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Aim and Scope

The Journal of ASEAN Studies (JAS) is an International peer-reviewed bi-annual journal that enriches understanding of the past, current, and future issues relevant to ASEAN and its circle of issues. The article shall address any research on theoretical and empirical questions about ASEAN. The Topics addressed within the journal include: diplomacy, political economy, trade, national development, security, geopolitics, social change, transnational movement, environment, law, business and industry, and other various related sub-fields.

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- **Practice notes:** These are shorter manuscripts approximately 1,500-3,500 words that are of specific interest to practitioners. These manuscripts must present new development for the ASEAN.
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We also commit to build, connect and share research and others kinds of knowledge generating activities for the betterment of life of the people and earth. Our immediate constituency is International Relations Department, BINUS University and the larger constituency is the broader academic community of the BINUS University and other universities and institutions both national and international as well as policy community.

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EDITORIAL

ASEAN and Its Relevance amidst Pandemic

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the global economy which brought many countries into recession. Not only that, the COVID-19 pandemic has also made a fundamental change in the international system. The extent to which this COVID-19 Pandemic will fundamentally change the way we view globalization, democracy, and most importantly the superiority of the United States' power in the world.

Such question indeed has been asked by many scholars of international relations. Drezner (2020) argues that although the impact of COVID 19 is enormous on the current global economy, it is only a short-term impact. In a more macro and long-term context, COVID-19 will have no effect in changing the international system as we know it today. Drezner even stated that COVID-19 would only be a footnote in the study of International Relations. At best, the impact of COVID-19 on the international system is no greater than the impact of the influenza pandemic on international politics, which is of course very minimal.

In contrast to Drezner, McNamara and Newman (2020) instead see that COVID-19 is accelerating the process of major transformations taking place in the international system. For both of them, COVID-19 shows how the process of distrust of globalization is getting bigger and the strengthening of identity and nationalism for the nation state. Despite the importance of international cooperation in resolving transnational issues such as the pandemic, the reality is that countries are increasingly nationalistic and seek to protect the goods they need.

Given such polarised debate, it is not surprising that the COVID-19 pandemic led many scholars to analyze the extent to which domestic politics may link to international cooperation. Pevehouse (2020) observes that despite the crisis required significant international cooperation, surprisingly there is

limited international cooperation had emerged. Here, he argues the need for us to see the impact of domestic politics in understanding the impact of COVID-19 towards the international system especially the rise of populism, and nationalist-inspired populism. Surprisingly, there is a tendency of the rise of populism in light of COVID-19 pandemic.

In this piece, we want to bring the debates into the context of ASEAN and the study of ASEAN. As one of the most dynamics and emerging region, Southeast Asia along with its robust regional organization can provide an interesting discussion on the study of International Relations in general and area studies in particular. In this opportunity, we argue that it is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic provides a clear picture of how the struggle of the two axis of power in the international system namely the US and China compete in shaping the narrative and offering a vision of post-pandemic international cooperation. Southeast Asia has inevitably become the centre of competition for influence from these superpowers in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEAN as a regional organization then needs to accommodate countries in the region to face various real challenges during the pandemic.

Moreover, we discuss three levels of challenges faced by ASEAN in facing the pandemic, namely the international, regional and domestic levels. At the international level, the deepening strategic rivalry between the US and China has become the major international challenges faced by ASEAN. We argue that ASEAN should be able to increase its assertiveness in enhancing international cooperation amidst the rise of competition between the US and China. At the regional level, the major concern is the cohesiveness of ASEAN in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. We assert that ASEAN should be able to stay relevant by making sure that all programmes and actions it created are delivered and implemented. Last but not least, domestic aspects matter in international and regional cooperation. We show that each ASEAN member state utilises different approaches which ultimately result in different mitigation outputs. We argue that ASEAN should provide a platform where each state can learn from other countries and can even help each other in the context of implementing best practice in the region.

The International Challenges

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic shows us how international cooperation is not something to be taken for granted. The literature related to the study of international cooperation has stated that international cooperation is more likely to occur when the cooperation is carried out in the context of low politics such as environmental and health issues than cooperation in the context of high politics such as security, nuclear, and also strategic (Drezner, 2003; Raustiala, 2002; Vries et al., 2021).

The notion of politicization of international cooperation is then importance to understand why some cooperation is problematic while others do not. According to Vries et al. (2021), there are two main aspects leading to namely public discontent about the existing international cooperation and the mobilization of this discontent by political entrepreneurs. Public discontent might be caused by three factors; First, economic consequences of international cooperation which may have negative impact toward the domestic audience. Second, growing concerns about identity and cultural value divide which make international cooperation is difficult. Finally, the contestation over international authority and their legitimacy. The mobilisation of discontent by political entrepreneurs, may be resulted in effort of strategic politicians to gain benefit from the grievances associated with international cooperation.

In the case of COVID-19 pandemic, arguably these factors indeed play roles in making the international cooperation in mitigating COVID-19 is getting harder. Public discontent toward international cooperation can be seen from the public's distrust of international authorities who manage cooperation to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. We also see how politicians politicize COVID-19 in both

developed and developing countries. In the United States alone we see how President Donald Trump sees COVID-19 not as a threat but as a tool to slow down the US economy. The same is true in Brazil and India where leaders are politicizing COVID-19 for their domestic interests.

We further show that the lack of international cooperation is also exacerbated by a growing rivalry between superpowers. In the case of COVID-19 pandemic, the United States and China are handling the spread of the devastating coronavirus pandemic in very different ways, and those differences are reshaping the global rivalry between the world's two leading economies. In the case of ASEAN, such rivalry seems to tilt toward China. For the past four years under Donald Trump administration, the United States' relations with the ASEAN region have been deteriorated. President Donald Trump refused to attend the ASEAN Summit for the third year in a row, even in 2020 when the forum was conducted online.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Xi Jinping regime was criticized for its slow response and indications to cover up the outbreak that allowed the coronavirus to spread rapidly around the world. With an authoritarian approach in dealing with COVID-19, China can control the spread of the virus and can successfully emerge from the crisis. With factories reviving, China is again exporting vital supplies and medical equipment to other countries.

The initiatives and steps taken by China with this 'mask diplomacy' are interpreted as a means of re-branding the Chinese government to be able to maintain good relations with ASEAN countries, especially in relation to economic cooperation. China seeks to change the face of COVID-19 from a COVID-19 outbreak to a symbol of its global leadership in overcoming the crisis. This effort is reinforced by propaganda that focuses on the Chinese government's response to the outbreak, which is part of a global campaign that observers call Covid Diplomacy. It is not surprising that according to study conducted by Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 44.2 percent of Southeast Asian respondents stated that China have provided the most help to the region for COVID-19 while the US is trailing behind with only 9.6% of respondents.

ASEAN must be able to continue to be an international actor who plays a balancing role between these two superpowers. In this pandemic era, ASEAN's role is becoming increasingly important. ASEAN must be able to keep the engagement of these two countries present in the region and at the same time not make one superpower country have a greater influence than the other.

The regional challenges

ASEAN's challenges at the regional level are more about the ability of ASEAN countries to be able to collaborate and synergize in efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 (Djalante et al., 2020). Many scholars view the role of ASEAN sceptically in helping member countries to be able to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the region. Beeson (2020) for instance would argue that ASEAN has so far been limited given that the organisation largely ineffectual in overseeing a collective response to the crisis.

Despite the scepticism in seeing how ASEAN response to crisis, we show that ASEAN is still relevant in nurturing cooperation among Southeast Asian states in mitigating Pandemic COVID-19. This stems from ASEAN member states that see the pandemic would crash their economy. To that end, ASEAN took action by proposing regional cooperation in an effort to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEAN leaders have made plans and discussed a number of policies that are part of ASEAN regional cooperation. There are a number of policies that are mutually agreed upon by all ASEAN members and it is hoped that these policies can help fellow members fight the COVID-19 virus. However, there are a

number of criticisms and challenges for ASEAN regional cooperation in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within ASEAN itself, the ten members agreed on several important points regarding the handling of COVID-19, namely strengthening cooperation against COVID-19 by exchanging information, best practice, research development, epidemiological development, and others. Furthermore, providing protection for ASEAN citizens in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening public communication and efforts to combat stigmatization and discrimination, committing to take collective action and coordinated policies to mitigate economic and social impacts, the importance of a comprehensive approach involving multi-stakeholders and multi-sectorals, assigning ASEAN economic ministers to ensure the continuity of supply chain connectivity so that trade can continue, and to support the reallocation of the ASEAN Trust Fund to tackle the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

The leaders of ASEAN countries have also decided to establish a regional fund to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The establishment of the Response Fund is aimed at securing the availability of essential medical supplies and equipment in the ASEAN region. The funds come from the reallocation of available funds and existing finances. Support from ASEAN partners, such as ASEAN Plus Three, contributed to this funding. This funding is also accompanied by a commitment to refrain from spending unnecessary funds on the flow of goods, especially strategic goods to combat COVID-19 such as medical, food and essential supplies (ASEAN Declaration 2020).

We certainly see new initiatives from the APT Summit and Summit such as the establishment of the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund and the ASEAN Center for Infectious Diseases as an ASEAN effort to become more relevant in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, learning from ASEAN's experience so far, initiatives to form new bodies like this often do not answer substantial problems at the member state level. Its effectiveness will clearly depend on the matter of funds and the will of each member country. However, there are economic-political factors that shape state-society relations in member states that often pose challenges for multilateral agencies in managing non-traditional security threats in such a region (Hameiri and Jones, 2015).

In the end, being able to demonstrate its important role in a crisis situation like this has indeed become a touchstone for ASEAN. Moreover, looking at the data that all ASEAN countries are almost certain to be exposed to this global outbreak, although to varying degrees. But again, ASEAN must be able to show its unity as a sharing and caring community. ASEAN must be able to prove that regional solidarity can be realized by giving priority to countries in the region to rise together.

We need to stress the importance of ASEAN to strengthen cooperation in accelerating ASEAN's economic recovery. President Joko Widodo in his speech also reminded that in the economic situation that was quite down due to the pandemic, all ASEAN countries must work harder to strengthen and grow the regional economy more quickly. The Indonesian government sees connectivity as the key, whether the connectivity of goods, services and economic actors can be revived as soon as possible. ASEAN is also considered in a need to start arrangements regarding the ASEAN Travel Corridor in a careful, measured and gradual manner. This is considered important because it can show the strategic meaning of the ASEAN community both in the region and in the eyes of the international community (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2020).

The domestic challenges

Arguably, the domestic challenges have so far, the main hindrance for ASEAN countries in responding to COVID-19. In the context of ASEAN, there are two debates regarding how Southeast Asian countries

respond to the emergence of the pandemic. The first is the debate related to the implementation of neoliberalism and policy capacity in mitigating the impact of COVID-19. The second is the issue of the securitization of health issues.

In mitigating the economic impact caused by the pandemic, the governments of each country have also issued domestic policies, both monetary policy and fiscal stimulus. Since early 2020, the majority of ASEAN members have lowered interest rates and implemented other financial sector policies, according to the approach of each country. These efforts are taken to ensure liquidity and financial stability are maintained, as well as reduce borrowing costs to stimulate business production activities and public consumption

The way each government in ASEAN deals with this crisis is also very varied, including the amount of the budget specially prepared to reduce this pandemic. But overall, there are two broad approaches that the state taken in its efforts to mitigate the COVID-19 namely fragmented regulatory model and authoritative state-driven developmental model. Jones and Hameiri (2021) provide an interesting comparative analysis of strong state Asian state and neoliberal European state.

This analysis fits with the context of ASEAN. Some countries choose to apply an authoritative approach such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia and countries that prefer a neoliberal approach such as Indonesia. We also see how the differences between these two approaches have implications for the output of handling COVID-19. In countries that use an authoritative approach, the state has managed to control the rate of spread of the virus. Meanwhile, in a country that is fragmented and neoliberal-oriented, the handling of a pandemic seems slow and unprepared.

Another debate regarding domestic aspect of the handling of COVID-19 pandemic is to what extent the state has frame the crisis as a security issue. As suggested by many studies, the government elites may best positioned to shape security attitudes and use their narratives influence public attitudes during a crisis (Karyotis et al., 2021). In his study, Chairil (2021) asserts that state response toward the pandemic may be particularly driven by the security issue rather than public health issue. This is particularly true to several ASEAN countries especially Indonesia. He shows how Indonesia's response initially focus on the de-securitization of the issue but later turn into securitization process limiting Indonesia's ability to restrict the spread of the pandemic. While countries such as Singapore that treats COVID-19 pandemic as a public health issue rather than security issue and then focus more on increasing states' presence of fiscal, operational and policy capacities.

The issues surrounding ASEAN

Having discussed the challenges faced by ASEAN, this volume reflects our concerns regarding the pandemic. As we have discussed above, the pandemic has further enhanced the rivalry between the US and China in the region. Moreover, we see that challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic has also directly impacted the economy of ASEAN member states. In this volume, we collect interesting topics that relate to the growing concerns faced by ASEAN both as regional organisation and as region.

We believe that understanding ASEAN-China relations is essential to understand the trajectory of ASEAN position in the post-COVID-19 international system. In the previous volume, JAS has published an article investigating China's defense diplomacy toward ASEAN (Sinaga, 2020). In this edition, we further enhance the debate by bringing article entitled "Of benevolence and unity: Unpacking china's foreign policy discourses toward Southeast Asia" written by Enrico Gloria. In this article, Gloria shows that China has constructed a story of a 'Benevolent China' in line with 'Developing Southeast Asia' to provide a positive representation of itself in light of its ongoing rise to great power status. By

doing so China is benefitting from its overall pursuit of a positive identity within Southeast Asia. Such positive sentiment can be seen from how China disburses Chinese vaccine to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia.

The second article entitled “Maritime security cooperation within the ASEAN institutional framework: a gradual shift towards practical cooperation” also discuss one of the main challenges of ASEAN particularly in the context of US-China rivalry that is how ASEAN members cooperate among each other’s particularly in maritime security issue. I Gusti Bagus Dharma Agastia shows that there are various forms of cooperation between ASEAN countries on maritime security issues. However such maritime security cooperation among ASEAN members continues to be largely dialogue-based, with few instances of practical cooperation. By comparing the three fora, He further shows that the organisational design of these forums tends to affect the forms of cooperation.

The use of technology for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is increasingly relevant to be able to continue operating in the midst of a pandemic, as well as increase productivity, expand market access, and look for alternative financing. In fact, ASEAN member states agree to enhance financial digitalisation in order to create market resilience in facing pandemic. Moreover, ASEAN itself currently has the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2016-2025 in which one of its strategic goals is to promote productivity, technology and innovation. The third article entitled “Prerequisites and Perceived Information System Qualities Model for Mobile Banking Adoption among the Customers of Private Commercial Banks in Myanmar” provides us with the glimpse how the adoption of mobile banking helps commercial banks in Myanmar to grow. Phyo Min Tun shows that user interface design quality is a prerequisite of system quality and information quality.

The next article deals with socioeconomic determinants of infant mortality rate in ASEAN. This article is relevant considering that studies related to health issues have not yet received an appropriate place in studies on ASEAN. This article looks at how the infant mortality rate indicates the health status of a country. Vita Kartika Sari shows that the size of the female workforce has a strong influence on increasing the infant mortality rate in ASEAN.

The last article entitled “Western Centric Research Methods? Exposing International Practices” is an interesting work for those who want to reflect how should we approach ASEAN without any western bias. Catherine Jones reminds us that in the study of international relations and particularly regarding institutions, area studies approaches should be more frequently adopted. The limited use of these approaches not only hampers new research but also hides a colonial hangover. This is the reason why Journal of ASEAN Studies tries to continue to understand ASEAN not only as actors and processes in international relations but also to bring understanding and an area studies approach to understanding the Southeast Asian region.

We hope that this regular issue Vol 9. 1 2021 would invite further examination of the role of ASEAN during the pandemic and post-pandemic. We look forward to more studies that search out the effects of Pandemic towards ASEAN and how ASEAN member countries cope with the pandemic.

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OF BENEVOLENCE AND UNITY: UNPACKING CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY DISCOURSES TOWARD SOUTHEAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT

While much attention has been directed on the security and economic implications of China's rise in the region, research on the normative implications of China's persistent attempt at projecting a positive major power identity continue to be lacking. This paper seeks to contribute to this growing literature, as it applies Social Identity Theory (SIT) in analyzing China's discourses toward Southeast Asia from Mao to Xi. More specifically, it unpacks social identity phenomena within discourses reflected in official documents by using predicate analysis. Insights from the findings of this paper underscore China's growing role as a normative power driven by a longstanding objective to be perceived positively and distinctively. Likewise, this paper also finds that there is a continuity with respect to China's foreign policy discourse of depicting Sino-Southeast Asia relations as unique and united. There are also indications that Southeast Asia has consistently been presented as benefiting from its relations with China, thereby treating it as a prototype of what a Sino-centric order might offer for the rest of the world. Ultimately, China's discourses of itself, Southeast Asia, and Sino-Southeast Asia relations point to major power aspirations of constructing a united in-group and a positive identity.

Keywords: *China's Foreign Policy, Southeast Asia, Sino-Southeast Asia Relations, Social Identity Theory, Discourse Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

How do we make sense of China's foreign policy discourse toward Southeast Asia since the founding of the People's Republic? How have China's discourses toward the region further its objective of presenting a positive and unique identity as a major power? This paper seeks to provide a discussion of China's foreign policy discourses toward Southeast Asia as reflected in its official foreign policy pronouncements since the founding of the PRC. Indeed, Sino-Southeast Asia relations since Mao Zedong's leadership has gone through considerable changes in terms of imperative global issues and domestic political developments. But despite these changes, this paper takes the critical assumption that Southeast Asia remains a consistent focus for China with respect to its overall foreign policy direction. And given China's growing influence in the region, it is important to take a more comprehensive appreciation of how China has represented and thought of Southeast Asia with respect to its overall foreign policy logic.

Southeast Asia plays a unique role in China's foreign policy. China's current leadership under Xi Jinping has been consistently straightforward in highlighting Sino-Southeast Asia relations as a "priority" region "in its relations with developing countries" and in China's overall "peripheral diplomacy" (MOFA, 2013; Li, 2013; Xi, 2015a; Li, 2020a). For instance, the idea of a Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) bore out of what China considers as Southeast Asia's important role along its ancient silk route, thereby prioritizing the region in the establishment of this initiative (Xi, 2013). And as argued by Jeffrey Reeves (2018) in his study of Xi Jinping's peripheral diplomacy, the current leadership "has made peripheral relations central to all its flagship foreign policy concepts" (p. 977).

Apart from narratives and concepts, the current strategic reality of Sino-Southeast Asia relations also provides evidence on the region's uniqueness and significance for China. It has been noted that China has been making "unprecedented inroads" in prioritizing new security partnerships with ASEAN countries, which points to the region's importance in China's geopolitical ambitions (Parameswaran 2020). In terms of economic relations, ASEAN-China trade grew by 7% despite the global health and economic crisis, making ASEAN as China's largest trading partner for the first time. This is a further testament not just to the resilience of Sino-Southeast Asia cooperation, but also to China's growing concentration on the region. China has also never failed to underscore that it is consistently the "first" major power to lodge support in various ASEAN initiatives-- from acceding to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, to the launching of an ASEAN-China free trade area (Li, 2013b). And with respect to managing the current pandemic, China has also hinted on motivations to prioritize Southeast Asia in receiving COVID-19 vaccine donations (Li, 2020b; Strangio, 2020; Tan and Maulia, 2020). Indeed, compared to other partnerships, Southeast Asia as a region plays a unique role in China's overall external relations as it is the logical recipient or "testing ground" for China to channel the expansion of its power and influence (Stromseth, 2019). This makes it important for observers of China's foreign policy to focus on Sino-Southeast Asia relations for a more nuanced understanding of China's continuous ascent to major power status.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently, mainstream explanations on China's foreign policy logic in Southeast Asia tend to assume the realist logic that its behavior is simply informed by a much larger major power competition for regional hegemony between China and the United States (see Beeson and Li, 2012; Xinbo, 2016; Suehiro, 2017; Kim, 2014). Li Xiaoting (2015) for instance argues that China uses its growing capabilities to "seek the assistance of its neighbors in turning away a rival great power from China's periphery" (p. 25). Other scholars forward this argument by focusing on great power influence as currency to purchase small neighbor allegiance in the face of the Sino-US geopolitical competition (Huong, 2019; Rüländ and Michael, 2019; Storey, 2012). Overall, this group of observations stems from a realist logic of considering Southeast Asia solely as an arena of major power competition, thereby treating Sino-Southeast Asia relations as the zero-sum counterpart of US-Southeast Asia alliance.

Another set of explanations rooted in a similar realist logic highlights China's 'core national interests' as the primary motivation for restraint or assertiveness observed in China's behavior toward the region. As Rumi Aoyama (2013) argues, "the simultaneous achievement of three national interests of security, sovereignty, and economic development" influences China's foreign policy in the neighborhood (p. 91). While this group tend to highlight a perceived proclivity for peace and non-aggression as a significant factor in determining the shape and form of China's behavior toward Southeast Asia, these explanations are rooted in an assumption that China's national interests come first, especially those concerning its economic development at home (Takahara, 2012; Boon, 2017; Goh, 2014). In this sense, national interest trumps other potential variables that may also explain China's foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

Despite mainstream realist explanations on China's foreign policy in the region, there are those who also highlight the importance of norms, ideas, and discourses in understanding China's Southeast Asia approach. As Song Weiqing (2020) has argued in his research on China's multilateral engagements in Asia, he claims that China's rise in the region is also informed by a "growing normative agenda" which therefore makes China a "normative foreign policy player" as it strives to dictate values and behavior that can be considered as "normal" hence shaping the way international relations ought to be conducted (p. 231). This group of explanations tends to highlight China's pursuit for non-material gains such as identity and status beyond security calculations (see Smith, 2021; Gloria, 2020; Callahan, 2016; Qin, 2006).

Lastly, and related to the above constructivist explanations emphasizing non-material gains, there is also a growing attempt in the literature to highlight the consequential role of Southeast Asia and how it is an important arena for China as it aspires to become a normative and distinct major power vis-à-vis western powers in history. As argued by William Callahan (2016), the current leadership under Xi seeks "to forge a new network" in Southeast Asia "guided by Chinese values" which ultimately serves the "much larger end of promoting China's new vision of global governance" (pp. 13-14). Song (2020) and Reeves (2018) also concur with this observation highlighting an increasingly prominent Sino-centric network in Southeast Asia ushered in by the normalization of specific norms and ideas, which in turn seeks to reshape the greater regional and global order. For these scholars, Southeast Asia acts as a

convenient ‘prototype’ for China in terms of showing the world how a Sino-centric order, founded on benign values and benevolent major power identity, may work for the future.

This paper seeks to contribute to the above constructivist literature, as it takes the assumption that China’s foreign policy discourses on Southeast Asia have been guided by more persistent objectives of presenting a positive and distinct identity as a benign normative power. More specifically, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion on Sino-Southeast Asia relations in two ways. First, it refers to *Social Identity Theory* (SIT) as a fitting theoretical framework in analyzing how identity manifested through discourse prevails in China’s foreign policy thinking toward Southeast Asia. As discussed in the next section, there is a growing literature on the application of SIT in international relations and Chinese foreign policy, but none yet in terms of a specific application in understanding Sino-Southeast Asia relations. Second, the paper also attempts to provide a much larger scope hence an overview of China’s foreign policy discourse towards Southeast Asia as it focuses on sample documents and excerpts in conducting its discourse analysis of official texts since the leadership of Mao Zedong. In this way, the findings of this paper allows for an identification of discursive continuities and changes, which is similar to what has been done in other explanations of Chinese foreign policy (see Qin, 2014; Li, 2019). While the existing literature have yet to make a systematic attempt at a more specialized focus on discourse and Southeast Asia as subjects of interest, this research does not promise a definitive interpretation of China’s overall discourse in the region. Following a discussion of SIT, the paper proceeds with an explanation of how discourse analysis was conducted in a sample of texts.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Identity Theory is one of the main theoretical developments in social psychology, which primarily deals with the study of intergroup relations. Its main assumption, as far as its applicability in the discipline of International Relations is concerned, is the centrality of *social identity* or status in determining prospects for conflict and cooperation. Social identity, as defined by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1986), refers to “those aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which an individual perceives himself as belonging” (p. 277). SIT assumes that individuals naturally aspire a positive social identity or self-image, the evaluation of which is relative to how it perceives a significant out-group or an ‘Other’ (p. 288). Applying SIT to IR, states such as China are assumed to also undergo social identity phenomena of seeking to achieve a positive and distinct identity.

To uncover social identity phenomenon at work as internalized by the ‘Self’ or the ‘in-group’, the underlying socio-cognitive processes of *categorization* and *self-enhancement* must be initially articulated and identified. The process of *categorization* refers to how the ‘Self’ or the state in question assigns and affiliates itself to a relevant category or grouping, and how the boundary between itself and the out-group is consequently sharpened through “group-distinctive stereotypical and normative perceptions” (Hogg, M., Terry, D., & White, K., 1995 p. 260). For the purposes of benchmarking other actors, this category or grouping is represented by a particular *prototype*, which may be a subset of the in-group that equates to an exemplary

representation of the distinctive qualities of the larger in-group. The prototype essentially allows the in-group to judge potential members, and to further enhance the group's entire image as discriminatory comparisons with the out-group are made. The latter refers to the process of Self-enhancement. More specifically, this process requires specific positive-negative comparisons to be made between an in-group and out-group, which results to improved self-esteem as it magnifies a positive depiction of the 'Self' relative to the 'Other'(Hogg et al, 1995 pp. 260-261).

This paper assumes that China, through the discourses it has promoted on its foreign policy and relations with Southeast Asia, exhibits social identity behaviors akin (1) to *categorizing* itself within a self-constructed in-group and, (2) to *enhancing* a positive major power image and status in contrasting itself from an out-group of western major powers. Moreover, there are also indications that this constructed Sino-Southeast Asia in-group unity is treated as a *prototypical in-group* as China seeks to universalize the norms and ideas it has consistently promoted, thus consistent with the observations made by existing literature on China's normative power. Overall, this paper adds to the growing literature on SIT's application in nuancing Chinese foreign policy (see Yi, 2020; Gloria, 2020; Larson, 2017; Lee, 2016; Larson and Schvenchko, 2014; Gries, 2005) . Most of them had hitherto focused on the implications of SIT in understanding China's rise vis-a-vis major power competition by emphasizing different 'identity strategies' China undertakes as it aspires for top major power status. This paper takes a slightly different direction as it considers the initial social identity process (categorization and self-enhancement, as well as prototyping) which existing studies have not sufficiently touched upon. The paper also contributes to the growing SIT-IR literature by also focusing on a much narrower subject of study such as Sino-Southeast Asia relations.

RESEARCH METHOD

Another crucial assumption that this paper takes is that "identity construction" and 'Self-Other' distinctions are manifested in discourse, and therefore can be uncovered using discourse analysis (Lindgren & Lindgren, 2017 p. 381; also see Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 2001). Discourse as conceptualized in this paper is consistent with Michel Foucault's (1972) understanding that language depicts modes of representation that serve to establish domains of knowledge. Related to this, "social representations in the mind of social actors" regarding the 'Self' and 'Other' are treated as the "theoretical interface" linking power and discourse, thus making discourse and identity simultaneously occurring (Van Dijk, 1993 p. 251). Therefore, consistent with SIT, social cognition and representation, or the way states think about their place in international society, becomes an important element of understanding discourse.

The paper conducts its discourse analysis in a sample of publicly available high-level government documents describing China's foreign policy rationale in Southeast Asia. Purposive sampling was done to select few but information-rich sample texts (Schreier 2018, p. 88). This sampling decision and approach is guided by the main objective of presenting an in-depth description of the five paramount leadership-periods-- Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping-- and their respective distinct operational codes or

foreign policy rationale (He and Feng, 2013). Consistent with the parameters of purposive sampling, identifying candidate documents were limited by a selection criteria that is practical yet consistent with the main research objective (Schreier 2018, 93). First, the selected documents were all obtained from open-access online repositories ensuring their wide availability. Second, the naturally occurring documents were either penned or articulated by high-level foreign policy officials (e.g. President, Premier, Vice President, Foreign Ministers, and Ambassadors) to ensure representativeness of a particular leadership policy legacy or operational code. And lastly, the subject focus of these documents pertain to a specific discussion of China's overall vision and main rationale for Sino-Southeast Asia relations. Limiting the selection search using this set of criteria yields a selection of a few sample documents that are homogenous for each of the five leadership-period, and are still relevant, representative, and information-rich (Patton 2014, p. 429). And to control for the differences resulting from variations in the number of publicly available documents within each leadership period, as for instance cold war leaderships would have relatively fewer documents that satisfy the criteria, a quota of three documents was determined to be sufficient given the objective of conducting an in-depth analysis of a few information-rich texts common in qualitative studies (see Crouch and McKenzie, 2006; Ruiz, 2009). Similarly, the three unique documents selected for each leadership-period were purposively determined based on their consistency with the identified criteria. Lastly, all official documents analyzed are English translations. While referring to official Chinese foreign policy documents do provide a closer approximation of the leaders' operational codes and logic, focusing on widely accessible English-language documents ensure that the specific descriptions unpacked are representations of relevant subjects (e.g. China, Southeast Asia) that China wants its foreign audience to specifically appreciate. Since social identity is about status curation and projection, texts meant for external audiences also fit the analytical logic of this research.

The focus is on uncovering salient discursive themes from the texts, which could point to the SIT phenomena of *categorization* and *self-enhancement*, and ultimately China's overall discourse of its foreign policy logic in Southeast Asia. These discursive themes are uncovered by conducting predicate analysis in reading the sample texts. Doing predicate analysis entails looking for discursive devices that assigns "stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative and positive traits" to relevant subjects-- or the main actors in China's story-telling (Wodak 2001, p.73). The identified relevant subjects are (1) Sino-Southeast Asia relations, (2) China, (3) Southeast Asia, and (4) western major powers. Identifying and focusing on these four subjects is also consistent with the analytical objectives of SIT to uncover the "defining characteristics" of "social categories" or the perceived in-groups and out-groups, which in this case are broadly represented by the four subjects (Hogg et al 1995, p.259).

ANALYSIS

This section provides a discussion of the salient discursive themes from the sample texts that were uncovered through predicate analysis. The analyses below are guided by the following questions: (1) How has China described the subject, (2) What consistent themes in

terms of common representations (i.e. predicates and descriptors) employed by various leaderships can be identified?

The first part focusses on how China predicated or described ‘Sino-Southeast Asia relations’ and the themes that they constitute. It is argued that ultimately, these themes make up China’s specific ‘discourse of unity’ in terms of how it perceives Sino-Southeast Asia relations throughout the five leaderships. While there are notable changes in context and therefore the rallying point for in-group unity, what has been continuous is China’s commitment to discursively portray China and Southeast Asia as belonging to a similar in-group.

Sino-Southeast Asia Relations and China’s ‘Discourse of Unity’

China’s reference to ‘Southeast Asia’ as a distinct group only occurred substantially in recent political history. More specifically, China under the leaderships of Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping tend to describe and refer to Southeast Asia within the larger ‘third world’ or ‘Asia’ grouping. Indeed, this observation is consistent with the division of the three worlds that Mao Zedong has formally stipulated in 1974, specifically stating that “developing countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and other regions belong to the third world” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2014).

On the other hand, clear reference to either a distinct Southeast Asian region, and ASEAN as a single political entity, only started appearing in official texts during the post-cold war period, beginning with Jiang Zemin’s leadership. This is consistent with Joseph Cheng’s (1999) observation that China during this period has started to consider ASEAN as one of the “poles in the multipolar power transfiguration in the Asia-Pacific region” (p. 177, also see Wong, 2007). This represents a shift towards a more increased focus and a more specialized approach on the region within China’s foreign policy. Despite this obvious change, China’s overall discourse towards Southeast Asia has been anchored on a continuous commitment to portray the two sides as being united as one in-group, as evidenced by four distinct discursive themes uncovered in this analysis. Indeed, regardless of the changing international circumstances and leaderships in the last 70 years, China has often described Sino-Southeast Asia relations on terms that evoke longstanding friendship and affinity. This points to China’s cognitive representation of itself and Southeast Asia as belonging in the same in-group of like-minded nations.

Discourse of Unity: Shared Legacies and Struggles

The first theme under China’s discourse of unity points to *shared victimhood*, as both sides have jointly been victims of western imperialism and underdevelopment. This idea of a shared victimhood has mostly been invoked by the cold war leaderships of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. For instance, speaking to then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954 on the overall conditions of Asia as a region, Mao Zedong stated that Asia as a whole is united by the “common experience” of having “suffered from foreign rule” (Mao, 1954a). And in

Zhou Enlai's speech in front of the historic Asian-African Conference in 1955, he referred to the same discourse of common victimhood to make the point that the developing world "found it easier to understand each other and have long deep sympathy and concern for one another" because of this shared suffering (Zhou, 1955).

Continuing this story of shared victimhood, succeeding leaderships have also invoked the idea, although less prominently during Jiang Zemin's and Hu Jintao's regimes. As stipulated in Deng Xiaoping's description of "China's Foreign Policy of Peace", the "third world" have been "victims of hegemonism," thereby making "union and cooperation" to safeguard world peace and oppose hegemonism a rational group focus (1982). Likewise, Xi Jinping in 2013 also referred to the same discourse of a common struggle between China and ASEAN, stating that the two "had sympathized and supported each other in their respective struggle for national independence and liberation in the last century". Indeed, China has constantly pointed to this unique experience of being subjected to imperialism, or the general antagonism coming from the west, to argue for a natural affinity between Southeast Asia and China. And this only served to sharpen the group boundaries that constitute China's constructed in-group.

In addition to shared victimhood, China also turns to the discursive theme of *shared historical legacies* to solidify its claim to in-group affinity with Southeast Asia. For instance, it is common to find predicates within high-level speeches referring to China and Southeast Asia's long history of contacts, friendships, and overall good relations, thereby justifying in-group affinity and solidarity (see Xi, 2013; Wen, 2011; Li, 2009; Jiang, 1997; Mao, 1963). Although this discursive theme emphasizing 'traditional friendship' can be uncovered in most high-level speeches since Mao's era, this is found to be most prominent in speeches under Hu Jintao's and Xi Jinping's leaderships. Xi Jinping in particular came to support the decision to make Southeast Asia a crucial component of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) owing to both sides' "long history" of friendship and contacts (2013). In addition to this, he would also describe longstanding neighborhood unity by referencing specific historical anecdotes and images that underpin a "history of amicable exchanges" between the two sides (Xi, 2015a). In the inaugural speech of the MSRI delivered in front of Indonesian legislators, the Chinese leader points to the voyages of Admiral Zheng He as testament to "stories of friendly exchanges" between China and the peoples of Southeast Asia (2013). Extending this pattern of referring to history, Premier Wen Jiabao (2011) under the previous leadership talked about how ASEAN and China "enjoy geographical, cultural, and historical proximity" and pointed to cherishing "traditional friendly ties" as part of the usual assessment of ASEAN-China relations. Just like with what was observed in China's shared victimhood discourse, this constant reference to shared historical legacies constitutes a discursive theme in itself that serves to solidify China's claim to having a natural in-group affinity with Southeast Asia.

A contemporary version of the above representations of in-group unity has also emerged, owing to transnational challenges posed by the post-cold war order. China has also turned to *shared struggles* as a discursive theme to depict in-group solidarity amidst emerging transnational issues. For instance, then Vice President Hu Jintao (1998) under the leadership of Jiang Zemin, recalled in his speech to the ASEAN summit how China and ASEAN "have

pulled together in times of trouble and supported one another” during the Asian financial crisis. Succeeding leaderships of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have also frequently referred to this shared experience of surviving the financial crises to emphasize China-ASEAN solidarity (Wen, 2011; Tong, 2011; Li, 2009; Xi, 2013, 2015; Li, 2020). In other instances where this discourse of shared experiences have been utilized, China-ASEAN bilateral relations was described as being cooperative towards each other, especially when it comes to jointly “responding to major natural disasters” as well as “controlling such communicable diseases such as SARS and avian influenza” (Tong, 2011). Almost a decade after, this narrative of jointly combatting transregional issues finds its way in Li Keqiang’s most recent speech delivered during the 2020 bilateral summit: “In times of adversities, from the two financial crises, to major natural disasters such as tsunamis and SARS and to the sudden onslaught of COVID-19, we have always stood together and looked out for each other in the spirit of a community with a shared future” (Li, 2020). Indeed, natural disasters, pandemics, and financial crises serve the same purpose as ‘colonialism’ and ‘underdevelopment’—central world issues that were most commonly invoked during the time of Mao and Deng—in allowing China to claim solidarity and natural affinity with Southeast Asia.

Across the five leaderships, continuity in terms of maintaining a consistent discursive agenda of projecting a unified in-group can be observed. This constitutes China’s discourse of unity when it comes to how it perceives Sino-Southeast Asia relations. More specifically, the three discursive themes discussed so far all point to perceived common internal characteristics between the two sides, often emphasizing similarities in ways of life as a result of common roots and experiences. Moving to the last discursive theme that make up China’s discourse of unity, China refers to shared goals and dreams, or *common destiny*, to emphasize why both sides persistently enjoy solidarity therefore in-group unity.

Discourse of Unity: Towards a Common Destiny

Counting as a fourth discursive theme under China’s broad discourse of unity, China’s leaders also frequently point to *shared trajectories and objectives* of maintaining peace and achieving genuine development to emphasize natural affinity with Southeast Asia. If the above three discursive themes emphasize past and present characteristics that have made the in-group *naturally* constituting, this last discursive theme points to how the in-group shares a common vision of what the future *should* look like. As Wen Jiabao (2011) has declared in front of ASEAN leaders, both sides “hold similar positions and views, face the same situations and challenges, and pursue the same goals on many key issues”.

This fourth discursive theme appeared to be the most common across all five leaderships and the respective texts inspected, albeit adapting with each different contexts. More specifically, while cold war era leaderships under Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping tend to focus on China-Southeast Asia unity against an imperialist western bloc, post-cold war era leaderships from Jiang to Xi on the other hand tend to focus on unity towards establishing and maintaining *good-neighborliness* within the region.

During Mao Zedong's leadership, the main shared objective according to leaders would be to categorically oppose western powers and colonialism. Zhou Enlai (1955) for example referred to "complete independence" as the common "objective for which the great majority of Asian and African countries have to struggle for a long time". During this time, much of the common objectives of Asia as described would pertain to the more salient conflict between China and the West, or what China perceives as between arrogant big powers and unwilling victims. As such, China frequently referred to the shared objective of Asia and the 'third world' to mutually "rise against colonialism," to "protect ourselves" from the western powers, and even "jointly propose that [West] hand over their big-power status" (Zhou, 1955; Mao, 1954a).

Although this narrative of going against western major powers grew less salient over time, it was still noticeably present under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. As reflected in one of Deng's speeches on China's foreign policy, China and Asia jointly maintains an "opposition to hegemonism" as both sides seek to "safeguard world peace" (Deng, 1982). It was also crucial for China during this period to emphasize that the in-group should "depend on ourselves to develop and lift ourselves out of poverty" (Deng, 1988). As evident in these excerpts, the ripe opposition to major powers that was prevalent in official texts during Mao's leadership was gradually being combined with justifications resting on common economic prosperity, and world peace. In succeeding leaderships of Jiang, Hu, and Xi, a gradual change in subject and tone can be observed, where win-win cooperation and regional peace took center-stage as main objectives uniting China and Southeast Asia.

Indeed, succeeding leaderships have introduced foreign policy ideas that go beyond the previous common objective of rising against the West and its perceived legacies of hegemonism or cold war politics, towards a more benign objective of achieving common prosperity. Under Jiang Zemin's leadership, the idea of maintaining *good-neighborliness* between ASEAN and China was introduced. The concept first appeared in a joint statement released by both parties during the first China-ASEAN Summit in 1997 (ASEAN, 2012). The concept itself stands for peaceful resolution and negotiations among China and ASEAN countries with respect to conflicts, an emphasis on regular bilateral dialogue, and pursuing deeper economic cooperation within the region (Liu and Tsai, 2014). It subsequently appeared in speeches delivered under Jiang's leadership, often describing China-ASEAN relations as jointly pursuing a "good neighborly partnership of mutual trust to the 21st century" (Jiang, 1997; Zhu, 1999). Ensuring discursive continuity with previous leaderships, Zhu Rongji in 1999 has also reiterated that the "partnership of good neighborliness and mutual trust with ASEAN countries" is pursued "on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence". The Five Principles were proposed by China in 1954, together with India and Myanmar, as guiding principles inspired by the conditions and needs of the developing world in doing international relations.

Beyond the emphasis on good-neighborliness and its component values, the three post-Cold War leaderships have always articulated pursuing win-win or mutually beneficial cooperation between ASEAN and China as their shared objectives. As Wen Jiabao (2011) has put it, pursuing "economic development and improvement of people's lives" in the region are the "most urgent and important task" for both ASEAN and China. Under the leadership of Hu

Jintao, there was much emphasis on ASEAN-China relations pursuing deeper economic cooperation (Wen, 2011; Tong, 2011; Li, 2009). This was also the same case for China under Xi Jinping, where much detail is usually spent on discussing how practical cooperation in various areas, including extensive cooperation via institutional innovations such as the Belt and Road Initiative, have consistently been improving. Indeed, it is this dual focus on ensuring a peaceful environment and deepening economic cooperation in the region, which China has referred to as “a more closely knit China-ASEAN common destiny,” that defines a united in-group according to this discursive theme.

Takeaways

The sociocognitive process of categorization accounts for China’s continuous emphasis on in-group unity. The discourse of unity uncovered in the analysis of the sampled texts shows that China persistently sees itself as belonging in the same in-group with Southeast Asia by virtue of their unique background (e.g. victimhood, histories, experiences), and their common future or destiny. Moreover, this uniqueness in terms of what the two sides share together, makes the in-group distinct from an out-group of western major powers in history led by the United States. This points to self-enhancement at work. Overall, China’s discourse of unity toward Sino-Southeast Asia relations allow for a positive representation of China, which speaks of how imperative the region is for China’s identity construction as a major power.

Discourses on Relevant Actors: ‘Benevolent China’ for a ‘Developing Southeast Asia’

This section discusses the predicates and descriptors China has exclusively attached to the remaining subjects—(1) itself, (2) Southeast Asia, and (3) an out-group of western major powers. Similar to the discussion above, this section focuses on identifying continuities and changes that characterize China’s respective discourses with respect to these relevant actors.

Benevolent China: Non-hegemonic and Not a ‘Threat’

Across the five leaderships, there has been a consistent trend of presenting China as a benevolent and therefore peace-loving major power. Benevolence (rén 仁) in Chinese philosophy largely refers to one of the core ideas of Confucianism where if applied to foreign policy, tends to emphasize great power empathy and fairness (Yan, 2018). In addition to these values, benevolence also point to a general aversion toward hegemonic behavior and policies (Xu Jin 2011). Indeed, China is well-known for frequently infusing its official speeches and documents on its foreign policy behavior with promises of rejecting hegemonism and of never seeking power politics; the sample of texts in this paper also represent this consistent trend (see Deng, 1982; Jiang, 1997; Zhu, 1999; Hu, 2011; Xi, 2015a).—Yet despite the continuity of stressing the benevolence of the ‘Self’, China’s presentation of this norm has varied across the five leaderships as they emphasize different priorities and experiences.

For instance, pronouncements made under the cold war era leaderships of Mao and Deng are situated within the rigid ideological competition between the west and China. As such, China's depiction of the self as a benevolent power is often made in explicit comparison with what it perceives to be the immoral or unrighteous legacies of its out-group consisting collectively of western major powers. In fact, it was only during these two leaderships that China often mention the West, or the United States more specifically as a hegemon. And these claims were in direct contrast with China's consistent pledge to non-hegemony. For instance, Deng has once openly accused the West of "practicing hegemonism and sowing discord" among countries in the developing world (Deng, 1982). Likewise, Mao Zedong noted that the United States in particular have "benefited from the two world wars" in terms of its overall progress, while continuing to rely on its "atomic bomb, heavy artillery, and a strong navy and air force" to maintain their dominance of the current international order (Mao, 1954b). He has also often appealed for solidarity with his Asian counterparts, noting that "us people of the East, have been bullied by western imperialist powers" and that the dominance of these "colonial powers" will inevitably face opposition from their victims (Mao 1954a, 1954b). Indeed, it is common for cold war narratives of China's foreign policy as reflected in official speeches to directly highlight the perceived immoralities of the western major power out-group, while depicting China as "hoping for peace more than anything else" (Deng, 1982). Therefore, within the background of intense ideological differentiation between China and its perceived out-group, China ambitions a benevolent power image by highlighting its benign qualities at the expense of putting the western powers in a bad light. Mentioning its out-group explicitly ensures a clearer picture of the zero-sum comparisons China promotes for itself.

For the post-cold war leaderships on the other hand, these discursive zero-sum comparisons are mentioned less explicitly in official speeches and documents. Yet despite this tamed rhetoric, the spirit of these comparisons remain noticeable in high-level discourses (see Wang, 2013). For example, Jiang Zemin (2000) underscores Chinese benevolence by focusing on its commitment "to promote a multi-polar international configuration" that "differs from the old one in which big powers contend for hegemony and carved up spheres of influence as seen in history". As for more explicit negative descriptions that mention these big powers, in particular the United States, China's responses to specific conflicts and criticisms to its own initiatives provide examples (see Wang, 2015). For instance, China has explicitly accused the United States of "practicing unilateralism and economic hegemony" as it engages in "trade bullyism practices" against China under the previous Trump administration (Information Office of the State Council on the PRC 2018, p. 52). And in former MOFA vice minister He Yafei's book titled *China and Global Governance* (2019), the distinctions are more explicit as he refers to "the United States and other developed countries in the West [as] having always upheld global governance by the elite class" at the expense of the interests of developing countries (p. 85).

Crucially, China's also argues for its benevolence by highlighting the logic behind a Sino-Southeast Asia in-group and by contrasting its out-group's relationship with the region. For instance, China still harkens back to how Asia is the first to forward the Five Principles in Bandung as they collectively struggled against western "imperialism, colonialism, and

hegemonism,” and how this forged an “Asian way of cooperation” toward “a community of common destiny [that] has increasingly taken shape” in 21st century Asia (Xi, 2015b; Liu, 2014). And in the more focused context of Sino-Southeast Asia relations, China would often remark that “close neighbors are better than distant relatives” to qualify the unique relationship of China and Southeast Asia on the basis of shared histories, common struggles, and common destiny (Xi, 2015b; Zheng, 2005). Being close neighbors also implied that intrusion by western powers in regional affairs prove counterproductive toward “good-neighborly friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation” which has served the in-group well for many years (Huang 2020). Indeed, when it comes to China’s discourse of its benevolent self under post-cold war leaderships, China has still referred to implicit categorizations between a China-led in-group and a western-led out-group that emphasizes value-laden narratives of their respective relationships with Southeast Asia.

China has also sought to highlight its benevolence under the post-cold war leaderships by reasserting its commitments to settling disputes fairly, and emphasizing peace and development as the central tenets of its foreign policy. At the same time, narratives of a ‘China Threat’ also provided added rationale for further emphasis on these objectives. Meant to distort global perceptions on China’s rise, this “master narrative” of a ‘China Threat’ traces its origins from US scholarly and policy debates as well as mass media descriptions, that zoom in on perceived “military and economic threats towards its neighbors and the United States” (Wu 2007, p. 135) As such, China has consistently emphasized throughout these three leaderships that it is a “good neighbor, good friend, and a good partner” to ASEAN despite frequent challenges in their relationship (Jiang, 1997; Wen, 2011; Xi, 2013). In 1998, then vice president Hu Jintao underscored China’s commitment in ensuring “friendly consultation on an equal footing” in managing ongoing disputes it has with some ASEAN members. This predication describing China’s commitment to an impartial dialogue and negotiation among concerned parties has been a mainstay in the pronouncements of succeeding leaderships (Tong, 2011; Wen, 2011; Xi, 2013; Li, 2020).

Even the cold war leaderships of Mao and Deng have consistently tried to reassure the developing world of its foreign policy trajectories as they always stress that China is “in urgent need of a peaceful international environment for the development of [their] independent and sovereign economy” (Zhou, 1955). Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy doctrine of ‘keeping a low profile’ has very clear similarities in terms of making a strong connection between peace in the international front, and economic development for China (Pang, 2020). This commitment to international peace for the sake of internal development became more pronounced under the leadership of Hu Jintao, through the relative institutionalization of the concept of “Peaceful Development” in China’s foreign policy doctrine, even going as far as pledging that “China will not deviate from [this] path... even when [it] becomes stronger in the future” (Dai, 2011; also see Zheng, 2005). And while the current academic literature on Xi Jinping’s foreign policy has observed that China is increasingly becoming more assertive at the expense of this longstanding peaceful foreign policy doctrine, its official pronouncements still maintain that “China is committed to peaceful development and pursues an independent foreign policy of peace,” even claiming it as a doctrine that has been held by China “starting with [their]

forefathers” (Xi, 2013; Xi, 2015a; Li, 2020). Overall, this narrative of peaceful development not only pose as a counternarrative to the ongoing discourse of a ‘China Threat’ but it also serve to sharpen the distinction between what China portrays as its benevolent self, and the hegemonic dispositions it has tried so hard to dissociate from since the time of Mao.

In relation to its neighbors in Southeast Asia, China has consistently described itself through discursive themes that highlight its perceived benevolence as a trustworthy partner and ultimately, a good neighbor. As Xu Jin (2011) has noted in his analysis of Mencius’ philosophy of benevolent leadership and its applications in understanding Chinese foreign policy, “the various Chinese governments have firmly opposed hegemony and hegemonism... since 1949” thereby in line with how the Pre-qin thinker understood the importance of benevolence (p. 170). Whether this can be observed as being true or not on the ground, for instance with how Southeast Asian nations perceive China’s actions, is another topic for discussion. But what is certain is China’s persistent commitment in constructing a discourse of itself as a benevolent partner for Southeast Asia.

Developing Southeast Asia and China’s Consequential Role

As what has been observed in the earlier discussion on predicates describing Sino-Southeast Asia relations, China only started substantially referring to Southeast Asia as a group under post-cold war leaderships. In terms of China’s frequent descriptions, the predicates uncovered have frequently described Southeast Asia as an economically developing region, which often times struggle in this objective, together with portrayals depicting China as its supportive partner. Ultimately, this combination of consistent predicates seek to depict Southeast Asia as a recipient of a beneficial partnership from China.

The discourse of a ‘developing Southeast Asia’ intends to emphasize the region’s focus on economic development, while also recognizing the relevant progress of the region in this area. Approaching the 21st Century, China’s pronouncements often highlight the region’s progress in “pressing ahead with its process to attain industrialization, modernization, and integration,” as well as in “recovering the economy” after surviving the Asian financial crisis (Jiang, 1997; Hu, 1998). Similarly, this was also the theme for the first decade of the century, as China continues to describe the region as casualty to the “imbalanced development between developing countries and developed counterparts,” while also recognizing how the region has been “plagued by serious financial and debt crises” (Li, 2009; Wen, 2011). Likewise, the region’s efforts to “address instability and underdevelopment” through “a distinctive ASEAN approach” has been a consistent point of recognition for China in characterizing the development of the region (Xi, 2015a).

Yet it is in this context of presenting Southeast Asia’s development experience that China associates itself as having a consequential presence in the fate of the region. For instance, citing financial crises, China claims that its decision “not to devalue its currency” comes from the initiative to “help other Southeast Asian countries” obtain economic recovery (Tong, 2011). Likewise, China would often indicate that it is ASEAN’s largest economic partner in terms of overall trade, as well as often the first outside player to come into formal agreements with the

group (Wen, 2011; Tong, 2011; Xi, 2015a; Li, 2020). As Li Keqiang (2020) has prided, “China has been number one on many fronts among ASEAN’s dialogue partners” in terms of “forging strategic partnerships... and giving unequivocal support”. China has also been consistently vocal in expressing its support for ASEAN integration as well as supporting ASEAN in taking a more proactive role in regional cooperation in greater East Asia. And when it comes to China’s flagship projects such as the BRI and other recent development initiatives, China’s leadership has not been shy in declaring the region as “the first to benefit” from these ambitious projects (Xi, 2015a; Li, 2020).

Ultimately, these predications press the discourse of a developing Southeast Asia largely benefiting from sound relations with China. From ‘good neighbors’ to reliable ‘business partners,’ China continues to portray in-group solidarity as it presents Southeast Asia in a way that matches its discourse of itself as a benevolent major power.

Takeaways

The discourses of a ‘Benevolent China’ and a ‘Developing Southeast Asia’ also point to categorization and self-enhancement processes at work. In terms of further self-enhancement, China’s portrayal as a benevolent power was constructed through comparisons to a western major power out-group, as well as through commitments to principles and norms that challenge major power hegemonism. In terms of further categorization, the discourse of a ‘developing Southeast Asia’ benefiting from ‘benevolent China’ seemingly portray a purposeful in-group where peace and development are simultaneously achieved. To this latter point, it can be said that Southeast Asia’s relations with China also serves as a valid prototype for its growing in-group, as China is able to showcase what a non-threatening, benevolent China can mean for developing countries alike.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to uncover China’s ‘story-telling’ of its relations with Southeast Asia on the basis of the theoretical assumptions outlined by Social Identity Theory. As such, this paper sought to contribute to the growing literature on SIT as applied in the discipline of International Relations and Chinese foreign policy in three specific ways. First, it focused on the dual sociocognitive processes of *categorization* and *self-enhancement* as indicators of social identity phenomena at work, which existing works on SIT’s application in IR have yet to adequately explore. Second, it sought to supplement the existing focus on great power status rivalry and competition as usual points of inquiry, and focused more on how such status rivalry can be manifested in specific relationships and policy areas such as Sino-Southeast Asia relations, as opposed to broad arenas of grand strategies and international norms which hitherto have been the focus of inquiry in this growing research area. And lastly, this paper has also provided analytical evidence indicating that Sino-Southeast Asia relations is being treated by China preferentially and in SIT language, *prototypically* as an in-group stereotype worth emulating (Hogg et al, 2005). Therefore, this paper systematically provides evidence on how the prototyping dimension of social identity phenomenon can also be explored

within interstate dynamics. And in this specific case, it was shown that China portrays its relations with Southeast Asia as hard evidence of its benevolence towards developing countries. This last point also has several implications for existing and future research on Sino-Southeast Asia Relations.

In terms of being portrayed as a prototypical in-group consistent with SIT assumptions, it can be said that China is also trying to send the message to prospective members of its growing in-group, ideally developing countries adhering to its normative causes, that a mutually beneficial relationship with benevolent China is possible. Indeed, this observed dynamics of prototyping Southeast Asia is also consistent with the Xi administration's focus on the region in terms of its relative significance within China's neighborhood policy. Likewise, it also echoes existing studies highlighting a step-wise process to China's "grand strategy to reshape the regional order in Asia, and eventually the global order with new ideas, norms, and rules for IR and global governance" (Song, 2020, p. 245; also see Callahan, 2016, Reeves, 2018). China has constructed a story of a 'Benevolent China' united with 'Developing Southeast Asia' to provide a positive representation of itself in light of its continuous rise to great power status.

From this story-telling, it can be said that China has indeed benefited from Southeast Asia ideationally as much as 'developing Southeast Asia' has materially benefited from China. Given the important role of Sino-Southeast Asia relations in China's overall pursuit for and presentation of a positive identity, it is highly likely that the region will continue to be a crucial strategic as well as diplomatic focus of China. The relatively fast disbursement of donated vaccines for COVID-19 in the region is a recent example of this continuing prioritization. Likewise, it could also be likely that China leverages on this grand story of Sino-Southeast Asian unity it has constructed ever since in moments where its benevolence is being questioned, most particularly when it comes to territorial conflicts with specific Southeast Asian countries, to shed light on the good and downplay the unpleasant. Perhaps as a next step for observers interested in inspecting this dynamics further, potential gaps and consistencies in terms of actions and discourses of Southeast Asia's role in China's foreign policy can also be examined.

Overall, this paper has highlighted the centrality of a pursuit for a positive and distinct identity in China's foreign policy. China aspires to be perceived differently vis-à-vis other western major powers in history, and it has sought this alternative image by forwarding norms and values in international relations that it perceives to be unique, which allows it to construct a discourse of itself as a benevolent major power. In terms of how identity is manifested in discourse, it is also clear that China has referred to a discourse of deep cultural and historical affinity with Southeast Asia, as it argues for natural familiarity, thereby allowing it to paint a picture of a major power cut from the same thread as Southeast Asia. In this way, China's benevolence can be easily appreciated. But Southeast Asia as a region ought to be wary. As this study has shown, China is indeed a discourse power as Song (2020) has emphasized. China actively utilizes historical narratives and recollections of particular experiences in highlighting a certain reading of how the region has fared in the face of a rising China. The power also lies with small countries in the region. China's preferred discourses will only have sufficient power and believability if subjects being depicted, as well as audiences targeted, lend meaning to

these messages and proclaim them to be accurate as well. In this sense, China's aspiration for a distinct and positive image is not a one-way street—Southeast Asia can be a grateful partner, as well as an impartial auditor of China's longstanding identity ambitions.

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MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION WITHIN THE ASEAN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK: A GRADUAL SHIFT TOWARDS PRACTICAL COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

How does ASEAN fare in addressing maritime security problems? This paper examines the shifting character of maritime security cooperation in Southeast Asia. In doing so, this paper looks at the outcomes of three maritime security-oriented fora that exist within the ASEAN regional framework: the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, and the ASEAN Maritime Forum. By compiling and analysing data on the forms and frequency of existing cooperative activities from 2003 gathered from publicly available sources, this paper finds that maritime security cooperation among ASEAN members continue to be largely dialogue-based, with few instances of practical cooperation. By comparing the three fora, this paper argues that the organisational design of these forums tends to affect the forms of cooperation. This paper concludes that despite ASEAN showing progress in adopting practical security cooperation, there remain hurdles in achieving regional maritime security.

Keywords: ASEAN, maritime security, regional institutions, security cooperation

INTRODUCTION

Since 2003, ASEAN has decided to prioritise maritime security as a regional problem. As a result, there have been numerous efforts to promote regional solutions to regional maritime security problems through ASEAN's multilateral bodies. In the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the security cooperation agenda has largely centred on disaster relief, counterterrorism, and maritime security. In maritime security, Haacke (2009, p. 446) found that 1) dialogue among ARF members have resulted in 'basic agreement on a normative

framework' which serves to guide future cooperation, and 2) capacity-building exercises, which constitute the bulk of practical security cooperation, are often conducted outside the auspices of the ARF. This paper seeks to expand on Haacke's initial findings to see whether the observed turn towards practical cooperation has been sustained. To that end, this paper examines the outcomes and efforts of maritime security-oriented fora, such as the ARF Intersessional Meeting on Maritime Security, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus, and the ASEAN Maritime Forum. These fora are considered important interlocutors of maritime security cooperation in the ASEAN region, as they have allowed member states to organise meetings, workshops, and operational exercises. However, these three fora are not alike; their design and purposes play a role in either expediting or inhibiting more 'practical' cooperation activities.

This paper proceeds in four main sections. The first section reviews the literature on security cooperation in Southeast Asia. The second section describes the analytical framework, along with the methodology of this paper. In the third section, this paper reviews the multilateral processes related to maritime security cooperation in ASEAN. Three major regional platforms for maritime security cooperation are reviewed: the ASEAN Regional Forum, specifically the Intersessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ARF ISM on MS), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and the ADMM Plus, and the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) along with the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), along with their key outcomes of the platforms. The fourth section provides a discussion of the results of the third section, particularly on the relation between organisational design and character of security cooperation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The maritime security discourse in ASEAN

Within ASEAN, there were already discussions of regional maritime security cooperation in the late 1990s. The 1998 Hanoi Declaration and subsequent Plan of Action to Combat Transnational Crime in 1999 showed a regional focus on piracy and armed robbery. These declarations were issued as a response to an uptick in piracy and armed robbery after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. The Hanoi Declaration noted piracy as a specific object of concern for ASEAN members, though it only mentioned the need to 'intensify individual and collective efforts' to address piracy and other transnational crimes. The subsequent Plan of Action conveyed ASEAN's interests in institutionalising responses to transnational crime by establishing the ASEAN Centre for Combating Transnational Crime (ACTC) and positioning the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime as the highest policymaking unit. This response, however, was mostly limited to transnational crime, and while piracy does fall within this category, the Plan of Action does not provide specific guidelines on a regional response to piracy. In this vein, maritime security was still viewed in the narrow sense of transnational crime, which was to be addressed individually by member states. A more specific call to action was issued by the ARF in June 2003. The joint statement noted the 'indispensable and fundamental' nature of maritime security and the urgency to 'step up broad-based regional cooperative efforts' between the relevant maritime law enforcement institutions. The statement

also urged the implementation and adoption of international instruments and guidelines, such as the 1988 SUA Convention and the 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (Nasu et al., 2019).

In addition to intramural efforts to come together on maritime security cooperation, there were also extra-regional efforts at maritime security, most notably from Japan and the United States (U.S.). In response to the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. issued three distinct security initiatives: the Container Security Initiative, Proliferation Security Initiative, and Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI). While the first two initiatives were implemented globally, RMSI was exclusively focused on securing the Malacca Strait from the threat of terrorism. Through RMSI, the U.S. sought to deepen cooperative ties with littoral states, namely Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, in maritime security efforts in the Malacca Strait. In his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee on 31 March 2004, Admiral Thomas Fargo of the United States Navy noted RMSI would include working together with regional navies to ‘build and synchronize interagency and international capacity to fight threats that use maritime space to facilitate their illicit activity.’ (House Armed Services Committee, 2004) Fargo’s subsequent statement explaining how cooperation under RMSI would be operationalized—‘...we are looking at things like high-speed vessels, putting Special Operations Forces on high-speed vessels, putting potentially Marines on high-speed vessels so that we can use boats that might be incorporated with these vessels to conduct effective interdiction’—generated staunch opposition from both Malaysia and Indonesia due to concerns of U.S. military presence in the Malacca Strait (Febrica, 2015, p. 123; Rosenberg & Chung, 2008). In contrast, Japan, seeking to secure the flow of trade in the Malacca Strait, proposed the Regional Agreement on Cooperation Against Armed Piracy (ReCAAP) in 1999, which entered into force in 2006. The ReCAAP initiative would be led by Japan and involved increasing coast guard cooperation and the establishment of a regional information-sharing centre to monitor and counter piracy and armed robbery. These attempts, however, saw mixed reception among ASEAN members. Indonesia and Malaysia were among the strongest opponents of the initiatives, citing sovereignty concerns (Storey, 2009, p. 40).

Several institutional changes in the early 2000s drove maritime security to the forefront of ASEAN. Chief among them was the second Declaration of ASEAN Concord (also known as the Bali Concord II), issued in October 2003 (Nasu et al., 2019, p. 117). It established maritime security as an organisational goal and specifically acknowledged the need for a regional response based on ‘common values’ in addressing maritime security threats. It noted the transboundary nature of maritime issues, which warrants a ‘holistic, integrated, and comprehensive’ response from ASEAN members, which would take the form of an ASEAN Security Community. In the Vientiane Action Programme (specifically Part II, sec. 1.3.), maritime security cooperation was to be further promoted as a means to prevent conflict, which would be facilitated by the creation of an ASEAN maritime forum. The idea of a maritime forum was also carried over into the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2015. In promoting maritime security cooperation, the Blueprint endorses the establishment of the ASEAN Maritime Forum, application of a ‘comprehensive approach’ on safety of navigation and security concerns that are ‘of common concerns to the ASEAN Community’,

stocktaking and identifying maritime issues and cooperation among ASEAN members, and promoting cooperation in maritime search-and-rescue activities (ASEAN, 2009, sec. A.2.5).

As a result of this regional emphasis on maritime security, maritime security cooperation activities began to become part of ASEAN's security agenda. However, while it was expected that the character of security cooperation would be a balanced blend of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' security cooperation, in reality, maritime security cooperation has mostly been 'non-traditional' in nature. While 'traditional' engagements persist at the bilateral level, there is a general aversion at the regional level to these forms of engagement (Bhattacharyya, 2010). Part of this aversion is attributed to ASEAN's reluctance to be branded as a military bloc; another reason is the need for consensus, which incentivises members to focus on the lowest common denominator. As such, maritime security cooperation in Southeast Asia has mostly revolved around counterpiracy, maritime terrorism, and countering illegal fishing (Damayanti, 2018).

On the effectiveness of Southeast Asian maritime security cooperation

In discussing security cooperation, observers often argue about the proper way of gauging the general effectiveness of regional institutions, and, in turn, the effectiveness of maritime security cooperation. While this paper does not seek to test nor examine the effectiveness of maritime security cooperation activities or that of ASEAN's regional institutions, the indicators of effectiveness do merit a brief review. In the literature of ASEAN, this debate is particularly noticeable, especially in assessing institutional outcomes, leading to assessments of the perceived value of regional institutions (Stubbs, 2019). These views stem from differing fundamental understandings of how power is wielded by regional institutions (Eaton & Stubbs, 2006). On the one hand, ASEAN sceptics tend to point out at the lack of practical outcomes produced by ASEAN bodies. This is often attributed to the consensus-seeking, informal, and intergovernmental character of ASEAN institutions which are enshrined in the values of the so-called 'ASEAN Way' (D. M. Jones & Smith, 2007; L. Jones, 2010). Viewed in this light, ASEAN processes arguably have less power in both encouraging and discouraging conduct. On the other hand, ASEAN proponents tend to view the development and exercise of existing regional processes as an indicator of ASEAN's performance as a regional institution (Acharya, 2009a, 2009b; Katsumata, 2006; Yates, 2017). Proponents argue that ASEAN's success and value as a regional institution should not be assessed in strictly practical terms as the sceptics suggest; rather, it ought to be assessed in ASEAN's progress in disseminating and shaping common values through constructive regional processes. In other words, the process matters more than outcomes.

In assessing the outcomes of ASEAN maritime security cooperation, it would seem there is a preference for outcomes instead of processes in the literature. Bradford (2005, p. 64), for example, proposes a simple method for determining whether specific maritime security cooperation activities are effective. Cooperation is considered effective when it is 'operationalised', i.e., a 'specific type and degree of cooperation in which policies addressing common threats can be carried out by midlevel officials of the states involved without

immediate or direct supervision from strategic-level authorities.’ This is contrasted with just ‘cooperation’, e.g., high-level consultations or information sharing agreements, which usually reflect political commitments, but not actual practices in the field. Haacke (2009) adopts a similar approach, which will be discussed further in the following section. This tendency towards practical cooperation being the yardstick for organisational progress in security cooperation is also reflected in academic literature of Southeast Asian security cooperation (see, among others, Tan, 2016, 2020).

Analytical framework

Haacke (2009) categorised cooperation into two broad forms: ‘dialogue’ and ‘practical’ cooperation. ‘Dialogue’ refers to forms of security cooperation centred on the routine sharing of experiences, often with the goal of confidence-building. In some circumstances, ‘dialogue’ forms of security cooperation often generate outcomes in the form of statements, ranging from affirmation of pre-existing commonly agreed principles, pledges or plans for further cooperation, to definitive joint statements. Among the three institutions, ‘dialogue’-based security cooperation generally take the form of routine meetings or workshops. ‘Practical’ cooperation explicitly refers to tangible results in information-sharing initiatives, field exercises, tabletop exercise, or related capacity-building exercises. Workshops which do not incorporate field activities are instead categorised as ‘dialogue’ activities. Second, a temporal dimension to the previous categorisation is added. This allows further distinction between routine activities, such as annual meetings or periodical workshops, and incidental activities, such as a one-off joint naval exercise or a thematic workshop.

	Dialogue	Practical
Incidental	A form of dialogue that only occurs once. This category also covers special events, such as the Bali Concord. (D-I)	Practical security cooperation that only occurs once, with low prospect of recurrence, such as a one-off instance of a naval exercise. (P-I)
Sustained	A form of dialogue that occurs on a routine and sustained basis. This category covers the routine meetings conducted within the forums. (D-S)	Practical security cooperation that is routine and sustained or has occurred once with high prospects of recurrence. (P-S)

Figure 1 Categorisation of Cooperative Activities, Modified from Haacke, 2009.

The distinction between ‘dialogue’ and ‘practical’ is not mutually exclusive. In some cases, practical security cooperation first requires robust dialogue processes. These are usually required to coordinate logistical needs and the intended objectives of the exercise. Second, some workshops, which ought to fall under the ‘dialogue’ category, do involve a form of ‘practical’ activity, such as table-top exercises. The cooperative activity will be classified as ‘practical’ in the case where table-top exercises constitute the bulk of the activity.

METHODOLOGY

In gathering the data on instances of maritime security cooperation, this paper refers to official data on maritime security cooperative activities from relevant ASEAN sources, such as the ASEAN website, ARF ISM-MS Co-Chair Reports, the ADMM website, and other official sources related to ASEAN bodies. Official data is then cross-referenced with relevant press releases or publicly available news to further identify the nature of the cooperative activity. Once identified, the cooperative activity is then subjected to categorization based on Figure 1. The frequency of cooperative activities is then presented in a simple clustered bar graph. Additional details of activities are provided in tables.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

The ARF was one of the forerunners in institutionalising maritime security cooperation in Southeast Asia. In August 2004, following their statement on maritime security, the ARF conducted a roundtable discussion on the stocktaking of maritime issues. The roundtable was an attempt to generate a common understanding of maritime security among ARF members. Participants of the roundtable agreed on a common set of principles of maritime security, which include adherence to UNCLOS 1982, a respect for the ‘ASEAN Way’ and the ARF principles of preventive diplomacy, and the facilitation of information-sharing efforts. The roundtable also noted six lessons for maritime security cooperation, derived from the experience of the participants: 1) the need for interagency technical cooperation, 2) information sharing, 3) learning of each other’s cultures, 4) the need to complement efforts instead of competing, 5) the need to implement plans, policies, and operational activities, and 6) the need for integrating training and exercise plans, Standard Operating Procedures, education, and legal cooperation (ARF, 2007). The most notable outcome of the roundtable, however, was an agreement on common maritime security concerns, which among others, included a need for increased exchanges in information-sharing capabilities and capacity-building measures. It would, however, take five more years before the ARF had a platform dedicated to discussing maritime security. The Intersessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ISM on MS) was formally agreed upon in the 15th ARF Ministerial Meeting in 2008.

In March 2009, the first ARF Intersessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ISM on MS) was held. The Meeting is designed to facilitate dialogue among members and hopefully motivate members to initiate maritime security related programs. In other words, it is intended to turn dialogue into practical cooperation (Haacke, 2009). The themes, or Priority Areas, discussed in the ISM on MS are outlined in the Maritime Security Work Plan, which is updated every three years. In the most recent 2018-2020 Work Plan, the Priority Areas covered include: shared awareness and exchange of information and best practices, confidence-building measures based on international and regional legal frameworks, and capacity building and enhancing maritime law enforcement agencies (ARF, 2018). Several notable discussions that have occurred in the ISM on MS include finding common ground on legal interpretations;

informational exchange and interagency cooperation; safety at sea; and coordination between regional maritime law enforcement agencies and existing maritime security initiatives (see Table 1).

Table 1. Selected discussions in ISM on MS, 2009-2019 based on Co-Chair Summary Reports.

Priority areas	Examples
Common ground on interpretation of legal regimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions on the principle of freedom of navigation in the EEZ (1st Meeting, 2009). • Development of a cooperative regional system to enforce implementation of international conventions such as COLREGS and SOLAS, along with bilateral recognition of rules and a standard of behaviour at sea (7th Meeting, 2015).
Information sharing schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility for mechanisms and procedures for sharing classified information on potential maritime security threats (4th Meeting, 2012) • The use of information sharing centres to provide vital information on illegal activities at sea (10th Meeting, 2018).
Confidence building measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of confidence building measures in enhancing maritime domain awareness (10th Meeting, 2018)
Capacity-building and technical cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prospects of operationalising a regional coast guard (4th Meeting, 2012). • Increasing capacity to effectively combat IUU fishing (10th Meeting, 2018).

Key outcomes of the ISM on MS

The ISM on MS has produced three Work Plans on Maritime Security, which provide a common point of reference for maritime security issues deemed important to the member states. In general, the Work Plans encourage members states to propose relevant projects, such as capacity-building workshops, table-top or field exercises, training, and studies on selected aspects of maritime security related to the Priority Areas defined by the Work Plan. Since the first Work Plan in 2011, these Priority Areas have remained consistent.

The activities of the ISM on MS are largely dialogue-based, though several workshops may provide skills training. Meetings are centred on general discussions and updates of the Work Plan, whereas workshops prioritise sharing of information and experience. Practical cooperation tends to be rare (see Table 2 and Chart 1). The only ARF-sponsored event involving practical cooperation was the Maritime Shore Exercise. In the 2006 Concept Paper, proposed by Singapore, the exercise would be an ‘important step forward following the successful dialogues on maritime security’ (ARF, 2006). The Exercise, conducted on 22-23 January 2007, included professional exchanges between maritime security agencies of the participants, both simulation and table-top exercises, and a tactical trainer exercise (MINDEF, 2007). Another workshop was conducted in 2019, but the scale was less ambitious compared

to the 2007 Shore Exercise. The exercise, dubbed the ‘ARF Workshop and Tabletop Exercise on Crimes related to Fisheries’, was proposed by Indonesia with the U.S. as a co-chair. The aim was to ‘develop a common understanding of the serious nature and extent of criminal offences’ in the fisheries sector. Like other workshops considered and endorsed by the ISM on MS, the workshop aimed to facilitate experience and expertise sharing and capacity building (ARF, 2019). There is also a tendency for initially thematic dialogue-based activities to be continued in the later years, such as the workshop on ferry safety and on UNCLOS, which may hint towards more specialised practical cooperation between member states.

Table 2 List of Track 1 activities related to maritime security. Full dataset (until 2019) available online at <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/List-of-ARF-Track-I-Activities-by-Inter-Sessional-Year-as-of-10-Dec-2019.pdf>. Activities in 2020 from <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/calendar-of-events/schedule-of-arf-meetings-and-activities/>

Name of event/activity	Date and location held
Meeting of Specialist Officials on Maritime Issues	Honolulu, 5 November 1998
ARF Workshop on Maritime Security Challenges	Mumbai, 27 Feb – 1 March 2003
ARF Workshop on Maritime Security	Kuala Lumpur, 22-24 September 2004
ARF CBM on Regional Cooperation in Maritime Security	Singapore, 2-4 March 2005
Workshop on Training for the Cooperative Maritime Security	Kochi, India 26-28 October 2005
Workshop on Capacity Building of Maritime Security	Tokyo, 19-20 December 2005
Maritime Security Shore Exercise Planning Conference	Singapore, 7-8 December 2006
Maritime Security Shore Exercise	Singapore, 22-23 January 2007
ARF Roundtable Discussion on Stocktaking of Maritime Security Issues	Bali, 24-25 August 2007
ARF Maritime Security Training Programme	Chennai, 24-29 March 2008
Second (Advanced) Maritime Security Training Programme for ARF Member States	Chennai, 17-22 November 2008
1 st ARF Intersessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ISM on MS)	Surabaya, 5-6 March 2009
ARF Seminar on Measures to Enhance Maritime Security	Brussels, 19-20 November 2009
2 nd ARF ISM on MS	Auckland, 29-30 March 2010
3 rd ARF ISM on MS	Tokyo, 14-15 February 2011
ARF Seminar on UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)	Manila, 8-9 March 2011
4 th ARF ISM on MS	San Francisco, 14-15 June 2012
ARF Workshop on Ship Profiling	Kuala Lumpur, 14-15 April 2013
5 th ARF ISM on MS	Seoul, 18-19 April 2013
ARF Maritime Security Workshop on Marine Environmental Protection Cooperation: Preparedness and Response to Pollution Incidents involving Hazardous and Noxious Substances	Honolulu, 4-5 March 2014
6 th ARF ISM on MS	Bali, 22-23 May 2014
2 nd ARF Seminar on UNCLOS	Manila, 28-29 May 2014
7 th ARF ISM on MS	Honolulu, 30 March – 1 April 2015
ARF Workshop on Maritime Risks Management and Cooperation	Beijing, 13-15 December 2015
ARF Workshop on Marine Oil Spill Emergency Response Management and Disposal Cooperation	Kunming, 17-18 December 2015
8 th ARF ISM on MS	Manila, 6-7 April 2016
ARF Workshop on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing	Bali, 20-21 April 2016
ARF Workshop on National Maritime Single Point of Contact	Cebu, 28-29 April 2016
ARF Capacity Building Workshop on Ship Profiling	Kuala Lumpur, 24-25 May 2016
ARF Workshop on Management of Marine Hazards in the Asia-Pacific	Beijing, 6-8 December 2016
9 th ARF ISM on MS	Tokyo, 8-9 February 2017

Table 2 List of Track 1 activities related to maritime security. Full dataset (until 2019) available online at <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/List-of-ARF-Track-I-Activities-by-Inter-Sessional-Year-as-of-10-Dec-2019.pdf>. Activities in 2020 from <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/calendar-of-events/schedule-of-arf-meetings-and-activities/>
(Continued)

Name of event/activity	Date and location held
ARF Workshop on Ferry Safety	Guangzhou, 12-13 December 2017
1 st ARF Workshop on Enhancing Regional Maritime Law Enforcement Cooperation	Nha Trang, 18-19 January 2018
ARF Workshop on International Cooperation on Maritime Domain Awareness	Tokyo, 7-8 March 2018
10 th ARF ISM on MS	Brisbane, 27-28 March 2018
ARF Workshop on Best Practices in Using Maritime Data to Combat Transnational Organized Crime	Bali, 17-19 July 2018
2 nd ARF Workshop on Ferry Safety	Guangzhou, 26-28 November 2018
1 st ARF Workshop on Implementing UNCLOS and other International Instruments to Address Emerging Maritime Issues	Nha Trang, 26-27 February 2019
11 th ARF ISM on MS	Da Nang, 14-15 March 2019
2 nd ARF Workshop on Enhancing Regional Maritime Law Enforcement Cooperation	Da Nang, 25-26 March 2019
ARF Workshop and Table-Top Exercise on Enhancing Law Enforcement, Preventive Measures and Cooperation to Address Complex Issues in the Fisheries Sector	Bali, 26-28 June 2019
2 nd ARF Workshop on Implementing UNCLOS and other International Instruments to Address Emerging Maritime Issues	Hanoi, 13-14 November 2019
3 rd ARF Workshop on Ferry Safety	Guangzhou, 12-13 November 2019
2 nd ARF Workshop on International Cooperation on Maritime Domain Awareness	Tokyo, 20 February 2020
ARF Workshop on Dispute Resolution and the Law of the Sea	Dili, 27-28 February 2020
12 th ARF ISM on MS	Spain, to be conducted in intersessional year 2019-2020
3 rd ARF Workshop on Enhancing Regional Maritime Law Enforcement Cooperation	Spain, to be conducted in intersessional year 2019-2020
ARF Workshop on Maritime Law Enforcement Promoting Comprehensive Approach to Address Maritime Crimes	Kuala Lumpur, to be conducted in intersessional year 2019-2020
International Ship and Port Facility Security Code Training Series and Manual Part 1	Papua New Guinea, to be conducted in intersessional year 2019-2020
International Ship and Port Facility Security Code Training Series and Manual Part 2	Mumbai, to be conducted in intersessional year 2019-2020
International Ship and Port Facility Security Code Training Series and Manual Part 3	Manila, to be conducted in intersessional year 2019-2020

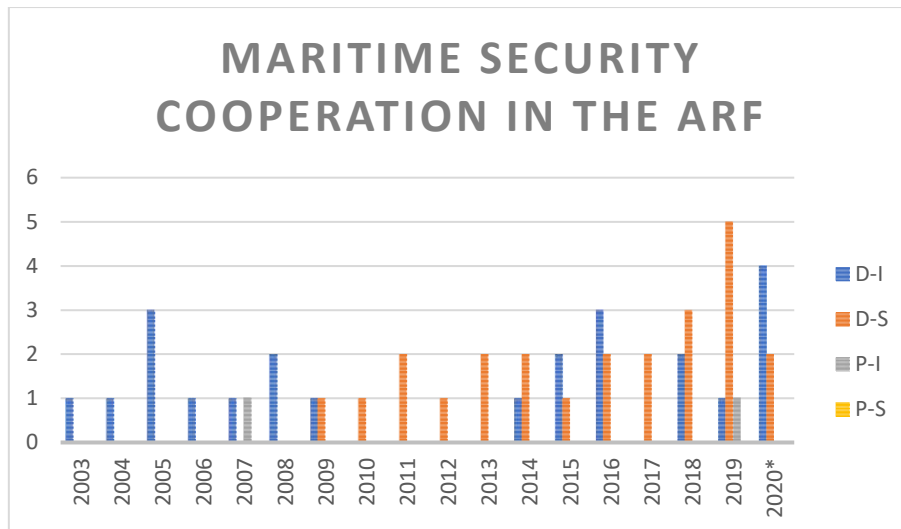


Chart 1. Frequency of maritime security cooperation activities in the ARF, 2003-2020. (*) indicates a year where data for activities that have yet to be conducted despite being planned for the specified year, and as such, the character of those activities cannot be precisely determined.

The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM)

The ADMM was established in 2006 as the highest meeting of defence officials in ASEAN. Prior to the ADMM, the ARF was the preferred venue for ASEAN defence officials to convene, albeit informally, under the ARF Defence Officers Dialogue and ARF Security Policy Conference. Outside of the ARF, ASEAN already had numerous venues for defence officials to interact. The ASEAN Special Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) had provided a venue for the meeting of defence officials since 1996, and military-to-military interactions, including intra-ASEAN military exercises, which had already been conducted since as early as 1972, in addition to specialised fora, such as the ASEAN Navy Interaction and the ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Informal Meeting (Chalermphanupap, 2011; Tan, 2016).

Given these modalities, the ADMM seemed like a logical next step for ASEAN multilateral security cooperation. There were concerns that the ARF would not be well-equipped to address rising challenges, particularly the emergence of China. ASEAN members particularly recognised the inherent limitations of the ARF’s institutional design; its diverse membership meant that much time had to be spent on confidence-building and addressing diverging perceptions on the idea of ‘preventive diplomacy’, which leaves less time for exploring practical security cooperation (Tang, 2016; Yuzawa, 2006). At the same time, discussions of advancing the vision of an ASEAN Security Community, initiated by the Bali Concord II and further elaborated in the Vientiane Action Programme, provided a push for developing intramural security cooperation. This was also in light of mounting security challenges faced by the region, such as terrorism and maritime piracy (Ba, 2017).

The ADMM-Plus would later be established to include ASEAN Dialogue Partners. The goal of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus is similar to that of the ARF; namely, to promote

cooperation and dialogue on both traditional and non-traditional security issues in Southeast Asia. However, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus are more equipped for implementing practical cooperation on top of their dialogue function. This is achieved through three methods. First, the agenda is set by defence ministers and officials instead of foreign ministers. Second, the ADMM-Plus makes extensive use of Expert Working Groups (EWGs), which allows for a ‘focused, task-oriented approach to security cooperation’ that involves technicians rather than diplomats. Third, ADMM-Plus membership is much more selective. In addition to the ten ASEAN member states, the ADMM-Plus only admits eight external Dialogue Partners. The smaller membership pool helps reduce friction in deciding and implementing programs (Ba, 2017, pp. 150–152).

At the core of the ADMM-Plus are the EWGs, which are specialised sub-units that work to provide and proposals to the ADMM. There are several EWGs, each dealing with a specific area in a similar fashion to the ARF Intersessional Meetings. Table 3 lists the relevant activities of the EWG on Maritime Security.

Table 3. List of Track 1 activities by the ADMM and ADMM-Plus related to maritime security, up until 2019. Available online: <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/events/past-meetings-and-events.html>. Data for 2020 is unavailable as the EWG on MS has no scheduled meetings or activities.

Name of event/activity	Date and location held
1 st ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	Australia, 19-20 July 2011
2 nd ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	Malaysia, 8-10 February 2012
3 rd ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security and Tabletop Exercise (TTX)	Japan, 17-20 July 2012
4 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	Australia, 26-28 November 2012
5 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security and Mid-Planning Conference for the ADMM-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise (FTX)	Penang, 27-30 May 2013
Final Planning Conference for the ADMM-Plus Maritime Security FTX	Sydney, 27 June 2013
Final Site Survey for the ADMM-Plus Maritime Security FTX	Indonesia, 13-15 August 2013
6 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	Sydney, 30 September – 1 October 2013
7 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security and Maritime Security Seminar	Melaka, 23-24 January 2014
8 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security and Workshop on Counter-piracy operations	Auckland, 23-26 June 2014
9 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security and TTX	Brunei Darussalam, 27-31 October 2014
Initial Planning Conference of ADMM-Plus Maritime Security and Counterterrorism Exercise	Brunei Darussalam, 2-6 February 2015
ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security Future Leaders’ Programme	Auckland, 13-17 September 2015
10 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	Auckland, 15-16 September 2015
Middle Planning Conference of ADMM-Plus Maritime Security and Counterterrorism Exercise	Singapore, 19-22 October 2015
Initial Planning Conference for the ADMM-Plus Field Training Exercise on Maritime Security "Exercise Mahi Tangarao"	Brunei Darussalam, 27-28 January 2016
Final Planning Conference for the ADMM-Plus Maritime Security and Counter-Terrorism Exercise	Singapore, 1-3 March 2016
ADMM-Plus Maritime Security and Counter-Terrorism Exercise	Brunei Darussalam and Singapore, 2-12 May 2016
Final Planning Conference for the ADMM-Plus Field Training Exercise on Maritime Security "Exercise Mahi Tangarao"	Auckland, 23-26 May 2016

Table 3. List of Track 1 activities by the ADMM and ADMM-Plus related to maritime security, up until 2019. Available online: <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/events/past-meetings-and-events.html>. Data for 2020 is unavailable as the EWG on MS has no scheduled meetings or activities.

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Name of event/activity	Date and location held
11 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	Auckland, 13-16 November 2016
ADMM-Plus Field Training Exercise on Maritime Security “Exercise Mahi Tangaroa”	Auckland, 13-16 November 2016
12 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	1-3 November 2017
Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting and Initial Planning Conference on the ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise	Singapore, 25-27 April 2018
13 th ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security	Seoul, 30 May – 1 June 2018
ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security Future Leaders' Programme	Singapore, 17-21 June 2018
ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise Middle Planning Conference	Zhanjiang, China, 3-6 July 2018
ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise Final Planning Conference and Table-Top Exercise	Singapore, 1-3 August 2018
ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise Field Training Exercise	Zhanjiang, China, 20-28 October 2018
ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security Table-Top Exercise and Middle Planning Conference	Singapore, 13-16 November 2018
Ad Hoc Working Group Meetings on the Guidelines for Maritime Interaction and Principles for ADMM-Wide Education and Training Exchanges	Manila, 19-23 November 2018
ASEAN-United States Maritime Exercise Initial Planning Conference	Singapore, 26 April 2019
ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security and Field Training Exercise	Busan, 29 April – 13 May 2019
ASEAN-United States Maritime Exercise Final Planning Conference	Pattaya, 11-12 July 2019
ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise	Thailand and Singapore, 1-7 September 2019
ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security Future Leaders' Programme	Seoul and Busan, 2-7 September 2019

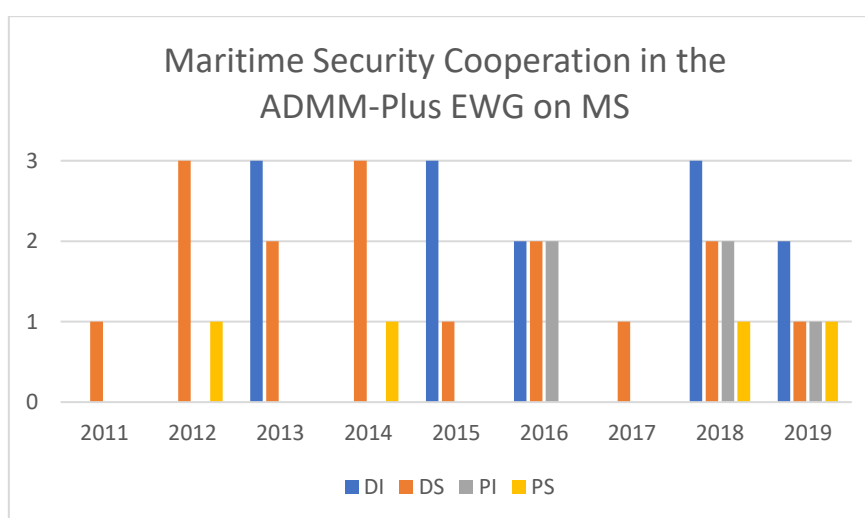


Chart 2. Maritime security cooperation activities in the ADMM and ADMM-Plus, 2011-2019.

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus have hosted many workshops on maritime security, particularly in maritime security cooperation and capacity building. The ADMM-Plus have also shown to excel in coordinating practical cooperation compared to the ARF. In 2016, for example, the ADMM-Plus managed to organise counterpiracy workshops, maritime security tabletop exercises, the maritime security future leaders programme, the joint ADMM-Plus Maritime and Security and Counter Terrorism Exercise and the Mahi Tangaroa Field Training Exercise. The most notable achievements of the ADMM are the initiation of two large-scale maritime exercises with both China and the US in 2018 and 2019, respectively. The first maritime exercise with China was held in two stages: a table-top exercise held in Singapore in August, followed by a field training exercise in the waters east of Zhanjiang. Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei, and the Philippines sent vessels, while Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Myanmar observed. The field exercises included search-and-rescue and medical evacuation drills based on the Code of Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES). The ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Exercise (AUMX) took place in September 2019. While the U.S. has maintained maritime security cooperation with individual ASEAN members through bilateral initiatives such as the CARAT exercises, the 2019 AUMX represented the U.S.'s first attempt at engaging with all ASEAN member states simultaneously (Parameswaran, 2018).

The ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF)

The Vientiane Action Programme planned for the eventual creation of an ASEAN maritime forum as a means to promote regional maritime security cooperation, a goal which was further emphasised in the APSC Blueprint. Hitherto, ASEAN lacked a specialised intramural forum for discussing maritime security issues, as maritime problems would often be discussed in conjunction with other sectoral bodies, such as the ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Transnational Crime and the ASEAN Environment Ministers Meeting. In September 2007, Indonesia hosted a workshop on the concept of the AMF, resulting in the Concept Paper on the Establishment of an ASEAN Maritime Forum, which was proposed to the ASEAN Senior Officer Meeting in May 2008. A year later, the Concept Paper was adopted and in 2010, the inaugural AMF was held in Surabaya. It would be the only intramural ASEAN forum where maritime security issues could be discussed comprehensively based on ASEAN principles (Rijal, 2019).

Though the AMF was intended to be an intramural forum for building maritime security cooperation, there was support for its expansion. At the 6th East Asia Summit in 2011, Japan proposed to expand the AMF to include ASEAN Dialogue Partners (Midford, 2015). The idea was endorsed by ASEAN leaders, noting that the expanded dialogue would allow members to 'utilize opportunities and address common challenges on maritime issues'. In October 2012, the inaugural EAMF was held. The forum exchanged views on the relevance of UNCLOS, maritime connectivity and capacity building, infrastructure upgrading, seafarers training, marine environment protection, promotion of eco-tourism and fisheries regime in East Asia, and identifying best practices. As of 2020, there have been ten AMF and eight EAMF meetings. The main topics of discussion are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of AMF and EAMF meetings. Compiled by author from press releases, open-source news, government statements, and conference reports.

	Issues discussed
1 st AMF in Surabaya, Indonesia, 28 – 29 July 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maritime connectivity - Maritime security problems - Search and rescue - Future work of the AMF, including updating the AMF concept paper, identifying topics and plans for future AMF meetings, and exploring avenues for concrete maritime cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, 2010).
2 nd AMF in Pattaya, Thailand, 17 – 19 August 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safety and security of sea lanes of communication (SLOC) in Southeast Asia - Maritime domain awareness - Regional maritime cooperation in search and rescue - Future work of the AMF, including stocktaking of issues and implementation of SLOC safety, maritime domain awareness, and maritime cooperation (Permal, 2011).
3 rd AMF in Manila, 3-4 October 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maritime security and cooperation in ASEAN - Freedom and safety of navigation, and addressing sea piracy in the high seas - Protecting marine environment and promoting eco-tourism and fisheries regime - Future work of the AMF (ASEAN, 2012)
1 st EAMF in Manila, 5 October 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevance of UNCLOS - Maritime connectivity and capacity building - Infrastructure and equipment upgrading - Seafarers' training proposal - Protection of marine environment - Promotion of eco-tourism and fisheries regime - Identification of best practices of cooperation (ASEAN, 2012)
4 th AMF in Malaysia, 1 – 2 October 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing maritime cooperation - Fostering sectoral coordination and cooperation within ASEAN, mostly centred on the need to reduce operational redundancies between the AMF and ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, and discussions of a possible reporting mechanism. - Future work of the AMF (<i>Briefing on the Outcomes of the 4th ASEAN Maritime Forum and 2nd Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum by Malaysia, 2014</i>)
2 nd EAMF in Malaysia, 3 October 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting maritime cooperation between ASEAN and Dialogue Partners. Endorsed U.S. initiative of civilian ASEAN seafarer training. - Discussion on freedom of navigation in the EEZ - Some discussions on the South China Sea (<i>Briefing on the Outcomes of the 4th ASEAN Maritime Forum and 2nd Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum by Malaysia, 2014</i>)

Table 4. Summary of AMF and EAMF meetings. Compiled by author from press releases, open-source news, government statements, and conference reports.

(Continued)

	Issues discussed
5 th AMF and 3 rd EAMF in Da Nang, Vietnam, 26 – 28 August 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation of implementation of initiatives proposed in previous for a - Future work for the AMF and EAMF - Experience sharing in marine research, disaster response, maritime security and connectivity, search and rescue, and prevention and managements of incidents at sea (Da Nang Today, 2014).
6 th AMF and 4 th EAMF in Manado, Indonesia, 9-10 September 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional regimes on marine resources - Enhancement of maritime cooperation - Regional maritime security challenges (Badan Keamanan Laut, 2015)
7 th AMF and 5 th EAMF in Jakarta, Indonesia, 6 – 7 December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advancing cooperation in maritime safety, such as in search and rescue and prevention of incidents at sea - Countering piracy, IUU fishing, and human trafficking - Protection of marine environment: reducing pollution and coastal management (Setnas ASEAN Indonesia, 2017)
8 th AMF and 6 th EAMF in Manila, 6-7 December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maritime security and safety - Maritime environment protection - Future work of the AMF and EAMF (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018)
9 th AMF and 7 th EAMF in Da Nang, Vietnam, 5-6 December 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maritime security and safety - Search and rescue and anti-piracy - Combating illegal fishing - Promoting environmental protection and dealing with plastic waste (Da Nang Today, 2019)
10 th AMF and 8 th EAMF in Hanoi, Vietnam, 12-13 December 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addressed ‘emerging challenges’ at sea - Need to take steps to ‘enhance information exchange and coordination’ - ‘Promoting links between strategies and initiatives on maritime cooperation’ - Support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (Viet Nam News, 2020).

DISCUSSION

Comparing the ARF, ADMM, and AMF: a thematic analysis

The ARF ISM on MS and AMF (along with the EAMF) tend to be heavily process-oriented, resulting in a format which privileges dialogue and agenda-setting over practical acts of cooperation. Granted, a degree of dialogue is necessary to facilitate smoother cooperation in the future and to allow states to progress at a comfortable pace, especially in a setting where member states have divergent threat perceptions and preferred approaches to maritime security cooperation. In this respect, these institutions fulfil their intended purpose, as it provides a meeting point where these differences may be discussed, and common ground be found. However, as Yuzawa (2006) rightly observed, uniting the divergent and often opposing perceptions of ARF members (particularly on preventive diplomacy) is often labour-intensive. The intergovernmental nature of the organisation also adds to the high possibility of discussions

becoming stalled, either intentionally or unintentionally. Critics of these processes have pointed out the relatively lacklustre stream of practical output as evidence of either failure or a lack of value of these institutions. An oft-repeated criticism levied on the ARF is that it is a ‘talk shop’ with limited means of delivering results (see, for example, Garofano, 1999).

Proponents of the ARF process point out that the Forum was never intended to act as a sort of hub where practical maritime security cooperation was the main goal. As Katsumata (2006) writes, the ARF should be considered as a ‘norm brewery’ in the Asia Pacific, as it allows member states to develop and practice relevant norms in security cooperation. In this sense, the constant stream of dialogue-based outcomes of the ISM on MS ought to be viewed as a positive sign of the ARF’s relevance. As the data shows, though the ARF has indeed been engaged in more sustained dialogue, this does not necessarily translate to more sustained practical cooperation in maritime security. This is consistent with the conclusions of previous research on the ARF (Haacke, 2009; Mak, 2010). In fact, the more intricate practical cooperation initiatives, such as regional information-sharing and naval and field exercises, are often practiced outside of the ARF.

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus demonstrate a refinement of promoting and institutionalising maritime security cooperation beyond the bilateralism that characterised ASEAN security (usually military-to-military) cooperation in the 1970s to 1990s. Having learned from the pitfalls of the ARF, the ADMM-Plus actively sought to limit its membership, reducing the probability of friction due to divergent threat perceptions and interests. As Dialogue partner members are required to have ‘significant interactions and relations with ASEAN defence establishments’ and must show commitment to be ‘able to work with the ADMM to build capacity so as to enhance regional security in substantive manner’ with ADMM members prior to their acceptance into the ADMM-Plus, the ADMM-Plus can dedicate more time to addressing practical solutions instead of building trust through exchanges and dialogue (Chalermpanupap, 2011). In a way, the previous ‘informal luncheons’, which then evolved into the ARF Defence Officials Dialogue, provided the foundation the ADMM-Plus needed to expedite the implementation of practical cooperation (Tan, 2012, p. 242). In other words, though still being process-oriented, the ADMM-Plus is also more outcome-oriented compared to the ARF and AMF, as the formal working group setting allows the ADMM-Plus members to quickly formulate plans of cooperation in multiple areas.

While the ADMM and ADMM-Plus have indeed contributed much to advancing practical security cooperation, they have also been criticised of being exclusively focused on non-traditional maritime security issues. The primary scope of the EWG on MS continues to be issues of maritime piracy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and counterterrorism. The non-traditional focus prevents deeper discussion and preparation on other, often pressing traditional maritime security issues which would require a higher degree of operational sophistication in the maritime domain, such as the South China Sea dispute (Mukherjee, 2013; Tan, 2017; Tang, 2016). In addition, as the ADMM-Plus programmes continue to increase in complexity and intensity, Tan (2020, p. 37) fears members may suffer from ‘participant fatigue’. In the long run, there are concerns that ADMM-Plus members may grow disillusioned

of the capability of the ADMM-Plus to address ‘high politics’ issues related to the maritime domain.

The AMF occupies an awkward position within ASEAN’s intricate network of maritime security cooperation, which impacts its performance. On one side, the ARF continues to be the premier forum for region-wide dialogue on maritime security due to its expansive network. On the other side, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus already provide platforms for practical maritime security cooperation on top of existing bilateral and ‘mini-lateral’ maritime security cooperation. The presence of the AMF and its expanded version seems to be overshadowed by these existing fora. As Muhibat (2017) observed, this might indicate members questioning the value of the AMF and EAMF as venues for maritime security cooperation, especially as other venues provide similar benefits. In addition, the AMF also adds to the many annual events that ASEAN members are already required to attend, stretching diplomatic resources thin.

Despite holding routine discussions, the output of the AMF and EAMF remains rather limited. One form of cooperation to emerge from the EAMF was the first Expanded ASEAN Seafarer Training Counter-Piracy Workshop, held in Manila on 23-25 September 2013. The workshop was joined by all 18 EAS members and resulted in numerous recommendations for increasing support and training for seafarers (EAMF, 2013). As a dialogue-first and process-oriented forum, the AMF and EAMF can only pass on these recommendations to the relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies. Implementation, then, is highly dependent on the sectoral bodies and member states. In other words, the AMF and EAMF may still need to carve out their own niche among the many regional platforms for cooperation within ASEAN.

Does the driver matter?

Still along the lines of institutional design, there is an obvious difference of the main drivers involved in the three fora. In the ARF and AMF, the primary drivers are foreign ministers, whereas in the ADMM, the primary participants are defence officials. Tan (2016, p. 74) points out that defence officials, with their ‘mission-mindedness and the military assets and resources at their disposal’, often perform better compared to foreign ministers. The data corroborates this observation; the practical output of the ADMM-Plus eclipses the combined output of ARF and AMF.

Could this be attributed to the functional expertise of the drivers? There are at least two reasons to accept the hypothesis. First, ASEAN militaries have had a long history of functional interaction. From the 1970s, security cooperation was usually centred on bilateral annual and intermittent military-to-military exercises. These exercises were deliberately kept separate from the formal multilateral channels, as foreign ministers were cautious of presenting ASEAN as a military bloc during the Cold War (Chalermphanupap, 2011, p. 19). These military-to-military interactions were then integrated within the ASEAN framework in the 2000s, as ASEAN defence officials were provided with specific sub-regional umbrellas to conduct cooperation. It stands to reason that this prolonged period of cooperation, free from the constraints of regional diplomacy, has provided ASEAN militaries with the modalities to

formulate security cooperation at a pace comfortable to all. Second, foreign ministers tend to be overtly bound by the formalities attached with regional diplomacy and national interests, whereas defence officials tend to take a pragmatic approach to security cooperation, albeit still within the constraints of regional and national preferences. These different approaches may be observed within the ARF and ADMM. Advancements of maritime security cooperation in the ARF tend to be hindered by an aversion to overt military-to-military exercises, which were deemed ‘unfeasible’ by the foreign ministers of the ARF (Tan, 2016, p. 74). This may stem from the ARF’s emphasis on respecting sovereignty and a lack of interoperability among ARF militaries (Haacke, 2009, p. 445). In stark contrast, the ADMM-Plus, defence officials were quick to discuss and plan Exercise Mahi Tangaroa in 2016, requiring only eleven months from discussion to implementation.

Practical cooperation guided by preferences?

Despite these trends towards deeper formalization of maritime security cooperation at the multilateral level, most of the practical maritime security cooperation in Southeast Asia occurs outside the purview of ASEAN-related institutions. The data in the previous section is limited to intra-ASEAN practical maritime security cooperation; however, ASEAN members have long cooperated with extra-regional powers in maritime security. The United States, for example, continues to provide capacity building, training, and funding through its Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative (which was renamed the ‘Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative’ during the Trump administration). Since 1995, the United States has been carrying out the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training and Southeast Asia Cooperation against Terrorism (SEACAT) exercises, which provide training and capacity building in counterpiracy and counterterrorism. Likewise, Japan has made significant contributions to Southeast Asian states in the form of technical assistance, capacity building, and funding, mostly under the ReCAAP framework (Llewelyn, 2017; Son, 2013).

ASEAN members also sometimes resort to intra-regional cooperative options outside the institutional boundaries of ASEAN. One notable example is the trilateral patrols in the Sulu Sea (modelled after the Malacca Strait Patrols), launched by Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in 2017 in response to rising levels of transnational crime. The initial idea for the patrols was proposed in as early as May 2016 and formal operations began in June 2017. Though not having to go through the complex bureaucracy of ASEAN, the delay in the implementation was caused by sovereignty concerns and logistical constraints between the three parties (Storey, 2018). These examples may indicate that a ‘mini-lateral’ approach to maritime security cooperation may be preferable to ASEAN members, particularly if ASEAN members were to increase cooperation to include more contentious regional issues (Heydarian, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to expand on Haacke's initial observation that security cooperation in ASEAN was more dialogue-oriented compared to being practical, although there is a slight positive trend towards more practical forms of cooperation. The review of the activities and outcomes of the ARF ISM on MS, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus EWG on Maritime Security, and the AMF and EAMF generally supports Haacke's observation. Among ASEAN institutions, maritime security cooperation is largely dialogue-based in the form of routine dialogues and periodic thematic workshops designed to increase the capacity of relevant state maritime security agencies. Practical cooperation, however, remains few and far between, particularly in the ARF and AMF, due to the respective organisational design and purposes. The notable exception is the ADMM-Plus, which has been shown to be capable of organising sustained feats of practical maritime security cooperation among ASEAN members and non-ASEAN members.

From 2003 onwards, ASEAN decided to focus on maritime security as a problem to be handled collectively, which necessitated a more formal, institutionalised approach to solving the maritime security problems. The institutionalisation of maritime security is reflected in the further specialisation of multilateral fora within the ASEAN framework, namely the ARF, ADMM, and AMF. These three institutions have their respective strengths and weaknesses in promoting maritime security cooperation, many of which stem from their institutional purposes and design. At the core of these weaknesses are divergent perceptions of maritime security. In these regional institutions, which are well-designed to promote confidence-building and dialogue, opposing views often require a lot of time to reach an operational level of accommodation before action is taken. As a result, the outcomes of these institutions are mostly dialogue and exchanges, with more concrete, practical forms of cooperation being few and far between, and often conducted outside the confines of regional institutions. As regional institutions remain hamstrung in promoting practical maritime security cooperation, further research might be interested in investigating the 'mini-lateral' turn in maritime security cooperation, particularly its proposed benefits and drawbacks compared to multilateralism. Additionally, future research may choose to investigate the divergent perceptions between the foreign policy elite with the defence officials, which have been hypothesized to affect institutional preferences.

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PREREQUISITES AND PERCEIVED INFORMATION SYSTEM QUALITIES MODEL FOR MOBILE BANKING ADOPTION AMONG THE CUSTOMERS OF PRIVATE COMMERCIAL BANKS IN MYANMAR

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ABSTRACT

The research attempts to conjecture the prerequisites of perceived qualities of information system (IS) such as mobile banking (MB). The quantitative research was conducted and a total of 577 MB users of private commercial banks in Myanmar participated in the research. The results of the hypotheses were formulated by using partly exploratory factor analysis (EFA), partly confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques. The findings expose that device quality is an independent factor, and an antecedent of user interface design quality and system quality. The research also discloses that user interface design quality is a prerequisite of system quality and information quality. In the research, system quality and information quality are key factors affecting customers' intention to adopt MB. Further, the results confirm that system quality has a statistically significant effect on information quality. However, the effect of device quality on information quality is insignificant. It is expected that the research gives valuable insights for not only bank managers but also software engineers who are going to develop MB systems.

Keywords: *mobile banking, information system, qualities, private banks, Myanmar.*

INTRODUCTION

The inventions of advanced technology drive the retail banks to perform the rapid digital transformation of banking services and create a mobile environment that enables customers to perform financial transactions with minimum effort (Tam & Oliveira, 2017). Therefore, the usage of mobile technology devices and innovative financial technologies (Fin-

Tech) in financial institutions is inevitable. As a result of technological advancement, banks invent an information system (IS) based on the mobile app to assist their customers to interact with their services (Noh & Lee, 2016). Mobile banking (MB) provides customers with extensive benefits such as conducting their financial transactions at anytime and anywhere. Moreover, MB supports the potential of increasing the effectiveness of payment methods and expanding the accessibility of traditional banking services by those who currently lack them. Being originally independent of location and time, MB provides cost-effective banking services and can play a crucial role, particularly in emerging countries. MB has extra advantages compared to traditional banking which allow the banks for minimizing cost, maximizing revenue, more market shares, higher brand loyalty, greater customer retention, and better customer experience (Jeong & Yoon, 2013). Thus, banks are investing in developing MB continuously. However, the adoption rate is still under the expectation of banks since their customers still hesitate to use this technology.

The research attempts to disclose the underlying prerequisite qualities of the perceived IS qualities from DeLone and McLean (1992) information system success (ISS) model, which is one of the widely employed research models to verify the likelihood of the success of IS in the mobile commercial application landscape (Petter, DeLone, & McLean, 2013). This empirical research is a first-time endeavor to discover the prerequisites of perceived IS qualities in MB context (Sharma & Sharma, 2019; Damabi, Firoozbakht, & Ahmadyan, 2018; Myo & Hwang, 2017; Deventer, Klerk, & Bevan-Dye, 2017; Tam & Oliveira, 2017; Lokman et al., 2017; Zhou, 2012; Zhou, 2011; Lee & Chung, 2009). Therefore, the research focuses on a comprehensive set of potential IS qualities that influence MB adoption. Two factors adapted from the ISS model of DeLone and McLean (1992), system quality and information quality, and two factors based on prior studies, device quality and user interface design quality, are employed to investigate the intention of users to adopt MB. Furthermore, the major objective of the research is to contribute to both theoretical and managerial issues concerning the relationships among the different quality aspects and the influence on the individual intention in MB adoption. Thus, the following research questions are needed to answer in this study:

RQ1: What are the underlying prerequisite IS qualities?

RQ2: What are the relationships between prerequisite and perceived IS qualities?

RQ3: Which perceived IS quality is more important than others in MB adoption?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Myanmar, an ASEAN country, had been mainly a cash-based economy due to the prolonged over controlling of financial policy by the central government since 1960. As a result of the Financial Institutions Law in 1990, several private commercial banks emerged. Nonetheless, the era of rising private commercial banks was short due to the banking crisis occurring in 2003, so the financial sector became fragile (Tun, 2020a). As a consequence of reforming economic policy in 2011, financial inclusion enabled conditions for the endeavor of re-establishing private banks (Turnell, 2011). There are currently 27 privately-owned domestic banks in Myanmar which dominate 67% of total bank assets in Myanmar (Hofmann, 2018).

Among them, Kanbawza Bank (KBZ) is the largest private commercial bank which represents 41% of the private bank market share. Ayeyarwady Bank (AYA) is the second largest with 17% of the total, followed by Co-operative Bank (CB) with 11% of the total. Furthermore, only 25% of the Myanmar population has bank accounts according to the World Bank Report 2018. Besides, there are about 68,24 million mobile phone users in Myanmar and mobile network coverage is currently at 82%. The majority of mobile phone users (90%) are using the device with the android platform, while only 10% are using Apple IOS devices (Kemp, 2020). Therefore, the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) has granted private banks to operate mobile banking services since 2013. Although there are abundant facilitating conditions, MB adoption in Myanmar is relatively low compared to mobile phone users (Lwin, Ameen, & Nusari, 2019).

The growth of m-commerce technologies transforms the way of banks and their customers conduct financial transactions, and mobile banking (MB) is one of them (AlBalawi & Rehman, 2016). MB is a major mobile financial management service having similar functionality with internet banking (via computer) that is widely adopted by many customers to mainly check the account balance and process fund transfers (Gu, Lee, & Suh, 2009). Similarly, Mahad et al. (2015) defined MB as the use of mobile smartphone devices to access banking tasks not only for transferring funds and monitoring account balances but also making bill payments and locating automated teller machines (ATM). Furthermore, MB can be assumed as a subset of electronic banking (e-banking) that refers to the transformation of accessing financial services from wired networks to wireless networks through a mobile device (Clarke III, 2001).

According to Yeo and Fisher (2017), MB is a more advanced financial technology than online banking with unique features such as narrow costs for usage, mobility, customization, and a broader scope of utilities. Moreover, MB has evolved from short message service (SMS) based banking to mobile applications installed in users' smartphone devices (Deventer, Klerk, & Bevan-Dye, 2017). MB offers private commercial banks' customers a variety of advantages of conducting financial services easily, effectively, quickly, and conveniently compared to accessing physical banks. In addition, MB is an application of m-commerce and an innovative method which facilitates business transactions via telecommunication channels by using mobile devices (Kim, Shin, & Lee, 2009).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

DeLone and McLean (1992) proposed a model to measure IS success (Figure 1) based on the Theory of Communication by Shannon and Weaver (1949). The IS success model caught the concept of a communication system which is a mechanism of delivering and transferring information to the receivers. As a result, DeLone and McLean built a framework consisting of two major quality dimensions, system quality to measure technical success, and information quality to measure semantic success. Later, Seddon (1997) suggested modifying the D&M ISS model for clarification since the original framework is confusing, and the use construct in the model is ambiguous.

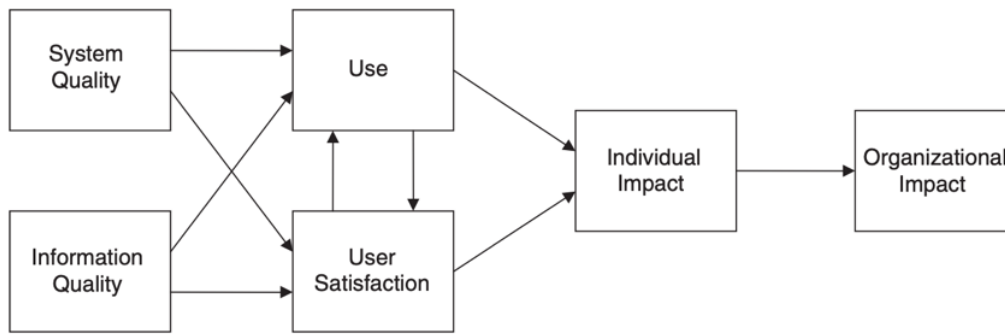


Figure 1 Information System Success Model (1992)

Consequently, DeLone and McLean modified their ISS model in 2003 by adding service quality factor into major quality components, system quality, and information quality, to enhance the measurement capability on the success of IS in e-commerce context (Figure 2). However, service quality is an insignificant determinant of behavioral intention (Brown & Jayakody, 2008; Kuo, Wu, & Deng, 2009). Tun (2020) also proved that service quality is not critical for mobile financial service adoption in Myanmar. Furthermore, Tam and Oliveira (2017) postulated that system quality and information quality could be the most significant quality dimensions to measure the success of an IS. Therefore, prior premise and research findings lead to exclude service quality construct in the research model.

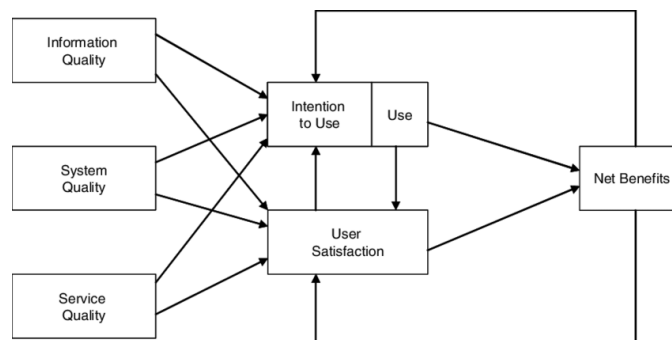


Figure 2 Updated Information System Success Model (2003)

Another significant modification in the updated D&M ISS model (Figure 2) is the separation of use and intention to use. Venkatesh and Davis (1996) argued that users show their intention to use the technology before they use it by modifying Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) explained that certain behavior of users originated from the intention for engaging by developing Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which is the background theory of TAM. Subsequently, DeLone and McLean (2003) proposed to separate ‘intention to use’ and ‘use’, but they are stuck to each other and alternation. Alam (2014) explicitly stated that behavioral intention is an unavoidable antecedent of actual adoption which is the ultimate business goal of banks. Therefore, the intention to adopt can be referred to as the willingness and possibility of the user to adopt a specific information system. The research model is adapted from DeLone and McLean (1992) as it focuses on investigating potential IS

qualities that will lead to users' intention to adopt an IS, which does not predict its success. Moreover, none of the previous studies, as shown in Table 1, attempted to investigate the prerequisite of key IS quality factors of DeLone and McLean (1992).

Table 1 Summary of Relevant Previous Studies

Researchers	Context	Country	Sampling Size	Investigated IS Qualities
Sharma and Sharma (2019)	MB	Oman	227	SysQ, InfQ
Lee and Chung (2009)	MB	Korea	276	SysQ, InfQ
Myo and Hwang (2017)	MB	Myanmar	206	SysQ, InfQ
Deventer, Klerk, and Bevan-Dye (2017)	MB	South Africa	334	SysQ
Zhou (2011)	MB	China	210	SysQ, InfQ
Zhou (2012)	MB	China	240	SysQ, InfQ
Tam and Oliveira (2017)	MB	Southern European	354	SysQ, InfQ
Damabi, Firoozbakht, and Ahmadyan (2018)	MB	Iran	155	SysQ, InfQ
Lokman et al. (2017)	MB	Malaysia	146	SysQ, InfQ
Chemingui and lallouna (2013)	Mobile Financial Services	Tunisia	300	SysQ
Gao and Waechter (2017)	M-Payment	Australia	851	SysQ, InfQ
Routray et al. (2019)	M-Wallet	India	200	SysQ, InfQ
Koo, Wati, and Chung (2013)	MB and Internet Banking	Indonesia	141	SysQ, InfQ
Talukder, Quazi, and Sathye (2014)	Mobile Phone Banking	Australia	242	SysQ
Wilson and Mbamba (2017)	Mobile Phone Payment	Tanzania	260	SysQ
Noh and Lee (2016)	Mobile Apps-based Banking	Korea	520	SysQ, InfQ
Yoo (2020)	M-Commerce	Korea	283	SysQ, InfQ
Phuong and Trang (2018)	M-Commerce	Vietnam	427	SysQ, InfQ
Lee and Chen (2014)	M-Commerce	Taiwan	406	SysQ, InfQ
Yassierli, Vinsensius, and Mohamed (2018)	M-Commerce	Indonesia	230	InfQ

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Device Quality

The advanced mobile services such as carrying out financial transactions, seeking information, playing games, and buying and selling products can be accessed by using modern mobile devices (Roy, 2017). Likewise, Middleton (2010) stated that advanced technology has enabled mobile devices to have higher computing performance and network connectivity through wireless technologies such as 4G, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, which has led to the rise of mobile phone usage. Liu, Au and Choi (2014) explained that users can utilize mobile apps to perform desired functions by installing and running them on handheld devices such as tablets and mobile phones. The mobile device has unique features to influence users' beliefs and support special services for various businesses and information systems. Technically, the device quality could be investigated in three aspects: functionalities, compatibility, and

performance. These aspects may have an impact on the perceptions of users, which in turn might outcome in the overall feeling of using the device (Parveen & Sulaiman, 2008). Thus, previous literature leads to formulate the hypotheses:

H₁: Device Quality has a significant positive effect on User Interface Design Quality.

H₂: Device Quality has a significant positive effect on System Quality.

H₃: Device Quality has a significant positive effect on Information Quality.

User Interface Design Quality

A higher quality of user interface design enables users to use desired functions on an information system in different approaches while being allowed to perceive the quality of the system (Branscomb & Thomas, 1984). According to Jeong (2011), user interface design is referred as screen design, and Yoo (2020) considered it as visual quality. User interface design encompasses the whole visual appearance of information systems such as the font style, color usage, icons and buttons placement, and content layout (Graham, Hannigan, & Curran, 2005). On the other hand, Bharati and Chaudhury (2004) stated that user interface design quality is the manner of displaying and presenting the information. Therefore, user interface design quality will be investigated as a discrete factor in the research although it is the sub-dimensions of system quality factor in D&M ISS model (Seddon, 1997). The users will learn further about the information system based on their initial experience in user interface design (Everard & Galletta, 2005). Lee and Chung (2009), Damabi, Firoozbakht, and Ahmadyan (2018) also proved that user interface design is a critical factor in mobile banking context. Therefore:

H₄: User Interface Design Quality has a significant positive effect on System Quality.

H₅: User Interface Design Quality has a significant positive effect on Information Quality.

System Quality

System quality is an instant impression through the using device that leads to use of the system since users do not directly access service in the case of MB (Gao & Waechter, 2017). The extensive scope of system quality is obvious in the various ways measured by ease of use, functionality, usability, and response time of the specific system (DeLone & McLean, 2003). System quality captures the concepts of the productivity model to evaluate the degree of IS resource, which is crucial in the mobile environment (Lee & Chung, 2009). On the other hand, Kuan, Bock and Vathanophas (2008) stated that system quality is the technical perspective of the e-commerce system that produces information. Furthermore, Talukder, Quazi, and Sathye (2014) define system quality as the technological quality of the mobile system that reflects the quality of the information provided to users. Hariguna and Berlilana (2017), Sharkey, Scott, and Acton (2010), and Lin (2007) asserted that higher system quality has the capability to boost the intention of users to adopt it and lead to the rise of market share in the e-commerce landscape. Therefore, the hypotheses have been formulated:

H₆: System Quality has a significant positive effect on Information Quality.

H₇: System Quality has a significant positive effect on intention to adopt MB.

Information Quality

Nelson, Todd, and Wixom (2005) defined information quality as a motivation factor, the information results or content of IS processing. Information quality is output of the system which represents how the information is organized on the limited user interface of a mobile device (Lee & Chung, 2009). On the other hand, the measurements of information quality in e-commerce and traditional IS context are different because of their nature to reflect the objectivity, relevance, and reliability of the information (Yoo, 2020). Information quality can be considered as two dimensions: 1) intrinsic, where the information from the system represents the data of the real world, and 2) contextual, where the information is produced by the system after completing a specific process (McKnight et al., 2017). In addition, McKnight et al. (2017) stated that information qualities such as consistency, accuracy, and completeness can motivate the users to continue engaging the current services rather than the other services with inaccurate or incomplete information. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H₈: Information Quality has a significant positive effect on intention to adopt MB.

According to the prior research, theoretical background, and formulated hypotheses, the research model presented in Figure 3 with eight hypotheses and five constructs is proposed to validate in the research. Moreover, H₂, H₃, H₄ and H₅ are intended to answer RQ1, H₁ and H₆ are intended for RQ2, and RQ3 will be answered by H₇ and H₈.

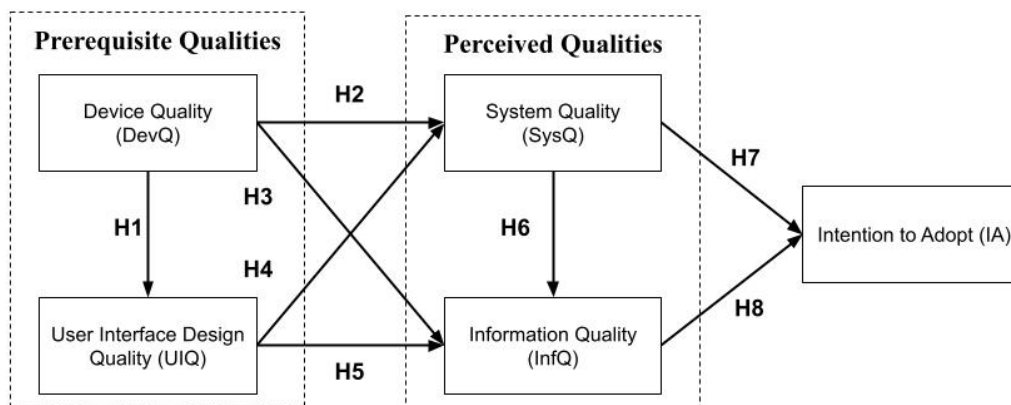


Figure 3: Proposed Research Model

RESEARCH DESIGN

Neuman (2006) recommended that the survey is an appropriate technique to understand attitudes and is suitable for quantitative research. Partly exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and

partly confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis are employed and used to test the proposed hypotheses. The survey questionnaire (Appendix A) is developed in the bilingual language (English-Burmese) by using Google Form to collect data. The questionnaire is reviewed by five highly educated people with strong experience in using MB. The survey is conducted through social networking sites, Facebook and LinkedIn. All the indicators of factors (Table 2) in the questionnaire use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), except demographic variables. In the questionnaire, there is a filter question to ensure target participants are MB users of private commercial banks in Myanmar to reduce the rate of invalid dataset due to lack of knowledge regarding MB in general. According to SEM analysis, the widely accepted typical minimum sample size is 200. On the other hand, Kline (2011) suggested that sample size to the number of questionnaire items ratio (N:q) should be 20:1. Furthermore, Comrey and Lee (1992) recommend that the scale of sample size 500 is very good. Therefore, a minimum sampling size of 500 is required.

Table 2 Questionnaire Items of Factors

Factors	Items (q = 15)	Reference
Device Quality	DevQ1, DevQ2, DevQ3	(Lu & Su, 2009)
System Quality	SysQ1, SysQ2, SysQ3	(Ahn, Ryu, & Han, 2007)
Information Quality	InfQ1, InfQ2, InfQ3	(Kim, Xu, & Koh, 2004)
User Interface Design Quality	UI1, UI2, UI3	(Lee & Chung, 2009)
Intention to Adopt	IA1, IA2, IA3	(Talukder, Quazi, & Sathye, 2014)

ANALYSIS RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Total of 620 people in Myanmar responded to the questionnaire, 43 respondents (6.9%) answered that they do not have prior experience in using MB, thus only 577 respondents are available for further data analysis. After eliminating outliers (12%) from the remaining responses according to the value of standard deviation of each dataset, the valid dataset is down to 508. The final usable dataset consists of 41.3% male respondents and 58.7% female respondents, indicating that the result does not have gender bias. Most of the respondents (71.1%) are the age group of 24-39 years (generation Y), followed by 18.9% above 40 years (generation X), and 10% below 23 years old (generation Z). In the survey, 66.3% respondents have higher than a bachelor degree and 31.1% respondents have a bachelor degree. Only 2.6% of respondents have a diploma and lower education level. Furthermore, half of the respondents (50.2%) are civil-servant, 28% of participants are employees, and 10.8% are self-employed. Only 9.1% are students and 2.0% of respondents are unemployed.

Table 3 Analysis Result of Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic		Freq (N = 508)	Percentage
Gender	Male	210	41.3%
	Female	298	58.7%
Age	<= 23 year	51	10.0%
	24-39 year	361	71.1%
	>= 40 year	96	18.9%
Education Status	High School	5	1.0%
	Diploma	8	1.6%
	Bachelor Degree	158	31.1%
	Master Degree	286	56.3%
Occupation Status	Ph.D	51	10.0%
	Employee	142	28.0%
	Self-Employed	55	10.8%
	Civil Servant	255	50.1%
	Student	46	9.1%
	Unemployed	10	2.0%

Preliminarily Descriptive Analysis

First, preliminarily descriptive analysis is examined in SPSS software. All the questionnaire items of values of standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis are between 2 and -2 according to the analysis results (Table 4). It indicates the normality of each questionnaire item and the contribution of respondents. Therefore, the dataset is suitable for the use of Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation in SEM analysis (Kline, 2011). Table 4 shows that respondents strongly believe that their mobile phone has adequate features to perform well in conducting MB transactions and is compatible with MB (DevQ1, DevQ2, DevQ3). Furthermore, respondents have a positive belief that MB is easy to use (SysQ2) as it provides appropriate functionalities (SysQ1) for prompt financial transactions (SysQ3). Besides, the willingness of respondents to increase using MB (IA2) and to use MB whenever opportunities arising (IA3) are high.

Table 4 Preliminarily Descriptive Analysis Results

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
DevQ1	4.44	0.649	-0.744	-0.491
DevQ2	4.48	0.626	-0.796	-0.376
DevQ3	4.56	0.605	-1.018	0.017
SysQ1	4.25	0.730	-0.617	-0.268
SysQ2	4.31	0.707	-0.748	0.186
SysQ3	4.07	0.707	-0.370	-0.118
IA1	3.90	0.979	-0.500	-0.666
IA2	4.14	0.827	-0.601	-0.444
IA3	4.21	0.794	-0.695	-0.203
InfQ1	3.82	0.773	-0.138	-0.495

Table 4 Preliminarily Descriptive Analysis Results
(Continued)

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
InfQ2	3.75	0.783	-0.054	-0.55
InfQ3	3.85	0.780	-0.233	-0.406
UIQ1	3.84	0.766	-0.068	-0.630
UIQ2	3.97	0.760	-0.391	-0.173
UIQ3	3.94	0.800	-0.438	-0.212

Analysis Results of Factor Loading and Cronbach's Alpha

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is conducted in SPSS software. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) method with a Varimax rotation of factor analysis is used to confirm that all the correspondence indicators are associated with respective factors from the proposed research model (Figure 3). All the indicators are with a loading coefficient greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010) and the factor analysis confirms five factors affiliated from 15 indicators (Table 5). Furthermore, the analysis results of Cronbach's alpha of factors are greater than acceptable value 0.7. The results indicate that internal consistency reliability is adequate (Table 5).

Table 5 Analysis Results of Factor Loading and Cronbach's Alpha

	Device Quality	Information Quality	Intention to Adopt	User Interface Design Quality	System Quality	Cronbach's Alpha
DevQ2	0.863	0.054	0.080	0.160	0.161	
DevQ1	0.809	0.212	0.121	0.045	0.100	0.833
DevQ3	0.799	0.041	0.183	0.158	0.209	
InfQ2	0.111	0.848	0.189	0.185	0.169	
InfQ1	0.087	0.772	0.191	0.195	0.266	0.851
InfQ3	0.159	0.751	0.186	0.294	0.165	
IA2	0.137	0.178	0.831	0.193	0.200	
IA1	0.190	0.146	0.816	0.172	0.077	0.828
IA3	0.091	0.226	0.769	0.179	0.236	
UIQ1	0.206	0.252	0.163	0.775	0.040	
UIQ2	0.099	0.211	0.218	0.760	0.296	0.813
UIQ3	0.101	0.204	0.202	0.747	0.273	
SysQ2	0.199	0.145	0.183	0.269	0.786	
SysQ3	0.117	0.352	0.171	0.212	0.710	0.779
SysQ1	0.361	0.206	0.219	0.111	0.629	

Correlations Among the Factors

The relationships between the factors are investigated by using the matrices of Pearson correlation coefficients in SPSS software. The results confirmed that all the factors have significantly positive correlation with each other at a 0.01 level. Further, correlation coefficient ranging from 0.344 (DevQ ↔ InfQ) to a maximum of 0.589 (SysQ ↔ InfQ). The shaded cells in Table 6 represent the eight causal relationships in the proposed research model (Figure 3). However, the significant correlations do not confirm that there are significant causal effects between the factors (Kline, 2011).

Table 6 Analysis Result of Factor Correlations

Factors	DevQ	SysQ	IA	InfQ	UIQ
Device Quality (DevQ)	1				
System Quality (SysQ)	0.503**	1			
Intention to Adopt (IA)	0.377**	0.524**	1		
Information Quality (InfQ)	0.344**	0.589**	0.499**	1	
User Interface Design Quality (UIQ)	0.381**	0.582**	0.512**	0.584**	1

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Results of Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability

According to the procedures of CFA, reliability and convergent validity were examined by standardized regression weights, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) by using AMOS software. The value of standardized regression weights for all indicators were greater than 0.691 and all the indicators are significant according to the suggestion of Hair et al. (2010). The acceptable threshold for CR value is > 0.7 and for AVE is > 0.5. All the constructs of CR and AVE values exceeded their respective minimum acceptable values. Thus, the results indicate that the dataset has good internal consistency reliability and adequate convergent validity (Table 7).

Table 7 Analysis Results of Convergent Validity, AVE and CR

Factors	Items	Std. Regression Weights	CR	AVE
Device Quality	DevQ1	0.732	0.837	0.632
	DevQ2	0.848		
	DevQ3	0.800		
System Quality	SysQ1	0.691	0.783	0.547
	SysQ2	0.778		
	SysQ3	0.747		
Information Quality	InfQ1	0.791	0.854	0.662
	InfQ2	0.854		
	InfQ3	0.794		

Table 7 Analysis Results of Convergent Validity, AVE and CR
(Continued)

	UIQ3	0.776		
User Interface Design Quality	UIQ2	0.837	0.817	0.599
	UIQ1	0.703		
	IA1	0.730		
Intention to Adopt	IA2	0.840	0.837	0.632
	IA3	0.811		

The Result of Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity for the evaluation of the amount of difference among correlated constructs as defined by Hair et al. (2010) is always an important analysis to examine the validity of constructs. All the values of the square roots of the AVE are larger than the correlation estimates of each construct which demonstrate discriminant validity. In Table 8, all the values of the square root of AVE are bolded. According to the analysis results (Table 8), the proposed research model has satisfactory discriminant validity for further SEM analysis.

Table 8 Analysis Results of Discriminant Validity

Factors	DevQ	SysQ	InfQ	UIQ	IA
Device Quality	0.795				
System Quality	0.601	0.740			
Information Quality	0.385	0.704	0.814		
User Interface Design Quality	0.449	0.735	0.680	0.774	
Intention to Adopt	0.433	0.645	0.585	0.616	0.795

Model Fit Indices Analysis

Verifying model fit indices is part of the CFA and the statistics for considered in this study are goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and comparative fit index (CFI). The fit indices of the measurement model obtained are as following: $\chi^2/df = 2.055$; GFI = 0.960; AGFI = 0.939; NFI = 0.958; IFI = 0.978; CFI = 0.978 and RMSEA = 0.046. The fit indices of structural model (research model) was further examined and the statistical results are: $\chi^2/df = 2.126$; GFI = 0.957; AGFI = 0.937; NFI = 0.955; IFI = 0.976; CFI = 0.976 and RMSEA = 0.047. The values of GFI, AGFI, NFI, IFI and CFI of both measurement model and structural model are greater than recommended value of 0.90 and RMSEA is lower than 0.05 and hence these verification results (Table 9) confirm that the research model of this research is good-fit with dataset.

Table 9 Analysis Result of Model Fit Indices

	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
Good-Fit	< 3	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	< 0.05
Measurement	2.055	0.960	0.939	0.958	0.978	0.978	0.046
Structural	2.126	0.957	0.937	0.955	0.976	0.976	0.047

The Analysis Results of Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were examined as proposed in Figure 3. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 10. Device quality positively affected user interface design quality ($\beta=0.589$, $p<0.001$) and system quality ($\beta=0.364$, $p<0.001$), which means that H₁ and H₂ are approved. User interface design quality positively affected system quality ($\beta=0.487$, $p<0.001$) and information quality ($\beta=0.340$, $p<0.001$). Thus, H₄ and H₅ are accepted. Furthermore, system quality ($\beta=0.593$, $p<0.001$) evidenced a positive effect on information quality. Therefore, H₆ is supported. System quality ($\beta=0.731$, $p<0.001$) and information quality ($\beta=0.261$, $p<0.01$) with regard to MB, showing a significant positive effect on the intention to adopt. Thus, H₇ and H₈ are consistent with the proposed hypotheses. However, the analysis result showed that the device quality has no significant effect on information quality which leads to rejection of H₃. All the analysis results of hypothesis testing are concluded in Figure 4.

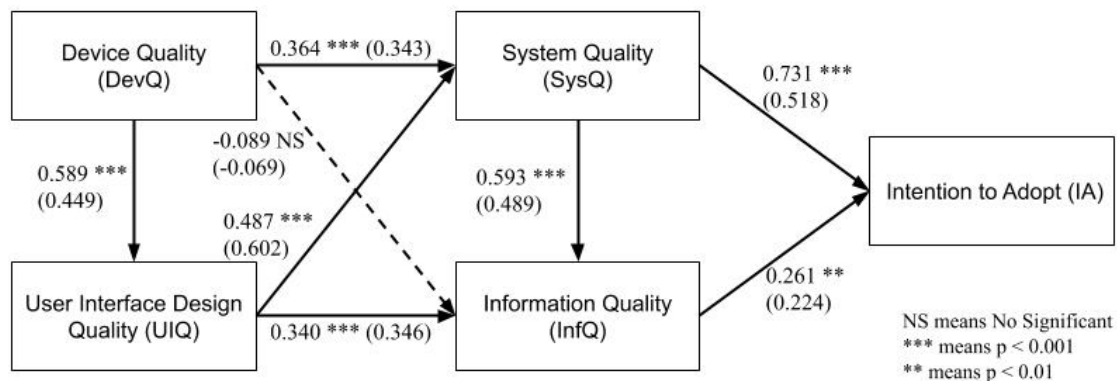


Figure 4 Research Model with Hypothesis Results

Table 10 Analysis Results of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	Hypothesis Results
H1	DevQ → UIQ	0.589 *** (0.449)	Approved
H2	DevQ → SysQ	0.364 *** (0.343)	Approved
H3	DevQ → InfQ	-0.089 NS (-0.069)	Rejected
H4	UIQ → SysQ	0.487 *** (0.602)	Approved
H5	UIQ → InfQ	0.340 *** (0.346)	Approved
H6	SysQ → InfQ	0.593 *** (0.489)	Approved
H7	SysQ → IA	0.731 *** (0.518)	Approved
H8	InfQ → IA	0.261 ** (0.224)	Approved

Note: NS means No Significant, *** means $p < 0.001$, ** means $p < 0.01$

The Effects in the Research Model

The shaded cells in Table 11 are additional findings of the research. An exogenous variable, device quality, has a higher effect on user interface design quality than system quality. Although device quality has no significant direct effect on information quality, it has a medium indirect effect through user interface design quality and system quality. User interface design quality has a medium effect on both system quality and information quality, and it is an intervening factor between device quality and information quality. Also, system quality has a medium effect on information quality. System quality and information quality have a direct effect on the intention to adopt construct, an endogenous variable, and system quality has a larger effect than information quality. Furthermore, both device quality and user interface design quality have medium indirect effects on intention to adopt through system quality.

Table 11 The Effects in the Research Model

Variables		Endogenous						
		Intervening			Dependent			
		UIQ	SysQ	InfQ	IA			
Exogenous	Independent	DevQ	Direct	Direct	Indirectly Only			
					DevQ → UIQ → InfQ 0.200***(0.155)		DevQ → SysQ → IA 0.266***(0.178)	
					DevQ → SysQ → InfQ 0.216***(0.168)			
	Intervening	UIQ	Nil	Direct	Direct	Indirect		
		SysQ	Nil	Nil	Direct	UIQ → SysQ → IA 0.356***(0.312)		
		InfQ	Nil	Nil	Nil	Direct		

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The investigation on device quality and user interface design quality as a prerequisite of D&M ISS model (1992) in the MB context is one of the novelties of this study. This study confirmed that underlying prerequisite qualities are existing and they are vivid requirements of information system success. The absolute qualities of the mobile device such as performance, functionality, and compatibility will help the users to interact with the MB comfortably through a user-friendly interface and learn the system quality effectively. Even experienced users are afraid that they will press the wrong buttons on complicated mobile applications during payment processes (Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005). Parveen and Sulaiman (2008) also stated that the smaller the screen size of mobile devices, the less information displayed. They further stated that better interface design and higher mobile device ability will lead to a positive belief of an individual that specific technology has adequate functionalities, fast response, and also easiness. According to the findings of this study, device quality will not increase the accessibility of sufficient and accurate real-time information. However, higher quality mobile

devices are capable of delivering quality information through system quality and user interface design quality.

Further, the better quality of the mobile device is able to support the users to perceive the system quality of MB which will lead to the use of MB intensively. The comprehensive good design perspectives such as font, color, style, and shapes on the screen will allow users to access the full capacity of the MB system and acquire desired information from MB. Laukkanen (2007) also recommended larger screen size is required to display adequate financial information in the MB system. It can be implied that user interface design quality is a mediator between device quality and system quality. The appealing user interface design of MB will support users to have a good experience in system quality then it will encourage the users to keep using MB. The finding also indicates that system quality is able to deliver sufficient information whenever users need. In the banking industry, Ali and Ju (2019) advocated that a system with higher quality will provide more reliable and valid information for its users, in addition, if the system is easy to use and learn, the likelihood of users' adoption will high. Subsequently, perceived system quality and information quality will enhance the willingness of users to use MB frequently. Therefore, the findings are consistent with previous studies in mobile commerce and mobile banking context (Bahaddad, 2017; Noh & Lee, 2016).

MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Bank managers should note that relying on existing IS quality factors for formulating MB system improvement strategy is not adequate. According to the findings, the better mobile device quality can display better quality of the image and higher screen resolution. Therefore, the users with the latest mobile device can enjoy the full capacity of the interface design of MB rather than the users with outdated mobile devices. MB is at a nascent phase most notably in Myanmar, MB must be easy to access and compatible with widely used mobile devices in the current market. Since user interface design quality has significant positive effects on both system quality and information quality, MB developers ought to ensure the interface of MB is simple, less complex and easy to interact with users by avoiding convoluted structures on the screen. Particularly in Myanmar, every text in MB is required to display in the native language properly and clearly, emphasize graphical user interface, and provide user guides to use of MB.

Therefore, users will get the best experience in system quality of MB and accessing the financial information through user interface design quality then MB adoption will follow. Banks should learn first about their customers' current performance of mobile phones before developing or releasing the new features for MB, and ensure the forthcoming feature is compatible with the mobile phone the customers are currently using. Thus, it is imperative for software engineers to understand what improves system quality and information quality, how they are correlated, and how they drive the adoption of MB. Software engineers also should duly develop MB systems by strictly following the standardization of technical aspects of mobile technology because higher quality of system is still a competitive advantage in MB context notably in Myanmar.

CONCLUSIONS

The research attempts to identify the underlying quality factors in information systems for the first time in MB context by utilizing D&M ISS model (1992). The empirical findings suggest that IS qualities model incorporating additional prerequisite qualities, device quality and user interface design quality, is a stronger predictor for MB adoption among the customers of the private banks, thereby answering RQ1. Also, the research findings highlight essential quality factors for MB system development, upgrading features of MB, and MB users' needs. In MB context, prerequisites of system quality are device quality and user interface design quality, system quality, and user interface design quality for information quality, thereby answering RQ2. In addition, the research concludes that system quality has a higher effect than information quality on MB adoption among the customers of private commercial banks, thereby answering RQ3. MB systems should be in harmony with mobile devices in the market and provide sufficient information as users require.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The major limitation of the research focuses on MB users only, and the perception of all the customers of private commercial banks does not reflect. Moreover, the opinion of generation Y is dominant in this study and the results may not be the same in generations X and Z who are with different experiences in the mobile technology landscape (Lin & Theingi, 2019). These research findings are limited to a cross-sectional study, and a longitudinal approach incorporated with qualitative research is therefore recommended for future studies because the technology landscape is rapidly advancing and transforming over time. According to the contributions of the present study, future research can include device quality as a prerequisite of system quality, and user interface design quality is for information quality. Future researchers can extend the updated D&M ISS model (2003) by supplementing the emerging factors of this study and should endeavor to investigate the underlying prerequisite of service quality. It is also recommended to validate the research model of this study in different contexts such as mobile learning, mobile commerce, and mobile services. Moreover, this research model can be reasonably extended by adding the role of the major device platforms (Android and IOS) as moderating variables for a deeper understanding of IS success in the mobile environment.

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APPENDIX

Items	Statements
DevQ1	My mobile phone has adequate features to support MB.
DevQ2	My mobile phone performs well while conducting financial transactions with MB.
DevQ3	My mobile phone is compatible with MB.
SysQ1	MB provides a fast response and transactions processing.
SysQ2	MB is easy to use.
SysQ3	MB offers appropriate functionalities.
IA1	I plan to use MB frequently in my daily life.
IA2	I intend to increase my use of MB.
IA3	I intend to use MB when the opportunity arises.
InfQ1	MB provides me with information relevant to my needs.
InfQ2	MB provides me with sufficient information.
InfQ3	MB provides me with accurate information.
UIQ1	The screen colors used for MB are appropriate.
UIQ2	The presentation style of MB is easy to understand.
UIQ3	MB is easy to navigate.

SOCIOECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF INFANT MORTALITY RATE IN ASEAN: A PANEL DATA ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The infant mortality rate indicates the health status of a country. Previous studies have proven that socioeconomic factors have a significant influence on infant mortality rates in both developed and developing countries. Further studies on infant mortality rates are useful for public service strategic policy in the health sector. The main purpose of this study was to analyze the socioeconomic factors influencing infant mortality rates in ASEAN based on panel data estimates for 2000-2017. The dependent variable for this study was infant mortality rate, while the independent variables were health expenditure, female labor force, maternal fertility rate, and GDP per capita. The authors concluded that the main cause of infant mortality in ASEAN is care during delivery. Other influencing factors include family health status, maternal education level, and socio-economic inequality. This study found that the size of the female workforce has a strong influence on increasing the infant mortality rate in ASEAN. The fertility rate also had a strong influence on increasing infant mortality rate in ASEAN, while GDP per capita had a negative influence on infant mortality rate. Health expenditure is proven to have no effect on the increase of infant mortality rates in ASEAN.

Keywords: *infant mortality rate, socioeconomic factors, ASEAN*

INTRODUCTION

The infant mortality rate is one of the main health indicators (see: Arik and Arik, 2009; Dallolio, et al., 2012; Naveed, et al., 2011; Rosicova, et al., 2011). The issue of infant mortality rate has long been a special topic of study by researchers, especially in developing countries (Gomez, Hanna, and Oliva, 2012; Hanmer, Lensink, and White, 2003; Oloo, 2005), because the infant mortality rate is related to other socioeconomic factors, as well as being an

indicator of human welfare. Bhatia, et al, (2018) also stated that efforts to reduce infant mortality rates are a top priority in developing countries. In addition, there is also an interesting discussion on whether prosperity level is related to health status. The infant mortality rate tends to be high in poor countries and low in developed countries (Chaudhuri & Mandal, 2020; Klugman, et al, 2019; Ullah, et al, 2011). Developed countries focus on providing healthcare in the form of quality care, including access to quality maternal and child health services. Sustainable development must consider the socioeconomic factors. Economists agree that economic development is not only measured by GDP per capita growth or other macroeconomic indicators, but also supported by public health status (Hanmer, Lensink, and White, 2003). This is in line with the policies of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) on the importance of human development in terms of health, education, poverty, and the environment as stated in the Human Development Index to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Bhatia, et.al, 2018).

According to WHO (2020), the infant mortality rate is defined as the death of a child before one year of age over a certain period of time. Lamichhane, et al. (2017) emphasized the infant mortality rate as a primary human development indicator and a key part of the challenge to provide good quality health so as to realize social welfare. Previous studies by Dallolio, et al., (2012); Erdogan, Ener, and Arica, (2013); Genowska, et al. (2015); and Iram and Butt (2008) explained the influence of socioeconomic factors on infant mortality rates. The economic factors were national income, income per capita, health expenditure, unemployment rates, and income equalization, while the social factors were the education level of the mother, nutrition, environmental factors such as pollution, healthcare quality, and women's welfare. Iram and Butt (2008) found the main influencing factors of infant mortality rates in Pakistan were environmental factors, family income, and the education level of the mother. Lamichhane, et al (2017) identified several influencing key factors of the infant mortality rate in Nepal, including birth spacing, breastfeeding, parenting styles, and ecology. In line with this, Sarkar, Dhar, and Rouhoma (2018) also found differences in the adequate number of health facilities in developed countries compared with the relative lack in developing countries, and identified several determining factors of infant mortality rates, namely delivery assistance, the education level of the mother, and total population. Most ASEAN countries are developing countries, and the infant mortality rate is still rarely studied in the ASEAN region, so it is interesting to estimate the influence of socioeconomic factors on infant mortality rate in ASEAN.

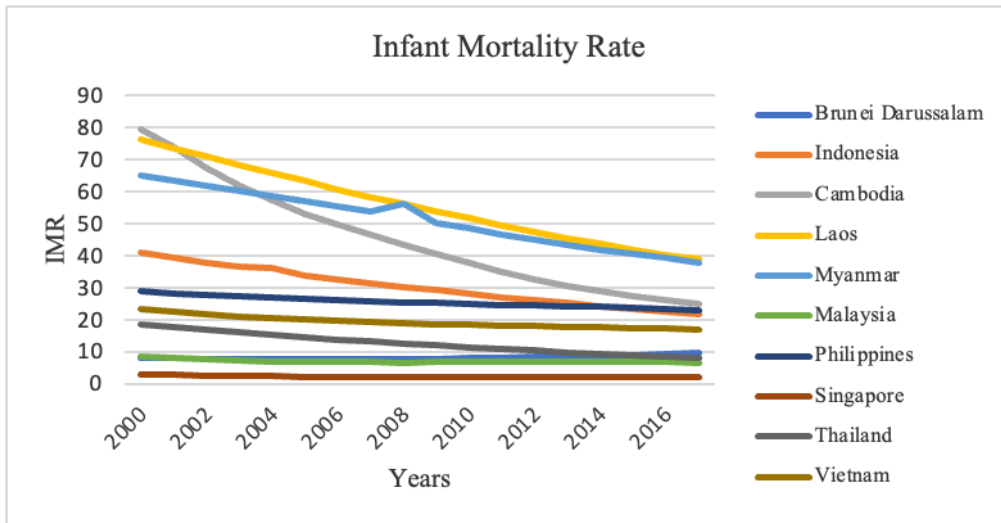


Figure 1 Infant Mortality Rate in ASEAN 2000-2017
Source: World Bank, 2020.

Based on the figure above, the infant mortality rate in ASEAN, in general, has significantly decreased from 2000 to 2017. In aggregate, the highest infant mortality rate was found in Laos, followed closely by Myanmar, while the lowest infant mortality rate was found in Singapore.

ASEAN countries are predominantly developing countries that are rapidly adapting to global changes. The amount of per capita health expenditure in ASEAN shows an increasing trend from 2000–2017, which can be seen in the following figure. Singapore and Brunei Darussalam had the highest health expenditure, followed by Malaysia and Thailand.

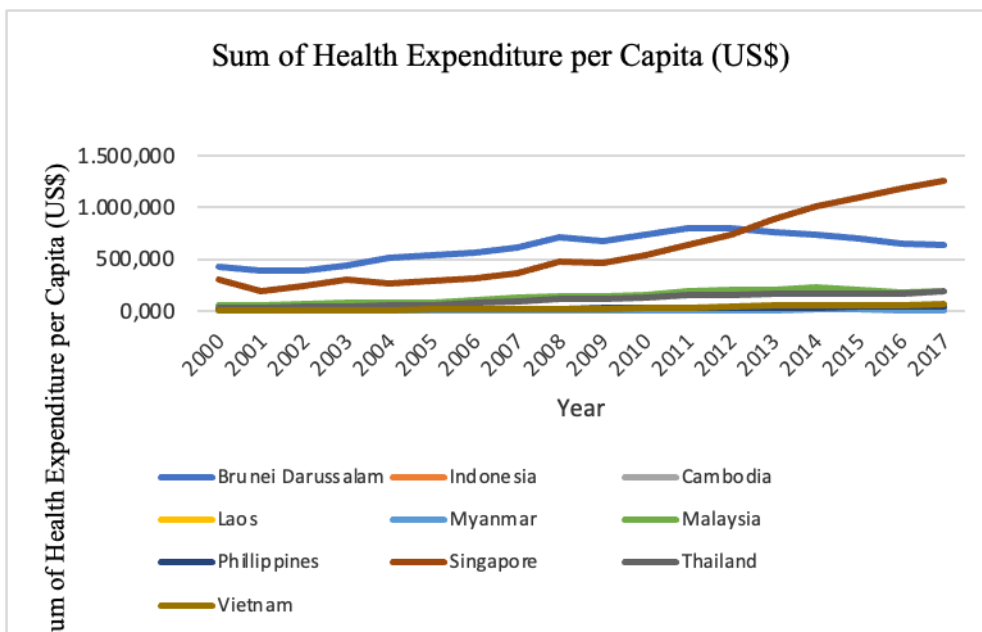


Figure 2 Health Expenditure Per Capita in ASEAN (US Dollar)
Source: World Bank, 2020.

The infant mortality rate is important for welfare, so the main purpose of this study was to analyze the socioeconomic factors influencing infant mortality rate in ASEAN. Studies analyzing infant mortality rates in ASEAN are still rarely performed. Hence, this study is expected to provide a literature reference related to the infant mortality rate in ASEAN so as to encourage policies advancing the maternal and child health sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the literature, there are two methods for calculating the infant mortality rate: 1) calculation of mortality in newborns, infants, and children under 5 years per 1000 births in a certain time period, or 2) calculation of mortality in infants over 28 days of age, infants aged 1 year, and children 2-4 years old per 1000 living people (Rutstein, 2000). According to Santiago and Tubayan (2016), the infant mortality rate is a key factor of a country's public health status. Improvement of human quality as the main development agent starts from the womb, delivery, childhood education, to adulthood. Maternal health during pregnancy and childbirth can be used as evaluation material to reduce infant mortality. Hanmer, Lensink, and White (2013) stated that development is not only measured by per capita income but must also measure variables such as infant mortality rate, literacy rate, and other social indicators. Ollo (2005) explained two causes of infant mortality: internally, infant mortality is caused by genetic factors, uterine disease, and birth defects, while externally it is caused by accidents.

Maternal fertility rates, nutritional status in pregnancy, smoking, and environmental pollution are thought to have a strong influence on infant mortality rates. The education level of mothers can in the long term affect the welfare of children, involving everything from breastfeeding to parenting style. Women with low education levels (see: Bhatia, et.al, 2018; Dallolio et al., 2012; Klugman, et al, 2019; Ullah, et al, 2011) tend to marry early, have no knowledge of pregnancy and its care, low economic welfare, and have a higher risk of mortality during childbirth.

GDP per capita also plays an important role because the better the standard of living, the better the healthcare (Oloo, 2005). With increase in economic growth, the portion of health expenditure is increased, health programs are expanded, and access to healthcare is becomes easier. Ullah, et al, (2011) pointed out that in developed countries, the government prioritizes maternal and child healthcare, but in poor countries, the government still needs to reduce the infant mortality rate.

Erdogan, Ener, and Arica (2013) described the important role of economic factors on infant mortality rates, with the main factors being equal income distribution and GDP per capita. GDP per capita can have a direct or indirect effect. High-income countries tend to have a higher quality of life in terms of the provision of food, education, and health. In addition, Erdogan, Ener, and Arica (2013) also found empirically, infant mortality rates decreased alongside economic growth in OECD countries, meaning that quality and affordable healthcare is needed to accelerate economic and social development.

Socio-economic factors also play roles. Rutstein (2000) explained the influence of socioeconomic factors: for example, increasing economic welfare positively improves child health, while social factors such as housing, maternal education, and electricity supply can also affect infant mortality rates. In line with this, Zakir and Wunnava (1999) explained the significant influence of socioeconomic factors, namely maternal fertility rate, female labor force, education level of the mother, and GDP per capita on infant mortality rate in several countries. Shobande (2020) identified the negative influence of energy consumption and pollution on the infant mortality rate in Africa. The infant mortality rate is thus useful for measuring the welfare of the total population over time and the basis for a strategy to improve maternal and child health policies.

Houweling and Kunst (2009) found that the difference in socioeconomic conditions in developed and developing countries is a cause of infant mortality, in addition to health factors such as maternal health, nutrition, and disease. Iram and Butt (2008) identified social factors namely neighborhood, education level of the mother, exclusive breastfeeding, and income had a significant influence on the infant mortality rate in Pakistan. Rezaei, Matin, and Rad (2015) found that the infant mortality rate in Iran was influenced by GDP per capita, the ratio of doctors per 1000 total population, female labor force participation, neighborhood, and education level. Dhrif (2018) found that health expenditure significantly reduced the infant mortality rate in developed countries but was insignificant in poor countries.

Oloo (2005) conducted a study in developing countries and found that the health expenditure per capita and immunization programs had no significant influence on infant mortality rate, but per capita income and maternal fertility had a significant influence on infant mortality rate. Bhatia, et.al (2018) in India found various programs reducing socio-economic inequality also reduced infant mortality rates. Shobande (2020) identified that energy consumption causing pollution has a negative and significant influence on the infant mortality rate in Africa. Rezaei, Matin, & Rad (2014) analyzed the influence of GDP per capita, the number of health workers, the female labor force, the total population in villages, maternal fertility rate, and education level on infant mortality rate in Iran. The study found a positive relationship between infant mortality rate, fertility, and population domicile, while the female labor force and GDP per capita were insignificant.

Sarkar, Dhar, and Rouhoma (2018) studied the influencing socioeconomic factors of infant mortality rates in several ASEAN countries and found that education level, delivery assistance by medical personnel, and the population had a significant influence on infant mortality rate. Goldani, et.al (2001) found that social inequality had an influence on the infant mortality rate in Brazil. Hosseinpoor et al. (2005) showed that socioeconomic inequality had an influence on the infant mortality rate between provinces in Iran; this is related to the importance of equitable development policies. Naveed, et al., (2011) with the Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) method aimed to find out the influencing variables of infant mortality rate in Pakistan and found that women's empowerment and income had a negative influence, but the total population had a significant influence on infant mortality rate. Dallolio et al. (2012) found that Gini Index and the unemployment rate had a positive

influence on infant mortality rate, while the education level of the mother had a negative influence.

ASEAN member countries are faced with the triple challenge of reducing infant mortality, child maternal, and maternal mortality. High infant mortality rates indicate the low quality of maternal and child health services, especially during and after delivery. The government also needs community support to maintain preventive behavior for pregnant women, maintain a healthy living environment, and implement a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, a comprehensive health policy is urgently needed to improve the quality standards of maternal and infant care services in the ASEAN health system.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to estimate the determining factors of infant mortality rate in ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, and Myanmar). This study used secondary data published by the World Bank, and undertook panel data analysis for the period 2000-2017 consisting of 10 cross-sections and covering an 18 years' time span. The dependent variable was the infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births), while the independent variables were health expenditure per capita (US \$), female labor force (% of the total labor force), maternal fertility rate (births per mother), and GDP per capita (constant LCU). According to Gujarati (2003), panel data is suitable for studying the dynamics of change, makes it easier to understand complex behavior, is good for measuring impacts that simply cannot be seen on cross-section data or time-series data, has more information and variations, can minimize bias generated in the aggregation, and can overcome heterogeneity. The first step in data estimation is looking at the distribution of variables through descriptive statistics and checking the correlation of the independent variables with the infant mortality rate. The data testing panel has three approaches: least square (common effect), fixed effect, and random effect. The common effect method is the simplest method, combining time-series data and cross-section data regardless of the differences in time and individual dimensions. The fixed effect method improves the common effect method by using dummy variables to intercept differences. The random effect method has different parameters between regions and time to be included in the error term, and technically can eliminate heteroscedasticity in the study model.

This study used a development model from previous studies by Hanmer, Lensink, & White (2003); Oloo (2005); Rezaei, Matin, Rad (2015); and Ullah et al (2011). The study period was chosen based on the economic conditions of ASEAN member countries which in 2000- 2017, which were relatively strong.

$$IMR_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 HE_{it} + \beta_2 WL_{it} + \beta_3 FR_{it} + \beta_4 GDP/cap_{it} + e_{it} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Equation (1) is Common Effects Model (CEM) estimation, equation (2) is Fixed Effects Model (FEM) estimation, while equation (3) is Random Effects Model (REM). The α_0 is the intercept while $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3,$ and $\beta_4,$ are the parameters/slope of the model, the ‘i’ is the cross-section of 10 countries in ASEAN while ‘t’ is a time series of period 2000-2017. IMR (infant mortality rate), HE (health expenditure per capita), WL (female labor force), FR (maternal fertility rate), and GDP/cap (GDP per capita).

$$IMR_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 D_{n1} + \beta_1 HE_{it} + \beta_2 WL_{it} + \beta_3 FR_{it} + \beta_4 GDP/cap_{it} + e_{it} \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

$$IMR_{it} = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 HE_{it} + \beta_2 WL_{it} + \beta_3 FR_{it} + \beta_4 GDP/cap_{it} + w_{it} \dots \dots \dots (3)$$

Furthermore, the model was tested with the common effect, fixed effect, and random effect. Then, the Chow test was carried out to test the best fit of the model between the common effect and the fixed effect. The Hausman test was carried out to select the best model between the fixed effect method and the random effect method. The Lagrange Multiplier Test was conducted to select the best model between the random effect model and the common effect model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study used panel data consisting of time series and cross-sections. According to Gujarati (2003), panel data can analyze big data, have a greater degree of freedom, and analyze more efficiently. Panel data analysis can be carried out through three approaches, namely the Pooled Least Squared (PLS)/Common Effect Model (CEM) with fixed coefficients between time and individuals; the fixed-effect model with a constant slope but different intercepts between individuals; and the random effects model with parameter differences between regions or between times are included in the error component. The testing stage was carried out by testing all these methods to find out the best model.

In general, descriptive statistics can be seen in the following table below including the mean, median, minimum value, maximum value, standard deviation, and the number of observations. The data had subtle differences for all countries, except for Singapore. Singapore had the lowest infant mortality rate and highest health expenditure per capita in the ASEAN region. However, in aggregate, there was a significant decrease in infant mortality rate in –between 2000 and 2017.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	IMR	Health Expenditure	Female Labor Force	Maternal Fertility Rate	GDP/cap
Mean	25.86	154.73	42.97	2.36	10299.40
Median	22.65	31.25	41.78	2.30	2459.04
Maximum	79.50	1262.33	51.83	4.31	57378.86
Minimum	2.20	0.39	34.69	1.15	342.14
Std. Dev.	19.87	257.78	4.90	0.71	15459.39
Correlation	1.00	-0.89	0.48	0.79	-0.89
Observations	180	180	180	180	180

Source: Processed Secondary Data.

With panel data estimates, common effect model and fixed effect model estimates were obtained. To select the best model from the two test models, the Chow test was carried out and found out that the fixed effect model estimate was better and valid than the common effect model. This can be seen from the prob value. Chi-square cross-section <0.05 , thus, the fixed effect was chosen over the common effect. After that, the random effect model was tested. Based on the Hausman Test to choose between the fixed-effect model and the random effect model, the best estimation model was the random effect model with H_0 or p value > 0.05 . Then, the Lagrange Multiplier Test was carried out to choose the random effect model or the common effect model. Based on the Lagrange Multiplier Test, the random effect model was the best model in estimating data. The p -value was 0,000 at a 0.05 significance level. Thus, based on Lagrange Multiplier Test, H_1 was accepted meaning that the best estimation method was the random effect model.

Table 2 Panel Data Estimation Results

Variable	Common Effect	Common Effect	Fixed Effects
Health Expenditure	-4.79 (0.00)***	-4.79 (0.00)***	-0.92 (0.36)
Female Labor Force	3.75 (0.00)***	3.75 (0.00)***	3.11 (0.00)***
Fertility Rate	11.00 (0.00)***	11.00 (0.00)***	3.06 (0.00)***
GDP/cap	-3.92 (0.00)***	-3.92 (0.00)***	-5.30 (0.00)***
C	5.77 (0.00)***	5.77 (0.00)***	5.49 (0.00)***
Adj- R-square:	0.91	0.91	0.99
(F-statistics)	446.18	1455.06	139.12
Chow Test		(0.00)***	
Hausman Test			(0.27)
LM Test			(0.00)***
Observations	180	180	180

Source: Author's estimation

Note: () denotes significance; ***, ** and * are 1%, 5% and 10% respectively.

The results of data estimation with the common effect model showed that health expenditure had a significant and negative influence on infant mortality rates in ASEAN, while female labor force had a significant and positive influence, maternal fertility rate had a significant and positive influence, and GDP per capita had a significant and negative influence.

Based on the random effects model analysis, health expenditure in ASEAN had no influence on infant mortality rates. This occurs because of differences in health expenditure, with the better the welfare of a country, the higher the attention it pays to health, leading to an increase in health expenditure per capita. Brunei Darussalam had the highest health expenditure per capita in ASEAN, Singapore in second, Malaysia in third, and Thailand in fourth, while Vietnam, the Philippines, Myanmar, Laos, Indonesia, and Cambodia had the low health expenditures per capita. This data imbalance shows that the impact of health expenditure was insignificant. Most ASEAN countries have not focused on policies for accessible and affordable health care. This is in line with a study by Dhrif (2018) showing the differences in health expenditure had no influence on infant mortality rates in poor countries but had a positive influence in rich countries. Sarkar, Dhar, and Rouhoma (2018) identified significant differences in developed countries which pay close attention to health, with the provision of health facilities to prevent and reduce the infant mortality rate while developing countries do not have this policy. Goldani, et al. (2001) found that economically weak regions had high infant mortality rates in Brazil. Maternal and child health cases in developing countries are more complex because of the more challenges faced, such as infant mortality, child and maternal malnutrition, stunting, and maternal mortality. Health services are a priority that should be spread throughout all regions to remote areas.

The female labor force has great potential in developing regions such as in ASEAN, by contributing to family income, increasing family purchasing power, and increasing aggregate consumption. Despite this, the female labor force had a significant influence on infant mortality rates. The coefficient of the female labor force was positive, indicating that the more mothers work, the higher the risk of infant mortality. The female labor force had a significant influence with a positive coefficient, meaning that every 1% increase in the female labor force causes an increase in the infant mortality rate of 0.03%. The maternal fertility rate also had a significant influence with a positive coefficient, meaning that every increase in fertility rate causes an increase in the infant mortality rate. Poerwanto, et al. (2003) found that the infant mortality rate in Indonesia was influenced by the prosperity level and education level of the mother. Low prosperity families tend to have a higher risk, and other factors such as maternal fertility rate, contraception use, birth spacing, and prenatal care also had a significant influence on infant mortality rates. Naveed, et al., (2011) also found that female labor participation and income per capita had a negative correlation on infant mortality rate in the short term. However, in the long run, the female labor force and maternal education had a greater influence than income per capita. This is in contrast to a study by Rezaei, Matin, and Rad (2015), which found that the female labor force had no influence on the infant mortality rate in Iran. Meanwhile in Poland, the work environment is not conducive and pollution from the industrial sector has an influence on the infant mortality rate (Genowska et al, 2015).

Based on previous studies, a high infant mortality rate was usually found in economically weak countries. Dhrif (2018) described that this condition is recognized as an important issue because it is closely related to the level of human productivity as a production factor to create economic development and welfare. Productivity starts from infancy and childhood, with good nutrition, education, and environment to improve social and economic conditions. Income is an important variable, a family with a high income can meet the needs of better quality, so as to improve the quality of life and welfare. Based on estimates, GDP per capita had a negative influence on infant mortality rates in ASEAN. GDP per capita had a significant influence on the infant mortality rate, where every 1% increase in GDP per capita reduces the infant mortality rate by 0.44%. This is in line with studies by Erdogan, Ener, and Arica, (2013) and Naveed, et al. (2011) showing the significant and negative influence of infant mortality rates and GDP per capita. Thus, the increasing prosperity level will be followed by a decrease in the risk of the infant mortality rate. Hosseinpoor, et al. (2005) found that socioeconomic inequality in Iran was the cause of the increased infant mortality rate, where provinces with high economic potential tend to have low infant mortality rates. Rezaei, Matin, and Rad (2015) also found that the insignificant influence of GDP per capita on infant mortality rate in Iran. Household income had no influence on the infant mortality rate in Italy, while the education level of mother had no strong correlation with the infant mortality rate (Dallolio et al, 2012). The risk of infant mortality must thus be viewed from a socioeconomic side in a balanced manner, in order to obtain a realistic policy direction and support weaker economic and social groups.

Modern health services today are more accessible for mothers and children, but this must also be balanced with income equalization so that services are easily accessible by all groups. Continuing social and economic inequality causes high infant mortality rates to be concentrated on poor families. Infant mortality rate censuses are needed for the formulation of development policies, especially in the health and social fields, forecasting population growth, and the possibility of a demographic bonus for sustainable development. Additionally, empowering women has both direct and indirect impacts on awareness of maternal and child health. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate effective health policies to reduce infant mortality rates, because maternal and child welfare determines the health of the next generation.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the socio-economic determinants of infant mortality rates in ASEAN member countries as an indicator of adequate human capital. Socio-economic variables such as female labor force, health expenditure, maternal fertility rate, and GDP per capita have previously been analyzed in other studies and were found to have a significant influence on infant mortality rates in various countries. High GDP per capita was also found to reduce infant mortality due to higher health spending on maternal and child health.

This study estimated the influence of socioeconomic factors on infant mortality rate in ASEAN,. The social variable was the maternal fertility rate, while the economic variables

were health expenditure, female labor force, and GDP per capita. Data estimation used static panel data model with balanced panels. Based on the estimation results, the best result was found in the random effect model. This study found that there was a significant influence of the female labor force and maternal fertility rate on infant mortality rates in ASEAN countries. Meanwhile, health expenditure per capita had no significant influence on infant mortality rate, but GDP per capita had a significant and negative influence.

Thus, the recommendations of this study are: 1) strategies are needed to provide accessible and affordable health facilities for all groups, 2) increase awareness of women's empowerment through educational programs on maternal and child health, 3) improve social conditions in society, and income equalization to improve citizen welfare. This study was limited by excluding other socio-economic variables which may influence infant mortality rates in ASEAN.

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WESTERN CENTRIC RESEARCH METHODS? EXPOSING INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Data curated by humans reflects the biases and imperfections of humans (O'Neil, 2017; 2016). For example, in autonomous weapons systems, the initial data entered produces algorithms from which weapons systems learn, and, as a result, the systems mirror and amplify existing biases in the data sets (O'Neil, 2017). In political science and international relations, biases are also both inherent and amplified through the research approaches and methods adopted. They, too, are frequently hidden. A stark example of this is in the debate between area and disciplinary studies. Although there is a growing recognition that area studies can make valuable contributions to the study of international relations and that there is a need to 'decolonise' the discipline (Suzuki, 2021), the debate so far has not recognized the gulf of differences in research methods between these two approaches. This article argues that in the study of international relations and particularly regarding institutions, area studies approaches should be more frequently adopted. The limited use of these approaches not only hampers new research but also hides a colonial hangover.

Keywords: *Research Methods, ASEAN, International Practices*

INTRODUCTION

According to Cathy O'Neil (2016; 2017) a leading data scientist, data curated by humans reflects the biases and imperfections of humans. For example, in autonomous weapons systems, the data entered produces algorithms from which weapons systems learn, and, as a result, the systems mirror and amplify existing biases in the datasets (UNGA, 2017). This is a striking example of the potential threat that data, the forms of data, and the imperfections of human choices could have on the development of weapons of destruction in the 21st Century.

Yet despite the importance of these choices, they are often presented as ‘objective realities’; therefore, the effects of these data choices are hidden.

In political science and international relations, biases are also inherent and subsequently amplified through the research approaches and methods adopted. They, too, are frequently hidden. Although it has been noted that there may be a need to ‘internationalise’ international relations (IR) theory (for example, Waever and Tickner, 2009; Special issue, 2011; Special Issue, 2013), and to liberate the curriculum,¹ it has not been recognised that this process or endeavour could have implications for the research methods employed.

This paper sits at the intersection of three debates in the broad field of international relations. The first is the Western-non-Western international relations debate regarding whether it is necessary to create a non-Western international relations theory. The second is Eurocentrism-comparative regionalism, wherein the debate concerns how to evaluate non-European Union (EU) regions without having the EU as an implicit or explicit benchmark. The third is the dichotomy between area studies and disciplinary studies, where the debate concerns the nature and value of what is the subject of study and what questions it is important to ask. In all these debates, the discipline has periodically engaged in moments of self-reflection and considered whether philosophically it is necessary to reconsider the origins of the disciplinary approaches; whether it is useful to have national international relations theories (for example the Chinese school of IR, or the Indian School of IR); whether to explicitly ignore the EU as a regional body; or indeed whether it is necessary and useful to develop area expertise.

In contributing to these debates, I argue that, fundamentally, it is necessary to move beyond the debates on ‘decolonising IR theory’ and instead identify that even in ‘decolonised theory’, the methods employed have been developed to identify Western understandings of how IR is done. Moreover, through processes all aimed at improving the quality of research – data transparency, the Research Excellence Framework, PhD completion rates, research funding – collectively produce a bias against the publication of some forms of research because of the types of data that they use. As a result, there is an unseen bias that privileges data that is more attuned to Western IR approaches. This is the case even when scholars seek to decolonise IR, as there is a continuing bias that has been obscured but which imbues non-Western theories with a Western centric bias. It is therefore not possible to seek a new theory without a change in methods.

In making this argument, the paper is divided into five sections. First, I outline why methods are important and unrecognised in this debate. Second, I outline how this discussion connects to other debates within IR that reflect the problems of making IR more ‘international’. Third, I focus on the area and disciplinary studies debate as an example of why methods are important. Fourth, I outline why this is important and to whom, and who can benefit from this discussion. Finally, I conclude with a central claim that, in decolonising, our thinking needs to extend to methods, and I offer a first step in moving forwards.

Why focus on methods?

For the past two decades in the United Kingdom (UK), there has been an increasing emphasis on the development of new research methods for social and political sciences. As reflected in this and other journals, as well as books and textbooks, a significant emphasis has emerged on the refinement and improvement of research methods, and the emergence of professional sections of existing publications focused on how to do research and deliver research methods in a teaching context.² This has been reflected in the added emphasis on methodology in UK Research Council funding applications,³ the development and expansion of the level and range of research methods courses integrated into training syllabi, and in considering how to teach research methods across the sector in higher education.

There are many benefits to these developments, especially in the diversification of the methodologies and methods that are credible for different forms of research, and a greater awareness and understanding of bias in research design and evaluation. For example, the expansion of quantitative methods in the UK through the Q-Step programs⁴ and the incorporation of ethnographic studies, focus groups, and participant observation from cogent disciplines including sociology and psychology has enabled research into political and social phenomena that was not previously possible. A further advantage of these developments is the greater potential to verify data used and therefore ensure the robustness of arguments, policy recommendations, and research articles. Thus, it has been recognised that research methods are at the forefront of political science research and enable cutting edge research in an active and dynamic environment.

However, the selection of methods also has an often under-acknowledged role in replication of bias and the referencing of particular forms of knowledge. As indicated in the example of autonomous weapons systems, the type of data used has the potential to reproduce bias – in this case, biases are caused by the dominance of Western approaches. Particularly, approaches viewed as valid are underpinned by assumptions of Western approaches to IR on ‘what is being looked for’; as such, they are imbued with Western assumptions. For example, the assumption that solutions or ends are being sought, and that these processes produce documents, texts, and codified legal frameworks, ensures that researchers can follow a paper trail. Although this is currently challenged as an accurate reflection of how institutions operate (see discussion below on international practices), it has set a standard for how institutions are evaluated that is derived from Western experience. Alternative approaches to the practice of IR – such as those found in East Asia, particularly in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – that do not conform to these basic assumptions are therefore more problematic to ‘make fit’ appropriate research methods and methodologies. These biases are then amplified by the need to publish in high-ranked journals – that are already overwhelmed with submissions – that tend to reflect disciplinary rather than area expertise.⁵

In looking at the rankings of International Relations journals from 2016 according to the impact factors for top international relations journals, the top 10 journals are all journals of disciplinary studies. In the top 20, European Union-focused journals (Journal of Common Market Studies, Journal of European Integration, Living Reviews in European Governance,

European Union Politics) all appear, but according to the parameters of the debate, these are not viewed as 'area studies' approaches as they take disciplinary approaches (Lambert, 1990: 712). It is only at rank 22 that the Chinese Journal of International Politics appears, as the first non-Western journal with an area in the title, yet this journal still has a disciplinary focus.⁶ The issue of the limited dialogue between Western and non-Western academics and researchers in the discipline was tackled in the conference theme for *Millennium* in 2010, (Millennium, 2011; Tickner, 2011: 607-618) and the problem at absence of the 'international' is engaged with in a cogent and comprehensive way in a series of works by Ole Waever and Arlene Tickner (2009; also See Seng Tang, 2009:12-13). To some degree, the dominance of the discipline in is not surprising, as the universal nature of the IR is a canonical truth for the dominant theories. However, there is scope to open the debate to include other voices. As a result, the discipline being created is increasingly divergent from both the needs of policy and the long-recognised needs to broaden research approaches to counter Western centrism. Ironically, this means that if we seek to create new theories or engage with new approaches, this must be done at the level of methods as well as at that of concepts and theories.

In mitigating these negative effects, I propose that there is an emerging but unrecognised link between international practices literature in International Relations and the approaches adopted by area experts and comparativists. In this disciplinary debate, the theoretical debate needs to be developed through empirical study (Beuger and Gadinger, 2015:458), although these scholars decry a lack of funding, access, and time to be able to produce such research. This type of research has been done for decades by area experts. By seeking to overcome the tendency to discredit each other's approach, building bridges through exchanges of research methods contributes to developing a more comprehensive and multi-discipline research sector. The potential for this approach to produce outstanding research has been shown in the work of some scholars working on other regions, for example Nicola Pratt and Dina Rezk (2019) where they explore the Muslim brotherhood through the lens of securitisation.

This approach will not be easy. Underpinning the divide are deep differences in ideology between the West and non-West. But this bridging approach may be more feasible, as a number of international and academic shifts are taking place. The first and most pronounced of these shifts is in the geopolitical balance moving in favour of East Asia. Examples of this shift are found in the UK the Integrated Review of Foreign and Defence Policy, which highlighted a 'tilt' towards the Indo-Pacific (HMG, 2021), and the March 2021 US announcement that they are seeking to recommit to allies, including in the Indo-Pacific, such as through an expansion of cooperation with Japan (US State, 2021). These large changes in foreign policy foci will necessitate a greater knowledge of the region, its institutions, and its states within Western countries. Gaining and deepening this understanding will require more flexibility (including in relation to assumptions of methods, knowledge, data, and ideology) on the part of Western states and their scholars.

The second major, albeit nascent, shift that is emerging is within academia itself. It is a shift towards recognising the value and necessity of interdisciplinary research. This is most clearly reflected in areas related to research on climate change and sustainability but is also

evident in the processes that evaluate academic performance (for example, the UK Research Excellence Framework [REF, 2021], which highlights the importance of inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches) and funding awards for large projects.

Not new but more urgent; calls for new methods in International Relations

In his 2011 paper ‘Dialogue and Discovery’, Amitav Acharya made a compelling argument that “IR theory has been written and presented, and is still being written and presented, as if it springs almost entirely from an exclusively Western heritage. Only by uncovering the assumptions and power structures that obscure IR theory’s global heritage can we move from dissent to dialogue and then dialogue to discovery.” (Acharya, 2011: 637, 630-1 and 633) The paper also indicated debates that can be extended or evolve further to try and recognise and overcome these limits – one aspect of which is to develop the links between area and disciplinary studies.

Rosemary Foot and Evelyn Goh (2018) argue that the unique nature of East Asian international interactions also calls for an evolution in research approaches. In particular, there is a need to engage and evaluate the processes of interactions rather than focusing on outcomes. In their article, the authors propose a new research framework and structure for analysis and make a call for new research methods to complement this new endeavour (Foot and Goh, 2018:2).

As a result, in the ongoing debate there are several voices calling for greater dialogue, inclusion, and recognition of non-Western approaches. These calls have produced a number of interesting avenues of discovery including projects on developing non-Western IR theory, and integrating subaltern voices. However, unseen in this academic debate is the recognition that research methods in IR are founded on assumptions that diplomacy is paper-based, legalistic, and teleological. Hence, despite significant positive moves towards the critical reflections of Waeber et al (2009), including the need to explore non-Western approaches, and the emergence of new approaches to the study of international institutions in the form of the international practices debate, there is still further to go in terms of re-setting the building blocks of IR.

The underpinning assumption of IR is that studies of institutions practice produces materials that can be referenced – this means that bureaucracies can provide researchers with libraries of official and unofficial documentation, a range of personnel to interview, and a set formula of types of meetings that can be observed. This assumption has formed the backbone of research on the EU and UN, as well as several studies of Southeast Asia. For example, in the classic correspondence exchange between Katsumata, Smith and Jones (2008) in relation to a previously published piece in *International Security*, the debate is over the efficacy of the norms of ASEAN and the (in)effective enforcement and compliance structures of ASEAN. However, reading this in detail, at the heart of this debate there is also a disconnect between Katsumata and Jones and Smith in terms of the evidence for each of their claims. However, for among a small but growing group of scholars, an argument has emerged that this assumption fails to reflect the actual practices within institutions but that the discipline is ill-equipped to overcome this methodological issue. However, in seeking to investigate processes

rather than outcomes, area studies' use and application of ethnographic research, interviews, and participant observation, alongside linguistic expertise and cultural understanding, presents a more comprehensive set of methods to understand and evaluate a process.⁷ Importantly, this alternative approach should not be seen as being 'soft' nor as a lower standard of IR research. Instead, these approaches should be championed as a part of the mainstream in a more inclusive or decolonised view of international relations.

This problem in methods is compounded by the dominance of Western institutions. Despite the recognition by some EU and disciplinary scholars that their approaches have become the 'benchmark' for the emergence of regional institutions and that this may unfairly limit the research undertaken (Warleigh-Lack and Van Langenhove, 2010; 542), there is little recognition of this underpinning 'benchmarking'. As the discipline and the profession move towards great enshrinement of the recognition of certain narrow forms of research products, there is a potential that area studies, despite a growing need in the wider political community, is under great endogenous pressure to conform to the approaches of the discipline.

The two sides of the debate: identifying the importance of methods

The area studies and disciplinary studies debate ebbs and flows in relation to both endogenous and exogenous pressures. During the Cold War, the need to develop in-depth region expertise ensured that centres for area studies were supported to develop and thrive (Johnson and Ijiri, 2005). At the end of the Cold War, however, area studies were seen to be in terminal decline (Fukuyama, 2004), as globalisation boomed and diversity between states and regions were perceived to be reducing, so the dominance of disciplinary level approaches aimed at producing generalizable patterns of state behaviour came to the fore.

This tension presents a stark example of the need to consider data bias. In this debate, discrepancies about data and how it is collected forms an almost unbridgeable chasm (Bates, 1997; Breslin, Pye, 2001; Katzenstein, 2001). Area experts privilege the detailed knowledge of a geographically small area, seeking to develop expertise across a number of disciplines, including politics, culture, economics, and history. On the other hand, disciplinary scholars seek to draw conclusions that are relevant across geographical divides, enabling them to make generalisations and produce theories within a particular field, such as international relations or economics. The theories employed by disciplinary scholars, however, have been subject to debate over their universalism, leading to a debate about whether there is a need to develop more regionally-driven theories.

However, in the debates on this process of putting the 'international' back into international relations, part of the debate remains untouched. Theories tend to set the parameters for what is to be investigated, how it is to be done, and what type or form of data is relevant. At their bases, the two approaches ask different questions and therefore look for different things. In O'Neil's terms, they set different standards for success (2016:21). For example, IR scholars tend to focus on the outcomes of processes (Foot and Goh, 2018:2) and towards the teleology of events, whereas area studies scholars focus on processes as the outcome and therefore centre on connections between different disciplines (Pye, 2001). As a

result, they make different assumptions about what is being studied. In an ASEAN context, a teleological approach can be problematic, as it is often noted that the states of Southeast Asia focus on processes and mechanisms that create dialogue and develop confidence building measures rather than those that find solutions for problems (ASEAN, 1967).⁸ This can be seen in the frustrations around the South China Sea disputes (ASEAN, 2002)⁹ and the evaluations of the ASEAN Regional Forum (for different perspectives and evaluations of the ARF see: Narine, 1997; Goh 2004; Haacke, 2009; Katsumata, 2010; Stubbs, 2014). As a result, as they are searching for different things, area and disciplinary studies also suggest different forms of data as being appropriate and/or required, and consequently produce different conclusions. In studying a process, the methods used need to reflect the ongoing and dynamic nature of interactions, whereas processes producing outcomes enable a view of the completed event that is no longer changing.¹⁰ Despite the significance of data selection, this debate is not presented as a debate of research methods *per se*, but rather as a philosophical debate about the nature and value of research.¹¹

One practical implication of this different approach is that exploring this different source of data will require a wider engagement with a multitude of research methods by scholars. Although this might at first seem easy to address, the structure of academic progression, the focus on publications, and the emphasis on excellence in teaching make learning new methods increasingly challenging because of the time commitment required. One way to address this might be for conferences to have a greater emphasis on an expansive range of approaches that reinforce the importance of research workshops and training. Some professional groups do have this built into their processes, for example the European Consortium on Political Research (ECPR) holds methods schools in both the summer and winter, as well as short courses (ECPR, 2021). However, these courses can be expensive and are also held at times to suit the academic year in Europe. That is not to take away from the significant contribution these courses make, but rather to highlight there is a need for more accessible study options.

An important aspect of the area/disciplinary divide in methods is that context matters. The types of politics and socio-cultural engagement in Southeast Asia operate in different ways to the legalistic approach that is dominant in Western states. What is being studied should affect the type of data that can be collected, and therefore the methods used to gather these materials. These differences in the data, collection and evaluation may then mean the conclusions cannot (and should not) be applied in other contexts. In some parts of Western IR, this lack of generalisability can be seen as undermining the quality of the research. However, according to the argument of this paper, this lack of generalisability is in fact evidence of the appropriateness of the approach adopted.¹²

This article argues that in the study of international relations and particularly the study of institutions, area studies approaches should be more frequently adopted in order to address an outcome-oriented, and, therefore, western-centric bias. Using a case study of ASEAN, the paper demonstrates biases in the selection of datasets and in the type of data viewed as valid; biases which mirror and amplify the primacy of Western approaches. In conjoining this work with an emerging approach to international practices in IR, this discussion also enables a

meaningful consideration of the appropriateness of currently accepted forms of data even for the study of Western institutions. At present, the limited use of these approaches not only hampers new research but also hides a colonial hangover.

For who or what is this important?

Western Institutions and International Practices

It is not the aim of this article to consider whether ASEAN is relevant, but rather to highlight the fundamental work of selection of appropriate evidence based on Western-centric expectations, in predetermining a conclusion to that question. The subsequent question that arises from this reflection is whether this is only an ASEAN or East Asian problem.

An important aspect of the tensions between area and disciplinary studies is an assumption that a particular geographical area is exceptional – it demands to be studied in a particularly detailed and disciplinary busting manner because does not conform to generalisations. It is an intrinsic case. However, in the case of ASEAN, the question emerges as to whether ASEAN is an exception where the paper trail is inadequate to capture the reality of institutional practices.

The problem of researching institutions and the inappropriateness of several methodologies has been noted in international practice literature. This development was a response to frustrations from the academic and diplomatic communities that the real world of diplomacy was not being accurately captured by IR texts (see: Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Navari 2010; Neumann, 2012). As a result, the international practice approach was championed by a small group of scholars working on international institutions. The methods of choice for the study of international practices are ethnographic participant observation (Beuger, 2014) coupled with elite interviewing (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014: 897; Pouliot and Cornut, 2015: 308; Pouliot, 2013: 48-9) within a process tracing approach. However, despite this new theoretical gold standard, it has proved almost impossible to achieve. Limitations in terms of resources, time, and access, all combine to make it nearly impossible to undertake an ethnographic study of an international institution like ASEAN While there exist several studies that conform to this gold standard, this perspective has only been applied to Western institutions, and the connection to area studies approaches hasn't been recognised.

Acknowledging this connection is important for both the extension of area studies and for the international practices turn in IR. According to Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger (2015:458), the problems of international practices as an approach need to be resolved through empirical investigation rather than theorising alone. Area studies offers both methods and empirical examples in order to achieve these investigations.

This approach also ostensibly offers an approach to 'decolonise' research methods and address the particular challenges of researching East Asia as well as bridging the gap between area and disciplinary experts. In essence, this approach involves treating the institution investigated as an 'area', and therefore subject to the research methods commonly associated

with area studies. It acknowledges that institutions have their own culture and language, and that the sociology of the place may affect the outcomes, as well as how bureaucracies function.

Yet in applying this approach to this region and its diplomatic practices, there are four central challenges. First, access to meetings is even more difficult than in the case of ‘western’ institutions. Second, the structure of the discipline and the developing trends of IR publications means that research based on these methods is only viewed as acceptable in area studies journals or in niche areas of European publications, ensuring that dialogue between scholars, particularly those in North America, is limited. Third, managing researcher bias has yet to be addressed in a meaningful manner. Fourth, as already noted in the literature on elite interviews, the interviewee may also seek to represent their own understanding of events, showing themselves or their institution in the best possible light – whether consciously or unconsciously (Harvey, 2011; Halperin and Heath, 2017: 258-276; Tansey, 2007: 766-768).

CONCLUSION

Adding to this difficulty is an issue that although several scholars have tried to overcome, challenge, consider, and critically evaluate the effects of imperialism in comparative and regional research, they have so far failed to consider that the research methods they apply in fact hamper this endeavour. Hence, in order to expand this area of research, it is essential to consider the ontological assumptions made and the research methods used in developing new arguments regarding non-Western regions.

All of this is not to say that we should abandon standards or particular types of evidence, but rather that we should consider from where they are drawn and the implications they have upon the subject being researched. Doing so, and considering the relationship between evidence and the assumptions being made, offers the opportunity to consider if the evidence we use affects the conclusions we draw and has an effect on the understanding of Western institutions.

There is therefore a need to decolonise research methods approaches in International Relations, or at the very least acknowledge the base assumptions being made in their usage. Whereas there have been debates on decolonising methods in other fields (in particular, the area of Indigenous studies, see for example: Smith, 2012; Louis, 2007) to date the need to do this in IR has not been discussed, despite the emergence of some potentially cogent debates on whether there is a need to develop non-western IR theories and the need to ‘liberate’ the curriculum.

In considering research methods, area research and international practices will inevitably cost more money and take longer. But perhaps methods and their consideration offer an opportunity to bridge the divide between area studies and IR. This will be difficult given the area studies and disciplinary traditions. As a result, perhaps the first steps are to begin an open conversation that a divide exists and first trace how it is being mitigated or accentuated in the sociology of the discipline. This may be effectively started by asking conference organisers to consider including a session to reflect on these issues or holding a methods ‘café’ or workshop to expand engagement with research methods; for journals to review the types of methods that

are used in the articles that are accepted; and for funders to consider if there are ways to further support this type of research.

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¹ According to Wesley Null, a liberal curriculum “pursues the goal of liberating minds so that they can become more fully human, make rational judgements and provide civic leadership”, (Null, 2011: 28). In UK universities this has come to be seen as providing a more diversity engagement with scholarship across difference races, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, genders and nationalities. See for example, the UCL project on Liberating the Curriculum, information available <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/education-initiatives/connected-curriculum/liberating-curriculum> accessed, 21 May 2018; and the National Union of Students Campaign LIBER8, available <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/liber8-education/liberate-the-curriculum> accessed 21 May 2018.

² See for example: PS: Political Science and Politics; Political Studies Review; Politics; and European Political Science.

³ In 2004/5 the Economic and Social research council in the UK funded a Research Methods call, in the changes to post-doctoral funding for the Future research leaders call there was also a section for skills development and training at the post-doctoral state. Similarly, in the development of the ESRC doctoral training centres scheme research methods were an essential element of applications from groups of universities.

⁴ In 2013 the Nuffield Foundation supported the creation of 15 quantitative methods centres around the UK, in order to create “a step-change in quantitative social science training”, support from this foundation total £19.5 million for an initial 5 year period has supported the development of new programmes of study, summer and winter schools, and routes to postgraduate study. See for example, Nuffield Foundation. 2018. ‘Q-Step centres and affiliates’ online at <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/q-step-centres-and-affiliates> accessed 21st February 2018; also Nuffield Foundation, 2018. Aims and Activities of the Q-Step centres’ document available to download from <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/q-step-centres-and-affiliates> accessed 21st February 2018 p.2.

⁵ This has also been noted as an issue for feminist studies whose methods often don’t conform to the expectations of the discipline and its ‘policemen’, (Waever and Tickner, 2009:21)

⁶ Statistics are from Scimago Journal and Country Rank, International Relations filter, accessed at <http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?category=3320&type=j> on 8th March 2018. Google Scholar Analytics also has a top 20 journal ranking but this has even fewer EU journals accessed https://scholar.google.co.uk/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=soc_diplomacyinternationalrelations on 8th March 2018.

⁷ For a discussion of Area Studies methods in practice see: McCargo, 2008: xiv-xvi. In another edited collection interrogating Southeast Asian research see: Kuhonta, Slater, and Vu, 2008.

⁸ See also, Collins describes ASEAN states behaviours as conforming to a regime and therefore a process rather than as an (outcome) community(Collins, 2007: 206-212; similarly, Jurgen Haacke, has claimed that evaluations of ASEAN’s effectiveness should be measured against its own objectives, and therefore its generation of a process rather than producing outcomes, (Haacke, 2009; Haacke, 2003: 16-51). similarly, Catherine Jones has argued that ASEAN shelves or limits the nature of its interactions, so that solutions can be in the realm of other international actors, (Jones, 2015)

⁹ In the South China Sea, ASEAN’s landmark ‘success’ was in the creation of a code of conduct rather than the production of a solution. Hence is sought to initiate a process rather than determining an outcome. See: ASEAN, 2002. Declaration on the Code of Conduct for Parties in the South China Sea, online http://asean.org/?static_post=declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea last accessed 1st May 2018.

¹⁰ The difference between these two approaches is seen in the discussion in Kuhn’s structure of scientific revolutions where he outlines that ‘revolutions’ or processes that are ongoing are difficult to identify and evaluate, as a result, we tend to only be able to identify that change has happened after it has been completed (Kuhn, 1991).

¹¹ In essence this debate directly engages with considerations of structure/action debates in social sciences (Hollis, 2008: 5-12).

¹² I thank the anonymous reviewer for this point. I am obliged that they took the time on the paper and saw a way to develop the point and enhance the overall argument.

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