The limits of China’s Rise
A Structural Power Analysis of ASEAN-China Relations

Paper prepared for the ECPR Graduate Conference 2012
Panel on “Approaches to Structural Power in IR”
Bremen, July, 4th-6th

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Abstract

This paper analyses the ASEAN-China relationship in terms of structural power. The analysis centres on a case study of China’s involvement in ASEAN-led multilateral security arrangements like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit. The argument of this paper is that despite the People’s Republic of China’s increasing economic and military capabilities, ASEAN does possess structural power vis-à-vis China. This structural power relates from two ideational goods provided by ASEAN that are crucial to China’s foreign policy interests: (1) the need for recognition of China’s status as a responsible status-quo power and (2) the security norms of the *ASEAN Way*. The Chinese need for these goods, and its spillover effects on other major power, elevates ASEAN to a level of regional significance beyond its material power capabilities and allows it for a leading role in regional multilateralism and to face the major powers on eye-level.
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Introduction

This paper analyses the China Threat to Southeast Asia in terms of structural power. The common arguments of China Threat theorists claim that because of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) increasing economic and military capabilities – Chinese hard power – an unstoppable power shift in China’s favour is happening in Asia. Some argue further that Southeast Asia – a region without a great power of its own – is particularly vulnerable if power and regional supremacy are shifting from the United States (U.S.) to the PRC.

China’s increasing multilateralism – e.g. in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or the East Asia Summit (EAS) – is often used as an indicator for China’s increasing influence in and the PRC’s aspirations for leadership in Southeast Asia. In opposition, this paper dismisses the argument that China’s is able to adopt an assertive leadership in the region or that the PRC has the ability to force an alternative regional structure and value system upon its Southeast Asian neighbours. In quite the opposite way China’s need for recognition of its international status and the need for cooperation in regional multilateralism influence China to accept ASEAN’s leading role in the ARF and EAS and there value system based on the ASEAN Way.

Considering China’s commitment to multilateralism and the ASEAN Way, an increasing trend toward expanding participation can be perceived among the great powers. China’s increasing involvement in ASEAN-led multilateralism influences states as diverse as the EU, India, Russia and the US to sign ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and to join the EAS. Thus it can be argued that despite China’s increasing hard power, the PRC is still lacking sufficient structural power to dominate the region. The developing regional structure is strongly influenced by ASEAN’s ideas and initiatives and thus creates structural power in favour of ASEAN instead.
Literature Review

What kind of role will the People’s Republic of China (PRC) play in world politics? Will China be a status-quo power or try to reshape the current international system in its favour? Is the People’s Republic of China going to establish a Chinese hegemony in Asia? Such and similar questions are characterising one of the most extensively discussed topics in contemporary International Relations (IR) research. This discussion, commonly labelled as China Threat Theory, varies by theme and level of analysis, so that it can argued that we are discussing several different China threats.\(^1\) However, most analysts agree that the good old puzzle of great power competition lies at the heart of the China Threat debate. With realists emphasising on China’s increasing hard power to support the China Threat Theory. Their arguments are mainly opposed by liberalists stressing the possibility of peace based on economic interdependence and constructivists emphasising China’s increasing international socialisation\(^2\). John J. Mearsheimer, for example, stresses that China’s increasing military capabilities fostered by its economic growth will ultimately lead to conflict with the United States (U.S.). The only option for China to guarantee its security, so Mearsheimer’s argument, lies in maximising its power and replacing the U.S. as the sole superpower.\(^3\) What is struggling regarding his argumentation is that, despite China’s impressive increase in economic power and military capabilities and U.S. efforts to renew and upgrade its bilateral defence relationships in Asia, China’s rise is not accompanied by active Chinese policies to balance against U.S. Supremacy.\(^4\)

Particularly, the literature analysing China’s rise in Southeast Asia is growing year by year. Academic articles and books discuss all possibilities from Southeast Asian balancing

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\(^4\) Johnston, Alastair Iain. „Is China a Status Quo Power?“. International Security, 27: 4 (Spring, 2003): 5-56. Here should be differentiated between internal and external balancing. Although China is currently not forming an alliance to balance U.S. supremacy, the PRC’s military modernisation programme can be seen as a form of internal balancing. For a broader theoretical explanation of internal and external balancing see: Mearsheimer 2001.
against, bandwagoning with to hedging\(^5\) against China. Still, the region which was once declared to be „ripe for rivalry“\(^6\), seems to be comparably stable especially since the beginning of Myanmar/Burma’s opening to the world\(^7\). It seems that many of these academic works either overemphasise the appeal of the U.S. defence network or China’s economic and military power, respectively. One could argue that the common element of theses arguments is an understanding of power that relies to strongly on hard power and the survival of the fittest.

It might be more fruitful to return to Hans J. Morgenthau’s earlier classifications of revisionist versus status-quo states\(^8\). A revisionist state is dissatisfied with the current global power distribution and the norms and rules that govern this system. For that reasons the revisionist state wants to change the system to its own preferences, like the Soviet Union wanted to replace the Western-led international system with global communism. A status-quo power, on the other hand, works within the system and does not attempt to replace or change it beyond an acceptable extend.\(^9\) Classifying if China is a revisionist or a status-quo power will help to prove or dismiss the China Threat. A growing number of researchers engage in this line of research and discuss China’s attitude toward international rules and norms.\(^10\)

Analysing China’s inclination toward status-quo or revisionist policies is an interesting and challenging task that should consider the constrains currently effecting China’s foreign


policy: China’s dependence on a stable international environment for its ongoing economic development\textsuperscript{11}, the importance of the U.S.-China economic relationship and China’s neighbour states suspicions of the PRC’s rise in the region (the \textit{China Threat}). As Yong Deng argues China is very aware of its negatively biased image and the suspicions held against it. Hence, the PRC increasingly tries to project an image of international responsibility and norm conformity to mitigate the perception of the \textit{China Threat}. Improving China’s international status is seen as an alternative and complement to increasing hard power.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, China’s status seeking foreign policy is important for the CCP regime’s legitimacy. International recognition of the PRC’s great power status helps to satisfy the needs of Chinese popular nationalism for a greater role in world politics.

This paper will analyse the effects of China’s commitment to ASEAN norms and values on its relationship with its Southeast Asian neighbours. Improving the PRC’s image is an important step toward achieving China’s foreign policy goal of international status recognition. To improve China’s image it is necessary to create trust among its neighbours, who would be have most to fear of an aggressive China, and to show the willingness to self-constrain by projecting responsible and status-quo conform behaviour. Considering this assumption, the argument of this paper is that China’s status seeking foreign policy does not only create (self-)constrain regarding China’s ability to use its increasing hard power capabilities, but it creates structural power in favour of ASEAN due to the associations’ role as a norm-entrepreneur and leader in regional multilateralism. ASEAN’s security norms, the \textit{ASEAN Way} build the foundation of regional multilateralism and should be regarded as an ideational good that is offered to satisfy the need for security and stability of the states involved in the region. As there are no alternative set of norms (outside options) that appeals to all parties involved, the circumstances allow ASEAN to play a far more important role than it should be able to based on realist power calculations.


Theory

Structural Power

In her 2009 article Evelyn Goh analysed China’s rising power and asked to what use China can and does put its increasing power. Besides China’s hard and soft power, she also assessed China’s structural power. However, her analysis relies on the traditional assumption of Susan Strange\(^\text{13}\) that structural power is the economically strong state’s ability to influence economic structure to its own preference. Goh comes to the conclusion that, despite the increase of China’s hard power, the main constraining factor of Chinese power and influence in the region is an unclear foreign policy toward how the PRC wants to use this increasing power in the region.\(^\text{14}\) Arguably, Goh’s argument could have been enriched in explanatory strength if she had adopted a different approach to structural power.

More recent research provides a different approach to Structural Power not based on the assumption that economically strong state’s have the ability to shape structures at will, but based on an interpretation of structural power as a rather independent "force" that develops out of the different interactions, capabilities and resources as well as needs of the actors involved in the process of international bargaining and negotiations.\(^\text{15}\) The framework introduced by Kremer and Pustovitovskij challenges the dominant assumption in International Relations Theory (IRT) that states which are rich in resources are powerful based on their resource wealth. Instead they suggest that resources are only influential in international relations when other actors express a need for these particular resources. In this way they become goods that can be exchanged to satisfy the needs expressed by other states. We look at an interpretation of power based on three levels: (1) the resource level, (2) the relational level and (3) the structural level. The structural level is influenced by the quality and availability of goods. If one actor is rich in a particular resource and the only one who can provide it to satisfy the need for this resource expressed by an other actor, he gains structural power over the later. If, on the other hand, his good (the resource the actor is rich in) is of lesser quality or

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there are several other actors that can satisfy the need expressed for the particular good, his resource power is relativized and he thus looses structural power.\footnote{Ibid.}

From this understanding of structural power the earlier mentioned analysis by Evelyn Goh can be enriched by analysing the needs expressed in China's foreign policy and how these needs can be and are satisfied by other actors. The following sections of this paper will address the need for recognition in China’s foreign policy. This status seeking policy is closely linked to China’s ability to project the image of being a responsible status-quo power to gain the trust of its neighbours. ASEAN’s recognition of China’s role as a responsible and cooperative actor in the region can be regarded as an ideational good which comes at the price of the PRC’s commitment to self-constrain. A key to creating trust and improving China’s image is to project norm-conformity, the behaviour expected from a status-quo power. ASEAN’s norms and leadership in regional multilateralism play an important role as the ASEAN Way serves best the difficult domestic constrains on China’s foreign policy. It is also the only set of norms accepted by all powers involved in the region. China’s commitment to the ASEAN Way, however, creates spillover effects on the behaviour of other major powers which thus further increases the structural power in ASEAN’s favour.\footnote{The author presented a similar structural power analysis in support of his argument that Sino-Myanmar relations are, despite of mainstream opinions toward the opposite, based on mutual dependence instead of one-sided dependence on China. See: von der Pütten, Jann Christoph. „Stepping out of China's Shadow?: An Explanation of Recent Changes in Myanmar’s Foreign Policy Beyond the ‘China Threat’ Argument”. \textit{Paper prepared for the Annual Conference of the Finnish Political Science Association}, Panel on „Security and Global Challenges”. University of Turku, March 8-9, 2012.}

\section*{Role of Respect and Recognition in International Relations}

What role do recognition and status play in international relations? Considering the findings of social psychology, Social Identity Theory (SIT) in particular, struggles for recognition are an important aspect of every actor’s identity claim. An actor’s struggle for recognition represent the desire to be recognised and accepted as an equal member of a defined in-group. However, it is a fact of everyday life that not all claims to recognition are met, but instead many are dismissed or ignored.\footnote{Haacke, Jürgen. „The Frankfurt School and International Relations: on the centrality of recognition”. \textit{Review of International Studies}, 31 (2005): 181–194.} Recognition is tightly linked to the feeling of respect and the
rejection to acknowledge an actor’s or group’s possession of a feature whose value is commonly accepted can therefore be defined as disrespect. The denial to acknowledge an actor’s or group’s economic prowess and the denial of the rights usually enjoyed by this type of group are common forms of disrespect.¹⁹ The rejection by Western states to recognise China’s status as a market-economy makes for a good example of disrespect. Disrespect, or rather the feeling of being disrespected, can and often does lead to uncooperative behaviour and the deterioration of relationships.

Hence, recognition plays an important role as only sufficient recognition²⁰ preserves an actor’s social status, while disrespect questions the actor’s status claims or lowers his/her status.²¹ Respect can be expressed as one of the three forms of (1) emotional support, (2) cognitive respect and (3) social esteem, which are accompanied by three forms of disrespect.²²

“In this context Honneth identifies three forms of disrespect that shatter the practical relation to self of individuals and give rise to struggles for recognition. The experience of abuse is viewed by Honneth to affect a person’s self-confidence. A denial of rights or exclusion is seen as denting self-respect, whereas denigration and insult are viewed as depressing a person’s self-esteem. As Honneth argues, the motivation driving the struggle for recognition, in whatever concrete manifestation, is grounded in ‘the experience of violence to intuitively presupposed conceptions of justice’.”²³

As Haacke observed these three forms of disrespect can also be applied in the context of International Relations Theory (IRT).

“Violations of territorial integrity, the denial or hollowing out of sovereign rights and the denigration of states and their political leaders can for example all be considered approximate equivalents to the abuse, the denial of rights and the denigration experienced by individuals and collectivities.”²⁴

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²⁰ Please note that respect cannot be measured in this context. It is rather the actor’s perception of the respect he deserves.

²¹ Wolf 2011.


Actors expect others to show them the *deserved* respect through their behaviour and based on the consideration of their (1) “physical presence”, (2) “social importance”, (3) “ideas and values”, (4) “physical needs and interests”, (5) “achievements, efforts, qualities and virtues”, and (6) “rights”. Paying sufficient respect does not mean that an actor’s every idea and initiative should be accepted or supported, but it should be paid “adequate consideration” in debates and decision-making.

Alongside respect three other forms of esteem influence the perception of being respected or disrespected, namely these are honour, dignity and prestige. Arguably the highest form of respect is fully uncompromised dignity, while humiliation, the violation of dignity, is the most strongly felt form of disrespect. For nation states, this culturally defined core currently consists of their rights to sovereignty, to territorial integrity, and to freedom of development [...]. National dignity thus largely coincides with a nation-state’s material interest in security. Humiliation does not only challenge some specific rights or values, but the foundation of an actor’s identity itself. It attacks the heart of the respective identity claim by questioning the legitimacy of the status right to be seen as an autonomous actor. A good example is China’s experience of the “century of humiliation” during which Western imperialism questioned the Chinese empire’s moral foundations and its right to exist. This experience is shared memory of most postcolonial states and explains their emphasis on the value of their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Their demand for independence and international recognition after the Second World War, hence, reflected their desire to restore their dignity and to secure their rights as an independent and autonomous actor in global politics with the aim to secure them from anew imperialist domination.

To sum up, recognition and respect are crucial to satisfy the self-image of actors and the denial of recognition questions an actor’s (perceived) place in society and the particular qualities that characterise him. Accordingly, it can be argued that every actor that feels disre-

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26 Ibid: 112.
spected and denied sufficient recognition of his status, has a need for recognition to restore its self-image and to gain respect by convincing (or in an escalating situation force) others to recognise its his or her rightful place in a given group.
The Dilemma of Rising Powers and Regional Stability

China’s Status Seeking Foreign Policy

Due to China’s historical experiences with Western colonialism, anti-imperialism played an important role in China’s foreign policy since Mao officially proclaimed the People’s Republic of China. However, it was argued that the so-called century of humiliation and the memory of China being cut up like a birthday cake by the colonial powers became increasingly important when Deng Xiaoping’s policy of reform and opening up replaced Mao’s policy of constant revolution.30 According to Hughes, Deng’s reform policy required the CCP to reassess and rebuild the basis of her legitimacy claims which resulted in the creation of a new interlinkage between economic development, foreign policy, and nationalism.31 This interlinkage and the experience of the century of humiliation are also reflected in the „Three Major Tasks“ defined by Deng Xiaoping:

1. Oppose hegemonism and strive to preserve world peace
2. The return of Taiwan to the motherland for China’s unification
3. Step up economic construction.32

They emphasise the desire for a strong and united state that is and will not be dominated by external powers. The Chinese foreign policy outlook is therefore increasingly complex. On the one hand, Chinese nationalism desires for China to take its „rightful place“ as a major power in global politics and to overcome the stigma of the century of humiliation,33 while the dependence of China’s economic development on a stable international environment and foreign direct investment (FDI) requires to be aware of and to address international suspicions.34

31 Hughes 2010: 56.
34 Qin 2010.
For these reasons international status plays an increasingly important role in Chinese academic debates on the development of "comprehensive national power". The understanding of ‘comprehensive national power’ is based on two important components. One is the PRC’s increasing hard power based on its strong economic growth and its increasing military capabilities, the other is the important role of international status in China’s foreign policy calculation. It can be argued that at the time being international status has a more important role in China’s foreign policy than (hard) power. As an emphasis on China’s increasing hard power would only strengthen suspicions held against the PRC and therefore the credibility of the China Threat argument, the status seeking foreign policy aims on eliminating the perceived status gap between China’s actual status and the status that China should possess. Status is thereby not simply a measure for China’s ranking in the global power hierarchy, but a measure for the PRC’s ability to protect its interests and project its influence on the international stage. In the context of China’s foreign policy status was described as “[a] key measure […] whether China’s great power aspiration is internationally accepted as legitimate and whether its core interests are respected by other great powers and neighbouring states”. Accordingly, the PRC’s foreign policy does not focus on the presentation of overwhelming Chinese hard power which threatens other actors and coerces them to respect China and its interests, but on the improvement of China’s image as a responsible and friendly power whose ideas and interests are taken serious and are respected on the international stage.

The U.S.’ ambiguous stance toward Taiwan is a good example of the perceived international disrespect for China’s ‘core interests’ which influences the perception of the status gap. While the U.S. Government officially accepts the One-China Policy and recognises the PRC (and not the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan) as the legitimate Chinese government, the U.S. is to a certain extend protecting Taiwan diplomatically through the Taiwan Relations Act and sales of weaponry and military equipment to the Taiwanese government. Hence the argument was made that “[c]ompared to the power factor, the problem of social

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35 Deng 2005: 2; Deng 2009: 15.
36 Deng 2005: 53
38 Taiwan Relations Act. Public Law 96-8 96th Congress. Congress of the United States of America, 01.01.1979.
denigration may be more decisive and yet more difficult to overcome. Because of the direct link to questions of nationalism and regime legitimacy, disrespect for China’s core interests like the Taiwan issue, are causing especially strong feelings and reactions by nationalists.

In the following sections the paper will analyse the importance of recognition of the PRC’s international status as the need for an ideational good and how it influences the structural power of the Sino-ASEAN relationship.

Challenges to Regional Stability and the Origins of the ASEAN Way

A similar example of the ASEAN states engaging a dominant regional power and the origin of the ASEAN Way is found in the history of ASEAN itself. The original ASEAN was founded to consolidate relations after Indonesia’s second president Suharto stopped his predecessor’s aggressive foreign policy of confrontation (konfrontasi) against Singapore and Malaysia. Indonesia’s neighbours were wary of a potential re-emergence of aggression by the region’s biggest nation-state. To improve relations and to enable the regional states to focus on their economic development, Suharto was willing to restrain Indonesia in the newly founded ASEAN. Suharto’s decision for “political self-denial in the interest of regional order” became his first great foreign policy success right at the beginning of his presidency. Indonesia was rewarded with the recognition of its status as primus inter pares or first among equals by the other ASEAN members, an important signal to Indonesian popular nationalism and accordingly a stabilising effect on Indonesia’s domestic situation. A former Indonesian general explained the ASEAN decision-making process as a very personality based process: “In those days they [the other ASEAN leaders] would turn to President Suharto for advice and ap-

41 Consisting of the founding members Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. Brunei joined in 1984 as sixth member ob ASEAN.
proval and to align their strategies”. The importance of Indonesia’s role in ASEAN can also be seen in the renewal of relations between China and the original ASEAN 6 itself. With many of them not officially reestablishing their relations until Indonesia which had the most troubled relationship with the PRC did so. It is unsure if this positive example was the reason China adopted its ‘good-neighbour policy’ after the Tian’anmen incident, but “ASEAN’s apparent belief that the Chinese penchant for good neighbourliness and strategic restraint is something that deserves strong encouragement and reinforcement, with the promise of regional recognition of China’s proper place as a regional leader, but one very much within an ASEAN-centred framework.” However, as Tan’s analysis indicates China’s engagement and rise in regional politics is expected to be facilitated on basis of the ASEAN Way.

44 Retired general and diplomat, interview by author, Jakarta, July 2010.
Structural Power in Sino-ASEAN Relations

Southeast Asia is very important to China’s foreign policy goals. The ten ASEAN members provide crucial resources and a market outlet for China’s economic growth, they are situated along China’s most important sea lanes of transportation and are in a crucial position to help facilitate the stable environment needed for China’s economic development. In this sense these can be understood as material (e.g. natural resources) and positional goods (location among China’s most important sea lanes of transportation). However, the analysis will focus on the centrality of ASEAN as a leader and norm-entrepreneur in regional multilateralism and how its ideational goods, the security norms based on the ASEAN Way, are important for China’s status seeking foreign policy and thus affect the Sino-ASEAN relationship.

Initial Chinese Concerns and the Role of ASEAN-led Multilateralism

ASEAN was not only the starting point of China’s regional multilateral diplomacy, opened the way for China’s new multilateral foreign policy on the global stage. Initially China’s decision to get involved with Southeast Asia multilaterally focused on the short term need to reduce foreign pressure after the 1989 Tian’anmen massacre and to circumvent Western isolation of China. At the outset, however, the ARF was perceived with deep reservations by the Chinese government which was worried about the effects participation in the forum could have for China’s core interests and the foreign policy goals defined in the Three Major Tasks. These fears relate to the perception that participation in multilateral security arrangements usually requires at least minimal concession of sovereignty and could in the worst case even lead to the erosion of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. These fears accumulated in three main concerns, (1) the possibility that the ARF was just another U.S. dominated organisation that would enable the United States to interfere in China’s domestic affairs (fear of U.S. hegemony), (2) the danger that China’s claims over Taiwan or the territorial disputes in the South China Sea would become an issue on the ARF’s agenda (fear that sovereignty and terri-

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48 For a related structural power analysis of the mentioned examples in the context of China-Myanmar/Burma relations see: von der Pütten 2012.

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ditorial claims would be eroded) and (3) the worried that the lack of transparency of China’s military modernisation could become a topic of discussion (the military dimension of the China Threat). In this sense the ARF would rather have turned out to be an instrument to limit China’s influence in the region, check its regional power and to (at least diplomatically) balance against the PRC.

Soon after an initial period of observer status and the cautious decision to join the ARF, China’s new good-neighbour diplomacy gained strategic significance and turned out to be helpful in reducing the perception of the China Threat and to increase Chinese influence in the region. It is also, very importantly, a vehicle for and interlinked with China’s status improvement. ASEAN-led multilateralism offered a valuable opportunity to gain recognition for the PRC’s status claims and the related foreign policy interests. ASEAN’s recognition of the PRC as a status-quo power can therefore be regarded as a limited ideational good. However, like any exchange of goods, recognition did not come for free but on basis of ‘costly signalling’, which is defined as:

“[...] the key mechanism that makes reassurance possible through the making of significant gestures by the parties involved that serve to prove to all each other’s trustworthiness. In the context of multilateral regional arrangements that are not defined by a ma-lign hegemony, interstate security cooperation will likely result only if an element of trust is present.”

Thus, it can be argued that the price China paid was the acceptance of ASEAN’s norms and leadership role in regional multilateralism as well as by compromising its own interests to a certain extend. Self-constrain and the compromise of national interests, to a do-

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52 The common debate on China’s rise is rather inclined toward seeing China as a revisionist state that will challenge the current international system instead of a status-quo power. However, the quality of recognition by ASEAN as an ideational good is debatable as unlimited recognition of China’s status and interests by the United States and other Western powers would surely rank much higher in quality.

53 Tan 2009: 166.
mestically justifiable extend, was a necessary move to win trust and to avoid pushing South-east Asia into the arms of China’s regional rivals, especially the U.S. and Japan.\footnote{Acharya 2009; To summarise in the words of See Seng Tan: „For its part, China’s growing involvement in and enthusiasm for ASEAN-based regionalism could also be viewed as a signal of its willingness to cooperate. More crucially, it could be seen as Chinese willingness to exercise strategic restraint” (ibid 2009: 173); For deeper elaboration of the concept of strategic restraint see: Ikenberry, G. John. After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.}

**ASEAN Leadership and Structural Power**

The ASEAN Regional Forum is usually analysed on basis of the traditional realist balance of power problematic. Back in 1996 the late Michael Leifer, one of the most acknowledged experts of Southeast Asian international relations, concluded that:

„The problem for which the ARF is an ambiguous and unproven solution is hardly new in international relations. It is that of a changing balance or distribution of power and, in particular, of the emergence of a rising power with a revisionist agenda [China].”\footnote{Leifer 1996: 53; For a similar assumption and a critique of the *ASEAN Way* see: Jones, David Martin and Smith, M.L.R.. ASEAN and East Asian International Relations: Regional Delusion. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006.}

In contrast it could be argued that the ARF is widely analysed on the wrong basis, namely based on conventional balance of power analysis, and that it would be more fruitful to discuss it as a „norm-building exercise“\footnote{Katsumata, Hiro. *ASEAN’s Cooperative Security Enterprise: Norms and Interests in the ASEAN Regional Forum*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009: 77}. Since the forum’s early days its purpose was the management of ASEAN’s relations with external powers and to establish a „peaceful and stable regional security environment“ by promoting its security norms through dialogue and mutual understanding. The uncertainties that ASEAN’s members faced can be largely attributed to China’s rise. Still this must not be understood as an ASEAN effort to involve everybody so that they balance each other, but as a diplomatic exercise that uses dialogue to seek solutions for problems and to dismiss uncertainties, misunderstandings.\footnote{Ibid: 77; See also: Sukma 2010; It is important to note that the ASEAN member states are due to their experience of colonialism highly suspicious of any form of military alliances and envision a region that is free of the need for any military alliances. See: Sukma 1999. These views are also reflected in the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint. See: ASEAN Secretariat. *ASEAN in the Global Community: Annual Report 2010-2011*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2011; ASEAN Secretariat. *ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2009; ASEAN Secretariat. *The ASEAN Charter*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2007.} This understanding is sup-
ported by the general perception of the ASEAN member states that their domestic development and stability (national resilience) is highly interlinked with regional stability (regional resilience)\textsuperscript{58} and their general awareness and fear of domination by outside powers.\textsuperscript{59}

ASEAN’s role was essential for the creation of the ARF and its leadership role a necessary consensus among the major powers to avoid that the forum would turn into a great power arena for the struggle of regional leadership and dominance.\textsuperscript{60} ASEAN leadership is similarly essential to keep the process in the ARF alive and to promote ASEAN’s security norms. Besides ASEAN’s position in the ASEAN Regional Forum’s \textit{driver’s seat} and its noticeably strong influence on the speed of process and membership questions, the association possess an exclusive channel to voice its opinion through the ARF Chairman’s Statement which it guards resiliently from major power interference. However, the Association does face limitations when it comes to setting the forum’s agenda due to the influence of the major powers.\textsuperscript{61}

The Hainan incident when a U.S. surveillance plane crashed with a Chinese jet over Hainan Island is one of the examples how ASEAN’s role in the ARF works. Although ASEAN had little influence to change U.S. behaviour regarding the diplomatic trouble\textsuperscript{62} between the U.S. and China, ASEAN could take the role of a mediator and use that year July’s ARF meeting in Hanoi to address the issue and to urge the involved parties to settle the dispute in accordance with the \textit{ASEAN Way}: peacefully and in a manner that preserves regional stability. This is a good example how ASEAN’s co-ordinated effort could contribute to stabi-

\textsuperscript{58} Anwar, Dewi Fortuna. Indonesia in ASEAN: Foreign Policy and Regionalism. Singapore: ISEAS & New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994; Retired general and diplomat, interview by author, Jakarta, July 2010; “Building Regional Resilience: ASEAN Charter, ASEAN Community Blueprints and ASEAN Community”. Speech by Mr. S. Pushpanathan, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN at the National Resilience Institute of Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta, 20 May 2009.


\textsuperscript{60} Leifer 1996; Sukma 2010; For similar reasons ASEAN is also in the \textit{driver’s seat} of the East Asia Summit.

\textsuperscript{61} Sukma 2010.

\textsuperscript{62} Hughes accredits the changes in the U.S. position to Japanese and South Korean reluctance to side with the U.S. and to kept a neutral stance instead. This form of diplomatic isolation was a stronger coercing factor on the U.S.’ behaviour. (Hughes 2010: 64)
lise the relations of the two major powers on basis of its security norms and prevent the manipulation of the multilateral forum by either of them.\

The Compatibility of ASEAN’s and China’s Security Norms and Chinese Commitment

For a state like China which fears outside interference in its internal affairs and worries about its territorial integrity and sovereignty the norms of the ASEAN Way are quite appealing as these stress among others:

1) Non-interference in internal affairs,
2) Consensus decision-making,
3) The right of every member to proceed at a pace comfortable to them
4) Mutual benefit, and
5) Cooperative security.\

There are striking similarities between the ASEAN Way and the normative foundation of the PRC’s foreign policy, which are based on the „Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence:"

1) Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty,
2) Mutual non-aggression,
3) Mutual non-interference in internal affairs,
4) Equality and mutual benefit, and
5) Peaceful coexistence.“\

Besides this appeal in content, joining the ARF was made easier by the facts that it is neither U.S.-dominated nor requires concessions on sovereignty or allows for interference into domestic affairs of member states. China’s commitment to these norms additionally opened the possibility for the PRC to become more proactive and to voice its own proposal of a “new security concept”, which emphasises “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and coordination” with the goal to promote cooperative security. Although some analysts see this as an indicator of increased Chinese desire to advance to a leadership role the emphasis on cooperative security is more of a necessity than choice as the alternative, namely alliance building,

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63 Hughes 2010: 64-65.
65 Hughes 2010: 55.
would boost the ‘China Threat’ and anti-Chinese balancing in the region and globally.\(^{67}\) Further, China’s proactive approach to the ARF is limited by the necessity of self-constrain, because a too assertive foreign policy or even leadership claim would renew suspicions and jeopardise China’s diplomatic achievements toward recognition and trust building.

Such constrains and there positive effect on China’s regional status improvement can be perceived in several concrete concessions (costly signals) made that go beyond basic rhetorical appeasement and emphasis of China’s peaceful nature. By signing the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC\(^ {68}\)), China committed to ASEAN’s basic principles to order relations and provide for peaceful settlement of disputes. „These basic principles are:

\begin{enumerate}
\item Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations;
\item The right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion, and coercion;
\item Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another;
\item Settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means;
\item Renunciation of threat or use of forces; and
\item Effective co-operation among members.”\(^ {69}\)
\end{enumerate}

Additionally, besides negotiating several smaller mutual agreements, China expressed its willingness to accede to the Protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ)\(^ {70}\) and became ASEAN’s first strategic partner through the Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in 2003 agreement\(^ {71}\). China also signed the Joint Declaration of ASEAN and China on Cooperation in the Field of Non-traditional Security Issues and most strikingly it negotiated and signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC).\(^ {72}\)

\begin{footnotes}
\item\(^{67}\) Ibid.
\item\(^{68}\) ASEAN Secretariat. The Text of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia: And Related Information. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2005; The accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation is also the basic requirement to be eligible for membership in the East Asia Summit.
\item\(^{69}\) Caballero-Anthony, Mely. Regional Security in Southeast Asia: Beyond the ASEAN Way. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005: 60.
\item\(^{70}\) Kuik 2005: 114; However, it is important to note that China did not yet accede to the treaty. Neither did any of the other four nuclear powers and United Nations Security Council members France, the United Kingdom, the United States or Russia.
\item\(^{71}\) Tan 2009: 175.
\item\(^{72}\) Ibid: 174.
\end{footnotes}
Especially the signing of the DOC shows one of the greatest concessions and simultaneously challenges of China’s engagement in regional multilateralism. The shift to discuss the South China Sea issue multilaterally also means that China has to deal with the collective pressure of ASEAN instead of the previous easier bilateral approach and has to abide to the norms of the ASEAN Way to find a peaceful solution. Additionally the DOC requires China to find a solution to the problem on the basis of international law.73

Spillover Effects of China’s Norm-Compliance & Status Improvement

One of the most important effects of China’s acceptance of ASEAN norms were the spillover effects it had on the commitment of other major and lesser powers to the region and to ASEAN’s norms. The commitment of China and other regional powers to the TAC, which is the key to EAS membership, coerced the reluctant United States to accept ASEAN’s norms (through signing the TAC) because of the increasing danger to isolate itself in the regional multilateralism and to miss chances. Although this general tendency of the East Asia Summit toward widening rather than deepening the organisation was criticised frequently, it guarantees ASEAN’s position as the driver of regional multilateralism.74 Camroux observes “an intra-regional convergence, albeit a convergence that may simply be an acquiescence in developments beyond the control of any one major global actor”75. Arguably to avoid suspicions of the PRC’s intentions, China has to accept every proposal made at the EAS as long as it does serves the interests of all participants and additionally must refrain from making any grant proposals for future structures of regional multilateralism. However, the convergence of interests in the EAS and ARF also plays into the hands of China’s foreign policy „discourse on the promotion of international ‘democracy’ and multipolarity”.76

Because no other external power could successfully promote alternative norms (or did not dare to due to the potential eruption of conflict), the norms anchored in the ASEAN Way

73 Li 2009. The DOC was often criticised as a too weak agreements, however, the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint foresees a re-negotiation and strengthening of the DOC. See: ASEAN Secretariat. ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2009.

74 Camroux 2009.

75 Camroux 2009: 11; For China the acceptance of enlargement represents its commitment to multilateral norms and inclusiveness as the opposite would only create suspicions regarding China’s intentions.

76 Hughes 2010: 56.
remain crucial as the basic *rules of the game* in regional multilateralism. The support by all participating major and lesser powers for ASEAN’s leadership strengthens its role as norm-entrepreneur who provides vision and ideas and safeguards the centrality of the *ASEAN Way* as the core of the multilateral arrangements. These circumstances create structural power in favour of ASEAN. Though this power is limited to multilateral diplomacy in the ASEAN-led multilateral arrangements, it allows a group of comparably weak lesser powers to influence multilateralism in its favour, to create the normative fundament of these institutions, to face major powers on eye-level and to extract concessions which they would be unlikely to receive through bilateral relations.
Analysing Contemporary Criticism of ASEAN-led Multilateralism through the Structural Power Lens

Critics of ASEAN’s role in and of the Southeast Asian regional security arrangements itself can be summarised in three main themes: (1) the problem of a lack of coherence within ASEAN leadership and the diluting effects of contemporary *global temptations*, (2) the constraining effects of the emphasis on sovereignty, and (3) the danger that regional security arrangements will be overshadowed by the increasingly strong economic multilateralism. In the following sections the paper will analyse these critics and how they affect the structural power ASEAN gained through its central position as a leader and norm-entrepreneur in the ARF and EAS.

**Limits of ASEAN’s leadership: The Lack of Coherence and 'Global Temptations'

According to Camroux the question of ASEAN’s „cohesiveness and centrality“ is very important to regional multilateralism and the long-term developments to a potential (East) Asian community. As was argued elsewhere ASEAN does neither „lack in visions, ideas and action“ nor was it unable to push initiate valuable initiatives. The problem on which these critics agree, however, is ASEAN’s lack of coherence and the absence of a united voice. According to critics initiatives cannot be fully accredited to cooperative effort by the ASEAN leadership, but rather to single ASEAN members and some active external members. These two problems of lacking (1) coherence and (2) legal ways to ensure compliance and effective implementation of decisions are, according to Camroux, further complicated by Indonesia’s membership in the G20. Arguably, the *global temptations* for Indonesia to leave behind ASEAN and regional multilateralism to take up a stronger global role based on its G20 mem-

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77 Camroux 2011: 7.
78 Sukma 2010: 122.
80 Camroux 2011.
81 Haacke 2009.
82 Camroux 2011.
bership, are vastly overemphasised. In fact Indonesia is still evolving a clear foreign policy toward the G20 at all and lacks the capabilities to take up to much international responsibilities. Though a leading Indonesian academic with political influence recently proposed that Indonesia should develop a foreign policy that is more independent from ASEAN, it seems unlikely that Indonesia will go in this direction. Instead, as one of the founding members of ASEAN and, at least in the past, acknowledged regional primum inter pares, Indonesia sees itself in the important, although difficult, role to promote ASEAN interests in the grouping as much as possible. The problem is not as much a problem that the lack of coherent leadership diminishes ASEAN’s structural power, but it considerably constrains ASEAN’s ability to effectively make use of it. The problem facing ASEAN now is to consolidate its plans for an ASEAN Security Community (ASC) and to make use of its new status as an official legal entity granted by international law due to the ratification of the ASEAN Charter. The current momentum could increasingly turn out in ASEAN’s favour if the association is willing to take bolder steps toward more community.

The Predominance of Sovereignty

It was argued that the predominance of sovereignty will be the most challenging problem to overcome if Asian regional multilateralism is to develop into a stronger institutionalised structure with powers for the enforcement of rules. As Hughes describes it in the case of China:

“In effect, this has placed the tension between nationalism and the sanctity of states at the centre of China’s diplomatic and security culture. From the broader perspective of global politics, such a tension can of course be seen as a reflection of one of the main sources of instability in the international system [...]. The linkage of nationalism and

83 Rizal Sukma, Executive Director, Department of International Relations, The Jakarta Post, June 30, 2009, Indonesia needs a post-ASEAN foreign policy.
84 H Hermawan, Yulius P. et. al. The Role of Indonesia in the G-20: Background, Role and Objectives of Indonesia’s Membership. Jakarta: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Indonesia Office in cooperation with Department of International Relations, Parahyangan Catholic University, 2011.
85 The Jakarta Post, 31.03.2011. Opinion. „Building True ASEAN Community“. Yulius Purwadi Hermawan.; Sukma 2010; Based on its new legal status ASEAN as a group was invited to G20 and ASEM (Asia-Europe-Meeting) meetings.

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opposition to ‘hegemony’ with the legitimacy of the CCP, however, has given this tension a particular salience in the formation of China’s diplomatic and security culture.”

This prevalence of sovereignty and the fear of external interference into domestic affairs is not only characteristic for China but as well for the ASEAN members and other post-colonial states, though they are not always so deeply interwoven with the ruling regime’s legitimacy like in China. Many of these states face a serious challenge through the current economic crisis. The current crisis indicates the necessity of cooperation in larger institutional structures to protect their sovereignty from the challenges of globalisation. However, solid sovereignty and legitimacy are also a requirement for effective regional organisations, because only states with consolidated sovereignty are able to handle the responsibilities and the temporary weakening of sovereign rights going hand in hand with successful regional organisations. This is an especially important factor in Asian regionalism.

Considering the Chinese example, Kuik illustrates the dangers for national sovereignty and territorial integrity that make China wary of stronger rules-based institutionalisation in the security sphere or even preventive diplomacy. The problem is getting intensified by the regions geo-strategic outlook which poses the threat of outside intervention, from the U.S. in particular. Perceived from a structural power perspective it can be argued that the sovereignty problematic actually strengthens ASEAN’s structural power as a norm-entrepreneur. ASEAN’s norms are based on the preservation of sovereignty and were originally developed with the purpose to assist and strengthen state-building processes in the ASEAN countries. Additionally, there are no (sovereignty preserving) outside options in form of alternative security norms that can currently replace the ASEAN Way. The only alternatives would be bilateral defence arrangements, like the U.S. centred hubs-and-spoke network of bilateral defence agreements. However, alliance building from China’s side would only destroy its current successes by proving the China Threat theorists right and additionally carries the risk of an Asian arms race. Again it the origin of ASEAN and its norms should be considered which lies in the

86 Hughes 2010: 56.
89 Li 2009: 29.
fear of domination by outside powers. Thus although defence relations with outside powers (especially the U.S.) exist in the region, the regional powers see these as a rather temporary arrangement and not as a goal in itself.\footnote{Hack, Karl. \textit{Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1968}. London: Routledge, 2001.}

\textbf{Will Increasing Economic Multilateralism Oust Regional Security Multilateralism?}

The third critical argument relates to the increasing economic multilateralism in the region. It was argued that the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) will cause further divide within ASEAN and that economic multilateralism will diminish regional security multilateralism.\footnote{Camroux 2011.} To counter this argument it is important to note that the CAFTA is based on and was negotiated on basis of the \textit{ASEAN Way} aiming to create a mutually beneficial (in this case economic) relationship. The CAFTA is an economic agreement and does not offer any alternative set of norms and values to challenge or replace the \textit{ASEAN Way}. Additionally, it does not provide for any measures to deal with security issues despite those related to trade. One counter-argument is that the ASEAN members like to overemphasise the Chinese influence in the political economy and security sphere. This way they indirectly influence other actors like the U.S., India, Japan, Australia, the EU, and many more to follow suit and to negotiate increasingly on ASEAN’s terms and based on ASEAN principles of mutual benefit and equality.\footnote{Goh 2011.} One effect in this regard is represented in the growing interest by other external actors in establishing FTAs with ASEAN. Though not being part of this discussion, this could make for another valuable test case of the here applied approach to Structural Power Theory. Instead of analysing China’s structural power through the CAFTA as the power of an economically strong state to shape structures at will, the intentions by other external powers to negotiate FTAs could be analysed as outside options for ASEAN, which might lead to the limitation of all these actor’s economic power vis-à-vis ASEAN. These developments could indicate another sphere were structural power involves in favour of ASEAN.

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\footnote{Camroux 2011.}

\footnote{Goh 2011.}
Conclusion

The analysis of this paper investigated into the effects of China’s rise on Sino-ASEAN relations. Instead of applying the commonly used balance of power approach or analysing the potential of China’s increasing economic strength to dominate its Southeast Asian neighbours, the paper investigated the importance of ASEAN’s leadership in the regional multilateral arrangements, predominantly the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit, and of its role as a norm-entrepreneur in terms of structural power. Considering the example of China’s involvement and self-constraint in regional multilateralism as well as the PRC’s acceptance of the ASEAN Way as its guiding norm, the paper showed how ASEAN’s particular role in the ARF and EAS creates structural power in the association’s favour.

This structural favour derives from two interlinked ideational goods provided by ASEAN. The first is the increasing willingness of ASEAN to engage China and to satisfy its need for recognition. ASEAN diplomacy addresses this need and shows respect for Chinese foreign policy interests through among others (1) its support of the One-China Policy, (2) its support for multipolarity and anti-hegemonism and (3) by providing China a forum to make its voice heard. The willingness of China’s neighbours to pay respect to China’s interests and to recognise its status as a responsible regional actor, however, comes at a prize. Due to the ancient historical legacies and the experience of Mao’s support for the communist revolutions in Southeast Asia, China needs to build trust and reassure its Southern neighbours of its peaceful intentions. The key to reassurance lies in a foreign policy that is conform to regional norms, pro-status-quo and revisionist. Hence the second ideational good provided by ASEAN is its set of values and norms that guides regional multilateralism and provides for equal opportunities and inclusiveness.

As there are no alternative universally accepted regional norms the structural power gained from ASEAN’s role as norm-entrepreneur is currently not challenged by outside options. Additionally, it was analysed that the usual criticism regarding the shortcomings of the regional multilateral arrangements do not or only to a limited extend effect ASEAN’s structural power in regional multilateral diplomacy. The current trend toward widening EAS membership, resulting from China’s increasing multilateral involvement which boosts the fear in e.g. the U.S. to be left behind and lose influence in the region, in fact increases the need for
the ASEAN Way as guiding principle which represents itself in the U.S.’ decision to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

There it can be argued that ASEAN does matter as an agent of change regarding China’s future role in the region, although it needs to be acknowledged that China’s relations to the other major powers are still more important. However, to strengthen ASEAN’s ability to put its structural power to use, it needs to follow its path toward a stronger ASEAN Community. Considering that ASEAN’s lack of coherence does not diminish its structural power, it still sets limits to how ASEAN can effectively use this power in the long-term to safeguard its own interests. Because today China might be constrained by its desire for status recognition, but in the long-term its projection of a positive image might elevate it to the most effective form of hegemony. As Evelyn Goh argued “the most successful hegemons are those that preempt conflict”93. They shape others’ opinions, grievances and perceptions in a way favourable of the great powers positions. Then Asia might return to a situation similar to the ancient tributary system.

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93 Goh 2011: 27.
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