



A Single Identity while Facing Diversity? Exploring ASEAN Integration through Culture*

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[*Abstract*]

Since the creation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, the main objective of creating a “prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations” through regional integration remains slow. While the aims and purposes of the ASEAN include accelerating, promoting active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters concerning culture and cultural development, the desired ASEAN Integration through culture is still in question. As a multicultural region, the richness and diversity of cultures constitute both prospects and challenges. This paper discusses 1) the concept of integration vis-à-vis the ASEAN; 2) the ASEAN’s goals, policies, and initiatives, concerning culture as stipulated in the key documents of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community—Culture and Arts sector; and 3) the ASEAN identity and community vis-à-vis culture. In the end, this paper proposes a framework on the ASEAN integration through culture in the context of a single identity amidst cultural diversity.

* The preliminary version of this paper was presented at the 2019 ISEAS-BUFS International Conference: The Recognition and Construction of Southeast Asia as a Whole (Busan, South Korea, May 23-25, 2019).

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Keywords: ASEAN integration, culture, ASCC-Culture and Arts sector, ASEAN identity and community, cultural diversity

I . ASEAN as case study

Examining goals, policies, projects, and institutional structures that contribute to regional integration in the context of culture remains a developing facet of scholarship on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since its formation in 1967 as an attempt to harmonize and integrate its member countries—Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—ASEAN has become a fertile ground for such “attempts” to regional integration. In a region where plenty of cultures exist, coupled with national and transnational economic and cultural policies, such objective of integration through culture legitimizes the need to analyze ASEAN even further.

Culture alongside politics and economy is being recognized as an important foundation or pillar in building the ASEAN community. As such, ASEAN highlights the role of culture in the community’s sustainable development. In fact, its ministers responsible for culture promote and raise awareness on the cultural dynamism and vibrancy of the region. While culture remains a fundamental concept, scholars have admitted that it poses a considerable challenge to integration in the ASEAN (Kim 2011; Thuzar 2014; Ma 2015; Igboanusi 2017). Its member countries in the Southeast Asia are diverse and pluralistic in many ways. See for example the ethnic differences and religious beliefs, where 661(±) million people make up the community landscape in the region. Moreover, it is in Southeast Asia where one can find the largest Muslim populated country in the world (Indonesia); a Catholic-majority country (Philippines); two Buddhism sects—Hinayana and Mahayana (Myanmar and Thailand); and a Hindu-majority Island (Bali). The mere fact that there is a diversity of cultural ancestry and history in the region, ASEAN is a legitimate case study in problematizing the topic on integration through

culture. Culture as a topic of research in the ASEAN calls for a proper and deep understanding of reductionistic and holistic manifestations of values, norms, worldviews, and ways of life vis-à-vis the region's national, international, and regional policies on culture and cultural development. By examining and understanding the appropriate application of ASEAN policies on culture, the community might attain integration.

Given these arguments, one can say that ASEAN is a fascinating case study for studying the interaction between culture and regional integration. Two reasons occur: to begin, when discussing the ASEAN concept, people often relate this to other forms of regional integration (i.e., European Union). Looking at Europe's historical context for example, one can see that culture has an underlying commonality within its peoples. It has a common set of social and economic values, and high-level growth, all of which reflect a shared culture's foundation. Meanwhile, ASEAN's great diversity: socially, religiously, culturally, historically, and even in terms of development, stands in stark contrast. Thus, forming an ASEAN identity and community is an important step towards an exceedingly ambitious ASEAN integration. Second, it is still debatable that culture should be an element of the plan for regional integration. From the mantra "unity in diversity" as aimed by the ASEAN 2015, member countries' leaders discern that a comprehensive and holistic approach, including a socio-cultural aspect to complement political and economic community building, should be implemented.

Given these arguments, this paper seeks to contribute to the scholarship of ASEAN studies by proposing a framework on ASEAN integration through culture by examining the region's policies, actions, and initiatives on culture, as embedded in some ASEAN key documents.

II . The concept of integration

Integrate as a verb, in its simplest meaning, according to *Cambridge Dictionary* is “to combine two or more things in order to become more effective.” Likewise, its meaning in *Oxford English Dictionary* is “to combine (one thing) with another to form a whole.” From these meanings, one can see key terms such as “combine,” “effective, and “whole” to be salient aspects as to *why* there’s a need to integrate (i.e., to form a whole), and *how* to integrate (i.e., to combine effectively). Adding *-tion* to the word integrate makes it a noun, which posits a process, or means, or state, or the specific action/result of the root verb. Moreover, integration could be identified with *uniting, unifying, organizing in a group* of two or more units. Although the different usages of the word “integration” from different disciplines may form a specific concept in context, these differences still converge at a common point: the whole as the end-result should be the most effective, most efficient, or most economical way there is.

To date, the concept of integration in the ASEAN is often related to economic, political, and cultural, particularly in the regional level. Economic integration entails agreement among nations is formulated to reduce or eliminate trade barriers and agree on fiscal policies. It benefits all economies in numerous ways since it allows countries to specialize and trade without government interference. It leads to a decrease in costs and, as a result, a rise in overall wealth. On the other hand, political integration is where states, in certain periods, delegate their sovereignty to a supranational entity, particularly in the sector of foreign affairs and other key domestic policies. It spontaneously emerges in a certain phase in the process of economic integration, because of the spill-over effect (Ilievski 2015: 12). In other words, it could be claimed that there is a relation of concrete dependence between the processes of political and economic integration. Apart from economic and political integration, there is also cultural integration that can be understood as a form of cultural exchange. It basically happens when one person or group adapts to the practices and beliefs of another group without sacrificing their own. What’s

interesting with cultural integration, as it may sound simple, is linked to more complex concepts such as identity, gender, religion, language, traditions, regionalism, nationalism, to name a few; thus, making the process more difficult to achieve. In this light, one of the many things one should investigate therefore, is the possibility of integrating cultures; particularly *what* aspects of culture *can* be integrated at what cost and how.

2.1 Regional integration

The concepts of “region” and “integration” embody exclusive meanings. Region can be perceived as a manifestation of geographical proximity or a manifestation of economic cooperation. The former perspective posits an inert and passive stance, suggesting that countries or nations are recognized by their natural and physical features. Thus, a region can be understood and defined as a territory or an administrative area. Meanwhile, the latter posits a vigorous and active stance, suggesting that countries or nations are recognized how their political, economic, and institutional mechanisms are utilized to strengthen common interests while promoting national interests through negotiation, dialogue, and mutual cooperation. To harmonize these perspectives, Godehardt and Nabers propose both geographical and political criteria in defining a region: 1) *Essentialism*—sharing the same boundaries, having common natural borders and similar historical experiences; 2) *Interactionism*—defined by the level to which states interact or seek to interact and cooperate with one another; 3) *Institutionalism*—states are self-consciously creating international or regional institutions accordingly to advance their own goals; 4) *Reflectivism*—addresses the main framework for the emergence of regions; prescribes that a region should be constructed intersubjectively, thereby explaining its internal structures and criteria in determining membership (2011: 1-7). While these criteria are not absolute, pre-requisites in the make-up of a region, whether they are in proximity or not, mainly revolve around the members states’ communal interaction and recognition.

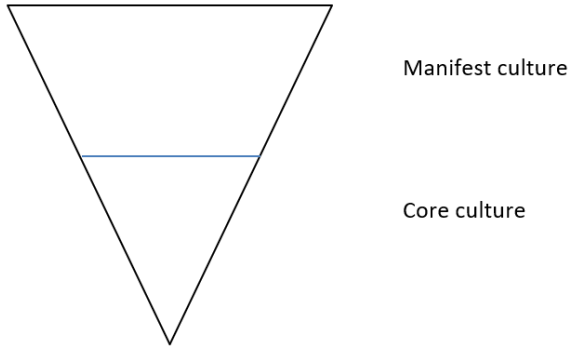
On the other hand, integration is a relationship among units in which they are mutually interdependent and jointly produce

system properties which they would separately lack (Deutsch et al 1957: 159). This conceptualization captures the basic rationale of *why* countries or nations choose and agree to join a cross-national/trans-national organization. The mere fact that each member complements one another in different aspects they might be deficient of produces a gestalt entity. In other words, by depending on each other, matters on economy, trade, culture, and politics can be enhanced in the national, international, and regional levels. Furthermore, Deutsch (1968: 192) specified four conditions needed for a supranational integration to be achieved: 1) Maintain and promote peace; 2) Ensure greater multi-purpose capabilities; 3) Achieve set tasks; 4) Carve a new identity and self-image for itself. Apart from the issues concerning security, economic, and political aspects, it can be argued that culture has a clear role embedded in the fourth condition. Moreover, objective compatibility or consonance of the major values of the participating populations should be present, thus permitting cooperation among them to be perceived as legitimate. This could be supplemented by indications of common subjective feelings of the legitimacy of the integrated community, making loyalty to it also a matter of internalized psychic compulsion (193). This assertion implies that to promote cooperation within the member countries of a region, identity and a common value system is needed. As such, one can surmise that regional integration entails the attainment of a sense of community by its members through proactive means.

2.2 Regional integration and culture

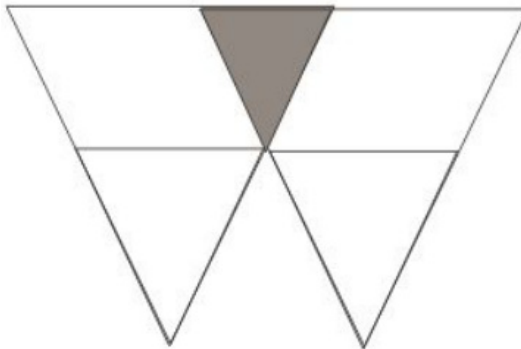
In this paper, culture is understood as the worldview and the values, rules, moral norms and actual conduct—as well as the material and immaterial products and symbols related to humans taken over from the previous generation; and try to pass over to the next generation and which in one or the other form differentiates them from human beings belonging to another culture (Gullestrup in Dosenrode 2008: 2). Culture is manifested in two levels: the basic, *core-culture* and the *manifest culture*. The former, is the fundamental worldview (e.g., nature of man as described in the Bible or the Koran), followed by the fundamental values (e.g., social responsibility), and the “not

perceivable present” (e.g., criteria of solidarity). On the other hand, the latter is the formalized morals and rules layer (e.g., practical rules for how to act or behave); the difficultly perceivable structural layer (e.g., social, and economic structures, administrative processes) and the “immediately sensible layer” (e.g., language, songs, law, rules) (77-78).



<Figure 1> Hans Gullestrup's culture model.

Furthermore, Gullestrup's model has the advantage of identifying the fundament of a culture and leaving space for a certain dynamism. It also shows that two different core-cultures may share common features of the manifest culture, although coming from different positions like democracy, which also explains why there may be different understandings of the 'same' feature. (4).



<Figure 2> Two cultures with shared manifest culture.

Apart from this concept of culture, one can see the practicality of why culture matters, and why one needs to analyze and understand cultures across cultures. Culture includes and relates to people, the foundation from which all institutions are created and organized. Even the history of economic development is fueled by culture. Moreover, Inglehart argues that culture has major social and political consequences, helping shape important phenomena from fertility rates to economic and democratic institutions (2000: 80). In other words, culture is the most important distinction among peoples where they define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and at the broadest level, civilizations.

While the concept of culture is multifaceted, it is clearly a variable in the process of regional integration. For one, culture and cultural identity played a significant role in the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). Even in the history of Germany, Brazil, Argentina and the US, culture proved to be a unifying factor for the different provinces to be states. With this in mind, Dosenrode hypothesized the relationship between regional integration and culture: 1) A successful and formidable integration process needs to imbibe both a shared core culture and manifest culture; 2) Integration project may be prone to crisis if it shares core cultures but not the manifest cultures, but they may develop a manifest culture along the line, and thus become more stable; 3) It will also be prone to crisis if the integration project shares only common manifest culture without sharing core culture; 4) Integration projects with lesser ambitions may succeed if actors share some common manifest cultures as well; 5) Integration projects are prone to fall apart if actors do not share a common core and manifest culture (17-18).

The analysis above suggests that culture could become one framework from which regional integration can be built. Placing culture therefore at the core of this endeavor presupposes that an emergence of shared regional identity amidst the varied socio-cultural profiles of the member countries should be created, or at least, realized by its population. Therefore, the question is how can

culture provide an alternative rationale and booster for integration particularly in Southeast Asia?

III. ASEAN and regional integration

Historically, the signing of the Bangkok Declaration in 1967 started the concept of ASEAN, a pivotal move signaling the need “to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in an equal manner.” Hund pointed out that ASEAN member countries’ foremost intention is to be a forum for mutual bilateral interaction and cooperation vis-à-vis political and economic concerns as effects of European colonialism (2003: 31). On the other hand, Jönsson claimed that the idea of ASEAN was centered on economic, social, and cultural cooperation (2010: 44). While the major purpose of ASEAN was not clear in its early inception, its major thrust then was to contain disputes within the region and insulate it from superpower conflicts (Piei 2000: 3).

In the same year, the “ASEAN Way” was informally launched, a set of rules centered on the principle of non-interference and consensus decision-making, which serves as a criterion in the style of operation and guide of conduct that dictated the way member countries should act. As Katsumata sees: “It was a collection of normative principles among which the non-interference in internal affairs and the mutual respect for the individual sovereignty were the most important ones” (2003: 106-107). While ASEAN became an avenue for its member countries to “talk” and negotiate with “dialogue partners” like Australia, Canada, China, European Union, Japan, India, North and South Korea, New Zealand, Russia, USA, as well as other regional and international organizations, its very identity, economic structures, and social formations are continuously shaped by powerful external forces and influences (Beeson 2002: 186-187).

As stated in the Bangkok Declaration, ASEAN calls itself a community, implying a sense of togetherness among its member countries. With diverse purposes on matters of economic growth, social progress, cultural development, and peace and stability, ASEAN articulates co-existence and cooperation, or “caring” and

“sharing,” values needed in forming a community. Only in recent years, ASEAN used Community (with a capital C) when the organization articulated its formal strategies and policies for integration as stipulated in the Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community (Enverga 2015: 17-19) In this light, one can see that ASEAN is consciously manifesting itself not just a regional organization that binds its member countries through policies, but also as an inter-people organization sharing practices, experiences, and discourses.

To further strengthen an envisioned open, dynamic, and resilient integrated regional community with a common regional identity by the year of 2020, an initiative for ASEAN was proposed in its seventh summit meeting in Bali, Indonesia in 2003. The main purpose of this initiative was to revitalize ASEAN’s development in three areas, namely economy, security, and culture. Thus, the creation of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). AEC is the realization of the region’s end goal of economic integration as it takes care of the economic development initiatives of ASEAN in further improving the economic relations among its member countries and consequently boost the region’s economic interest. The concept of economic integration¹ in ASEAN as envisioned by AEC, pivoted from “acknowledging the strength of the interdependency between ASEAN economies by proposing an intensification of the regional integration efforts” (Cockerham 2010: 175). This paved for the development of the ASEAN Vision 2020 that outlined the original, long-term core objectives and tasks that envisioned the creation of a single market and manufacturing center. With this, components such as global integration, equitable development, and competitive economic region were helmed as regional ideologies. As a result of the integration of a single market, there is an addition of the free flow of production factors in the

¹ Although undoubtedly, ASEAN integration prioritizes the region’s political-economic aspect, various problems occurred during the integration process, particularly the commitment of member countries in doing local reforms remained an issue. Moreover, local immigration laws and regulations hamper the realization of a free movement of professional workers; thus, the commitment in law reformation of the member countries poses a major problem to the integration process (Chia 2011).

region, such as products, services, capital, investments, and labor (Carpenter et al, 2013: 6-8). As seen by several scholars, ASEAN's economic goals were given more focus and much attention by its member countries (Stubbs 2000; Beeson 2005; Kim 2011; Dosch 2016). Concrete policies on regional understanding and agreement are pushed for economic stability in the region. One example is the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) that regulates the economic concerns in all member countries. As the desire to remain competitive and relevant remain a top priority, the AEC has almost become synonymous with the ASEAN Community itself. While economy is still a significant priority in all its member countries, integration will be difficult if the ASEAN people are not brought closer socially and culturally (Vejjajiva 2017: 347-348).

APSC on the other hand, ensures regional peace and a just, democratic, and harmonious environment for ASEAN. Guided by the ASEAN charter and APSC Blueprint, the member countries pledged to rely exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences and regard their security as fundamentally linked to one another and bound by geographic location, common vision, and objectives. It has the following components: political development; shaping and sharing of norms; conflict prevention; conflict resolution; post-conflict peace building; and implementing mechanisms. While the APSC assures the existence and significance of ASEAN in the changing international political climate, its policies are more of accommodation rather than policy direction. APSC's policies are created through the interaction between countries within the Southeast Asian area, as well as actors from both inside and outside the region, thus contributing to the complexity of security concerns (Putra et al 2019: 46-47). For one, this approach prevents ASEAN from resolving some of its member countries' domestic issues, such as the Rakhine conflict and the South China Sea dispute.

Lastly, ASCC² aims to contribute to the creation of an ASEAN

² The size, scale, and breadth of the ASCC cuts through macro to micro sectors such as information and media, social welfare and development, gender, rights of women and children, rural development and poverty eradication, civil service, disaster management and humanitarian assistance, and finally, culture and arts. Following the framework of this paper, the following discussions will focus on the latter.

Community that is people-centered and socially responsible, with the goal of achieving long-term solidarity and unity among ASEAN's member countries and people by forging a common identity in the creation of a caring and sharing society that is inclusive and harmonious, and where people's well-being, livelihood, and welfare are improved. A quick overview of ASCC, in line with ASEAN Vision 2020, envisions Southeast Asia as "united in cooperation as a community of caring societies." Thus, the community will promote social development cooperation aimed at improving the standard of living of disadvantaged groups and the rural population, by encouraging active participation from all sectors of society, particularly women, youth, and local societies. Moreover, standing on fundamental premises and taking a long-term perspective, one could infer that the core of ASEAN is its socio-cultural community, conceived as a vehicle for developing a sense of what Southeast Asian identity is, creating a regional awareness, and nurturing mutual understanding among the peoples of ASEAN (Severino 2006).

Echoing Deutsch's (1957) classic definition of regional integration as "the attainment, within a territory, of a "sense of community" and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a long time, dependable expectations of peaceful change among its population, one can perceive that ASEAN integration is complex. While there are steps to advance the realization of ASEAN integration, there remain doubts for its achievability (Kim 2011). Fauzisyah argued that "the region's distinct social, institutional, economic and political circumstances explain the theoretically unpredicted slow integration process" (2017: 23-24). Clearly, the ASEAN is still in the process of regionalization and is still not much of an integrated community. The organization remained primarily a discussion forum, with state leaders urging a shared ASEAN value and identity, but no one was willing to push for advancement by pooling their national sovereignty into a supranational body. While integration therefore remains as a core concept or ideology of the ASEAN mantra, it seems that the heterogeneity of its member countries in terms of political, economic, and socio-cultural attributes hamper this process and vision.

IV. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

Also known as the “third pillar,” ASCC gives the impression that it is the least prioritized aspect or dimension, just behind economic and political. As discussed, this third pillar may be the most complicated since Southeast Asia is so diverse in the socio-cultural context. While economic and political communities might be argued and settled in a macro-standardized level, cultures and communities remain in the basic communities or grassroots. While being “third,” there is no doubt that ASEAN recognizes the role of the socio-cultural aspect as equally important. In fact, even the AEC Blueprint 2025 supports its political-economic visions within a cultural context in terms of identity building. In other words, even the AEC envisions an encompassing participation, governance, inclusiveness, sustainability, resilience, of ASEAN’s population as an identifiable whole. This is further concurred by the former ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan’s argument that “management of ethnic, religious and identity differences in one of the world’s most culturally diverse regions will be equally as important as creating economic opportunities.”³ He also called for this subject to be discussed in all forums concerning ASEAN integration, because such dialogue was critical for promoting mutual understanding, thus preventing conflict (Pimoljinda 2013: 52-65).

As a working body of ministers, ASCC’s specific goals are: 1) Enhance commitment, participation and social responsibility of ASEAN peoples through an accountable and inclusive mechanism for the benefit of all; 2) Promote equal access and opportunity for all, as well as promote and protect human rights; 3) Promote balanced social development and sustainable environment that meet the current and future needs of the people, 4) Enhance capacity and capability to collectively respond and adapt to emerging trends; and 5) Strengthen ability to continuously innovate and be a proactive member of the global community. To answer the growing need to bring the ASEAN people “together,” ASCC formulated the ASCC blueprint. This blueprint, implemented from 2009 to 2015, became

³ To illustrate, Supavanich argues that although economic growth has reduced poverty in ASEAN, it has not been pro-poor and pro-women (2016: 12).

ASCC's strategy and planning mechanism, and further improved to address "new and emerging challenges." By creating ASCC blueprint 2025, it "opened a world of opportunities to collectively deliver and fully realize human development, resiliency and sustainable development." This blueprint was adopted by ASEAN Leaders during the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and will chart the path for ASEAN integration in the next ten years. ASCC Blueprint 2025 therefore specifically aims for an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community that is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, dynamic, and one that engages and benefits the people (Supavanich 2016: 23). Its 18 Key Result Areas and 109 strategic measures are translated to workplans of sectoral bodies which will: 1) Recognize the importance of social protection (e.g., human rights and sustainable development of the region); 2) Recognize differences among ASEAN member countries to be included in national priorities; 3) Support a multi-sectoral approach on capacity building, institutional strengthening, research and monitoring, and evaluation; 4) Complement national efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (31).

From this background, one can argue that managing the indifferences/uniqueness of each member country forges a sense of shared destiny of peace and prosperity for all ASEAN peoples based on common ASEAN values with an ASEAN identity is in fact asserted in ASCC key policies. Moreover, when banking on culture, there is a need to capitalize from the region's cultural richness and diversity, thus contributing to the theoretical and practical discourse on the elusive ASEAN integration (Thuzar 2014). If the main rationale of ASCC is to bring people at the core of its regional community building, then it becomes even most significant for it aims to have a people-oriented, people-centered region/community by focusing on the individuals to the regional integration efforts.

While both ASCC and its blueprint provide much needed framework for the socio-cultural pillar, much of the progress has been due to policies and initiatives at the domestic level of member countries. This explains why several regional problems remain unsolved.⁴ This also means that externally, ASEAN is not seen to be helping countries attain the goals specified in the ASCC vision. In

addition, while a consensus is present in supporting the different goals stipulated in the vision, including the initiatives and projects in the blueprint, ASSC lacks a clear image of “what kind” of a community ASEAN wants to be (Vejjajiva 2017: 349). Moreover, “culture” is only mentioned twice in the ASSC blueprint 2025: “A community that embraces tolerance and moderation, fully respects the different religions, cultures, and languages of our peoples...;” (14) and “A dynamic and harmonious community that is aware and proud of its identity, culture, and heritage...” (16). In other words, while culture is an important issue in identity and community-building or integration in the region, as stipulated together with “identity” and “heritage,” ASSC blueprint 2025 is deficient in defining and advocating what it is.

As a response to this limitation, the creation of the culture and arts sector under ASSC spearheads the development of the narrative of ASEAN identity, as part of the continuing efforts to promote awareness and foster a shared identity while celebrating and strengthening cultural dynamism and vibrancy in the region. Through its key documents (e.g., Agreements and Declarations, Strategic Plans, Statements, etc.) efforts are being realized to promote and develop small and medium cultural enterprises (SMCEs) to bolster regional development of the digital and creative economy.

The culture and arts sector is driven by the ASEAN’s rich cultural diversity and heritage. This is a significant rationale which attests that regional integration in Southeast Asia will not be successful if it just focuses on material aspects of integration. With this, the sector created policies to be an “engine” for economic growth and sustainable development, a “building block” for social cohesion and transformation, and an “asset” for regional pride as well as a “vehicle” for forging closer friendship and understanding. Guided by the Strategic Plan on Culture and the Arts 2016-2025, the sector’s key priorities include: 1) deepening ASEAN mindset and identity to increase appreciation for the histories, cultures, arts,

⁴ Recently, the case of the Rohingyas as a regional problem, brought to the attention of the international audience, did not produce any effective regional or gestalt response from ASEAN.

traditions, and values of the ASEAN region; 2) promoting ASEAN’s cultural diversity to foster intercultural understanding; 3) leveraging on culture for inclusive and sustainable development; 4) harnessing the use of culture for creativity, innovation, and livelihood-creation; 5) promoting regional cooperation to raise capabilities in cultural and heritage management; and 6) promoting the role of culture for ASEAN to become a proactive member of the global community. These would-be-policies are then manifested into published agreements and declarations, strategic plans, and statements.

To realize the sector’s goals and objectives, cooperation in the culture and arts sector is led by the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) and supported by the Senior Officials’ Meeting on Culture and Arts (SOMCA). SOMCA works in partnership with the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (ASEAN COCI) through the Sub-Committee on Culture (SCC) to implement projects and address policy issues related to the sector.

<Table 1> Major sectoral bodies/committees on culture and arts.

Name	Description
ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) Related meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AMCA+3 ● AMCA+China ● AMCA+Japan ● AMCA+ROK 	ASEAN sectoral body tasked with developing strategic regional solutions for culture and arts cooperation, enhancing mutual understanding and solidarity among the peoples of ASEAN.
Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts (SOMCA) Related meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SOMCA+3 ● SOMCA+China ● SOMCA+Japan ● SOMCA+ROK 	ASEAN body comprising senior representatives of the Ministries and/or Agencies in charge of culture and arts from the ASEAN member countries. Monitors the progress of programs and recommendations of AMCA.
ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI)	Responsible for the formulation, implementation and review of culture and information projects for funding by the ASEAN Cultural Fund (ACF).
ASEAN Sub-Committee on Culture (SCC)	Tasked with promoting, intensifying, and advancing ASEAN regional cooperation in culture and arts under the direction and approval of COCI.

Efforts to mainstream the role of culture and arts in achieving peace and progress in the region are manifested in several policy and project initiatives put in place each year by playing a part in promoting a culture of peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding. The ASEAN City of Culture and the Best of ASEAN Performing Arts are two flagship initiatives. Music, literature, performing arts, contemporary arts, cuisine, and cultural festivals, and cultural policy conversations are among the other activities. Moreover, preservation and conservation of tangible and intangible heritage, support, and promotion of creative and cultural industry (SMCEs), arts exhibitions, and capacity building for museum professionals are also accomplished. Aside from these, the sector is also maximizing the digital technology by creating and continuously developing the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive (ACHDA) website, and the virtual reality of ASEAN UNESCO heritage sites which can be enjoyed at the ASEAN Cultural House in Busan, South Korea.

The most important, and perhaps most difficult, endeavor for the sector is leading the construction of the ASEAN identity narrative. This is in part of the continuing efforts to promote awareness and foster a shared identity in the region. By collaborating with dialogue partners and various stakeholders, the sector continuously raises awareness and appreciation on the rich histories, cultures, arts, traditions, and values of the ASEAN region.

4.1 Promotion of ASEAN awareness and sense of community

ASEAN aspires to inculcate a sense of belonging as well as mutual knowledge among member countries about their culture, history, religion, and civilization through the promotion of ASEAN awareness and sense of community. To attain a truly ASEAN community, the sector is promoting an ASEAN mindset as the framework for designing and crafting regional policies, programs, projects, and promotional strategies concerning culture. This framework is intended to develop a regional (ASEAN) shared cultural discourse to strengthen the ASEAN Community.

In line with this framework, the Declaration on ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity: Towards Strengthening ASEAN Community

(Bali, November 17, 2011) stipulates respect, protection, promotion, and utilization of ASEAN cultural diversity. ASEAN member countries should work together to conserve and promote cultural diversity in accordance with international obligations and duties. Also, they should ensure the utilization of cultural diversity with a view to achieving the establishment of the ASEAN Community. As a caveat, while member countries expand regional collaboration, they must guarantee that commercial use of culture does not jeopardize ASEAN society's integrity, dignity, or rights.

Clearly, ASEAN member countries will rely on culture to achieve their goals. As a valuable resource, culture should be utilized as 1) component for natural disaster repair and natural disasters, as well as other emergency situations in the region; and 2) component for the improvement of well-being and welfare of the people towards the development of a caring and sharing community. As a community, ASEAN member countries will collaborate on human resource capacity building for the preservation and protection of cultural heritage and achievements through documentation, workshops, seminars, trainings, expert exchanges, grass-roots people-to-people exchanges, youth camps, cultural study tours, and the sharing of best practices to raise the level of knowledge and experience in the ASEAN region. Moreover, the convening of regular cultural dialogues bringing together intellectuals, renowned artists, and experts in the field of culture who will address issues concerning matters on culture is encouraged.

The ASEAN's policies on matter of the ASEAN community are further acknowledged and reaffirmed in the Hue Declaration on Culture for ASEAN Community's Sustainable Development (Vietnam, April 19, 2014). In this key document, cultural creativity and diversity are emphasized to guarantee the viability of the ASEAN Community. It is also stipulated in the document that necessary steps should be made towards the realization of a people-centered ASEAN Community, including developing a measurable and effective role for culture, and by harnessing the potential of culture in development and sustainability.

There are 22 action plan lines related to the promotion of ASEAN awareness and sense of community. Projects were developed to support ASEAN identity and community awareness, to improve coordination in disseminating print, broadcast, and multimedia materials on ASEAN identity, to support school activities promoting ASEAN awareness, to promote ASEAN sporting events, to support the role of the ASEAN Foundation, to encourage interfaith dialogue and media coverage, and to promote youth exchanges.

4.2 Preservation and promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage

The concept of cultural heritage is clearly explained in the ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage (Bangkok, July 25, 2000). The term encompasses 1) significant cultural values and concepts; 2) structures and artifacts: dwellings, buildings for worship, utility structures, works of visual arts, tools, and implements, that are of a historical, aesthetic, or scientific significance; 3) sites and human habitats: human creations or combined human creations and nature, archaeological sites and sites of living human communities that are of outstanding value from a historical, aesthetic, anthropological or ecological viewpoint, or, because of its natural features, of considerable importance as habitat for the cultural survival and identity of particular living traditions; 4) oral or folk heritage: folkways, folklore, languages and literature, traditional arts and crafts, architecture, and the performing arts, games, indigenous knowledge systems and practices, myths, customs and beliefs, rituals and other living traditions; 5) the written heritage; 6) popular cultural heritage: popular creativity in mass cultures (i.e. industrial or commercial cultures), popular forms of expression of outstanding aesthetic, anthropological and sociological values, including the music, dance, graphic arts, fashion, games and sports, industrial design, cinema, television, music video, video arts and cyber art in technologically-oriented urbanized communities. The ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage further mandates its member countries to “identify, delineate, protect, conserve, promote, develop and transmit to future generations the significant cultural heritage within its territory and to avail of regional and international assistance and cooperation, wherever necessary and appropriate.”

While completely respecting each member country's sovereignty and national property rights, ASEAN acknowledges that member countries' national cultural legacy is shared by Southeast Asia, and it is the responsibility of ASEAN to safeguard it.

Moreover, ASEAN will work together to protect antiquities and historic works of art, as well as movable and immovable cultural properties that are manifestations of national history, of great structural and architectural importance, of outstanding archaeological, anthropological, or scientific value, or associated with exceptional events, and are to be considered or declared National Treasures, Protected Buildings, or Protected Artifacts. Historic locations, cultural landscapes, scenic beauty zones, and natural monuments should be identified, acknowledged, and safeguarded. ASEAN member countries should take all necessary steps to protect cultural assets from all human and natural threats, including those posed by armed conflicts, territorial occupations, and other forms of public unrest.

In acknowledgment of people's right to their own culture, ASEAN member countries should work together to nurture and preserve living traditions and folkways while also protecting its living bearers. Given this mandate, they will develop both formal and non-formal learning programs for living traditions in both rural and urban settings, emphasizing the dignity and wisdom of these traditions while supporting creative variety and different world perspectives and values. To further strengthen and preserve local material and immaterial cultures on the other hand, member countries should recognize their local community of origin. Thus, communal intellectual property rights should be recognized and prevention of illicit transfer of cultural property should be reinforced.

Furthermore, the works of prominent sages, philosophers, artists, and writers from the past and present serve as permanent beacons of insight and illumination, wellsprings of guidance and direction for present and future ASEAN peoples. Their maintenance, recording, and promotion are considered of the utmost importance. With this, popular modes of expression in mass cultures are a

valuable aesthetic, intellectual, sociological, anthropological, scientific, and historical resource, as well as a foundation for social and intercultural understanding. The preservation of excellent “popular” traditions and heritage should be encouraged and supported by the ASEAN.

ASEAN member countries should find ways to improve the ASEAN value and cultural dignity. Systems at the local, national, and regional levels in contemporary society should be utilized in a good way to create direction and a vision for genuine human development, especially in the areas of education, media, and governance and commerce. With this, ASEAN member countries should continue to engage in cultural exchanges, networks, and collaboration, by allocation the needed resources for cultural heritage activities.

Matters on cultural heritage are further reinforced through Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation in ASEAN (Laos, September 6, 2016). Cultural heritage cooperation is conceptualized in this key document as a response to growing threats to cultural heritage, including illicit cultural property trafficking, natural disasters, climate change, unsustainable tourism, rapid urbanization, and threats arising from poverty and marginalization. Two main policies are presented: First, advancing tangible cultural heritage cooperation by protecting, preserving, and promoting cultural heritage. Second, strengthening intangible cultural heritage cooperation by 1) determining areas of collaboration in the field of intangible cultural heritage and use them to spread ASEAN principles and camaraderie among the people; 2) encouraging regular and long-term interpersonal interactions stressing the rich traditions and shared experiences, ASEAN ideals and cultural expressions; 3) encouraging collaborative cultural scholarship and linkages; 4) encouraging the documentation and distribution of intangible cultural heritage and traditions.

ASEAN has selected 14 action lines with 47 linked initiatives for the protection and promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage. Its action lines include developing or improving national legislation and regional instrument mechanisms to protect, preserve, and promote

ASEAN cultural heritage and living traditions in each member country by 2015; documenting the region's cultural heritage; conducting risk assessments and preparing emergency responses to threatened significant cultural heritage, capacity building in heritage management, preserving, and developing traditional handicraft villages; and developing or improving national legislation and regional instrument mechanisms to protect, preserve, and promote ASEAN cultural heritage and living traditions in each member country.

To date, the launching of the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive website is considered as the major outcome of the ASEAN policies on cultural heritage. This is an effort to digitize the valuable historical cultural heritage of ASEAN countries. The website was made public on February 27, 2020; and to date, 267 cultural assets from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand are available to the public. This system supports images, audio recordings, and video data that are available on other Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT) DATA digital archive systems, as well as an expanded capability to handle three-dimensional models of physical objects. In other words, all specimens of ASEAN cultural heritage can be freely “experienced” by anyone in the world.

4.3 Promotion of cultural creativity and industry

On the promotion of cultural creativity and industry, ASEAN will promote cultural creativity activities and industries towards innovations, generating livelihoods and supporting economic development in ASEAN member countries. To address such goal, regional cooperation, and partnership for wider ASEAN markets in the cultural industry are expected from member countries. In this context, ASEAN member countries' government and private sectors are encouraged to support the development of Small and Medium-sized Cultural Enterprises (SMCEs).

To foster cultural creativity and industry, ASEAN member countries will advocate for the protection, promotion, and enforcement of intellectual property rights and community rights of cultural products, in accordance with their respective international commitments. At the same time, ASEAN member

countries will promote regional cooperation and partnership for wider ASEAN markets in the cultural industry, and creative industry (e.g., film, music, animation, etc.).

On the other hand, the ASEAN also seeks to attain economic growth and poverty alleviation by optimizing appropriate use of tangible and intangible cultural assets. In realizing such goal, one major initiative is promoting ASEAN as a hub for cultural and creative industries, human resource development, and training by fostering collaboration between educational institutions and the creative industries on knowledge exchange, technology transfer, capacity building, product and design creation, and arts curriculum development.

Moreover, partnerships with cultural institutions (e.g., inter-government institutions, foundations, academies, cultural centers, etc.) between ASEAN member countries and dialogue partners on programs and projects related to cultural conservation, cultural and arts education, cultural events and festivals, and creative industries are continuously being organized. Looking at these initiatives on culture and arts, ASEAN has consistently highlighted the cultural diversity among its member countries and has consistently maintained the primacy of state sovereignty and, as such, has favored cultural policies that allowed countries to showcase their respective national cultures (Enverga 2018).

Undoubtedly through ASCC, ASEAN is guided to be characterized by a culture of regional resilience, adherence to agreed principles, spirit of cooperation, collective responsibility, and will promote human and social development, respect for fundamental freedoms, gender equality, promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of social justice (ASCC Blueprint 2025: 6). Meanwhile its culture and arts sector pushes for the promotion of ASEAN identity which will be the basis of Southeast Asia's regional interests and the collective personality, norms, values, beliefs, and aspirations as one community.

V. ASEAN identity and ASEAN community vis-à-vis culture

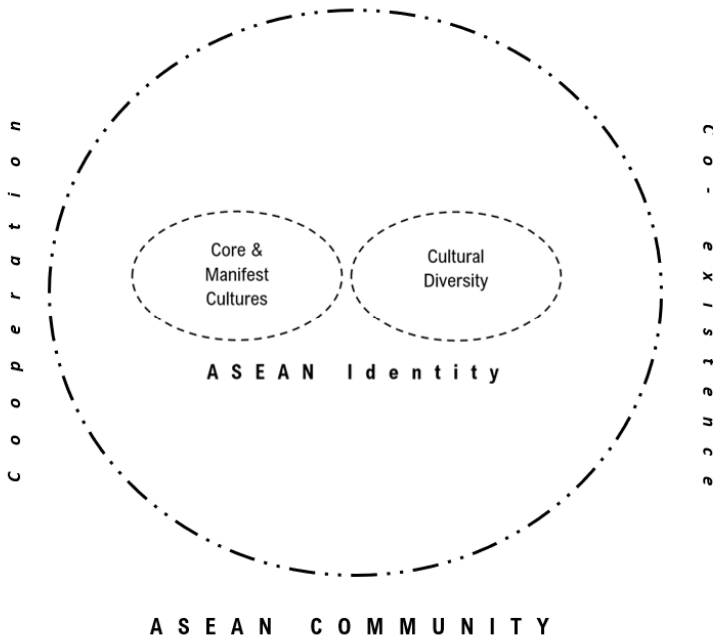
ASEAN has diverse peoples and therefore has diverse socio-cultural systems. Each member country is diverse as well as unique. Their cultural norms and traditional values are largely ingrained in both its socio-cultural practices and government institutions. It should be expected that some of these ideals and customs might make cultural encounters difficult. Thus, establishing “flexible” cultural connections at a regional level proves to be arduous. Even when such exchanges exist, there is concern that they might be affected by ethnic tensions, political preferences, or religious intolerance. In any cultural interaction, the modes and limitations should be addressed explicitly, to avoid clashes of conflicting identities.

While there are several recognized factors (e.g., language, religion, socio-cultural institutions, etc.) that pose as challenges for the ASEAN as a community, these should not be seen as an obstacle but rather an encouragement to all member countries to develop multi-faceted ways of harmonious and peaceful coexistence. The ASEAN community’s cultural diversity itself provides member countries and their peoples with numerous opportunities to learn about and respect one another’s assets and skills. This opportunity is considered as being largely enforced by the ASEAN as guided in the ASCC blueprint 2025, and the culture and arts sector’s key documents.

If one sees that there is an absence of common identity (i.e., cultural diversity) in the region, ASEAN as a regional body may formulate new ideologies and narratives on identity based on democratic principles, respect, and tolerance. In other words, the concepts of ASEAN identity and ASEAN community is demystified through fostering a sense of belonging, strengthening unity in diversity, and developing mutual understanding among member countries regarding their culture, history, religion, and civilization. Moreover, promoting the conservation and preservation of ASEAN cultural heritage to ensure its continuity will increase people’s awareness and understanding of the region’s unique history and cultural similarities and differences between and among ASEAN member countries, while protecting ASEAN cultural heritage’s

distinctiveness.

On the other hand, the perceived strong cultural biodiversity in ASEAN member countries is neither a strength nor a weakness but an opportunity to the region (Chia 2013: 4-5). This implies that member countries can only choose how to position themselves to gain maximum benefit from culture. Simply put, member countries that have a more stable state and efficient resources can take full advantage of it (e.g., creating strong historical and cultural links throughout Southeast Asia) and will surely be “winners” in the region. As Jetschke and Ruland argues: “they do so because developing institutional isomorphism increases their legitimacy, their access to resources and therefore their survival capabilities” (2009: 183). Thus, by highlighting the uniqueness of a member country’s culture (and identity) in the ASEAN community, its culture is legitimized as asset and leverage.



<Figure 3> Culture in the core of the “imagined” ASEAN identity and community.

From the above discussion, this paper asserts that ASEAN identity and community are constructed through strong selfhood and cultural ties. While being pre-requisites for a successful regional integration; the ability of different regional actors to possess strong sense of identity with one another is also required. The implication drawn from this assertion is that having a common identity, or a cultural consistency of the regional actors will most likely reduce conflicts or misunderstanding in the region, thus allowing them to achieve common goals.

Considering the merit of such strategies, the region in its diverse cultural uniqueness and differences, highlights the most basic and fundamental question thus far: how can the ASEAN integrate with such diversity in worldviews, religions, languages, traditions, values, and beliefs of its member countries? If this diversity expresses or creates cultural identities, how then can integration through culture be possible?

VI. ASEAN integration through culture

As discussed, Deutsch's concept of integration highlights the mutual interdependency of its units. While integration refers to the importance of the whole, it also refers to the unity of the different parts; and while integration reduces cultural differences, it may lead to the diffusion of a dominant culture and dilution of local cultures. Using this as background, this paper suggests two perspectives that may become the scenario of ASEAN integration through culture. First, harmony of shared common interests amidst complexity or diversity; and second, emergence of hybrid cultures amidst complexity or diversity. Given this picture, ASEAN integration through culture should undergo coordination and cooperation of the cultural differences of peoples to promote understanding between the different member countries in the region. Also, this step can avoid the negative effects arising from the different goals and policies regarding culture.

In the periphery, integration through culture in the ASEAN context considers the region's heterogenous levels of economic

development vis-à-vis the political will of members countries. The possibility of a real integration might be in jeopardy because if state leaders themselves may not see an absolute necessity of the creation of a “shared” cultural community. Even when there is an assumption that more benefits will be reaped if all the member countries can work together to build a community, the question “who has both capability and willingness to take the first step?” should be answered. Nonetheless, this paper argues that these arguments will clearly affect how each member country prioritizes its culture and identity as an asset to the region. If taken as a premium, then, proper, and sufficient resources should be invested for the dissemination of the member country’s culture and identity. With political will on the helm, appropriate policies and laws can be taken to account to boost member countries’ historical and cultural linkages throughout the region. As such, language-cultural camps, workshops, immersion, tourism, regional conferences, and expositions are staple strategies and initiatives employed by “politically-motivated” member countries.

Taken to account, the issue of “identities” may hamper the ASEAN integration through culture. Conflicts are difficult to avoid with around 1,500 ethnic groups using around 1,300 languages and dialects in Southeast Asia. Considering ethnicity and religious beliefs for example, communities have forged unique beliefs, ideologies, and value systems about the many issues concerning the region. As a result, local identities still prevail over the “perceived” ASEAN identity. A holistic, inclusive, and pragmatic way of integrating cultures therefore may still be a topic for discussion. Practicality will dictate the feasibility of bilateral relations for example, instead of a homogenous relation with all the member countries. Not all plans or strategies might be deemed appropriate to each and everyone in the region.

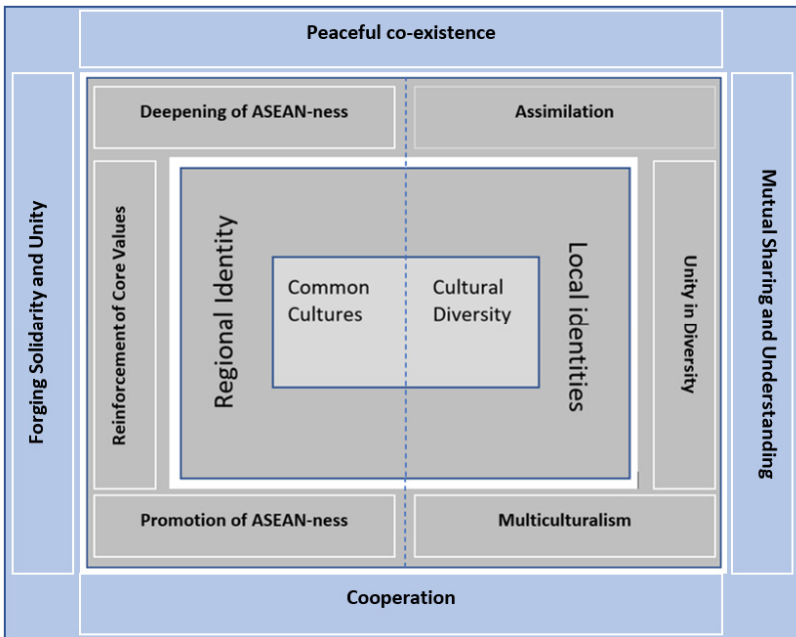
The image of ASEAN integration through culture, where ASEAN peoples have mutual respect by helping and understanding each other without leaving their own traditions, is laudable yet utopian. Using shared core and manifest cultures as framework, ASEAN integration through culture can revolve around deliberate promotion of processes and sentiments of mutual identification,

loyalties, and sense of belongingness. Local and regional machineries concerning culture should ensure peaceful coexistence (through tolerance and understanding) and cooperation within the culturally diverse region.

To capitalize the region's diversity, three approaches are suggested. First is assimilation of cultures which realizes how distinct ethnic groups grow to share a shared culture as a natural result of having the same socioeconomic opportunities as other ethnic groups. This process entails the gradual substitution of new cultural and behavioral standards for old ones. Then, once initiated, the process unavoidably and irreversibly leads to complete integration as manifested by a typology of assimilation patterns⁵ (Gordon 1964). Second is multiculturalism, which realizes the lowering of barriers and borders to provide citizens with opportunities, thus ASEAN member countries can learn about each other's cultures. With this, cultures can freely intermingle and in turn could enhance respect, understanding, and tolerance within the region. There should be a "reconciliation" of cultures, rather than a mixing of cultures or a sensation of being culturally divided. To date, this is a significant attribute particularly to ASEAN migrant workers, where one's cultural heritage and lived experiences blend. This paper asserts that it is possible to integrate elements of multiple cultures and create something unique that is satisfying for each actors involved. Moreover, multiculturalism reinforces people's comfort and familiarity with both their ancestral culture and the culture of the country or region in which they have established. It applies not only to immigrants from other nations, but also to their offsprings who, despite being born and reared in the receiving community, are likely firmly rooted in their families' heritage culture at home (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). It may also apply to people

⁵ 1. Acculturation: newcomers adopt language, dress, and daily customs of the host society (including values and norms). 2. Structural assimilation: large-scale entrance of minorities into cliques, clubs, and institutions in the host society. 3. Marital assimilation: widespread intermarriage. 4. Identification assimilation: the minority feels bonded to the dominant culture. 5. Attitude reception assimilation refers to the absence of prejudice. 6. Behavior reception assimilation refers to the absence of discrimination. 7. Civic assimilation occurs when there is an absence of value conflicts and power struggles.

who live in ethnic enclaves, where heritage cultures are likely to be passed down through generations, as well as people from visible minority groups who may be identified as being different from the majority ethnic group even if their families have lived in the receiving society for generations. Furthermore, as Mistry and Wu tend to argue, the ethnic component of multiculturalism is not solely a reaction to prejudice. It also symbolizes a sense of pride in one's heritage and a desire to preserve it (Umaña-Taylor 2004: 12). Third, unity in diversity which is concerned with recommendations, policies, and strategies in both local and regional level that will foster regional appreciation by putting cultural differences into practice. By this, member countries should capitalize in contributing and promoting the transmission of local knowledge, skills, arts, and information to both national and international levels. As shown, there have been innovative initiatives focused in developing a close network based on mutual understanding and joint exploration of common challenges. Engagements not only in local affairs, but



<Figure 4> Proposed framework for the ASEAN integration through culture.

rather in regional and international affairs should be a common picture particularly in the academic and intellectual exchanges. By maximizing practical ways of disseminating cultures and identities, transnational and transregional engagement and negotiation could be feasible, and respectful.

This paper places an exclusive, single ASEAN identity thrust by the mantra “one vision, one identity, one community” in question. While the findings exhibit that the ASEAN is propelled by common economic, political, and cultural goals, its identity and community remains heterogenous at its roots. Brushing aside strong tendency to privilege “major” cultures and marginalizing or exoticizing smaller ethnic groups, the ASEAN is a plethora of unique cultural manifestations and socio-cultural negotiations. In this light, one can say that ASEAN’s identity delves on the plurality of its member states. The staple food for example, is both rice and noodles; sentiments of being an “Asian” is being both “Filipino” and “Malay;” wanting to invest in the Chinese markets (China and Hongkong, Taiwan, Singapore) but consciously grappling with anti-Chinese sentiments as aggravated by maritime dispute. In other words, ASEAN identity and community is demystified, being a gestalt concept. From this point, it is clear why ASEAN aspires regional cooperation and solidarity in matters of culture as seen in actions, policies, and sustained initiatives embedded in ASCC-culture and arts sector key documents. The proposed framework for ASEAN integration serves as an alternative paradigm, and a pragmatic endeavor for its member countries to be “culturally united” with each other while being “true” and “unique” in their actuality.

VII. Limitations and unexplored vistas

This paper only explored the culture component of ASCC on the surface. Future research should consider how other factors (e.g., cultural diplomacy, state and regional politics, discrimination, regional schizophrenia, cultural dissonance, etc.) may affect the ASEAN integration through culture. Researchers are also encouraged

to embark on the issues of transcultural contact and negotiation (e.g., public health and medicine, nutrition sciences, disaster responses, environmental management, tourism, migration, digital revolution, pop culture, etc.) and the different modalities for creating a sustainable cultural landscape in the ASEAN.

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Received: Apr. 1, 2022; Reviewed: May 3, 2022; Accepted: June 30, 2022

