When do Developing Nations Mimetically Adopt Global Norms?

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Abstract

Since the early 2000s, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been reforming their association, by adopting a new humanitarian norm – in particular, what can be regarded as the norm of humanitarian security, centered on the belief that international institutions should address domestic humanitarian concerns, arising from issues such as ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, and the abuse of political power. Why have they been doing so? Why have they gone humanitarian, thereby adopting a new norm? The present study argues that the ASEAN members have been "mimetically adopting" the norm practiced by the advanced industrial democracies in Europe and North America, with the intention of enhancing the prominence of their association in today’s global society. They have been doing so, in a socially-threatening environment, whose elements include downplaying and/or disregarding.

Introduction

A normative change has been taking place in Southeast Asia. Since the early 2000s, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been reforming their association, by adopting a new norm founded on humanitarianism. In particular, they have been adopting what can be regarded as the norm of humanitarian security, centered on the belief that international institutions should address domestic humanitarian concerns, arising from issues such as ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, and the abuse of political power.

Why have they been doing so? Why have they gone humanitarian, thereby adopting a new norm? Humanitarianism characterizes the post-Cold War development of international institutions, in particular, the United Nations (UN) and European institutions such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In this respect, in what sense should the diffusion of the norm from Europe/the global society to Southeast Asia be understood, or in what terms can ASEAN's adoption of a new norm be explained?

In an attempt to account for the case of ASEAN, the present study refines the "mimetic adoption" thesis, centered on the proposition that developing nations mimetically adopt norms championed by the advanced industrial countries, for the sake of international prominence (Katsumata 2011). In particular, it addresses the conditions under which mimetic adoption takes place, by focusing on the social environment. To put it briefly, by drawing on the mimetic adoption thesis, the present study argues that the ASEAN members have been mimetically adopting the norm practiced by the advanced industrial democracies in Europe and North America, with the intention of enhancing the prominence of their association in today's global society.
They have been doing so, in a socially-threatening environment, whose elements include downplaying and/or disregarding.

In what follows, the first section focuses on the adopting of a new norm by the ASEAN members. The second section deals with some theoretical issues. The third section attempts to provide a sound explanation for the case of ASEAN. The concluding section explores the implications of the finding.

1. Normative Change in Southeast Asia

1.1. Adoption of a new norm

The ASEAN members have been adopting what can be regarded as the norm of humanitarian security, centered on the belief that international institutions should address domestic humanitarian concerns, arising from issues such as ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, and the abuse of political power. Most notably, in October 2003, they adopted the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, setting out a plan to promote community building in three areas, namely, security, economy and society. Elements of a security community include “conflict prevention,” “conflict resolution,” “post-conflict peace building,” as well as the promotion of human rights and democracy in Southeast Asia. Elements of a socio-cultural community include disaster management and relief (ASEAN 2003, 2004b, 2004a, 2004d).

By adopting a new norm, the ASEAN members have been departing from their traditional diplomatic norm, encapsulated in the notion of the “ASEAN Way” of diplomacy. The ASEAN Way norm emphasizes state sovereignty and autonomy, on the basis of the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of other members and decision-making through consensus. In accordance with this norm, the ASEAN members had for a long time sought to maintain the unity of their association and to stabilize the Southeast Asian region. They had done so, although there had always been numerous sources of humanitarian security concerns in Southeast Asia for decades. However, in recent years, they have sought to strengthen the ability of ASEAN to address humanitarian concerns, by adopting a more flexible approach to state sovereignty.

It can be said that the ASEAN members have already began to translate the norm into actions. The construction of an ASEAN security community has already begun. In August 2005, several ASEAN members – Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines and Brunei – sent their troops to the Indonesian province of Aceh, thereby joining the EU in monitoring the peace agreement between the government and the rebel force. In May 2008, in the aftermath of the cyclone disaster, the Southeast Asian countries established an ASEAN humanitarian task force which coordinates international aid operations in Myanmar. This also reflects their flexible interpretation of state sovereignty. Moreover, in February 2011, following a series of border clashes between Cambodia and Thailand, ASEAN announced that it would dispatch observers to the disputed area to prevent further armed clashes between the two parties (ASEAN 2011).

Albeit slowly, their human rights diplomacy has also been changing. Although they had for a long time adhered to the principle of non-interference, they have placed human rights issues on the agenda of ASEAN diplomacy. In particular, in ASEAN meetings, they have been dealing with the issue of Myanmar. Symbolically, in September 2007, the foreign ministers held a meeting whose sole purpose was to address human rights abuses there. At this meeting, in response to the crushing of
pro-democracy demonstrations, they “demanded that the Myanmar government immediately desist from the use of violence against demonstrators” (ASEAN 2007c). It is worth noting that Article 14 of the ASEAN Charter, signed in November 2007, stipulates that “ASEAN shall establish an ASEAN human rights body” (ASEAN 2003, 2004b, 2004a, 2007a). One instance which symbolizes a change ASEAN’s practice in this area was the election of the Philippines as the chair of a series of ASEAN meetings in 2006-07. According to alphabetical order, it was supposed to be Myanmar’s turn. Nevertheless, the ASEAN members elected the Philippines, which was next in line, thereby conforming to international public opinion, which was critical of the Myanmar government.

**Intriguing aspects**

For IR theorists, the case of ASEAN is intriguing, in that ASEAN has been adopting a new norm, although at least three factors have remained largely constant. First, the level of pressure from the Western powers has always been limited. From the perspective of realists, material powers are central to institutional development (Krasner 1993; Mearsheimer 1994). However, in the case of ASEAN, the great powers such as the US and the EU have made little attempt to coerce this association of minor powers to adopt a new norm. When ASEAN announced its plan for a security community in 2003, the Western powers were rather indifferent. With regard to human rights issues, the Western powers are certainly concerned with the situation in Southeast Asia. Yet the level of Western pressure on ASEAN has been limited. The US and the EU have not imposed or threatened to impose economic sanctions on ASEAN as a whole, although they have done so on an individual country, namely, Myanmar. They sometimes suggest that they would not forge a free trade agreement with ASEAN due to the problem of Myanmar; nevertheless, in reality, they have on a bilateral basis sought stronger economic partnerships with many of the Southeast Asian countries (US Embassy in Singapore 2007; AHN Media Corp 2007; ASEAN and the EU 2007, 2009).

Second, transnational activists have not been able to involve themselves in the decision making of ASEAN, to persuade policy makers of the appropriateness of the new norm. For constructivists, transnational activists can persuade countries into internalizing the appropriateness of new norms and translating them into policies ()(Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). They do so by gaining access to policymakers, since persuasion requires direct contacts ()(see Risse-Kappen 1994; Checkel 1997). However, in the case of ASEAN, transnational activists have had few opportunities to persuade policymakers of norm appropriateness. In Southeast Asia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have always had a hard time in gaining access to the decision-making structure of ASEAN. To be sure, NGO activities have become more salient today than they were in the 1970s. To illustrate, regular meetings of the ASEAN People’s Assembly (APA) have been held in the 2000s, bringing together Southeast Asian activists who are concerned with issues such as human rights and democracy. However, the role of these transnational activists has been constrained. As one of the chief organizers of APA notes, the interface between

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1 It is worth adding that, in parallel with these developments at the governmental level, business relations between Western multinational corporations and their Southeast Asian counterparts have been sound. The former have been expanding their business activities in Southeast Asia for decades by making direct investments, regardless of the status of ASEAN’s liberal reform.
ASEAN and APA has been severely limited (Morada 2007, pp. 58-66). If transnational activists cannot influence official policies from inside the policymaking mechanism, they have to do it from outside. This relates to the next point.

Finally, the level of social pressure from the global society has remained either low or constant. The relevance of social pressure has been addressed in the constructivist literature in IR. Some have demonstrated that, since countries are concerned with their international legitimacy, they may be "shamed" into adopting humanitarian norms by transnational activists (Risse and Sikkink 1999, esp. 15; also see Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 1998, 635). Similarly, several other authors have shown that countries respond to international criticism and change their policies, so as to avoid opprobrium, stigma, shame or a loss of reputation (Johnston 2008, Chapter 3; Avdeyeva 2007; Moravcsik 1995; Schimmelfennig 2001; also see Goodman and Jinks 2004; Gillies 2010). However, in the case of ASEAN, the relevance of social pressure should not be overestimated. Among various humanitarian security issues in Southeast Asia, the central concern of Western NGOs must be the human rights abuses taking place in countries such as Myanmar. Two things should be noted here. First, the level of social pressure on ASEAN has been low, in that the targets of the "shaming" strategy of Western NGOs have been individual countries – in particular, the military government of Myanmar – rather than the Southeast Asian association as a whole. To illustrate, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued a number of reports and statements on individual countries, but not on ASEAN (see Amnesty International 2007; Human Rights Watch 2007, 2003, 2000, 1998a, 1998b). Second, if there has been any, the level of social pressure has been largely constant, in that the Western world has always been critical of ASEAN's human rights diplomacy. If we are to focus on the media report, in the late 1990s, a large number of articles appeared in the newspapers in Europe and North America, critically reporting ASEAN's decision to admit Myanmar as a new member. Yet this certainly does not mean that the level of criticism at the time was higher than that in other periods. In other words, it is hard to argue that the West became less critical of ASEAN, once the Southeast Asian association admitted Myanmar as a new member. The issue of Myanmar has always been a contentious issue, complicating ASEAN's relations with the West. The decision of the US to boycott the ARF meeting in 2005 epitomizes the complexity of the issue.

Bearing in mind these intriguing aspects, why have the ASEAN members been adopting the norm of humanitarian security? What are their motives? The next section put forward an original theoretical perspective.

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2 Perhaps the only exception is the network of ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), the activities of which started in the late 1980s. Participants of ASEAN-ISIS do have access to the ASEAN governments. Yet it should be noted that they tend not to challenge official positions (Katsumata 2003, pp. 93-111; Ball, Milner, and Taylor 2006, pp. 174-188). Thus, in the area of conflict management, NGO activities have not been significant. It is hard to argue that ASEAN-ISIS had actively promoted the ideas concerning conflict management, although it might have played a role in the establishment of the ARF itself (Katsumata 2003). In addition, in the area of human rights diplomacy, NGOs have always found it hard to influence ASEAN's decision-making.
2. Mimetic Adoption Thesis

The "mimetic adoption" thesis addresses the issue of norm diffusion by focusing on the agency of developing nations: these nations mimitically adopt norms championed by the advanced industrial countries, for the sake of their international recognition. In particular, with the intention of gaining international prominence, these nations do so when they are in a socially-unfriendly environment, in particular, when they are downplayed/disregarded, and thus effectively treated as irrelevant players.

The mimetic adoption thesis summarized above is associated with the sociological literature on institutional isomorphism, encompassing the world culture literature. In the field of sociology, sociological institutionalists have demonstrated that the mimicking of external models explains the isomorphic structures of various organizations, such as firms, schools, hospitals and nation states. For example, almost all nation states have national flags, airlines, and similar educational systems. They all seek similar high-tech weapons, and have tripartite military structures, with an army, air force and navy (see Meyer et al. 1997; Thomas et al. 1987; Scott, Meyer, and Associates 1994; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Finnemore 1996).

However, at the same time, there is an important difference between the perspectives of the sociological institutionalist literature and of the mimetic adoption thesis advanced in the present study: while the former focuses on the "diffusion" of political innovations on a global scale, the latter concerns the "adoption" of new norms on the part of developing nations. By focusing on diffusion on a global scale, sociological institutionalists successfully identify institutional isomorphism across units. Yet the drawback of this kind of approach has been a neglect of actors' agency (Finnemore 1996, 1999, 163-164: Hall and Taylor 1996, 954). In particular, they are rather silent on the question of when actors adopt political innovations. The mimetic adoption thesis fills this gap, by providing the actors' side of the story. It does so by drawing not only on the sociological institutionalist literature but also on some experimental studies conducted by social psychologists.

This effectively means that the mimetic adoption thesis infuses a new element into the existing IR literature on norm diffusion. The existing literature tends to downplay the agency role of local actors (Acharya 2004, 242). Its main focus is on the activities of developed countries and global organizations led by such countries, as well as transnational activities spreading from the developed world to other places (Finnemore 1993, 565-597; Gheciu 2005, 973-1012: Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998). In contrast, the mimetic adoption thesis proposed here focuses on the agency of developing nations. It addresses their voluntary behavior, independent of external coercion, persuasion, or social pressure.

In this respect, it is worth underlying the main characteristics of mimetic adoption, by comparing it with a similar kind of norm adoption. There are two kinds of norm adoption for the sake of international recognition, influenced by a socially-unfriendly environment: "socially-pressured adoption" for the sake of international legitimacy, responding to "shaming" or criticism; and "mimetic adoption" for the sake of international prominence, dealing with downplaying or disregarding (Table 1). The former is a reactive act, for the sake of securing international legitimacy, prompted by a social environment which involves a clear intention to bring about policy change in a specific issue area, such as human rights. The latter is voluntary behavior, for the sake of gaining international prominence, influenced by a social environment which does not involve any intention to bring about policy change. The rest of this section discusses the mimetic adoption thesis in detail.
Table 1. Norm adoption for recognition

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<th>Socially-pressured adoption</th>
<th>Mimetic adoption</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social environment</td>
<td>Shaming/criticism</td>
<td>Downplaying/disregarding</td>
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<td>Audience's intention</td>
<td>Intended to bring about policy change</td>
<td>Not intended to bring about policy change</td>
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<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Reactive policy change</td>
<td>Voluntarily policy change</td>
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<td>Aim</td>
<td>International legitimacy</td>
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2.1. Why mimetically adopt?

At the basis of the mimetic adoption thesis lie two key insights of the sociological literature on institutional isomorphism, in particular, the world culture literature. The first is about mimetic behavior: with the intention of securing their international recognition or gaining international prominence, developing nations mimetically adopt political innovations of the advanced industrial countries. The notion of "mimetic isomorphism" has been one of the key themes in the sociological institutionalist literature for decades (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 151-152, 154-155; Mizruchi and Fein 1999). John Meyer and his colleagues observe that the nations in the periphery commonly copy those in the center, but not vice versa (Meyer et al. 1997, 164).

The focus here is on the pursuit on the part of developing nations of international recognition for its own sake. In this respect, mimetic adoption should be distinguished from instances of norm adoption in which international recognition is sought for material reasons – in particular, for domestic political survival. Governments in the developing world may adopt new norms to gain international legitimacy, so as to enhance their domestic political legitimacy needed to stay in power (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 903; Hawkins and Humes 2002, 242). Mimetic adoption should be distinguished from this kind of behavior in that it is driven by the actors' concern with international recognition for its own sake.

The second is about symbols: political innovations of the advanced industrial countries carry symbolic weight, and this explains why they are adopted by developing nations seeking to gain international prominence. The focus of the world culture literature is on the political innovations which have been widely supported by members of the international community, such as national flags (Cerulo 1993), high-tech weapons (Eyre and Suchman 1996; Suchman and Eyre 1992), university education (Schofer and Meyer 2005), environmental protection (Frank, Hironaka, and Schofer 2000) and female suffrage (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997). Controversial policies have insignificant symbolic appeal, and do not become objects of emulation. The apartheid policy of South Africa a few decades ago illustrates this point (see Meyer et al. 1997, 164). The importance of symbols should be understood in terms of their ability to generate images or beliefs. Symbols are significant, to the extent that what they indicate is universally recognized (Mead 1934, 146-147), and thus they can be a
significant force to generate particular images or beliefs about what kind of country their possessors are (see Cerulo 1993, 252). The political innovations of the advanced industrial countries can be said to symbolize the kind of international prominence these nations enjoy and developing nations seek to secure.

2.2. When mimetically adopt?

When or under what conditions do developing nations mimetically adopt norms championed by the advanced industrial countries? More specifically, what factors motivate them to take action to secure their international recognition, or to gain international prominence? The existing empirical studies have found at least two important factors which affect the pattern of diffusion, by conducting regression and event history analyses, covering a large number of observations on a global scale: an increase in the symbolic weight of given political innovations and links developing nations have with the global society.

First, political innovations diffuse rapidly when they gain symbolic weight, or their value as elements of the world culture increase, in one way or another. Instances which enhance the symbolic significance of political innovations include the theorization by experts of their virtue, in terms of efficiency, progress or justice (Strang and Meyer 1993, esp. 497), a growth in the number of countries which have adopted them (see Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997; Koo and Ramirez 2009; Wotipka and Ramirez 2008), and the global expansion of relevant activities – for example, a growth in the number of scientific associations, in the case of the expansion of university education (Schofer and Meyer 2005), and the holding of a UN conference on human rights, in the case of the diffusion of national human rights institutions (Koo and Ramirez 2009; also see Wotipka and Ramirez 2008; Frank, Hironaka, and Schofer 2000). These instances facilitate the diffusion of given political innovations by making them more attractive to developing nations seeking international recognition. Yet the pattern of the diffusion of salient political innovation is by no means even. This leads to the next point.

Second, political innovations tend to diffuse more rapidly to developing nations with dense global links. In other words, those with denser links to the global society tend to adopt elements of the world culture more rapidly than secluded ones – such as Bhutan and North Korea. A common indicator of global links is the number of memberships in international organizations (see Eyre and Suchman 1996; Frank, Hironaka, and Schofer 2000; Thomas and Lauderdale 1988; Wotipka and Ramirez 2008).
Global links are important because they serve as channels through which developing nations can learn what the global models are, and what they can do to enhance their international recognition (see Wotipka and Ramirez 2008, 315).7

Taken together, these two factors shape the pattern of "diffusion" on a global scale: however, they do not necessarily determine the "adoption" of new norms on the part of developing nations, in that they do not necessarily propel these nations to take action for their international recognition. The fact that political innovations with symbolic weight exist in the global society and that given developing nations can learn what such innovations are does not necessarily mean that these nations will adopt them. Given the global tendency that political innovations with symbolic weight diffuse more rapidly to developing nations with denser global links, what should be explored now is the question of when such developing nations adopt salient political innovations, or what factor motivates them to do so.

The key motivating factor for mimetic adoption can be found in the social environment surrounding individual nations: developing nations mimetically adopt external norms when they are in a socially-unfriendly environment which effectively denies their international prominence. In concrete terms, they do so when they are downplayed/disregarded, and thus effectively treated as irrelevant players. Downplaying means a lack of positive attention, and disregarding means a lack of any kind of attention. Both of them should also have serious social implications, making the social environment threatening to given developing nations, by blocking their intention to gain international prominence. Such a socially-threatening environment should motivate developing nations to take action for their international recognition.

The insight here derives from the findings of experimental studies conducted by social psychologists, dealing with the effort of individuals to be recognized in particular ways, so as to secure their own identities or self-conceptions. Their studies are founded on the traditional view of symbolic interactionism – that the self-conceptions on the part of individuals of who they are is shaped by the way in which others see them (Mead 1934; Cooley 1902, esp. 152). Of particular relevance are two strands of experimental studies, both of which show that people feel some kind of psychological distress when there are in a socially-unfriendly environment which denies their own identities or self-conceptions, and thus take action to change the situation.

The first strand is experimental studies on "self-symbolizing" activities, which demonstrate that, when individuals lack social recognition, they engage in symbolic activities to indicate their identity, so as to gain greater social recognition in the areas of activity in which they are committed. Examples of unrecognized individuals making self-symbolizing efforts include inexperienced tennis players wearing branded sportswear (Braun and Wicklund 1989, 170-172), unaccomplished business persons wearing luxury watches (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982, 152-155), unacknowledged altruists participating in TV shows and talking about their own altruistic activities (Trepte 2005), and uncelebrated male photographers writing self-aggrandizing descriptions of themselves for a female who actually favors modest men (Gollwitzer and Wicklund 1985, 709-712; also see Schiffmann and Nelkenbrecher 1994; Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel, and Harmon-Jones 2009; Zhong and Liljenquist 2006; Wendt and Barnett 1993, 336-337). Individuals make these self-symbolizing efforts because a lack of social recognition leads to a "sense of incompleteness" in acquiring the

7 What seems to be especially important are links to the center of the world culture, commonly constituted by the advanced industrial countries. This explains why countries with British colonial links developed mass education systems earlier than those with Spanish and Portuguese links (Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992).
intended identity or becoming who they want to be (Gollwitzer, Wicklund, and Hilton 1982; Gollwitzer and Wicklund 1985).

Some experimental studies on self-symbolizing have demonstrated the relevance of social recognition by placing the subjects in a situation in which they are unnoticed by others. One study has found that, when their expression of intention to become lawyers went unnoticed, law students tended to translate their intentions into action more seriously – for example, by doing their reading assignments more intensively (Gollwitzer et al. 2009). Another has shown that, when medical students were not addressed as doctors, they tended to spend more time working out solutions for the medical problems at hand, so as to demonstrate their expertise (Gollwitzer 1986, 146-147). Another focused on female subjects who are committed to raising a family, and found that, when their self-descriptions as ideal mothers went unnoticed in one setting, they tended to emphasize that their personalities were ideal for motherhood, in another setting (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982, 69-78).

The second strand is experimental studies on "self-verification" behaviors, which demonstrate that, when individuals receive feedback which is inconsistent with their conceptions of themselves, they translate these self-conceptions into action, so as to gain feedback which confirms the self-conceptions. For example, when self-conceived dominant persons are labeled submissive, they tend to behave more dominantly; and when self-conceived submissive persons are labeled dominant, they tend to become more submissive (Swann and Hill 1982; Swann 1983, 39-41, 48-49; also see Swann and Read 1981; De La Ronde and Swann 1998; Lemay and Ashmore 2004). These behaviors reflect the preference of people to be seen by others as they see themselves, or to gain feedback which confirms their self-conceptions, for the sake of a psychological sense of coherence. Since people prefer self-confirmatory to self-discrepant feedback, when they receive the latter, they focus more attention on their self-conceptions or ask themselves more thoroughly who they are, and make efforts to gain self-confirmatory feedback to verify their self-conceptions. Strategies for self-verification include the displaying of signs and symbols, such as clothes and cosmetics, to indicate specific identities (Swann 1983, 37-38; Swann, Rentfrow, and Guinn 2003, 371-372).

Although these insights concern behaviors of individuals, again, they should be relevant to the study of states. Social psychologists have focused on self-symbolizing efforts made not only by individuals but also by organizations, such as vintners (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982, 156-158) and university departments (Harmon-Jones, Schmeichel, and Harmon-Jones 2009). Their studies imply that individuals inside organizations may make efforts to secure the social recognition of their own organizations.

Although the findings of these experiments concern behaviors of individuals, they should be applicable to the study of states. Individual policymakers may implement policies, on the basis of their concern with the ways in which their states are evaluated. It is worth noting that social psychologists have identified individuals seeking confirmatory feedback not only on conceptions of their own personal characteristics but also on various other things, including their possession of collective identities, such as "women" and "nationals of a country" (Chen, Chen, and Shaw 2004; Swann et al. 2009) and their sense of belongingness to social categories such as "religious" and "academic" (Lemay and Ashmore 2004).

A study has found that, when individuals who conceive of themselves as emotional are evaluated as unemotional, they respond faster to adjectives which describe emotions; and when self-conceived unemotional persons are evaluated as emotional, they respond faster to these emotionality-related adjectives (Swann 1983, 48-49).
2.3. Internalization

The next step from mimetic adoption is the internalization of norms. Mimetic adoption is strategic behavior, whose aim is to enhance international recognition. After strategically adopting new norms, developing nations may begin to internalize the appropriateness of these norms and, as a result, they may be driven by two motives which are compatible with each other: the pursuit of international recognition and of normative appropriates. That internalization may follow strategic behavior has been widely recognized. The IR literature suggests that actors may begin to internalize new norms, after strategically adopting them in response either to material pressure – i.e., the threat of political or economic sanctions by great powers (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 62) – or to social pressure – i.e., the "shaming" strategy of transnational activists (Risse and Sikkink 1999; also see March and Olsen 1998, 953; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

Here it should be emphasized that actors are more likely to internalize the appropriateness of new norms when they adopted these norms through a mimetic process than when they did so in response to material or social pressure. This is because mimetic adoption is voluntary behavior, based on free choice. In instances of mimetic adoption, the actors are not told by external players what to do or which norms to adopt. Social psychologists have shown that an act of selection is an important factor which affects people's attitudes toward objects. To illustrate, after freely choosing one item over another, people tend to develop a more favorable attitude toward the former than before, and a less-favorable attitude toward the latter than before. They do so in order to reduce "cognitive dissonance" caused by the unfavorable aspect of the chosen item and the favorable aspect of the unchosen item (Brehm 1956; Brehm and Cohen 1959; for an alternative interpretation, see Bem 1967, 193-195; also see Goldgeier and Tetlock 2008, 468). In any case, an important task in empirical research is to examine the relevance of mimetic motives at the time of norm adoption – a task to be handled in the next section.

3. ASEAN’s Mimetic Adoption

The case of ASEAN can be explained by drawing on the mimetic adoption thesis, centered on the proposition that developing nations mimetically adopt external norms for the sake of international prominence when they are in a socially-threatening environment. To put it briefly, the ASEAN members have been mimetically adopting the norm practiced by the advanced industrial democracies in Europe and North America, with the intention of enhancing the prominence of their association in today’s global society. They have been doing so, in a socially-threatening environment, whose elements include downplaying and disregarding.

It is worth noting that a unique characteristic of ASEAN makes it easier for us to identify the intention of its members to secure their association’s international recognition for its own sake, if such an intention is present. It does so by reducing the possibility that their intention has been to use international recognition as an instrument for domestic political survival. ASEAN is an international organization dominated by political elites and, if there is such a thing as an ASEAN identity, it must be mainly held by these elites. The ordinary citizens should be less sensitive to the international standing of such an elitist international organization than to that of their own country. Thus, although international recognition can often be instrumental in maintaining the domestic political legitimacy needed to stay in power (Finnemore and
Sikkink 1998, 903), it must be hard for the Southeast Asian countries to use ASEAN's international recognition for such a purpose.

To substantiate the claim that ASEAN has been mimetically adopting a new set of norms, the rest of this paper does three things. First, the study focuses on the factors which should affect the pattern of norm diffusion, and finds that such factors were present when ASEAN began to adopt the humanitarian security norm. This means that the norm was ready to be adopted by ASEAN at any time.

Second, the study focuses on the social environment surrounding ASEAN, so as to assess the correspondence between environmental and behavioral changes. When mimetic adoption is in operation, one's behavior should correspond with changes in one's social environment. In the case of ASEAN, the social environment has become increasingly threatening since the early 2000s. This effectively means that behavioral changes have corresponded with changes in the social environment. Since the early 2000s, the ASEAN members have been adopting a new set of norms, against a background of changes in the social environment.

Third, the study focuses on the way in which the ASEAN members have been adopting new norms, so as to identify what they have prioritized. When mimetic adoption is in operation, one's behavior should prioritize its own appearance over its political functions. The present study demonstrates that the ASEAN members have been prioritizing the appearance of their association over its institutional function. This kind of practice reflects their desire to display their new policies to the global society, for the sake of ASEAN's international recognition.

(1) Diffusion Factors

When ASEAN began to adopt a new norm in the early 2000s, the two factors which are said to affect the pattern of diffusion – symbolic weight and global links – were already present: therefore, the norm was ready to be adopted by ASEAN at any time. First, humanitarian ideas had become salient, and thus become attractive to developing nations seeking to enhance their international recognition. In the post-Cold War era, humanitarianism had become an important global agenda, supported by a number of UN members, including the advanced industrial countries. The number of UN peace keeping operations has increased, and the OSCE has expanded its activities, on the basis of the notion that, in a democracy, sovereignty is not vested in the state but in the people (see Flynn and Farrell 1999, 523-528). In the early 1990s, major international conferences on human rights were held, resulting in a substantial increase in the number of countries establishing national human rights institutions: the first world conference for promoting national human rights institutions in 1991, the second in 1993, and the World Conference on Human Rights or the Vienna conference in the same year (Koo and Ramirez 2009).

Second, ASEAN's links to the global society had expanded, and this effectively meant that its members had had more channels to learn what the global models were or which policies had symbolic weight. Notable in this respect are the developments of mega-regional institutions encompassing the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, including the launching of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989, the evolution of the Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1993/94, and the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996. These institutions provided ASEAN with dense links to members of the global society, in particular, the European and North American countries, which constitute the core of the world culture.
(2) Correspondence

It can be said that the policies of the ASEAN members have corresponded with changes in the social environment surrounding the Southeast Asian association. It was in the early 2000s that the ASEAN members began to adopt a set of humanitarian security norms, thereby announcing a plan for an ASEAN security community, and facilitating the establishment of an ASEAN human rights mechanism. These developments took place against the background of a gradual change in the social environment. Since the early 2000s, the social environment surrounding the Southeast Asian association has become increasingly threatening to ASEAN in a social sense.

Modernity questioned

In the early 2000s, the ASEAN members came to be seen as less advanced than many others in the world. There are probably a number of reasons behind this, including the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, the political turmoil resulting from this crisis, and economic successes of many others in the world. In any case, at least in relative terms, the image of the Southeast Asian countries in the global society became less favourable in the early 2000s. This is evident from the declines in their "global competitiveness" rankings. The World Economic Forum (WEF) – the organizer of the Davos Forum – has been ranking countries by their "global competitiveness," measured by factors such as technological developments, the soundness of public institutions, and the overall macroeconomic environment. The extent to which the WEF rankings truly reflect the competitiveness of countries can be a subject of debate, but these rankings should at least reflect the ways in which countries were perceived in the global society. The figure shows the rankings of the five original ASEAN members, among the 47 countries included in the first WEF report in 1996. It is clear that, in the early 2000s, the positions of all the five countries declined.
This is notable, taking into consideration the strong desire of the ASEAN members to be seen as modern and advanced. Their desire should be understood in terms of their pursuit of developed nation status. They have sought status as modern and advanced nations. For them, economic development is a matter not only of statistical figures but also of status. This is why they are greatly concerned with categories such as “First World” or “developed” countries. Most notably, the Philippines has recently declared its vision of attaining ‘first-world status’ in two decades. Malaysia has set out its national development plan, aimed at achieving “developed nation status” by 2020. Even Singapore has been concerned with its status, believing that it should move from the ‘lower half’ to the ‘upper half’ of the First World (Presidential Management Staff 2007, 46; Office of the President 2007; Badawi 2006; ChannelNewsAsia 2007).

Centrality to Asia-Pacific regionalism questioned

ASEAN has been disregarded and thus effectively treated as an irrelevant player. In particular, its pursuit of centrality to Asia-Pacific regionalism has been disregarded. The Southeast Asian association initiated security regionalism in the Asia-Pacific region, by establishing the ARF in 1993/94, expanding the PMC in 1996, and inviting the three Northeast Asian countries to a summit meeting in 1997. In the early years of Asia-Pacific regionalism, ASEAN seems to have received much attention from the world. It is true that, when the ARF was established, some of the participant countries, such as Australia, openly questioned ASEAN's ability to lead security cooperation (see Stewart 1993). Yet, overall, the mere fact that an association of minor powers took a lead in regional security cooperation was widely seen as remarkable. Even a strong critic of ASEAN diplomacy, Michael Leifer (1996, 29), pointed out that there had been no other historical example of a group of lesser states assuming such a diplomatic centrality in fostering a multilateral security arrangement which involves all the major powers in the Asia-Pacific region. However, after several years, the limitations of ASEAN became apparent. It is questionable whether ASEAN has attained the status of leader of Asia-Pacific regionalism. With regard to the APT, the cynical remark has often been made that it is not a forum involving “ASEAN plus” the three Northeast Asian powers but a “three plus ASEAN” framework (see Rake 2004). The US, for its part, has not regarded the ARF as one of the core components of its national security strategy in the post-September 11 era (White House 2002, 2006).

That the world disregarded ASEAN’s pursuit of centrality to Asia-Pacific regionalism has been reflected in the media coverage of the ARF. The figure shows how many times the word "ASEAN Regional Forum" was mentioned in major Western newspapers and magazines – namely, The Economist, Guardian, Observer, Independent, The Times/ Sunday Times, Financial Times, Los Angeles Times, International Herald Tribune, New York Times, Wall Street Journal Asia, and Washington Post. It is clear that the world ceased to pay serious attention to ASEAN’s most important security forum by the early 2000s.
This kind of situation must be threatening to the Southeast Asian nations in a social sense, given their pursuit of ASEAN's centrality to Asia-Pacific regionalism. They have projected their association as the legitimate leader of Asia-Pacific regionalism. For them, ASEAN’s role in forums such as the ARF, the APT and the EAS should not be confined to providing venues for meetings. Its role should also be to lead the major powers involved in these forums, thereby placing itself in the center of regional cooperation. Their pursuit of ASEAN’s status of centrality has been reflected in their political documents. Few documents produced at important ASEAN meetings fail to mention the centrality of ASEAN and the ARF in Asia-Pacific security regionalism (ARF 2008; ASEAN 2003, 2004c, 2009).

It is worth adding that, in the economic area too, ASEAN's pursuit of centrality to Asia-Pacific regionalism has been disregarded. This has been mainly due to the rise of China as a global economic power. At least until the early 1990s, Southeast Asia was seen as an integral part of the "miracle" of East Asia, and strongly attracted the attention of the world. Yet, in the early 1990s, a few years after the Tiananmen Square incident, which resulted in a temporally isolation of the country, China began to rise, attracting a large amount of foreign investment. It is worth adding that China was less affected by the financial crisis in the late 1990s than were the Southeast Asian countries.

The focus of world attention began to shift from Southeast Asia to China, as a result of the economic rise of the latter. The longitudinal changes in the amounts of FDI to China and ASEAN illustrate this. The figure shows that only in the early 2000s did the FDI flows to China and ASEAN diverged.
Due to the developments described above, the social environment has been increasingly threatening to ASEAN, since the early 2000s. The Southeast Asian nations have taken such an environment seriously. In other word, they have been greatly concerned about the deterioration of their association's international recognition. Most notably, they have been worried about the deterioration of ASEAN's image in their dealings with the issue of Myanmar. At the ASEAN summit in January 2007, the leaders agreed on the “need to preserve ASEAN’s credibility as an effective regional organization”. Following the crushing of pro-democracy demonstrations in September 2007, the foreign ministers expressed their concern that the “developments in Myanmar had a serious impact on the reputation and credibility of ASEAN” (ASEAN 2007b, 2007c; also see AFP 2007; AP 2007b, 2007a). The concern of the Southeast Asian nations about ASEAN's international recognition, evident in this kind of discourse, formed the basis of their adoption of new norms. This becomes clear when focusing on the way in which they have been adopting new the norms.

The ASEAN members have been prioritizing the appearance of their association over its institutional function. This kind of practice reflects their desire to display their new policies to the global society, for the sake of ASEAN's international recognition. In other words, it reflects their attempt to assure the world that ASEAN is doing the "right thing" – what a legitimate, modern and relevant international institution is supposed to do in the international community in the present era.

This point becomes apparent when focusing on the process of the development of security agendas. Since the 1990s, the standard practice of the ASEAN members has been to announce new security agendas promptly, before discrediting their traditional diplomatic norms, and then explore ways of implementing these agendas. To illustrate, when the ASEAN members announced their plan for an ASEAN security community, they also underlined the principle of non-inference, thereby revealing their ideational inconsistency (ASEAN 2003). Only after announcing the new plan did they begin exploring concrete measures for the collective management of conflicts (ASEAN
In the area of human rights diplomacy, it can be said that the ASEAN members have sought to display to the global society their promotion of human rights diplomacy. This is because some of their political agendas in this area are overly ambitious, as their plan to establish a regional body for human rights illustrates. It is hard to expect such a body to be influential in solving problems such as human rights abuses in Myanmar. In reality, ASEAN has little leverage over the Myanmar military government, since this government relies heavily on China, not on its Southeast Asian neighbors. Nevertheless, the ASEAN members have been exploring the possibilities of a regional human rights body for the past ten years, as if taking it for granted that regional organizations today must establish such a body. The ASEAN members seem to have intended to display, for the sake of ASEAN's international recognition, their adoption of this appealing concept, thereby displaying to the world that they are doing the ‘right thing.’

In some sense, in the area of human rights diplomacy, ASEAN’s goals are more ambitious than what the Western powers have asked it to do – i.e., simply to take tough measures against Myanmar. ASEAN’s goal is to establish a comprehensive set of measures to address human rights issues in general. The aims of an ASEAN security community include the protection of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, people with disabilities and migrant workers; the promotion of education and public awareness of human rights; and the involvement of NGOs such as APA in community building (ASEAN 2004b, 2004a).

**Conclusions**

It can be concluded that the ASEAN members have mimetically been adopting a new humanitarian norm for the sake of their association’s international prominence. Moreover, it can be inferred that mimetic adoption is one of the pathways by which norms travel from one region to another, or by which norms diffuse in the global society. These conclusions have some policy implications. They lead to a distinct policy recommendation to the Western powers in the area of human rights.

One may doubt the significance of the present study, whose purpose is to explore the question of why the ASEAN members have been adopting a new norm. One may do so, on the basis of the observation that the extent of change has been limited, and the ASEAN members have been modest in implementing the new norm. This is a valid observation. Although they have demonstrated a strong willingness to manage conflicts collectively and to address human rights issues, they have been slow to establish an ASEAN security community and an ASEAN human rights mechanism.

However, this is precisely why the present research on ASEAN’s motives is important. The establishment of an ASEAN security community and an ASEAN human rights mechanism is probably desirable from the moral point of view. Thus, we need to identify measures to encourage the Southeast Asian nations to facilitate the reform of their association and to make a stronger commitment to the new norms. The first step to making reasonable policy recommendations must be to understand the reason why they have begun to reform their association.

What can the international community do to facilitate ASEAN’s reform? Realists would probably state that the European and North American countries should use their economic and military resources to put strong pressure on the Southeast Asian nations, for example, by threatening to impose economic sanctions.
Constructivists would probably point out that those who do not possess material resources may implement measures for social influence in two ways (see Johnston 2001). On the one hand, members of the international community may criticize ASEAN for its slow pace of reform. On the other hand, they may praise ASEAN for its attempt to reform itself, thereby granting the Southeast Asian association a certain social status. In this respect, Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko suggest that great powers should enhance their counterparts’ status if they are to obtain the latter’s cooperation (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 95). The findings of the present research show that some of these measures – such as criticizing – are probably useful, but others – such as praising – are either unfeasible or counterproductive.

The findings also imply that there may be an additional measure for social influence. The Western powers may implement what can be regarded as a strategy of disregarding, by not inviting ASEAN delegations to important international meetings. It is worth noting that these strategies may be pursued in combination with conventional methods, such as material pressure, economic incentives, persuasion and socialization. We may facilitate ASEAN’s liberal reform by combining various strategies, including the non-conventional ones identified in this paper.

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