature of the ASEAN resolution, Hypothesis Three that dissatisfied states may decide to pursue its own interests outside the group offers another possible explanation. Considering that China and India have enhanced their relationships with the junta in recent years, Myanmar does enjoy bilateral alternatives outside ASEAN (Katanyuu 2006; McCarthy 2008; Storey 2007). As ASEAN states turn their backs on Myanmar, the generals are fully aware of playing a China or India card to obtain the support it needs (Storey 2007). Given the nature of the regime and political survival of the junta (i.e., PreProp 1 and PreProp 2), it is possible that the generals may consider retreating to their traditional foreign policy position—neutrality or isolationism, if its ASEAN membership imperils the regime survival (McCarthy 2008). To conclude, I summarize the aforementioned relationships between the cases, hypotheses, game models, rationales, and similar cases in Table 2.
Table 2. Relationship between Cases, Hypotheses, Game Models, and Rationale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Applicable hypothesis</th>
<th>Applicable game models</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Similar cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFTA</td>
<td>H1, H5</td>
<td>Hybrid chicken-stag hunt</td>
<td>Collective economic interests prevail and individual interests are protected.</td>
<td>ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); East Asian Summit (EAS); China-ASEAN FTA; Japan-ASEAN economic FTA; TAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South China Sea disputes</td>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Sequential bargaining</td>
<td>Compromised security interests prevail.</td>
<td>ASEAN’s Regional Haze Action Plan; ASEAN Convention on Counter-terrorism (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H3, H4</td>
<td>Chasing rabbit</td>
<td>Individual interests from outside players prevail.</td>
<td>US-Philippine alliance; US-Singapore FTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN Charter</td>
<td>H2, H5</td>
<td>Sequential bargaining</td>
<td>Compromised results between the visionary group and the status quo group.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar issue</td>
<td>H1, H5, (H3)</td>
<td>Hybrid chicken-stag hunt</td>
<td>Collective and individual interests in abandoning Myanmar.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N/A refers to no similar case.

Conclusion

The assessment of ASEAN’s practices and accomplishments has been divergent and contradictory. By questioning why ASEAN at some points makes significant progress but at others is ineffective, I argue that the rational choice approach provides logical and consistent explanations to the variations of ASEAN’s decision-making. Through constructing a set of hypotheses and employing game theoretical models, I illustrate that the convergence or divergence of interests among ASEAN states is the key determinant in deciding whether ASEAN could reach consensus. The examination of four cases not only demonstrates the applicability of the proposed hypotheses in explaining the success and failure of ASEAN’s decisions, but also reveals the implicit dynamics of ASEAN’s decision-making and the self-interested behaviors of individual states.

Overall, this article contributes to the ASEAN study in three ways. First, from a methodological perspective, the application of rational choice approach provides a deductive way of generating a systematic interpretation to the group’s decisions and states’ behaviors. By focusing on the nexus between each state’s interests and the mechanism of the group, I propose logical inferences to elucidate the plausible outcomes of ASEAN’s decisions by calculating individual members’ preferences. Second, from a theoretical perspective, this article not only
distinguishes itself from extant studies with its rational choice interpretation to the dynamics of ASEAN’s decision-making, but also serves as a bridge to assess the credibility of different theoretical arguments. As the preceding analysis illustrated, while the AFTA case supports the assertion of neo-liberalism, the South China Sea disputes and the Myanmar case unveil the frailty of constructivism and suggest the preponderance of neo-realism.

Finally, from a policy perspective, the rational choice hypotheses and models in this article provide a solid ground for practitioners to comprehend, interpret, and conjecture the probability of ASEAN’s decision and the policy orientation of specific states on certain issues. As the analysis indicated, ASEAN is unlikely to reach consensus on highly-sensitive political and security issues. Even if it does, the implementation of that decision will be questionable. For example, it seems improbable for ASEAN to collectively take a strong diplomatic stance (e.g., either bandwagoning or balancing) toward China. Nor shall we have a high expectation that the ASEAN Charter will induce significant progress on human rights and democracy issues for all ASEAN states in the near future. However, it is likely to expect that some states’ behaviors may occasionally deviate from ASEAN’s collective interests for pursuing individual benefits. Hence, for ASEAN, the road to reach the destination of successful integration may continue to be long, devious, and bumpy. Without ASEAN leaders’ joint determination to effectively strengthen the implementation of the union’s decision and to alter its mechanism of decision-making, the success of the ASEAN Community will remain a visionary ideal rather than a reality.

Notes

1 This border dispute escalated in July 2008 after the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approved Cambodia’s application for the temple named a world heritage site. In October 2008, the confrontation became a military conflict. Two Cambodian soldiers were killed and both sides had several soldiers injured.
2 Many principles upheld by ASEAN, like the TAC, are similar to the Five Principles of Peace and Co-existence embraced by China. Additionally, many of those norms are explicitly documented in the UN Charter and international laws.
3 Only one exception is Kawasaki’s (2006) article on the ASEAN Regional Forum.
4 The ASEAN founding states include Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. These states were the original members of ASEAN in 1967.
5 The Philippines became democratic in 1986, Thailand in 1988, and Indonesia in 1999, although the stability of their democratic operations remain questionable.
6 In the Spratly Island, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, China, and Taiwan are disputants. In an area north, west and east of Natuna Islands, Vietnam, Indonesian, Malaysia, and China are disputants.
7 In the rational choice theory, preference is based on three basic assumptions: completeness, fixed preferences, and transitivity. See Gates and Humes’ discussion (1997, pp.8-9).
Despite the risk of over-simplification, I argue that the two-player game assumption is suitable for ASEAN. First, the player in this game refers to a group of state(s) holding a similar opinion on one issue. The number of states in each group is flexible. Second, a two-player game is likely to be a natural outcome for the group like ASEAN, since ultimately ASEAN states have to express either their support or objection on one issue. Finally, while not denying the utility of multi-player game, these complex strategic games are beyond the scope and length of this article.

The game of complete information means that each player knows who the other players are, these players’ strategies, and these players’ payoffs. See Gates and Humes (1997).

It is called bargaining consistency.


Although ASEAN and China signed the Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in 2002, it is not included in the article.

In the 1992 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM), the Philippine President Fidel Ramos pleaded that “a solution of the Spratly dispute could not be postponed any longer and that Manila would like to push for an international meeting to discuss the issues” (Lee 1999, p.25).

Since China had been a long-term supporter of the Khmer Rouge regime and deeply involved in the Cambodian conflict, ASEAN countries worried that offending China might affect its support of the Cambodian reconciliation process.

In February 1995, the Philippines found that the Chinese naval forces built blockhouses, flying the PRC flag, on the Mischief reef in the Spratly Islands, claimed by the Philippines (Leifer 1996, p.37).

EPG’s original version of the Charter was more progressive than the final document approved by ASEAN states (Simon 2008, p.274).

In 2005 the U.S. sent a signal to ASEAN that it might downgrade its relations with the organization if Myanmar takes the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN meeting (Storey 2007, p.16).

It is reported that Myanmar’s Foreign Minister was not present when the statement urging Myanmar to resume national reconciliation was read by ASEAN Chair Yeo at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in December 2005.

References


