**Social Media and Minority Issues in ASEAN Context**

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**Introduction**

In my talk today, I will focus on the issue of “minority” through the concept of “cultural identities in ASEAN. This is because ASEAN has been defining “cultural identities” loosely to include ethnic, religious, and linguistic dimensions. Furthermore, the concept of majority/minority groups in society has not been frequently used in ASEAN. And, more recently, ASEAN has adopted the term “vulnerable groups”, following many UN documents, to categorized women, children, people with disability, the elderly, indigenous people, and ethnic minority people---recognizing the intersection of cultural disadvantaged and the physical disadvantaged groups. Three discussion points are:

1. The ASEAN context of minority and cultural identity issues
2. The ASEAN Identity Narrrative:

---inherited-ascribed identity

---constructed cultural identities paradigm to localize and incorporate human rights principles in the ASEAN context.

1. The ASEAN Action Plans (2020-2025) which may incorporate the issue of Social Media and ASEAN Identity.

**I. The ASEAN Context**

1. In 2007, the ASEAN Charter was adopted by the 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS) to establish an ASEAN Community consisting of 3 pillars:

ASEAN Political/Security Community (APSC)

ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

ASEAN Social/Cultural Community (ASCC)

Article 2 of ASEAN principles

2(e) Non-interference in the internal affairs of AMS

2(l) *Respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the peoples of ASEAN, while emphasizing their common values in the spirit of* ***unity in diversity****.*

Article 20 Consultation and consensus decision-making process

And, at the 14th ASEAN Summit in 2009, the leaders adopted the **Declaration on** **the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community, 2009-2015**,

the 3 pillars’ Blueprints, and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Strategic Framework and IAI Work Plan 2 (2009-2015).

2. During the first decade, sectoral bodies and the Senior Official Meetings of the 3 communities worked separately in silos. After reviewing the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community, 2009-2015, the ASEAN leaders charted the path for ASEAN Community building over the next ten years with a document titled **ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together** or **the ASEAN Community Vision 2025**. (Cross Sectoral and Cross Pillar Collaboration)

1. **ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together**, is a forward-looking roadmap that articulates ASEAN goals and aspirations to realize further consolidation, integration and stronger cohesiveness as a Community. ASEAN is working towards a Community that is 'politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible'.

**ASEAN Identity: The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprints**

1. **The ASCC Blueprint (2009-2015)** states:

***(E) Building ASEAN Identity***

*The ASEAN identity is the basis of Southeast Asia’s regional interests. This identity includes collective personality, norms, values and beliefs as well as aspirations as one ASEAN community.*

*Objective: Create a sense of belonging,* ***consolidate unity in diversity*** *and enhance deeper mutual understanding among ASEAN Member States about their culture, history, religion, and civilization.* (Blueprint 2009-2015).

2. The **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025** which came out in 2016 claims the success of ASEAN’s socio-economic progress in the past two and a half decades “heralded by remarkable human and sustainable development.” And, at this critical juncture, to go beyond the current progress in the ASCC and the region, the document states:

*5.5 A dynamic and harmonious community that is aware and proud of its identity, culture, and heritage with the strengthened ability to innovate and proactively contribute to the global community.*(ASEAN ASCC Blueprint 2025: 3)

The slogan “**ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity**” has been promoted.

**II. The Narrative of ASEAN Identity**

Earlier this year, on 31 August 2020, ASEAN held a Cross Sectoral and Cross Pillar Consultation on the narrative of ASEAN Identity. The document recognized two types of values/identities, i.e. **(1) ascribed inherited values**   **(2) constructed values.**

**2.1 Ascribed-Inherited Identity Formation and Its Application in ASEAN** **during the Cold War (WW II to 1970’s)**

The document defines ascribed-inherited values and identities of people in Southeast Asia region as values and identities

“*which have been passed on for generations, through the natural process of human interaction that develops into various type of communities with much similarities. …. The traditions, customs and beliefs since the pre-historic era laid the foundation of the process of an ethnic community blending in Southeast Asia. ….. The process of interaction and acculturation continued to take place during the era of Ancient Kingdoms of Southeast Asia through alliances, marriages, barter, quests, etc. …. The acculturation later on became the Southeast Asian community’s DNA as a pluralistic community that appreciates and respect diversity.”.*

**World War II** marked the **end of colonialism** and the world was divided into capitalistic-democratic regime and socialist-communist regime. After independence, cultural identity and cultural interactions became an important issue for emerging nation-states. Cultural identity was debated in the discourse on national identity and national security. Many **non-communist governments**, especially those who have been colonized, were tugged and torn between adopting modernism of the western culture or maintaining non-western culture. Cultural hegemony of colonial powers brought about resistance and rejection of western culture and appear in the form of nationalism and national identity.

In **non-communist** Third World countries **nationalism was adopted as a necessary ideology.** Acculturation and assimilation or integration were cultural-ethnic relations’ policies adopted. In **communist countries**, Cultural Revolution represents a form of a Marxist anti-tradition and anti-capitalist concept was used as a tool for nation building.

Among ASEAN-5, national security was the most important reason given for the role of military rule in non-Communist countries. While adopting capitalism as economic policy, different forms of cultural-ethnic policies were adopted.

* Thai governments viewed the country as culturally and ethnically homogeneous, consisting only of Thai people. Those who were ethnically non-Thai were outside the Thai social structure. They lived as separate groups but inter-mixed with Thais, having free cultural and economic exchanges. During the military dictatorial regimes (1960-1973), communism was viewed as threatening to national security. Assimilation was the ethnic relations’ concept adopted by the Thai Government to co-opt ethnic minorities into Thai social structure. All citizens should adopt Thai culture.
* In case of Malaysia and Singapore, the concept of integration was adopted when they established their nation-states in 1954. Both Malaysia and Singapore recognized the co-existence of the Chinese, the Malays, people of Indian origin, and expatriates in the countries. At the same time, national security was the main concern of the governments in terms of nation building. Adoption of integration as ethnic relations’ policy implies that all cultural/ethnic groups are recognized as coexisting in the country. However, in practice, they are not treated equally. Malaysian Government adopted “*bhumibutra*” policy, giving priorities to people with Malay descent.
* As for the Philippines, after being colonized by the Spanish and the Americans, and with the existence of multi-ethnic groups living in the many islands of the country, the ethnic relations policy adopted by the government has been somewhat ambiguous from the eyes of lay observers. **Tagalog was declared the official national language** of the majority group of the country. Ethnic groups who speak other languages have been considered minority groups.
* Similarly, in Indonesia, after being colonized by the Portuguese and the Dutch, and with large number of ethnic groups living in more than 10,000 islands, cultural/ethnic relations’ policy of the government was also ambiguous if not confusing. The policy of *panjasila* was adopted by Sukarno right after independence. At the same time, *bahasa* Indonesia was declared official national language. Non-Muslims who do not speak *bahasa* Indonesia were considered minority groups.

While recognizing cultural and ethnic differences, but because of national security paradigm adopted, the countries mentioned above built their nations using nationalism as the uniting tool. However, in case of **Timor Leste,** the majority Indonesian Government was not successful in using nationalism as a tool for integrating the Timorese into Indonesian nation. Timor Leste gained independence subsequently.

**2.2 The Construction of “ASEAN Identity” during 1970’s to 2000’s and the ASEAN Charter**

**At the turn of 1980s**, after the fall of the communist regime, cultural pluralism became obvious.

The Universal Decoration of Human Rights **(UDHR)** introduced in 1948 and the ratification of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights **(ICCPR)** and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights **(ICESCR)** which came into effect in 1976 brought about paradigm shift in the interpretation of self- identity and cultural identity related to the issues of freedom of expression, freedom of movement, self-determination, etc.

ASEAN realized the need to reconstruct the understanding and interpretation of “cultural identity”. **To support civil rights, cultural identity needs to be redefined and to redefine cultural identity, civil rights must be observed.**

The universal norms on human rights were often seen by almost all ASEAN states as an enforcement of Western values and norms to their cultures and traditions. The term “Asian Values” was introduced and advocated by Singapore and Malaysia to counter the human rights argument. Asian values give emphasis on the importance of local needs, norms and values, at the community rather than individual level.

**The debate** on human rights principles and Asian Values went on for 2-3 decades leading to the ASEAN mutual understanding that ASEAN must not reject universal principles of human rights. But the application must be adjusted the local ASEAN conditions

**Through a localization process, ASEAN Member States consciously constructed ASEAN human rights structures, set up their own agenda, pace and steps to implement human rights without feeling their policies were part of the Western agendas.**

Thus, **in the ASEAN Charter**, the three main structures (using the term “community”) of ASEAN are: (1) political-security community, (2) economic community, and (3) socio-cultural community. Structures for human rights are not included in the community structures but are presented in the form of commissions/committee. The three identified human rights commissions are: ASEAN Inter-Government Commission on Human Rights **(AICHR)** established in 2009, the ASEAN Commission for Women and Children Rights **(ACWC)** established in 2010, and the ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers **(ACMW)** officially institutionalized in 2017.

**The Narrative of ASEAN Identity** defines constructed values/identities as:

*ASEAN Identity were cognizant and actively constructed with the establishment of ASEAN in 1967. In the midst of the Cold War, through the Bangkok Declaration, ASEAN envisioned to achieve economic growth, social progress and cultural development which will contribute to the establishment of regional peace, security and stability, by focusing on the aspect of cooperation between ASEAN Member States.*

**In other words, at the ASEAN regional level, the goal is to achieve regional unity among ASEAN Member States, while not rejecting human rights principles. And, to not abandon the Asian Values context, ASEAN Member States agreed that state security, economic development and integration, as well as political stability are more important than civil and political freedom.**

**III. ASEAN Cultural Identity in the 21st Century**

ASEAN has been able to define the term “cultural identity” somewhat loose except when dealing with the issue of separatist movement and terrorist movement. After the adoption of the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime or the Palermo Convention in 2000 and the fall of the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, the issue of terrorism and transnational violent crime became public open issues. Cultural identity profile became essential tool adopted by national security agencies. At the same time, to tackle cross-border crimes, cooperation among ASEAN Member States are more important. The role of **social media** has been identified as the main source of communications among terrorist groups. At this stage, it is clear that the ASEAN Member States need to re-examine the human rights and cultural identity paradigm—an evolutionary process.

**Cultural Identity (Minority) and Social Media in ASEAN**

**Post-modern society recognizes democracy and equality** of different organic cultural groups in the society. No discrimination shall be made based on gender, class, culture or ethnicity.

1. **Compatible relationships Forms** of cultural-relations include cultural pluralism as well as, acculturation, assimilation, and integration of ethnic groups.
2. **Non-compatible relationship** may be seen in civic movements such as militant and separatist movements.

In both cases, cultural conflict may have started as conflict between cultural groups but developed to become conflict between one ethnic minority group and the state whose members belong to the majority group. **Social media** and hate speech have been effective communication tools linking the **in-groups** and out-casting the **other-groups**.

For **the in-group**, **social media**, helps maintain the sense of belonging to the same culture and identity can be tight or loose depending on the desire of those involved.

By using **social media in a counter process**, the effect can be creating the negative impact of manipulating the marginals and the powerless.

ASEAN perspectives on “minority” has been loosely defined and prefer the term “**cultural identity**”, to include both the cultural majority people and also cultural minority people with disadvantaged characteristics, encompassing national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic.

ASEAN also adopts the term “**vulnerable group**” to include people who are physically disadvantaged characteristics, i.e., women, children, the elderly, and people with disability.

At the same time, recognizing that people may have multiple disadvantaged characteristics which intersect, or intersectionality, ASEAN further construct ASEAN identity to be **inclusive of all dimensions** with the term “**cultural diversity**”.

**ASEAN Future Work Plan Related to Minority and Social Media**

Because of time constraint and adopting the cross-pillar, cross-sectoral principles of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, I will focus on two ASEAN identities which have been collaborating on the issues related to minority and social media, i.e., Senior Official Meetings on Transnational Crime (SOM TC) and AICHR.

**1. SOM TC---The ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2019-2025)** ----4 priority areas

Priority Area 1: Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

* 1. Promote an approach of moderation and tolerance in the maintenance of peace and security through, amongst others, encouragement of dialogue and conflict prevention.
  2. Strengthen good governance, human rights and the rule of law to prevent the rise of radicalisation and violent extremism
  3. Engage communities, particularly those communities vulnerable to prevent the rise of radicalization and violent extremism
  4. , 1.5, 1.6 Youth, Women, Religious leaders and organizations
  5. Develop early warning systems

Priority Area 2: Counter Radicalisation and Promote De-radicalisation

2.1 Develop counter-radicalization program

2.2 De-radicalisation in rehab. And reintegration prog.

2.5 Develop community policing strategies to counter radicalization and violent extremism

Priority Area 3: Law Enforcement and Strengthening National Legislation Related to Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

3.1 Ratify, introduce appropriate domestic legislation to enable ratification of Inter. Instr. pertaining to terrorism

3.3 Support the implementation of the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism

3.4 Strengthen the capacity of law enforcement

3.5 correctional service officers

3.6 Establish a national coordinating mechanism within the criminal justice system…

3.7 Sharing information

3.8 cooperation amongst border control agencies

Priority Area 4: Partnership and Regional Cooperation

1. **AICHR Five-year Work Plan (2021-2015)**

Priority Area 1: Promote the full implementation of ASEAN instruments related to human rights

* 1. Facilitate the formulation of frameworks for HR cooperation based on the AHRD
  2. Promote effective implementation of international HR treaty obligations

--Inter-regional dialogue on HR mechanisms with other regional, national and international HR mechanism

--Design and conduct a regular training program on the implementation of Inter HR treaty obligations undertaken by ASEAN Member States for government reps of AMS

Priority Area 2: Strategies for cooperation to promote and protect human rights

2.1 Develop HR strategies to address challenges in building the ASEAN Community with focus on mainstreaming HR in all pillars/sectors, realizing HR protection mandate ……..with a focus on vulnerable groups such as women, children, people with disabilities, and older persons

--Consultation on inclusive education for vulnerable and marginalized groups

2.2 Identify the HR matters of interest to ASEAN and develop common approaches and positions on the identified matters

2.3 Support thematic studies on HR in consultation twith relevant ASEAN bodies

--Study on grievances mechanisms

--Freedom of religion and belief

--Freedom of opinion and expression

2.4 Facilitate sharing information, experiences and practices among the AMS on the HR grievances system

--Consultation on HR grievances mechanism to counter radicalism and violent extremism

--Consultation on victims-oriented protection to counter radicalism and violent extremism

2.5 Promote a mechanism for coordinating a HRBA and remedies in ASEAN

2.6 Strengthen cross-pillar and cross sectoral collaboration on HR and gender equality, including support to gender mainstreaming efforts across ASEAN community pillars.

--Initiatives to share best practices in addressing human rights issues on women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, older persons, indigenous people, vulnerable groups

Priority Area 3: Policy support for ASEAN Member States / ASEAN Sectoral Bodies

3.1 Identify HR instruments for accession and ratification by AMS

3.2 Promote favourable conditions based on HR principles and existing domestic laws for the rights of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, vulnerable and marginalized groups

--Consultation on favourable conditions based on HR principles and existing domestic laws for the rights of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, vulnerable and marginalized groups

3.3 Facilitate information sharing among ASEAN stakeholders on the ASEAN Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, inclusive, resilient, healthy and harmonious society

--Dialogue on the culture of prevention in ASEAN

3.4 Provide policy support and technical assistance on HR to ASEAN Sectoral Bodies in addressing cross sectoral/cross pillar issues

--AICHR dialogue with the ASEAN Sectoral Bodies on emerging issues on HR in the Digital Age.

Priority Area 4: Engagement with stakeholders and partners

* 1. Engage stakeholders and partners in dialogue and consultation for the promotion of human rights, social cohesion, peace and tolerance
  2. Promote synergy among the state and private sectors to PP/HR
  3. Improve cooperation with national, regional, and inter institutions concerned with the PP/HR

--ASEAN forum on grievance mechanism and services providers for HR

Priority Area 5/6: Capacity building and public awareness / Other Tasks

**Conclusion**

I have attempted to show how ASEAN dealt with the human rights issues which has been labelled as western. Instead of classifying people of diverse characteristics into majority/minority groups, ASEAN prefers to treat each group separately, and hope that they can co-exist under the slogan “unity in diversity”. During the period after WW II and the Cold War, for nation-building purposes, ethnic relations policies were implemented by the ASEAN-5 non-communist nations---with some success and failures.

The ratification of many human rights instruments during 1970’s and afterwards, forced ASEAN nations to consider incorporating human rights paradigm in the formation of ASEAN regional structure. ASEAN Member States with different inherited-ascribed values called Asian Values, debated the human rights discourse and agreed not to reject human rights but to adjusted and localized to fit domestic context. ASEAN constructed the concept of “cultural identity” to encompass national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities. The goals of regional economic and political integration are identified as high priority over rights of individuals or civil and cultural rights.

The turn of the millennial marked a great paradigm shift in ASEAN mindset regarding human rights. The 9/11 event, the rise of terrorism, the bursting of internet and impacts social media forced ASEAN to evolve further to co-exist with other regional mechanism. On the topic of minority and social media, the SOM TC Plan of Action for 2019-2025 and the AICHR 5-Year Plan (2021-2025) are some of the attempts proposed to deal with the challenge facing ASEAN in the up-coming decade.