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**No. 199**

**Do Stated Goals Matter?  
Regional Institutions in East Asia and  
the Dynamic of Unstated Goals**

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## ABSTRACT

Do stated goals matter for the agents of regional institutions in East Asia? This question arises from an empirical puzzle described by the endurance of extant institutions and instances of institutional creation *despite* a poor record of goal accomplishment in the region. This paper surveys the stated goals of East Asian institutions, assesses the quality of these goals in terms of their conceptualization and means-ends relationships, examines the record of goal accomplishment and employs the insights of sociological institutionalism to argue that regional multilateral institutions in East Asia, in varying degrees, approximate to “institutionalized organizations” which depend less on the efficient fulfillment of stated ends and more on the adoption of the rational myths of their environment for legitimacy and survival. Besides the existence of ambiguous goals, a rich historical experience of institutional isomorphism and the evidence of “decoupling”, these institutions are not rational organizations—despite their claims to “concrete actions” and “efficiency” in organizational discourse—because of the absence of discrete Weberian bureaucracies, which, in turn, makes them vicariously live off the organizational apparatus of national bureaucracies. The absence of a Weberian bureaucracy, then, forms the context in which national political and bureaucratic elites pursue a range of ‘unstated goals’ or those latent and unacknowledged goals whose formal recognition in stated organizational discourse would cause “organizational stress”. The paper hypothesizes that national elites use regional institutions for three unstated goals: *a)* for domestic power consolidation, *b)* gaining legitimacy via association with international normative structures and discourses, and *c)* for pursuing a range of realpolitik practices that emerge from their socialization in realpolitik ideology.

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# Do Stated Goals Matter? Regional Institutions in East Asia and the Dynamic of Unstated Goals

## Introduction

Do stated goals matter for the agents of regional institutions in East Asia?<sup>1</sup> This question, arrogated as central to this enquiry, may appear exaggerated for two reasons: first, it runs counter to the commonsensical and intuitive notion that stated goals undergird all forms of purposive individual and group actions; and second, it challenges the conceptualization of regional institutions and formal organizations as a *means* to accomplishing stated regional *ends*.

In other words, there is a certain absurdity in asking a question about the *obvious* significance of stated goals to pursue action. This is expected. The notion that organizations function according to their formal blueprints and the concomitant tendency to explain their behavior in terms of explicit function rather than latent ones, is rooted in a rational conception of organizations that can be traced to Weber's explanation for the modern emergence of bureaucracies as an efficient means to control expanding markets and facilitate the imperatives of state centralization (Weber, 1947). Organizations, thus, emerge as efficient instruments to manage complex and widening relational networks. Since the coordination they enable offers competitive advantage, organizations grow, and this theoretically explains the pullulation of organizations in most spheres of modern life, including, as examined in this paper, in contemporary international politics in the form of international and regional institutions with formal structures.

The emergence and expansion of regional institutions has been a particularly salient dynamic in the international politics of East Asia, especially in the post-Cold War period.<sup>2</sup> A rational conception of organizations—where stated goals undergird the possibility of purposive action and where organizations strive to efficiently accomplish stated ends—can explain the emergence of these institutions as a response to the

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<sup>1</sup> This first sentence betrays the location of agency in this study. The attribution of agency to actors within institutions is not motivated by a theoretical predisposition to rule out the possibility of the agency of institutions. The compelling work on International Organizations makes such an *a priori* position untenable. The argument here, and which is developed through this paper, is that institutions in the empirical context of East Asia cannot be treated as agents who are “corporate persons” with collective group intentionality and with the specific qualities that enable ‘actorness’ (Wendt, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> While ASEAN was founded much earlier in 1967, the other institutions studied here emerged in a post-Cold War context: the ARF in 1994, the APT in 1997 and the EAS in 2005.

necessity of coordinating an expanding network of boundary spanning exchanges heightened in the context of globalization, and as responses to mitigate strategic geopolitical uncertainty by enhancing dialogue, transparency and socialization among state actors. Notwithstanding the cognitive and causal validity of the ‘instrumental’ and ‘rational’ that inform the action of state actors, the attempt to understand regional institutions using rational-choice precepts runs into trouble in accounting for some of the more intriguing empirical puzzles that describe the contemporary status and purpose of East Asian regional institutions. The question of whether stated goals matter is rooted in an empirical puzzle described by the dynamism of institutional activity in the region, reflected by both the endurance of extant institutions and the instances of institutional creation in East Asia *despite* the empirically demonstrable inefficiency of regional institutions in accomplishing their stated goals. In other words, the explanatory power of rational institutionalism—in terms of the hypothesis and predictions that must follow from its behavioral assumptions of state actors prescribed by a rationalist ontology<sup>3</sup>—is complicated by two empirical trends: first, the lack of goal accomplishment that has been both persistent (temporally) and comprehensive (in terms of issue scope); and second, the paradoxical endurance of these institutions coupled with the surprising proposals for institutional creation where new arrangements touted as more effective alternatives have been introduced into an extant organizational field<sup>4</sup> even though they differ little from their predecessors in terms of institutional norms, goals and designs. Importantly, this paradox is legible as a *paradox* on the basis of rationalist tenets: how, one may ask, can inefficient organizations not only persist but also lay claims to more ambitious goals? And what explains the production of new and potentially inefficient alternatives? In short, for rational institutionalism, the persistence of East Asian regional institutions runs counter to the logic of “natural selection” that should have weeded out inefficient organizational forms, while the creation of new institutions

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<sup>3</sup> Hall and Taylor describe this ontology as one of actors possessing a fixed set of preferences, behaving instrumentally to maximize the attainment of preferences in a strategic manner, and doing so on the basis of extensive calculations. They also note how rational institutionalism views politics as a series of collective action problems and conceptualizes institutional creation as a product of voluntary agreement by relevant actors (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 944–46).

<sup>4</sup> DiMaggio and Powell define an organizational field as “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 148).

contradicts the logic of functionality and efficiency that are central to its theory of institutional genesis.<sup>5</sup>

If not rational choice institutionalism, what explains institutional inefficiency and endurance in the context of East Asia? This paper addresses these two aspects separately. In answering the first puzzle—why don't stated goals matter for East Asian institutions?—it employs the theoretical lens of sociological institutionalism, which emerged on the insight that the “engine for rationalization” in modern societies were no longer the competitive markets that had driven the growth of organizations that Weber had observed. Instead, organizations emerge in highly institutionalized contexts populated by “rational myths”, which, once institutionalized, possess “explosive organizing potential” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 47).

Once formed, organizations in the course of their evolution appropriate these myths of their institutional environment, grow isomorphic with existing models of legitimate organizations, and discard efficiency considerations to gain access to resources, enhance survival, and legitimacy. However, as generalizable norms, these myths may not efficiently attend to the unique needs of the environment in which the organization operates, and organizations struggle to reconcile the need for efficiency with the advantages of legitimacy and resources accrued by the ceremonial adoption of these myths. This reconciliation is effected by the decoupling between the organizations' formal structure and its day-to-day activities (ibid; March and Olsen, 1976), a disjuncture that is sustained by reducing inspection, monitoring, and by the inculcation of a “logic of confidence and good faith” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 357–58). Under these circumstances, an organization is no longer a rational instrument as may be hypothesized by rational institutionalism. Instead, it becomes an

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<sup>5</sup> There may be some degree of simplification, as there have been some attempts by rational choice theorists using game theoretic methods to incorporate culture and ideas to explain institutions. However, there are limits on how far rationalist analysis can go in explaining institution creation without resorting to the assumption of self-maximizing actors seeking instrumental gains. This is fundamentally evidenced by their unproblematic approach towards the concept of ‘information’, which, Johnston point out, is taken as obvious and uncontested by contractualists. He notes the profound difficulty in establishing “a criteria for the credibility of new information” (Johnston, 2008: 8), one that invokes the problem of infinite regress where each proof depends on an unending chain of proofs. The contractualist approach to information thus falls into the ancient trap of the highly radical strand of philosophical scepticism. For the problem of ‘infinite regress’ and the other modes of the skeptic Agrippa, see Williams, 2001.

institutionalized organization—one that reflects and parasitically survives on the institutional rules of its environment.<sup>6</sup>

This paper argues that these insights corroborate with 1) the decoupling that appears to have occurred in East Asian institutions between their formal structures and their day-to-day activities, a decoupling that is evidenced by the gap between their formal stated goals and their day-to-day capacities for accomplishing them, and 2) the isomorphism evidenced by the emulation of the European model that has occurred in their recent institutional life in the context of uncertainty and crisis.

While sociological institutionalism offers a theoretical basis for re-conceptualizing these institutions as “institutional organizations” rather than as rational organizations, it does not fully account for the complexities that describe the specific empirical case of East Asian institutions. These complexities are apparent as one seeks an answer to the second puzzle of the causes for the ongoing dynamism in institutional activity in the region, in terms of the endurance of current organizations as well as the creation of new institutions. Sociological institutionalism explains the emergence of new institutions as a product of the ever-growing rationalization of professions and organizational fields (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This structural explanation for institutional creation, however, does not adequately grasp the specificities of institutional creation in East Asia—both in organizational form as well as in terms of proposals. Here, this paper highlights the role of a different dynamic: it argues that in the absence of substantive and autonomous Weberian bureaucracies, Asian regional institutions have been driven by national bureaucracies and diplomatic and political elites who use regional institutions for three unstated goals: *a)* domestic power consolidation, *b)* for gaining legitimacy via association with international normative structures and discourses, and *c)* for pursuing a range of realpolitik practices that emerge from their socialization in realpolitik ideology: hedging and balancing against rising powers like China, managing the involvement of Major Powers in the region, and checking the strategic aspirations of neighbors. The utility of ASEAN as an external source of legitimacy and domestic regime consolidation in states of varying political systems in Southeast Asia, the dramatic creep of good-governance and human rights norms in the discourse of East Asian regionalism, and the salience of competitive

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<sup>6</sup> This summary of the core premises of sociological institutionalism is drawn from the pioneering work of sociologists John Mayer, Paul DiMaggio, Walter Powell, Brian Rowan and others. See Powell and DiMaggio, 1991.



institutionalism (Narine, 2007: 216; Acharya and Goh, 2007: 7) evidenced by the preference of Chinese elites for the APT and the enthusiasm of Japanese elites for the EAS, are all empirical illustrations of the above-mentioned three hypotheses.

The operation of unstated goals is ventured as an important factor that explains both institutional endurance as well as the growth of new institutions in the region. This enables a more qualified answer to the central question of this paper: do stated goals matter? For the sake of clarity, a short answer may be ventured: stated goals are not vital to the survival and legitimacy of East Asian institutions which are, in essence, institutional organizations that depend less on efficiency and more on the adoption of the rational myths of their environments for legitimacy and survival. Instead, goals of a different type and order seem to matter and explain institutional activity. These unstated goals not only complement neo-institutionalist explanations for the survival of extant institutions by pointing out the utilities of inefficient institutions to state agents, but go further than neo-institutionalism by offering a more contextually informed explanation for institution creation in East Asia.

By placing accent on the role of state agents and their *evolving* instrumental and means-ends considerations, this paper speaks to ongoing debates on how causal and/or constitutive regional institutions are in East Asia, and argues that while these institutions have served as social environments that have re-constituted and influenced agent identities and preferences, it remains unclear if these constitutive processes have had substantial causal implications, especially in terms of changing the practices of state agents. It argues that the absence of a Weberian bureaucracy places severe limits on the autonomy and agency that these institutions can exercise in relation to the power of member states. It is this lack of a discrete organizational bureaucracy that makes possible the operation of unstated goals in these institutions. It must also be noted that the attempt here is to explicate unstated goals in more programmatic rather than causal terms, and as a fruitful area of enquiry for more empirically grounded research.

This paper shall develop the above argument in the following four parts. First, it will survey the empirical record of goal accomplishment in East Asian institutions and examine the evidence that suggests that they have fallen short in fulfilling stated goals within stipulated time frames. In examining the reasons behind this goal deficit, the second section employs the insights of sociological institutionalism to argue that these institutions approximate to institutionalized organizations for which efficiency considerations—and concern for stated goals—are in conflict with the advantages they

derive from the adoption of institutionalized myths from their environment. In doing so, the argument draws from the work of sociological institutionalists as well as some recent works that have fruitfully employed these insights in the context of ASEAN (Jetschke and Rüländ, 2009; Katsumata, 2009; Jetschke, 2009). This paper extends this line of analysis by specifying the ways in which not only ASEAN but also broader East Asian institutions—contrary to their projection as rational organizations—are institutionalized organizations, especially because of the absence of discrete bureaucracies with rational-legal authority. This lack of substantive organizational bureaucracy and the opening it provides for national bureaucracy and state elites forms the context in which unstated goals emerge, and some of these goals are hypothesized in section three.

**Definitions: “Institutions with formal structure”; “stated goals”; and what does it mean to “matter”?**

Before examining whether stated goals matter, three clarificatory points are necessary. The first point pertains to how I define institutions. Extant conceptualizations are diverse. While institutions are often treated as synonymous with the rules and conventions of formal organizations—especially in realist, neo-realist and historical sociological approaches—there exist much broader conceptualizations. Critical and constructivist approaches in IR, for instance, treat norms and practices like sovereignty and diplomatic immunity that instantiate international politics as informal institutions (Hansen, 1996), while sociological institutionalism goes even further by including cognitive elements like “symbol systems, cognitive scripts and moral templates” (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 948). While this diversity in conceptualizing institutions betrays more fundamental theoretical contests (do institutions matter? If so, which institutions matter?), the choice of an appropriate definition depends on the subject and design of particular research questions. Since the institutions examined in this study involve elements of formal structure, it works with a definition that identifies institutions as “explicit arrangements among international actors, that prescribe, proscribe, and/or authorize behavior” (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal, 2001: 762). Besides incorporating an unacknowledged sociological basis to conceptualizing institutions,<sup>7</sup> this definition

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<sup>7</sup> While this definition is used by its authors to study the “rational design of international institutions”, it – like other definitions by contractualists – possesses an unacknowledged sociological dimension. As Johnston notes of

foregrounds “arrangements” that may possess “formal structure”, that is, organizational features—such as blueprints indicating the distribution of offices, departments, positions, and staff—which are explicitly tied to goals in order to provide a rational theory of how an institution’s structure and specific activities fit together to accomplish goals (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 342).

Which are the institutions with formal structure that are examined in this study? I have chosen four institutions that have been central to the East Asian experience of economic and security regionalism: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).<sup>8</sup> Considering the traditional distinction between organizations and institutions,<sup>9</sup> the suggestion here that these select institutions can be identified—to varying degrees—as “institutions with formal structures” can be contentious. Let me explain. Among these, ASEAN is the only institution with an explicit formal structure: it has a Secretariat in Jakarta, an elaborate “organizational structure” that maps out its internal hierarchies and division of work (ASEAN, 2009a), a key organizational document like the ASEAN Charter that attempts to legalize its status, and a workforce comprised of hired technocrats, bureaucrats and a Secretary- General.

None of the other regional institutions enjoy the same corporeal properties of ASEAN’s organizational existence. This, however, does not mean that they do not emerge from, and depend on, formal structures. The key distinction to be made here is that while ASEAN enjoys an autonomous formal structure of its own, the ARF, APT and the EAS are instantiated and possible because they depend indirectly on more than one formal structure. While these institutions exist separately in terms of their memberships and their announced goals, they are organized around, and vicariously live off, the organizational apparatus of ASEAN and of the national bureaucracies of

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other contractualist definitions, their “language implies that the most efficient institutions are those that get actors to internalize or at least take for granted that which is prescribed and proscribed”, i.e. norms, values, and messages of the social environment (Johnston, 2008: 14).

<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of the ARF in this list of ‘East Asian’ institutions may strike odd especially since the institution is framed ostensibly as an ‘Asia-Pacific’ institution. I argue that there are grounds to identify a certain ‘set’ of institutions in East Asia on account of their common debt to ASEAN in taking the initiative to create them, and in being a source for their institutional design, institutional norms, as well their vocabulary of goals and actions. I, therefore, choose to relax official categories of ‘Asia-Pacific’ and ‘East Asia’ since a) they are subject to fundamental ontological contestation and b) they are not very strictly followed even in official discourse as well: in describing the ‘complementarity’ of one institution with another, organizational documents often invoke the EAS, APT and the ARF in the same breadth, and there are also significant instances of inconsistent usage of ‘East Asia’/‘Asia-Pacific’ (see, for instance, EAS, 2009a: point 21).

<sup>9</sup> That is the distinction between organizations as formal and institutions as informal objects (or subjects).

individual member countries that constitute them. This is quite apparent in the case of the ARF, a security dialogue mechanism at work since 1994. Even though its membership is nearly thrice the size of ASEAN, it does not have an independent Secretariat. Instead, an ARF Unit functions within the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta and is housed under the principle that it “constitutes a part of the ASEAN Secretariat and operates under the ASEAN Secretary-General” (ARF, 2004: 1). Besides providing administrative support to the ARF, the Unit serves as a “depository of ARF document/papers” as well as the ARF’s “institutional memory” (ibid: 2). Its staff is comprised of seconded personnel from ASEAN countries only (ARF, 2005a) while an ARF fund is managed under the rules and regulations of the ASEAN Secretariat (ARF, 2005b). The ARF also has the office of an ARF Chairman heading the institution, appointment to which is restricted to foreign ministers from ASEAN countries (ARF, 2001a).

The APT, founded in 1997 with a more exclusive ‘East Asian’ membership that includes states from Northeast and Southeast Asia, cohered around a range of initiatives for monetary regionalism. Its institutionalization has occurred through an annual summit attended by the heads of member states, 14 ministerial level meetings, 19 senior official meetings, 2 Director General meetings and 18 technical level meetings (APT, 2009a). As with the ARF, ASEAN has actively transposed its preferred institutional design to the APT as well: the APT ministerial and senior official meetings follow its model of organizational work, and all meetings—even those held in non-ASEAN states—are always chaired by an ASEAN country (APT, 2009b). The EAS, held since 2005 as a forum for “dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues” (EAS, 2005a), is the largest East Asian institution with 16 members. It is also the least institutionalized of the four and is organized around an annual leader’s Summit and a few ministerial level meetings,<sup>10</sup> all of which are chaired by ASEAN members.

Both the APT and the EAS are explicitly ‘driven’ by ASEAN and thus draw from its formal organizational designs. Besides the ASEAN Secretariat, these institutions depend on the organizational energies of national bureaucracies: their most visible leader summits are held back to back in the ASEAN state that holds the rotating

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<sup>10</sup> As the least institutionalized body, the EAS is primarily a leaders-led institution and does not have as many Sectoral meetings as the APT does. The more recent EAS documents, however, indicate a rapid expansion of initiatives and activities and it is likely that it will develop an elaborate calendar year of Sectoral meetings and conferences.

chairmanship, while ministerial level meetings (and senior official meetings, in the case of the ARF and the APT) that are held in Southeast Asia as well as beyond are organized by host countries and their bureaucracies. Further, while the “External Relations Directorate” under the ASEAN Secretariat monitors and records the activities carried out under the APT and the EAS, it does not play an extensive role in agenda setting: most of the proposals for functional cooperation are put forth by individual countries, and specifically, their bureaucracies. To illustrate this: an “EAS Environment Ministers’ Meeting” or an “APT Economic Ministers’ Meeting” may seem to suggest a corporate EAS or APT institutional identity (which the institution seeks to achieve) but in substance these are meetings of the ministers from member countries, who represent the capacities and interests of their national bureaucracies, as well as specific national agendas, and these particularities show up in the proposals these ministers bring to the table for regional cooperation (this is further discussed in part two). Finally, besides circuitously depending on the formal structures of ASEAN and national bureaucracies, the ARF, APT and the EAS also draw on the institutional norms that describe these formal structures, specifically, the norms of non-interference and consensus-based decision-making.

The second clarification concerns the concept of goals, which, despite its centrality to the practices of international politics, remains consistently unspecified. Unlike in IR, goals have been actively studied in social psychology, especially under the New Look in Motivation, where they have been explicated as cognitive constructs that can be primed by various stimuli (Kruglanski and Kopetz, 2009). Goals are defined as “subjectively desirable states of affairs” that can be attained through action (ibid: 29); as “mental representations” that are linked to cues in the environment (Moskowitz and Grant, 2009: 3); and as a “discrepancy between an actual and desired state” which sets up a tension system (Lieberman and Dar, 2009: 278). Besides complementing the cognitive turn marked by sociological institutionalism, such conceptions allow for an examination of the cognitive aspects that underpin static descriptions of goals expressed by the agents of institutions. I make a further distinction between the stated and unstated goals of institutions. By stated goals I refer to those goals that are explicitly articulated by the institution by its internal bureaucracy and/or state agents. Such goals are gleaned from the vast body of organizational literature including statements and declarations during summits, and via the statements of agents who claim to express the corporate positions of the institution at political or technical levels of inter-state activity. In short,

my focus is on documents underpinned by claims to corporate positions; documents that carry a distinct vocabulary and which enable institutions to communicate with their environment. In contrast, unstated goals are those that are not visible in the formal literature or audible in the putatively corporate voices of the institution. They are discussed in detail in section three.

This brings me to a final clarification: What do I mean by *matter* when I ask whether stated goals matter? While ‘matter’ relates to notions of ‘significance’ and ‘importance’, these linguistic-conceptual associations are not under question here. Instead, I am curious about two things: first, for whom (which agent) should they matter, and second, whether they are worthy of analysis. It is possible to make the case that stated goals should matter to the institutions and agents of institution building in East Asia. This is not based on a normative argument (that the author thinks that they should matter for realizing a vision of regional life) but rather on the ‘fact’ that the accomplishment of stated goals *is also articulated as a stated goal* by institutions and their agents, as evidenced by numerous expressions to this effect in the official discourse of these institutions.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, such expressions of intent could be completely superficial. However, the accomplishment of stated goals in the context of East Asian institutions has come to matter to institutions and their agents because notions of institutional ‘relevance’, legitimacy, and ‘credibility’ have become tied to a performance-oriented criterion of goal accomplishment. In other words, the discourse of stated goals betrays how agents perceive themselves and their activities as contributing to a rational model of organizational work, where stated ends are putatively important, and where elaborate means are formulated for accomplishing stated ends.<sup>12</sup> Realizing goals has thus become important for external legitimacy in a wider institutional field

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<sup>11</sup> For ASEAN as a “community of action” and the repeated calls for “concrete actions”, see (ASEAN, 2009b); also see the ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprint, which is framed as an “action-oriented document” (APSC, 2009). For the ARF, see ‘ARF Vision Statement’ where members “pledge to” make ARF an “action-oriented mechanism that develops concrete and effective responses to the challenges confronting the Asia-Pacific region ...” (ARF, 2009: point 7); also see point 1 where members state that it is “vital for the ARF... to make further efforts to raise its effectiveness” (ARF, 2009: point 1). Even though the EAS emerged as a dialogue forum it has sought to build cooperation in certain areas like environment and energy, and has employed the language of efficiency in seeking to fulfil its activities and goals. See, for instance, the call for “concrete cooperation” in priority areas, (EAS, 2007b). The valorization of “concrete proposals” also figures in the organizational discourse of the APT as well (APT, 2007a: point 11).

<sup>12</sup> Which begs the question of what has caused this. This is explained by the argument developed later in the paper that these institutions are institutionalized organizations that depend on the myths of their institutional environment. The myths of rationality and performance-oriented criteria as a basis for adjudicating success and failure of institutions is one such rule that they have incorporated, though, as will be evidenced, in contradictory ways.

comprised of developed states and international organizations. Further, goal accomplishment should also matter to state agents for domestic legitimacy, especially since institutions (like ASEAN) have sought to anchor their legitimacy in the claim that regional projects cater to the utilities of the wider citizenry of the region.<sup>13</sup> In short, these institutions and their agents are bound by the dynamic of accountability that comes with articulating stated goals, especially since criticisms—both internal and external—have been framed in relation to performance in realizing goals. Thus, stated goals should matter to institutions and their agents. Whether they *do* matter is quite another question, and this then makes it worthy for the purpose of analysis.

Having offered these clarifications, it is instructive to flesh out the stated goals of the institutions under consideration and examine what the empirical record tells us regarding their accomplishment.

### **The Record of Goal Accomplishment in East Asian Institutions**

ASEAN has been particularly elaborate in staking its institutional development to the realization of a single overarching goal: an ASEAN Community by 2015. In order to make this overarching goal actionable, and to impute it with some empirical grounding, ASEAN's goal-setters reified three areas of social activity and tied the accomplishment of this goal to the realization of regional communities within these separate domains in the form of an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), an ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC), and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

#### *ASEAN Economic Community*

Considerable scholarship has been devoted to understanding what an AEC entails as an end goal, and the means underway to realize it. Besides lending itself to more coherent empirical investigation, the goal of an AEC is also an exception in terms of the specificity with which it has been outlined. ASEAN's literature conceptualizes the AEC as the "end goal of economic integration" characterized by a "single market and production base" which must be realized by 2015 (AEC, 2007: 2). However, if the latter refers to a "geographical area in which a single price should prevail throughout the regional market for every tradable commodity and factor of production" (Ravenhill,

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<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on this goal is apparent in the recent talk of making ASEAN "people-centered". References to this people-centered goal in recent organizational documents are ubiquitous; see, for instance, ASEAN, 2009b; APT, 2009b: point 9; APSC, 2009; ASEAN Charter, 2007, among others.

2008: 467), then there are several factors that impede the attainment of this goal without substantial institutional reforms. Indeed, even goals that must necessarily precede a comprehensive economic community, such as an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) are beset with a range of problems. The lack of precise obligations for members (Ravenhill, 1995), poor usage by the private sector amounting to nearly 5 per cent of total trade (McKinsey and Company, 2003), limited liberalization of the services sector and the continued use of Non-Tariff Barriers (Ravenhill, 2008: 473) appear to have rendered the AFTA an ineffectual instrument for regional integration. A more fundamental problem that informs the sluggish prospects of an AFTA lies in the nearly insignificant advantage it offers to businesses, especially since much trade was freed up under unilateral liberalization by Southeast Asian countries through the 1980s and 1990s (Ravenhill, 2008; Sally, 2010). Furthermore, the proliferation of bilateral free trade agreements between Southeast Asian countries and extra-regional states—some of which have more substantive tariff reductions—have eaten into the advantages that the AFTA should have offered for ASEAN states; in effect, some states seem to have bestowed advantages to states outside the region than those within it, in contravention to the “ASEAN First principle” (Ravenhill, 2008: 474). Besides the contradictions of the AFTA, a range of other fundamental problems impede the goal of an AEC: the lack of dispute settlement mechanisms, poor monitoring, low intra-regional trade, and the limits placed by ASEAN’s core institutional norms of non-interference and consensus-based decision making on the effectiveness of compliance and implementation mechanisms.

#### *ASEAN Political and Security Community*

The original articulation of the goal for an ASEAN Security Community at the Bali Summit in 2003 was revised and substituted in 2007 with the goal of an ASEAN *Political and Security Community*. The stated goals of the APSC are diffuse and diverse: to take “ASEAN’s political and security cooperation to a higher plane ... ensure that the peoples and Member States of ASEAN live in peace ... in a just, democratic and harmonious environment” (APSC, 2009: 6), among others. The official blueprint notes that the APSC “envisages” three characteristics: a commitment to being a “rules-based community”, to be a “cohesive, peaceful, stable and resilient region” and a “dynamic and outward looking region” (APSC, 2009: 2, point 10). The examination of these multiple goals is difficult not only because they appear to be conceptually tenuous and unclear, but also because of the challenges they present for empirical investigation.



What *is* a security community and *how* can it be identified are questions that have been debated through a long theoretical tradition spanning from Deutsch to Adler and Barnett and more recently (and in the context of ASEAN) by Acharya. In terms of pure empirical correlation, the argument that ASEAN has been successful in securing “peace and stability” is valid in light of the absence of war among its members for four decades (and this was indeed the stated goal in the Bangkok Declaration of 1967). Stated goals such as “Security Community” or a “Political and Security Community”, articulated in past decade, are however claims of a different order, warranting more elaborate (though not necessarily fruitful) interrogation.

While ASEAN’s usage of this concept is unclear, it is possible to investigate this stated goal using some specific conditions developed by the theoretical work on security communities. Two, in particular, are useful: the experience of “cognitive transition” among elites (Job, 1997: 175) that leads to “we feeling” and the durable expectations of peace, and second, the presence or absence of organized preparations for war or violence among members of the putative community (Deutsch, 1961: 99). Does the stated goal of an APSC by 2015 seem plausible on both these counts? Adler and Barnett identify the causal and constitutive role of liberal values in enabling the development of “we feeling”, mainly because liberalism helps in creating a civic culture that transcends national boundaries and produces vibrant and open societies (Adler and Barnett, 1998). The cognitive glue of liberalism is amiss in the case of ASEAN. What exists instead is an “illiberal peace” (Kuhonta, 2006) where Westphalian rational-legal norms of sovereignty and non-interference and cultural norms of an ASEAN way (Acharya, 2000: 24–25) provide a basis for conceptualizing a “nascent security community”. However, a distinction must be made between the possibility of “peace and stability” (Khong, 2005) that these norms enable, and the more elaborate causal claim that they produce a “cognitive transition” where war among states is unthinkable. As norms designed to secure the status quo, and which foreground a strictly statist ontology in the acts and utterances of agents, they offer little impetus in themselves for any cognitive transition towards a transnational psychological conception of community.

With regard to the second point the empirical trends are complex. Even though ASEAN has not experienced war, and while the norms of diplomatic interaction are institutionalized, military spending by states in Southeast Asia has increased by nearly 50 per cent from 2000 to 2008, with the military budgets of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand having nearly doubled over this period. As Bitzinger (2010) argues, this

spending may not reflect an arms race as much as a competitive “arms dynamic” or a reciprocal trend of arms acquisitions where states spend to maintain status quo. While such military spending does not indicate the explicit preparation for war, it nonetheless renders the regional security environment more insecure. Thus, even though ASEAN is identified as a “nascent security community” (Kuhonta, 1996) or as a “security community” (Acharya, 2000), the inherent limits of status quo norms and the empirical trend of arms spending cast doubts on how meaningful such an ascription is, and indeed, undermine the plausibility of accomplishing an unproblematic APSC by 2015.

### *ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community*

The problem of multiple goals and the challenge of empirical investigation are exacerbated when it comes to analyzing the plans for a “Socio-Cultural Community”. The stated goals of the ASCC are many: to realize a “people-centered and socially responsible” community in order to achieve “enduring solidarity and unity among nations and peoples of ASEAN by forging a common identity and building a caring and sharing society ...” (ASCC, 2009: 1, point 4). This sociological goal is, like the APSC, an attempt at creating the “we feeling” that is necessarily entailed by the sociological elements pregnant in the overarching goal of an “ASEAN Community”. While the APSC focuses on such sociological processes at the level of the elites, the ASCC is more directly an attempt to anchor the community-building project at the level of the “people”. The blueprint for the ASCC elaborately lists out its four main “characteristics”: *a)* the promotion of human development, *b)* social welfare and protection, *c)* social justice and rights, and *d)* ensuring environmental sustainability. A factual assessment on goal accomplishment of the ASCC with reference to its elaborate blueprint is particularly difficult not only because of the vagueness of goals, but also because of the highly non-operational character of the activities that are listed as means for the accomplishment of these goals. Nonetheless, there is, in this instance, a certain obviousness of the immense problems in realizing these goals in the context of a region described by varying political systems with drastically different relationships with their citizenry. Indeed, the singular case of Myanmar as a signatory of the blueprint adds much perspective to the commitment to such stated goals.

### *ASEAN Regional Forum*

Unlike ASEAN, the ARF enjoys the benefit of possessing a more specific mandate of action. While ASEAN's vocabulary of ideal goals ("peace, progress and prosperity", etc.) extends to the ARF's Concept Papers and Ministerial statements (ARF, 1995: 1; ARF, 2009: 1),<sup>14</sup> it was established explicitly—as its 1994 Chairman's statement put it—as a forum "to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues" among its members, and to "make significant contributions towards confidence building and preventive diplomacy" (ARF, 1994). While the ARF was founded as a "forum" in 1994, over the years, it has moved towards identifying itself as an "action-oriented mechanism" as well (ARF, 2009: 2). While the ARF has been widely studied for its role in furthering cooperative security by serving as a "norm brewery" (Katsumata, 1996) and in serving as a site for elite socialization (Johnston, 2008: 160–82), it has also come under sharp criticism for its failure in accomplishing a goal that was articulated explicitly in its 1995 Concept paper: to move from confidence building to conducting preventive diplomacy (ARF, 1995). Even though the ARF is referred to as the region's "premier" security institution, the more notable instances of preventive diplomacy were carried out under the aegis of other frameworks: the North Korean crisis by the Six Party Talks and the South China Sea dispute managed under the ASEAN-China framework.<sup>15</sup> Even though the ARF has moved towards limited forms of "practical security cooperation" primarily in the form of desktop and field exercises in disaster relief, it is unlikely that it will be able to engage with security cooperation in more substantive terms (Haacke, 2009). While some attribute the ARF's inertia to the non-intrusive norms of the ASEAN Way (Morada, 2010), others note the excessive formalization of the hitherto flexible ASEAN Way (Emmers and Tan, 2009) as the cause for the ARF's goal deficit.

#### *ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit*

By virtue of their dependence on ASEAN's formal structure, the APT and the EAS not only share ASEAN's diplomatic culture, institutional norms and designs, but also a

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<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, the ARF 1995, point 1 and the ARF Vision Statement, which notes the importance of creating an environment "conducive to sustainable development, social progress and improved quality of life for all the peoples in the region" (ARF, 2009: points 2 and 3).

<sup>15</sup> The specific claim here is that they are being 'managed', that is, being addressed under the ASEAN-China framework as a first step in preventive diplomacy. The more substantive concern of whether this has led to any progress leading to dispute resolution is, of course, debatable, and for a critical study of this problem, see Storey (2010) and Schofield and Storey (2009).

similar vocabulary of goals. This is evidenced by their formal pursuit of a holistic regionalism, one that delineates the economic, security and social dimensions of regional life and seeks to trigger the linear and teleological processes of “community building” notwithstanding the various constraints that impede such fulfilment (Nair, 2009: 120–24). This holistic model is reflected by the stated “long-term goal” of building an East Asian Community (APT, 2007a: point 2; EAS, 2007b: point 21), a goal that both the APT and the EAS share as ostensibly “East Asian” institutions, even though their conceptions of the region are underpinned by radically different ideas of identity and membership. To be sure, both institutions set goals to pursue a range of activities—financial regionalism in the case of the APT, and energy efficiency and environment-related activities by the EAS. These functional interactions are, however, designed to work towards the vision of a regional community.

Even though there is no stipulated time frame for such a regional community, are there any ongoing empirical trends that may substantiate the APT and EAS’ aspirations for realizing the goal of a regional community—in both material and sociological terms? One can challenge the plausibility of such a goal by referring to several impediments—the historical mistrust among actors that find expression in popular demonstrations and nationalist politics, the presence of sites of insecurity like North Korea and the Taiwan Straits that instantiate *realpolitik par excellence*, among others. However, for the specific purpose of assessing goal accomplishment, it may be useful to interrogate the activities that the agents of these institutions have explicitly articulated as the necessary means for accomplishing their broader goal. One such means—and a key one at that—articulated by both the APT and EAS for an East Asian Community, is to create a free trade area spanning their particular conceptions of the East Asian region. (In some IPE literature, the goal of a regional community is entirely reduced to the realization of a region-wide FTA [for instance, see Cai 2010] but this is to gloss over the express intent to pursue community building in sociological terms by agents in both institutions)<sup>16</sup>.

What does the current state of economic regionalism indicate? One strand of functionalist literature has lionized the organic character of East Asia’s “new” economic regionalism, arguing that the imperatives of the market and the interests of businesses

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<sup>16</sup> See the East Asia Vision Group document for instance, and also summit statements of the APT and EAS, which have introduced initiatives for regional identity.

propelled economic cooperation in the region, with formal inter-state arrangements (mostly, Preferential Trade Agreements or PTAs) emerging as a response to rising interdependence to reduce transaction costs in an increasingly complex field of economic activity. However, more recent assessments of the character of trade policy and financial cooperation in East Asia cast doubt on these primarily economic explanations for the rise of inter-state arrangements like PTAs that underpin triumphal notions of regional integration. Ravenhill, in particular, persuasively debunks the claims central to such economic explanations and demonstrates how PTAs and other arrangements have been driven less by the interests of local businesses and more by the geo-political and strategic considerations of state elites in the region. This “primacy of the political” as he puts it, is evidenced by a range of trends: the absence of any substantial rise in economic interdependence in East Asia since the 1997 financial crisis, the superficial level of interdependence in the exchange rate field, the proliferation of PTAs with states mostly outside East Asia,<sup>17</sup> and by the conclusion of such PTAs with relatively insignificant trading partners (Ravenhill, 2010:3–10).<sup>18</sup> However, there are more fundamental grounds to question why the proliferation of PTAs should suggest rising liberalization, economic interdependence and welfare that may serve as the basis for conceptualizing a regional community. It is noted, for instance, that PTAs are in themselves a poor alternative to realizing greater trade liberalization which is perhaps better realized by non-discriminatory global agreements (Searight, 2009: 211; Ravenhill, 2010: 9). Indeed, PTAs proliferate precisely because they can be tinkered with by political elites who seek to protect sensitive sectors from liberalization and minimize political risks. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for understanding the rise of formal agreements in the region as products of political and strategic considerations comes from the timing and context in which some of the more notable trade agreements central to the discourse of the East Asian community building actually came about. The China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA) was motivated by China’s desire to allay fears over its membership to the WTO and was part of a broader attempt to improve its diplomatic relations with Southeast Asian states and counter anxieties about a “China Threat” (Narine, 2007: 207). The perception of losing out the region to

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<sup>17</sup> He notes ADB figures that as many as 104 of the 134 agreements that were proposed or being negotiated in 2008 were with states outside the region (Ravenhill, 2010: 8).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, the economies with which Japan has negotiated PTAs amount to only 14 per cent of its exports. Despite concluding several PTAs, China’s partners amount to only 13 per cent of its exports (Ravenhill, 2010: 8).

China was an important consideration in leading Japan to conclude a PTA with ASEAN (Munataka, 2006: 132–34). Sino-Japanese rivalry also colors another cornerstone of East Asia’s much vaunted accomplishment in financial regionalism: the Chiang Mai initiative, which germinated as Japan’s proposal for an Asian Monetary Fund following the 1997 crisis but was put down by the United States and, importantly, opposed by China. However, as Ravenhill notes, China’s opposition to an idea that enjoyed popularity among other East Asian states was not compatible with its broader ambition for regional leadership, and resulted in a reversal with China championing this initiative in the APT process (Ravenhill, 2010: 22).

### *Three problems*

In sum, a survey of goal accomplishment indicates a rather weak record in fulfilling stated goals. Bearing in mind their homologous character, it is perhaps possible to raise three broad problems concerning the discourse and practice of goals in East Asian institutions. These problems pertain to the conceptualization of goals, their implementation, and finally, the inferences drawn from their existence.

The first is a basic—and fundamentally crippling—ontological problem. What is the nature of the goals being sought? Any process of rational goal accomplishment—where stated ends are realized by stated means—must follow a certain hierarchy: of *being* goals, followed by *doing* goals, an array of motor control goals, and which in turn depend on irreducible automatic physical acts (Lieberman and Dar, 2009: 280). While “being” goals tend to be by definition a bit vague (“to look good”, “to be intelligent”, as often studied in social psychological experiments at the level of the individual; similarly, “to become a peaceful, prosperous and stable region”, in international politics) they can nonetheless be accomplished in certain conceptions by the operation of specific “doing” goals. While the “being” goals or “end goals” of East Asian regional institutions are unsurprisingly vague, the problem arises not only with the general poverty of specific “doing” goals, but also with a persistent confusion arising from the conflation of “being” goals with “doing” goals. This conflation is especially apparent in the case of ASEAN: it seeks to *be* an ASEAN Community by 2015 and to *do* so it seeks to accomplish the three sub-goals of a Political Security Community, an Economic

Community and a Social-Cultural Community (ASCC, 2009: 1; AEC 2007: 1).<sup>19</sup> But these “doing” goals are veritably “being” goals in themselves, undergirded by several “doing” goals which are crucial for their individual realization.

Furthermore, it is often unclear what even the express “being” goals *are*. The blueprint for an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, for instance, lays out a multiplicity of ideas about what the ASCC *is*: it “*will address* the region’s aspiration to lift the quality of life of its people ...”, “*shall contribute* to building a strong foundation for greater understanding ...”, “*is characterised* by a culture of regional resilience”, “*shall respect* the different cultures, languages and religions of the peoples of ASEAN ...”, “*will also focus*” on narrowing the developmental gap in the region, and “*envisages the following characteristics:...*” such as “Human Development ... *Ensuring Environmental Sustainability ... Building an ASEAN Identity*”, etc. (ASCC, 2009: points 5,6,7,8; emphasis mine). In short, it is unclear whether the ASCC is a vision, an institutional entity with aspirations for agency, a mechanism for action or all of these combined. Similar ontological confusion—to varying degrees—describes the nature of goals in the AEC and the APSC.

The second problem concerns the provisions for the implementation of goals and what they tell us of the means-ends connection. Again, following rational models, the strength of the means-ends relationship is critical for the efficient execution of work. Indeed, it would have implications for motivational properties such as the degree of commitment and the quality of affect (Kruglanski and Kopetz, 2009: 37). ASEAN’s elaborate community blueprints work with an explicit means-ends framework as evidenced by the classification of goals into broader “strategic objectives” followed by a detailed list of “actions”. A survey of this relationship between objectives and actions discloses an apparent lack of specificity and, often, considerable ambiguity. Extreme examples include the APSC Blueprint where the realization of the APSC is tied to the creation of “a rules-based community of shared values and norms” (APSC, 2009: 3), which in turn is based on a vague sub-goal to “promote peace and stability in the region” (ibid: 7). Intriguingly, the blueprint goes on to outline a second “characteristic”—“a cohesive, peaceful and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security” (ibid: 9), which is tied to “conflict resolution and pacific

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<sup>19</sup> ASCC states that “the primary goal of the ASCC is to contribute to realizing an ASEAN Community that is people-centered and social responsible ...”. Similarly, the AEC blueprint notes that the AEC, along with the ASC and ASCC are the “integral pillars of the envisaged ASEAN Community...”.

settlement of disputes” (ibid: 11), and the realization of which is based on “[to] promote regional cooperation to maintain peace and security”. Besides the hazards of vagueness and repetition, this specific point is followed by unspecified “Actions” including “ii. Identify national focal points, with a view to promoting regional cooperation in maintaining peace and stability” (ibid: 13).

Such problems are replete in the ASCC blueprint where the “strategic objective” of “A.1. Advancing and prioritizing education” is backed by a list of “actions” which includes idealized statements such as “xix. Promote life-long learning”(ASCC, 2009: 2). Similarly, the sub-goal to “B.3. Enhance food security and safety” is linked to “Actions” including a prescriptive statement such as “xi. Ensure that food is available at all times for all ASEAN citizens” (ibid: 7).

While other East Asian institutions do not work with such elaborate blueprints, the problem of unclear means-ends relationships can nonetheless be gleaned from their organizational documents. The ARF, for instance, explicitly sets itself the goal of Preventive Diplomacy (PD) as the “next stage” from Confidence Building, yet its specific explication of the PD concept includes “measures” such as “confidence-building efforts” (ARF, 2001b: 3). While there is no doubt that PD has to be predicated on confidence-building measures (hence, it represents the *second* stage), the act of reiterating this as the first point in a section that specifically develops the PD concept simply mixes the dominant delineation between PD and CB, and leads to unnecessary conceptual confusion. A feature that accompanies the articulation of goals in the documents of not only ASEAN leaders, ministerial and sectoral meetings but other institutions as well is the ubiquity of prescriptive verbs under “actions” and “measures” instead of more concrete appraisals of projects and initiatives. Most documentation of putatively “action”-based functional tasks are often prefixed by words like “support”, “enhance”, “develop”, “undertake”, “study”, “promote”, “harmonize”, “strengthen”, among others.

Such seeming cherry picking of problematic cases of goal setting should not, however, be a basis for an absolute generalization of the goals articulated in these documents. There are parts in the ASEAN blueprints, for instance, where a certain degree of specificity can be found, for instance, in the sections on disaster management



and non-traditional security (APSC, 2009: 14–16). Indeed, the co-existence of specific and highly ambiguous goals leads us to “glass half-full or half-empty” metaphor often invoked in the context of East Asian institutions. While the record of goal setting and goal accomplishment has been highly mixed, there is, however, a major qualification that needs to be leveled to those who marshal the abundance of such initiatives and goals as the basis for envisaging a regional community in the future, and even those who—in a more qualified sense—note that a rhetorical discourse with ambitious goals at least garners minimum commitments for cooperation. I refer here to the problem of teleological determinism, whereby the abundance of initiatives—in trade and financial cooperation, soft-security initiatives and social cultural activities—must necessarily pave the way for deeper integration. The determinism entailed by such thinking is problematic as it enables the articulation of goals that are beyond the capacities of institutions, and thus widen the deficit between what is claimed and what is accomplished (Nair, 2009).

In some measure, the presence of teleological thinking is a natural consequence of espousing “being” goal as ambiguous as a regional security or social community. The ontological and epistemological challenges that arise from such a goal are enormous. Perhaps it should be noted that even for Deutsch—who claimed that such communities were empirically verifiable by quantifying the volume and scope of intra-regional interactions using a statistic tool of an “index of relative acceptance”—the concept presented insuperable challenges. As Sangovanni (2006) points out, the purely quantitative increase in transactions within a region (a trend often invoked by East Asian community enthusiasts) does not indicate any sense of mutual obligations that must justify the sociological basis for a regional community.

### **Rational Organizations or Institutional Organizations?**

The espousal of fairly elaborate goals (including “end goals”) couched within a rational means-ends framework, and the repeated concern for efficiency and concrete results in stated discourse indicate how East Asian institutions have projected themselves as rational organizations. However, an assessment of the record of goal accomplishment belies this claim. Instead, it discloses that the realization of stated goals is not central to the *raison d'être* of these institutions, and nor has this record affected their survival. How, then, can these institutions be understood and identified? Studying this precise conundrum of inefficient practice coupled with putative claims to efficiency pervasive

in modern organizations, sociological institutionalists in the 1970s explicated the concept of “institutionalized organizations”, that is, organizations which depend on the rational myths of their institutional environment rather than the efficient management of activity for their legitimacy and survival. The rational conception of organizing activity, forged in the context of the market and centralizing states, and which motored the early phase of organizational growth and bureaucratization in modern societies, becomes a myth loaded with legitimacy that can be mechanistically or selectively adopted by organizations and entrepreneurs, even if doing so conflicts with the particular requirements of their activities.

*Institutional isomorphism, decoupling, and the “logic of confidence and good faith” in East Asia*

Recent studies have assiduously fleshed out the experience of “Institutional isomorphism” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) in the case of ASEAN, which, through much of its institutional evolution, has actively borrowed from the European model of regional integration: from its establishment in August 1967 on the heels of the European Community that came into effect in July 1967; the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and its striking resemblance with the language and norms laid out in the Helsinki Accords passed a few months earlier; the establishment of the ASEAN Inter-parliamentary Organization in 1977 which mirrored the European Community’s attempt to democratize its regional project with a European Parliament; the launch of the AFTA that came as a response to Europe’s move towards a common market in the early 1990s; to ASEAN’s Troika created in July 1999 that came a month after Europe established a Troika in May 2000 (Rüland and Jetschke, 2009: 184–86; Jetschke, 2009: 414–18). Importantly, this path dependency has intensified in contexts of deep uncertainty, and the changes in ASEAN following the Asian Financial Crisis of 2003 are testament to this with ASEAN reviving its dented reputation with the Bali Concord in 1997 with the goal of an ASEAN Community built on a three-pillar structure strikingly reminiscent of the three pillars of the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, and ASEAN’s attempt to seek a legal identity with the Charter in 2007, a document that is comparable to the EU Constitution in form if not in substance.

In short, a study of ASEAN’s institutional evolution discloses the considerable influence of the European model in terms of its structural form, organizational vocabulary as well as its discourse of goals (a regional “Community”, in particular).

While the case for such isomorphism is built on correlation, what makes this compelling is the persistence with which developments in the European model of integration found their way into ASEAN's institutional elaboration, even if the transposition was mainly in appearance. The presence of powerful legitimated myths explains how ASEAN—far from playing catch up—has been actively borrowing to gain the advantages of ceremonial legitimacy. It explains not only the puzzling establishment of the AIPO when Thailand was the only democratic country in a region described by authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes, but also intriguing trends in ASEAN's most recent institutional experience, especially the vigorous embrace of liberal norms of “good governance”, “political reform”, the “rule of law”, “democracy” and “human rights” that occupy a central place in its key organizational documents like the Charter and the APSC blueprint.

A qualification is necessary here: this account of isomorphism offers a highly structural explanation for the growth and elaboration of ASEAN i.e. ASEAN and its features were elaborated purely in response to the pressures of a broader organizational field. This is incorrect. The causal forces that pressured the elites in Southeast Asian countries to form a regional association, and espouse norms, were centrally concerned with (re)producing and sustaining unstable domestic social orders (Jones, 2009). Motored by these internal pressures, state elites employed a process of mimicking to appropriate features from models of regional cooperation legitimated in the First World. Institutional myths, then, did not impose themselves on abject and inert Southeast Asian elite subjects, rather these myths were being actively appropriated to further their legitimacy as well as to simultaneously pursue their unstated goals in the production of domestic social orders.

On account of their dual character, institutional organizations invariably face a conflict between the need for efficiency and, at the same time, preserving the symbolic and material benefits of their ceremonial adherence to rational myths of organizational activity. These organizations, however, reconcile these conflicts by employing certain strategies to stabilize organizational existence. First, they decouple their formal structure from their day-to-day activities, and second, reduce monitoring and inspection by employing a “logic of confidence and good faith”, thereby obviating the undesirable strains that may arise from a thorough appraisal of work activities in relation to stated goals. The existence of vague goals with poor means-ends connection is a classic

expression of such decoupling and indeed, as neo-institutionalists point out, is an important predictor of the rate of isomorphic change.

The ubiquity of vague goals in ASEAN is an expression of the loose coupling between the goals of ASEAN's formal structure and its acutely limited day-to-day work capacities for realizing them. Similarly, the hypothesis of uncertainty as a predictor of isomorphic change (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 156) is also corroborated with the intensity of isomorphism gleaned from ASEAN's institutional changes in the aftermath of the Cold War and the 1997 financial crisis (Jetschke, 2009: 12). The logic of confidence is also clearly at work in ASEAN. It is not only expressed in the often unqualified optimism that imbues most organizational documents, assessment reports, as well as ceremonial Summit statements but also conceptually expressed in the comfortable teleological understanding of regional cooperation alluded to earlier.

As institutions designed by ASEAN, the APT, EAS and the ARF also approximate to being institutionalized organizations, though important variations exist. The operation of ASEAN's key norms of non-interference and consensus-based decision making fundamentally precludes these pan-regional institutions from pursuing efficient accomplishment of stated ends, in other words, from becoming rational organizations. Dependence on ASEAN's loosely coupled formal structure has meant that these institutions extend ASEAN's properties as an institutional organization to a broader regional level: from the operation of ambiguous goals such as Community-building; the adoption of 'legitimate' models of regional activity, specifically, the model of regional integration first charted by the European integrationists in the 1950s, popularized by integration theories and internalized by ASEAN; the selective adoption of legitimate domains of rational professionalized activity, as evidenced by the EAS' attempt to justify its odd existence by forging cooperation along a range of 'relevant' themes like climate change, energy conservation and efficiency; and the consistent deployment of the logic of good faith and confidence to minimize monitoring and inspection (see, for instance, APT, 2007a: point 2).<sup>20</sup>

Variations must be noted, however. The APT and the EAS are institutional organizations in ways that make them distinct from the ARF. They both pursue

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<sup>20</sup> As an example, refer to the APT's Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation Building: "We noted that the rapidly changing international environment and globalization brought forth both opportunities and challenges. We agreed that driven by converging interests, aspirations and commitment to peace, stability, cooperation and prosperity, the prospects for a resilient, open, innovative and competitive East Asia *are bright* (emphasis mine)." APT, 2007a: point 2.

ASEAN's model of holistic regionalism, elaborate their activities along a broadly three-pillar approach of "economic", "political/security" and "social-cultural" cooperation (more so in the APT, see *ibid*: 2–3), and also adopt ASEAN's community-building project explicitly with the goal of an East Asian community via region-wide FTAs and identity building. The ARF, in contrast, is not an instrument for regional integration but a mechanism for achieving a relatively more specific goal of regional security cooperation. Its organizational activities do not include the pervasive rhetoric of community building, neither does it have to negotiate with the complications arising from holistic regionalism. Nonetheless, it does embody ASEAN's institutional norms that impede goal accomplishment, its organizational vocabulary, its poor mechanisms for monitoring and feedback loops, as well as a fair dose of confidence and good faith. While conflicts are suppressed in favour of ceremonial unity, there have been more vocal debates within the ARF than in other institutions over issues of efficacy, as reflected in preference for dialogue or "process" among ASEAN states and China in contrast to the preference for more definitive initiatives for preventive diplomacy among the "Western" members (Simon, 2002: 10–11). By virtue of more specific goals, the absence of holistic community building ambitions, and the presence of actors that defy an easy categorization under reified 'East Asian' identities, the ARF is perhaps less of an institutionalized organization than the APT and the EAS.

#### *The Absence of Weberian Bureaucracy*

There is perhaps a more fundamental reason why East Asian institutions are not rational organizations at all: they don't possess the autonomous bureaucratic apparatus that are central to Weber's conception of rational organizations. As discussed earlier, East Asian institutions comprise both formal organizations (ASEAN) as well as institutions with formal structure (APT, EAS and the ARF). All these institutions depend on bureaucracies, but a distinction must be made between the possession of a discrete and centralized bureaucratic structure and the dependence on diffuse bureaucratic structures, including the national bureaucracies of member states.

While ASEAN established a Secretariat in 1976 to provide for "greater efficiency in the coordination of ASEAN's organs and for more effective implementation of ASEAN projects and activities" (ASEAN, 1976), it limited its total staff size to 64 officers. Reforms to expand the staff in 1983, 1989 and 1992 have increased the size of the organization to approximately 260 staff members including 78

openly recruited officers (Directors, Assistant Directors and other senior staff).<sup>21</sup> This increase, however, does not match the exponential growth in initiatives for technical cooperation over the past three decades. By designing a small Secretariat, and by constraining the size of the organization's own bureaucracy, Southeast Asian states have ensured that the organization stays dependent on the resources and energies of the bureaucracies of national governments.

The APT, EAS and the ARF don't possess bureaucracies that are separate from those of either ASEAN or its constituent member states. The absence of discrete and adequately large organizational bureaucracies means that these institutions depend on national bureaucracies not only for resources and logistical support in organizing conferences and summits, but also in the elaboration of substantive organizational work. The field is thus open for national bureaucracies to pursue their particular interests. An overflow of proposals and projects, the dilution of organizational missions, and the articulation of ambiguous and even contradictory goals follow. Instances where national bureaucracies played a lead role in agenda and goal setting are abundant. Notable instances in ASEAN's recent experience include Indonesia's role in drafting the blueprint of the APSC with goals on democracy and human rights which comport with its domestic changes but are at variance with the political systems of a majority of Southeast Asian states, and the role of the Philippines in advancing liberal norms in the ASCC even though they make the mission of "community building" unrealistic for other states. In the APT too, core organizational work is defined by individual states who put forth a range of proposals for regional cooperation that are customarily accepted: China's proposal for a seminar on life sciences, Japan's proposal to host an APT Human Security Symposium on Women and Poverty Eradication and South Korea's proposal for cooperation in civilian nuclear energy are some of the recent projects that were "welcomed" by the "APT leaders", who, after all, are members of a small pool of national political elites. The engrained character of this mode of organizational work is reflected by individual states taking the lead within different sectors: Thailand is thus a "lead shepherd" on education, China is a "lead shepherd" on economic and trade cooperation, Japan is a shepherd on disaster management, while Korea has taken the lead on financial cooperation (APT, 2009b: points 16 and 17).

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<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Moe Thuzar at the ASEAN Studies Center for this information.

Proposals by individual states describe the body of the EAS's work too. Moreover, even though the areas of cooperation in the EAS overlap with those of the APT, the position of the lead state here is occupied by different states: Thailand, China and India all have put forth overlapping proposals for cooperation on climate change, while Australia and China have proposed initiatives in disaster response (EAS, 2009a: point 13; EAS, 2009b: points 2–3), and there is no clarity on how these different proposals contribute towards a definite end other than creating new organizational work or, in their vocabulary, “fostering cooperation”.

Perhaps the role of state agents and national bureaucracies may be limited in the realm of Track Two processes, which by definition offer an interface between state actors and experts with technical and specialized knowledge, with the latter not only defining new domains of activity but also socializing state agents by offering critiques of extant practice, introducing normative discourses, and offering new cognitive frames and vocabulary. These possibilities are, however, limited in the context of East Asian institutions. The country coordinators of six of the 13 participating countries of the Track Two process of the APT—the Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT)—are units directly associated with their foreign ministries, while most of the other coordinators are research institutes closely linked to the foreign ministries of their respective countries rather than potentially independent university establishments;<sup>22</sup> a similar pattern, though to a lesser extent, describes the Track Two process of the ARF—the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP)—with its member committees, especially those from Asian states, represented by units within foreign ministries or those closely linked to it.<sup>23</sup> Though lacking a Track Two component, the inputs from policy and specialized knowledge actors in the EAS comes via a policy think tank, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). Even though the ERIA seeks to provide policy analysis for the EAS, and is based at the ASEAN Secretariat at Jakarta, it remains explicitly tied to Japan's interests: it emerged from a Japanese proposal at the second EAS (EAS, 2007a: 2), is funded by a 10-billion-

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<sup>22</sup> NEAT, Country Coordinator Institutions, <[http://www.neat.org.cn/english/zjdyen/index.php?topic\\_id=001005002](http://www.neat.org.cn/english/zjdyen/index.php?topic_id=001005002)>, (accessed on 18 April 2010).

<sup>23</sup> CSCAP Member Committees, <<http://www.cscap.org/index.php?page=member-committees-page>>, (accessed on 18 April 2010).

yen grant by the Japanese government and is linked to Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry or METI.<sup>24</sup>

To be sure, the role of national bureaucracies is not exclusive to East Asian institutions, and they play an important part in apparently successful regional projects like the EU. What distinguishes the two, however, is the existence of a discrete bureaucracy, like a permanent European Civil Service, which is drawn not by appointment or secondment from member states to the Secretariat on a temporary basis, but by means of a region-wide examination conducted by the European Personnel Selection Office. This body of permanent career bureaucrats housed separately at Brussels is substantial in size—with estimates putting it at 23,000 civil servants—and has evolved over time with its own distinct formal structure, standards of procedure, and has its own—rational and dysfunctional—bureaucratic culture. These civil servants or “Eurocrats” are central to the agency of the EU, and its power in relation to its member states in Europe (Geuijen, Hart, Princen, Yesilkagit, 2008).

But why, one may ask, should discrete and large bureaucracies be appealing? This is especially valid since they too are susceptible to the processes of isomorphism as well as a range of other pathologies arising from bureaucratic culture. There are two reasons. First, the bureaucratic form is key to the rational accomplishment of stated goals. Even though Weber was acutely aware of the cultural biases inherent in conceptions of both the rational and the legal that underpin bureaucratic objectivity, he noted that the bureaucratic form succeeded because its deployment of technical knowledge to tackle complex modern challenges with predictability, continuity and precision proved to be superior for the efficient realization of goals, as evidenced by their role in expanding markets and in securing state control. To argue that East Asian institutions need discrete and large bureaucracies may be naturally accompanied with apprehensions over the prospect of bureaucratic inefficiency. But these possibilities for dysfunction *coexist* with the possibility of relatively efficient goal accomplishment, which the current organizational model may not permit at the outset.

Second, discrete bureaucracies are key to the possibility of organizational autonomy. Weber theorized that the source of the bureaucracy's legitimacy was its distinctive rational-legal authority. By embodying the legal (dependence on rules and

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<sup>24</sup> Speech by Toshihiro Nikai, Minister of METI, 2009, <<http://www.meti.go.jp/english/speeches/2009newyeargreetings.html>> (accessed on 18 April 2010).



procedures laid by law) and the rational (using socially legitimate technical knowledge for pursuing goals) bureaucracies do not depend on charismatic or traditional forms of legitimacy (Weber, 1947). Added to this is the bureaucracies' control over information and specialized knowledge which may not be available to other actors like political elites. Organizational theorists in IR extend these insights to flesh out how bureaucracies play not only a role in implementing policies but also in shaping them: by classifying and naming categories of actors and actions, by fixing meanings of the social world, and by serving as producers and transmitters of norms and principles (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999: 710–15).

This concern with the presence/absence of a Weberian bureaucracy speaks to a more fundamental theoretical debate in IR: the possibility of organizational autonomy, which asks whether formal institutions are agents or abject instruments of state power. East Asian institutions have been studied in this light, with much constructivist scholarship stressing their importance as social environments where state agents are socialized in externally legitimated norms that change their identities and preferences. However, the evidence for precisely how these constitutive effects have causal implications, and if changes in identities also change practices, remains unclear and contested.<sup>25</sup> Even though the arguments here do not engage with this theoretical debate substantively, it is nonetheless conscious of the implications of its conclusions. Theories of isomorphism would suggest that as much as East Asian states have been pressured into incorporating appropriate norms of their environment into their vocabularies and discourse, they have also taken advantage of the benefits of this appropriation without substantively changing the practice of their cooperation. Furthermore, if organizational theory predicated on the role of the bureaucracy is to be the foundation for arguing in favour of the power and autonomy of institutions vis-a-vis states, then there exist severe limitations on the causal-constitutive power of East Asian institutions in changing the practices of its member states.

### **The Unstated in the context of East Asian Institutions**

If East Asian institutions were indeed rational organizations pursuing stated goals efficiently, then the endurance of extant institutions as well as the creation of new

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<sup>25</sup> Johnston's contribution is important in this regard. He explicates the micro-processes which demonstrate how constitutive effects have causal implications for state behavior. His work is for the PRC in its participation in the ARF (Johnston, 2008). There is no comparable work for other East Asian institutions.

institutions would hardly be a puzzle. It is precisely the evidence of such endurance as well as institutional creation in an East Asia described by the absence of rational organizations that makes the institutional dynamism in the region quite intriguing. While ASEAN has been subject to increasingly trenchant criticisms for nearly a decade, it has responded to these by undertaking vigorous reforms to demonstrate symbolic intent: the community-building project, an ASEAN Charter, and more recently a Human Rights Commission, all of which echo social psychological studies on the “promise of the moment” as a substitute for action and on the function of promises to “feel good” (Kruglanski and Kopetz, 2009: 34). Similarly, the APT, EAS and the ARF, despite criticisms, remain the principal institutions for regional multilateral cooperation. In short, despite their problems, these institutions face no threat of dismantlement or desuetude. The endurance of ASEAN-modelled institutions in East Asia is perhaps most powerfully reflected in the extent to which they remain central to any discussion of multilateral activity in East Asia, as reflected in the many discourses on regional “order” and “architecture”.

Institutional creation—referring broadly to both the formal establishment of new arrangements as well as the elaboration of new proposals—is evidenced by the founding of the EAS in 2005 (which has been treated as an extant institution in this study but nonetheless represents the region’s most recent grouping), the proposal for an “APEC caucus” within the G-20 as an expression of ‘Asian’ dominance within arguably the most prominent inter-state economic forum,<sup>26</sup> Japan’s highly inchoate proposal for an “East Asian Community”, as well as Australia’s proposal for an Asia-Pacific Community. However, the “newness” of these institutions and frameworks suggested by these proposals can be doubted. The EAS is firmly anchored in ASEAN’s diplomatic and security culture (EAS, 2005b: point 13; EAS, 2007a: point17).<sup>27</sup> To be sure, the APC represented the strongest challenge yet to ASEAN’s position in regional

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<sup>26</sup> The call for such a caucus was made by Fred Bergstein in July 2009, see “Forming an Apec caucus may be useful. Band of 10 nations in G-20 could help the region exert more influence: economist”, *Singapore Business Times*, 14 July 2009. This idea was also suggested by Hadi Soesastro as part of a forthcoming PECC report. See ‘Architectural Momentum in Asia and the Pacific’ by Hadi Soesastro, 14 June 2009, <[http://www.iseas.edu.sg/aseanstudiescentre/ascd3\\_soesastro\\_140609.pdf](http://www.iseas.edu.sg/aseanstudiescentre/ascd3_soesastro_140609.pdf)> (accessed on 18 April 2010).

<sup>27</sup> In organizational terms it has been explicitly rooted in the apparatus of national bureaucracies and the ASEAN Secretariat. In the Summit statements of the EAS this is indicated in the responsibility bestowed on “officials and the ASEAN Secretariat” to follow up on the activities formulated at the EAS. See Points 13 and 17 of the first and second EAS Chairman’s meeting.

cooperation.<sup>28</sup> However, there is increasing evidence of ASEAN's success in nesting this within an ASEAN-driven institutional framework in the region, thereby diluting any prospect of a fundamental challenge to its centrality.<sup>29</sup> Further, the APC works within the discourse of community building pursues a three-pillared holistic model of cooperation, and—even though it is a work in progress—its drafts make no substantive contribution in terms of radically new institutional designs or mechanisms for tackling collective action problems.<sup>30</sup>

Is it possible, then, that purposive action need not be based on the existence of stated goals? Indeed, are there goals that are not expressed in the stated realm which play a part in shaping the politics of these institutions, in terms of their designs, functions and even endurance? I argue that there are grounds to argue for the operation of unstated goals in East Asian institutions. This final section shall attempt to define unstated goals, and shall end by hypothesizing three unstated goals being pursued by state agents through these institutions.

### *What are unstated goals?*

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<sup>28</sup> Rudd's first speech caused much anxiety among some Southeast Asian elites by not referring to 'ASEAN' as a member of the future APC; instead, it referred to individual ASEAN states—notably, Indonesia—as a member. ASEAN is quite used to being taken as a corporate actor when it comes to discussions on regional 'architecture building'.

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the most direct evidence for this nesting can be found in the proposals for an expanded EAS and an ASEAN Plus Eight, both of which plan to include the United States and Russia, and thus seek to realize the inclusive 'vision' of the APC. This nesting is a two-way process. On the one hand, ASEAN has been taking the lead at trying to incorporate the APC into their framework. See, for instance, the 2009, EAS and the Chairman's statement arising from that meeting which "noted with appreciation ... Australia's proposal for an Asia-Pacific community in which ASEAN will be at its core ... " (EAS, 2009a: point 17). On the other hand, there is growing acceptance by Australian elites that the APC will not be a new mechanism *in toto*. See speech by Kevin Rudd at the Shangri-la Dialogue in 2009, where his position turned more accommodative of ASEAN as indicated by his remark that "ASEAN itself would of course remain central to the region, and would also be an important part of any future APC." <<http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2009/plenary-session-speeches-2009/opening-remarks-and-keynote-address/keynote-address-kevin-rudd/>> (accessed on 18 April 2010). Evidence for nesting is also found in reports from conferences and diplomatic forums that indicate a fatigue towards more meetings and a lack of appetite for more institutions. This was also recognized by Kevin Rudd as he drew from the findings of his Special Envoy Richard Woolcott's visits to Asian countries, see "Rudd presses for new Asia-Pacific community with summit", 29 May 2009, <<http://www.news.com.au/breaking-news/rudd-presses-for-new-asia-pacific-community-with-summit/story-e6frku0-1225718260610>> (accessed on 18 April 2010). Also see Peter Drysdale's Special Editorial 'What Prime Minister Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community Conference Delivered', 7 December 2009, <<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/12/07/special-editorial-what-prime-minister-rudds-asia-pacific-community-conference-delivered/>> (accessed on 18 April 2010).

<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of why the APC is perhaps not quite different from ASEAN-designed institutions, and thus not necessarily a better alternative, see "How novel is the Asia-Pacific community?", by Deepak Nair, *Viewpoints: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*, 13 May 2010, <<http://www.iseas.edu.sg/viewpoint/dn14may10.pdf>>.

In the context of organizations and formal institutions, unstated goals refer to those latent functions and evolving objectives whose accomplishment may be precluded by their explicit recognition and whose formal articulation in official organizational discourse may be disruptive to the organizations' stability and stated rationales for existence.

But how can the unstated be identified as a 'goal'? In comprehending unstated goals—both conceptually and methodologically—I am guided by Cressey's sociological study of prisons, which demonstrated how the fundamental stated goal of prisons—the protection of society from prison inmates—coexisted with a new unstated goal of protecting inmates from society. The unstated, in this context, was gleaned from the organizational *practices* that did not corroborate with the stated goal: the protection of inmates from staff ridicule, informal rules against exhibiting inmates to tourists, the re-conceptualization of the criminal as a “sick” subject, and the accompanying practices of counseling by psychiatrists and social workers, among others (Cressey, 1958).

Thus, a distinction must be made between the stated and the unstated goals that operate within an organization or formal institution. But on what basis can these boundaries be fixed? One means of demarcating the stated and the unstated is to locate stated goals in the official discourse of the organization and to look for unstated goals in the unofficial and disparate expressions of its constituent agents and also—as Cressey's work demonstrates—in the practices that don't comport with stated organizational missions. The possibility of *practice* as a location of unstated goals does, however, raise another possibility: while stated goals must be necessarily explicit, should unstated goals be limited to conscious expressions at variance with the official view? In other words, can the unstated also be the unconscious-unthinking-spontaneous-subliminal? For example, can an unstated goal rooted in realpolitik sensibilities emerge from, and be strictly located in, confidential deliberations of diplomatic actors or can they also be located in the practices that internalize and institutionalize the cognitive scripts of realpolitik thought within foreign policy establishments? The possibility of the unconscious as a stimulus for goal activation and pursuit need not be related to Freudian unconscious. Social psychologists note the possibility of unconscious goals emerging from an actor's limited mental resources which necessitates some degree of automaticity (to walk and talk at the same time, for instance). Thus, there could be some goals that could be pursued in an automatic manner without necessarily resorting to conscious deliberation at every turn (Kruglanski and Kopetz, 2009: 38–39). These cognitive

concerns can be applied to the study of unstated goals, and specifically in the context of International Relations where the “practice” turn has been working towards unbundling the cognitive constructs and “background knowledge” of agents like diplomatic and state elites (Pouliot, 2008).

Unstated goals can also operate at different levels and be pursued by different agents. They can be found within a formal institution and expressed through conflicts among agents such as members of a discrete bureaucracy and/or the political and diplomatic elites of member states. They may also describe the interaction between two or more formal institutions with relatively stable corporate identities, and may also operate in the interaction between an institution projecting a corporate vision and a member state it seeks to persuade or sanction.

Unstated goals can thus be varied, and there exist several possibilities in identifying them. The character of the unstated goals (conscious/unconscious), the agents that pursue them (state elites or bureaucracies) and the level at which they operate (within an institution, between institutions, or between institutions and states) are considerations that must be factored into account on the basis of the empirical problem at hand.

For the purposes of this paper I identify stated organizational goals of East Asian institutions as those that appear in their official discourse—documents like reports and Summit statements—which project their corporate voice and identity, while goals and functions expressed by state agents—which can be located in public or private interviews, domestic political discourses, or even in bilateral political interaction—constitute the unstated goals of agents *in* institutions.

The classification of the stated/unstated along official/unofficial realms may seem simple but is by no means simplistic. After all, why do organizations and formal institutions communicate in a certain way, with predictable vocabularies, with strategies for framing ‘facts’, justifying rationales, tactful dissimulation and even lying? Catton, for instance, raises this point eloquently in his study of a minority group organization in the United States whose loss of elite status could not be publicly proclaimed as a concern and was instead pursued as an unstated goal. As he puts it, “An elite consists of respectable people, and it would not be respectable in democratic America to set up an ‘Organization for the Preservation of our Elite Status’” (Catton, 1962: 34). Similarly, in international politics, a range of goals that may be perceived as central to notions of state survival by state agents—the ‘protection of the interests of the ruling class’, ‘the

pursuit of grand strategy’, ‘to check the power of the neighbour’, etc.- are disruptive to the norms and philosophy underpinning the collective missions of organizations and multilateral institutions. Their public proclamation, then, becomes a cause for “organizational stress” (ibid: 29) and may preclude the accomplishment of the unstated goal being pursued.

### *Hypotheses*

In the absence of substantive Weberian bureaucracies, Asian regional institutions have been ‘driven’ by national bureaucracies and political elites who, I hypothesize, use regional institutions for three unstated goals: *a)* domestic power consolidation, *b)* for gaining legitimacy via association with international normative structures and discourses, and *c)* for pursuing a raft of realpolitik practices that emerge from their socialization in realpolitik ideology: hedging or balancing against rising powers like China, managing the involvement of Major Powers in the region, and checking the strategic aspirations of neighbors.

What is the empirical evidence that these hypotheses can generate?

*a)* The utility of ASEAN as a means for the domestic consolidation of elite power in semi-authoritarian states in the context of communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia is recognized in several scholarly accounts of the organization (Acharya, 2000; Leifer, 1989; Narine, 1998). The Bangkok Declaration of 1967—ASEAN’s founding document—emphasizes the idea of regional cooperation via economic and social activities, with an oblique reference to this goal by stating a desire to “promote peace and stability” in the region (ASEAN, 1967). As Lee Kuan Yew notes, “The unspoken objective was to gain strength through solidarity ... While ASEAN’s declared objectives were economic, social and cultural, all knew that progress in economic cooperation would be slow. We were banding together for political objectives, stability and security (Lee Kuan Yew 2000: 369).”

It is possible to argue, however, that the scope and depth of ASEAN’s most famous unstated goal remains somewhat under-appreciated. While scholarly narratives recognize this unstated goal in the context of ASEAN’s founding, they nonetheless circumscribe its operation to that period mostly. ASEAN’s founding, then, seems to inaugurate not only regional cooperation but also the presence of stable Southeast Asian states. Institutional developments like the ZOPFAN and the TAC are informed by other imperatives of states (such as the desire of states to formulate norms for inter-state

cooperation and/or the pressures of an emergent normative architecture). By approaching ASEAN's genesis *and* institutional elaboration from a historical materialist approach, Jones emphasizes how the founding of ASEAN embodied a supreme moment of state reification: the nation states that signed up to the Bangkok Declaration were not stable products of hegemonic state construction as they approximate to today, but were sites of active contestation for radically different social orders. While regional reconciliation and the fostering of a favorable international climate were its stated goals, ASEAN's "ultimate purpose was to defend a certain vision of social order" which involved the construction of hegemonic internal social orders as well as "violent-state making" processes (Jones, 2009: 14). Importantly, the contest over social order informed ASEAN's historical elaboration as well: the norm of non-interference (which Jones debunks as being often violated by ASEAN especially in the struggles of Indochina) was an "elite alliance against the revolutionary segments of their own populations"; the signing of the ZOPFAN with the stated goal to exclude great powers from Southeast Asia was—in the context of the Nixon doctrine, the revolutionary upswing in Indochina, and military takeovers in Thailand and the Philippines—a means to "burnish ASEAN's neutralist credentials ... and rhetorically distance the organization from the United States and entice the ascendant communist forces to respect the formal neutrality of the Laotian and Cambodian governments"; and similarly the TAC must be located in the context of 1975–76 when communist victories across Indochina and the social orders built by Southeast Asian elites were threatened (like in Malaysia and Thailand). The historical context to the TAC, Jones notes, indicates how it was "designed to conciliate various victorious communist regimes ... and persuade them to join ASEAN in establishing a collaborative regional environment" (Jones, 2009: 15–18).

The usefulness of ASEAN as an instrument of domestic elite power consolidation extends into the more contemporary period, and this is most starkly demonstrated by advantages conferred and extracted by military junta in Myanmar. As a member of ASEAN, the junta's identification with state power is effected as it becomes the unchallenged representative of state power, has access to symbolic capital by being a recognized actor in regional politics,<sup>31</sup> obtains access to the material resources and

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<sup>31</sup> This legitimacy is not only automatic but also effected with ASEAN's lobbying on behalf of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) states for external legitimacy. Consider, for instance, ASEAN members

markets that may sustain its elites, and is in a position to disregard Western criticisms, punishments and sanctions (Kuhonta, 2006: 349–50; Steinberg, 1998: 180–84).

*b)* The second hypothesis logically follows from the arguments on isomorphism elaborated earlier. Even though ASEAN projects itself as an exceptional model of integration in the developing world, it has persistently mimicked the integration project in Europe to acquire an organizational form that appears legitimate and acceptable. This unstated goal is confirmed not only by varied acts of institutional mimicking but also from the statements made by some of ASEAN’s leading statesmen in a private capacity: the former Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, for instance, who said “our model has been and still is, the European Community ...” (quoted in Jetschke and Rüländ, 2009: 184); the former Malaysian Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, who remarked that ASEAN had adopted a terminology similar to the EU because it offered “respectability” (ibid: 184); and the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, who noted the inspiration provided by the European experience of economic cooperation (Jorgensen-Dahl, 1982: 70).

Besides mimicking the organizational features of the EU, ASEAN has plugged into the international discourse on governance and human rights to bolster its institutional legitimacy especially in the context of crisis following 1997. Katsumata argues that this rather dramatic incorporation of liberal and cosmopolitan norms in ASEAN’s core documents—the APSC and the ASEAN Charter—is meant to secure ASEAN’s identity “as a legitimate institution in the community of modern states” (Katsumata, 2009: 619). Even though these norms are subversive for several states—excluding perhaps Indonesia and the Philippines—they are nonetheless incorporated because, first, they feed into the domestic discourses for national advancement, specifically, the goal of becoming a “first world country”, which has been articulated in varied garbs in several Southeast Asian states (Katsumata, 2009: 627–28), and second, because they eschew the implementation mechanisms that would have made these norms truly subversive. Katsumata’s primary ascent on “mimetic isomorphism” can, however, be expanded to include instances of “coercive” isomorphism as well (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 150–51), where formal and informal pressures exerted by other states, organizations, as well as subtle pressures of material dependence can cause

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expressing their “appreciation to China, Japan and the Republic of Korea for their support to Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar to participate in the Asia-Europe Meetings”, Chairman’s Statement of the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEAN +3 Summit, 2004, point14 <<http://www.aseansec.org/16847.htm>>.



isomorphism. Normative discourses don't exist in themselves and neither are they appropriated purely on the basis of their appeal. In other words, an external normative framework is legitimate precisely because it is articulated and championed by certain agents (states and organizations). ASEAN has been subject to long-standing pressures over the character of political and human rights within its members, primarily Myanmar, and this concern animated its discussions with external (and highly legitimate and power conferring) actors like the EU—during the Asia-Europe Meetings in the early 1990s—as well as with the United States and the United Nations more recently. Besides such external pressure, the isomorphism has also been a result of a certain degree of dependence on external resources. Note, for instance, how the ASEAN Community blueprints tie the prospect of goal accomplishment to the success in securing resources from “Dialogue, Sectoral and Development Partners; Regional and International Institutions in particular the ADB, the World Bank/IFC, the UN; Regional and International Foundations”, “Donor countries, international agencies”, etc. (ASCC, 2009: 25; AEC, 2007: 28; APSC, 2009: 16). Besides International Institutions, ASEAN also materially depends on major external powers like Japan, the US and EU, and Cole and Jenson flesh out the significance of these external actors in creating the pressures that may have triggered and/or facilitated ASEAN's post-1997 isomorphism (Cole and Jenson, 2009: 258–263).

c) The third hypothesis—the use of institutions for pursuing practices motivated by realpolitik conceptions of state interests and security—has become an increasingly salient dynamic in East Asia's recent institutional experience. This has been most apparent by how multilateral institutions have been ‘hijacked’ by Major Powers *as well as* Southeast Asian states to service their perceived geo-strategic interests. The resulting “institution racing” (Acharya and Goh, 2007: 7) or “competitive institutionalism” (Narine, 2007: 216) has a direct bearing on the capacity for fulfilling stated organizational missions. Major Powers latching their interests to institutions has implications for both institutional endurance (they take the lead in elaborating organizational work via initiatives and resources) as well as the creation of new frameworks (they may pursue new institutional frameworks if they find their interests frustrated within existing institutions).

The creation of the East Asia Summit in 2005 is a classic example of this hypothesis. The proposal for the EAS emerged from the APT process, whereby the

latter was supposed to “evolve” into the EAS (EASG, Report: 8). The stated goal in creating the EAS was to take forward the East Asian Community building project with the pre-existing membership of the APT. However, the blueprints for this planned evolution changed within a year, and the first EAS held in 2005 reflected a revised conception of East Asia that incorporated India, Australia and New Zealand into the ‘East Asian’ fold. The EAS, as Breslin notes, broke the fundamental consensus on an exclusive East Asia, and emerged as an “anti-region” (Breslin, 2007: 9); Dent notes how the EAS was “neither a substitute for the APT nor a distinctly separate mechanism in its own right” (Dent, 2008: 169). The unstated goal in revising the blueprints of the EAS, and for the inclusion of three members with close relations to the United States, has been to check the perceived leadership of China within the APT (Breslin, 2007: 8; Tanaka, 2007: 65–68; Goh and Acharya, 2007: 7; Dent, 2008: 171). Tanaka notes how China’s embrace of a proactive role in regional politics, and the consolidation of its position in the APT, occurred in the context of domestic disarray and leadership changes in Japanese and South Korean politics (Tanaka, 2007: 67). China’s proposal for an FTA with ASEAN, its signing of the TAC, and the introduction of a range of social and economic initiatives were meant to reassure its Southeast Asian neighbors, but they contributed to the perception of its aspirations for hegemonic leadership in the region. These perceptions divided deliberations over the membership to the EAS with Japan, Indonesia and Singapore on the one hand supporting the membership of the three new members to the EAS, and China and Malaysia opposing their inclusion. This underlying goal to ‘check’ Chinese influence in regional institutions was expressed strictly in the unofficial spaces, while in official organizational literature the dramatic revisions embodied in the EAS were officially couched in, and legitimated via a discourse of “open and outward-looking” regionalism (EAS, 2005a: point 11).

Japan’s lead in articulating the CEPEA as a new East Asian free trade agreement which overlaps—if not conflicts—with the EAFTA proposed under the APT framework with the backing of Chinese elites, and Japan’s role in funding the ERIA to support the EAS process and China’s role in supporting the APT process, are important features of the competitive institutionalism that has ensued since the founding of the EAS.

The use of institutions to pursue unstated goals laced with realpolitik objectives is at work elsewhere too. ASEAN’s decision to offer membership to Myanmar and its subsequent policy of constructive engagement have been couched in the stated rationales of a united ASEAN-10, as well as to socialize its member state, but it has also

been crucially motivated by the goal to ‘check’ what it perceives to be China’s growing strategic hold of the junta reflected by a range of economic and military interactions as well as the “suspicion” that China seeks a “naval foothold in Southeast Asia” (Kuhonta, 2006: 351).

Strategic considerations have been imputed with causal value in a range of studies with regard to several other acts of regional cooperation: China’s interests in signing the CAFTA with geopolitical considerations in mind; Japan’s decision to sign an FTA with ASEAN as an attempt to counter/match-up to China even though it had so far been reluctant to enter the PTA bandwagon; and the decision to establish the APT in 1997 which emerged less from ‘supply meeting the demand’ for institutions and more as a result of ASEAN’s decision to invite China and South Korea to a summit that Japan’s premier Hashimoto had originally proposed as an exclusive ASEAN-Japan Summit, (Tanaka, 2007: 59–60).

In suggesting a potentially causal role of unstated goals, the argument here, like rational institutionalism, may appear to highlight the ‘intentionality’ of state agents in shaping the agenda and direction of these institutions. Indeed, it could be argued that these unstated goals are also ‘rational’, but importantly, they need not be studied using rational choice epistemologies or with a rationalist ontology of agents and their “intentionality”. Whitford, in his wide-ranging critique of the paradigmatic privilege of rational choice theory, argues that it is possible to rescue the rational actor from rational choice epistemologies by discarding a portfolio model of the actor and its fixed *a priori* means-ends duality by employing a pragmatist theory of action which posits a means-to-end-to-means relationship (Whitford, 2002).

As this demonstrates, the exposition of unstated goals in this study is by no means exhaustive. Besides studying them via different theories and methods (rational choice or otherwise), it is also possible to extrapolate various types of unstated goals (unconscious goals, for example) using interpretive methods, such as those employed by the “practice turn” in IR.

## **Conclusion**

Do stated goals matter for the agents of regional multilateral institutions in East Asia? If not, why? And what explains their endurance as well as the enthusiasm for new institutions and frameworks? These are some of principal questions that have been explored in this study. This paper examines the terrain of stated goals that populate the

organizational documents of these institutions and relates them with empirical trends to argue that stated goals do not seem to *matter* for the agents of these institutions *in practice*, despite their claims that they do in official discourse. It employs the insights of neo-institutionalism in sociology to identify these institutions as “institutionalized organizations”, which incorporate the rationalized myths of their environments, grow isomorphic with existing models of legitimate organizations, and discard efficiency considerations to gain access to resources, enhance survival, and legitimacy. It argues that a key factor that impedes the possibility of these institutions from becoming rational organizations is the absence of a discrete and large Weberian bureaucracy. It demonstrates how, as a consequence, East Asian multilateral institutions draw on the organizational resources and the formal structures of national bureaucracies of their constitutive member states for not only logistical support but also for the very elaboration of their organizational work and rationales. Besides placing severe limits on the capacity of these institutions to change the practices of states, the absence of discrete bureaucracies also opens up the field for national political and bureaucratic elites to pursue a range of goals that may conflict with stated organizational missions as well as the appropriate norms of multilateral interaction. Unstated goals are thus offered as a basis to conceptualize the forces that inform the endurance as well as growth of regional institutions in East Asia.

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