"One Southeast Asia": Emerging iconographies in the making of a region

"As in many other geographical representations, regional labeling is a spatial construct; a form of geo-power deeply embedded in a historical and cultural context, a conceptual formation generally presuming some form of correspondence in space between physical landmasses and human cultural features. Yet, it is also a very adaptable form of geographical representation, which can modify its spatial coverage over time, perambulate around its original site, or even reverse its symbolic meaning, departing from the system of cultural references in which it was initially coined whilst still remaining tied to its own place."

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Introduction

Periphery of many centers, colony of many colonizers, Southeast Asia has traditionally been an area more prominent as a cultural and political medley, than as a coherent geographical region. A "collection of peninsulas and archipelagos" (DWYER, 1990, p. 1) lying between the landmasses of Asia and Australia, owing its enormous cultural variety to the contrasting action of circulation and insularity, Southeast Asia, before World War II, "was scarcely even a geographical expression" (FRYER, 1970, p. 1).

In the Cold War period, this area, which remained extraordinarily fractioned by hundreds of linguistic and religious divides, but was now politically organized in the form of a conglomeration of nation-states, assumed new strategic consequence, because of the rift splitting its member countries into two ideologically opposed camps. Given its geostrategical importance, the area began to gain recognition as a single region by the West, and to be organized as such, at least insofar as the non-Communist countries were concerned. In 1967, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded to strengthen regional cohesion among the non-Communist countries of the area (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines). In 1971, the ASEAN nations set as their goal the establishment of a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia. Joined by Brunei in 1984, and, in the 1990s, by Vietnam, Laos,

Cambodia and eventually Burma, ASEAN now comprises all the ten countries in the area, under the motto "One Southeast Asia" (figs. 1 and 2).

In addition to enlarging its regional boundaries, ASEAN has widened its field of action over the same period, launching a scheme to establish an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), and generally promoting greater economic integration among its member countries. Moreover, it has also cobbled together a unifying narrative of shared norms and values. Even so, it is still disputable whether its emerging iconographies (which include an official anthem and a logo) are powerful enough to make ASEAN something more than a "security community" of states.

"In search of Southeast Asia"

As in many other geographical representations, regional labeling is a spatial construct; a form of geo-power deeply embedded in a historical and cultural context, a conceptual formation generally presuming some form of correspondence in space between physical landmasses and human cultural features (LEWIS and WIGEN, 1997). Yet, it is also a very adaptable form of geographical representation, which can modify its spatial coverage over time, perambulate around its original site, or even reverse its symbolic meaning, departing from the system of cultural references in which it was initially coined whilst still remaining tied to its own place.

In this perspective, "Southeast Asia" is no exception. "Asia" is a metageographical category originally applied only to a small area in Turkey, later extended right up to the Bering Strait covering the whole eastern and southeastern quadrant of the Eurasian continent. Nowadays the term is confined in general use only to this latter part of the "official" continent – which is ostensibly more "Asiatic" than Israel or Syria (LEWIS and WIGEN, 1997). If Asia was born as a "western concept," unknown to the very people living there till their encounter with Europeans, the reference to cardinal points, such as South and East, is an even more blatant restatement of a dominant Eurocentric position. For this very reason, some
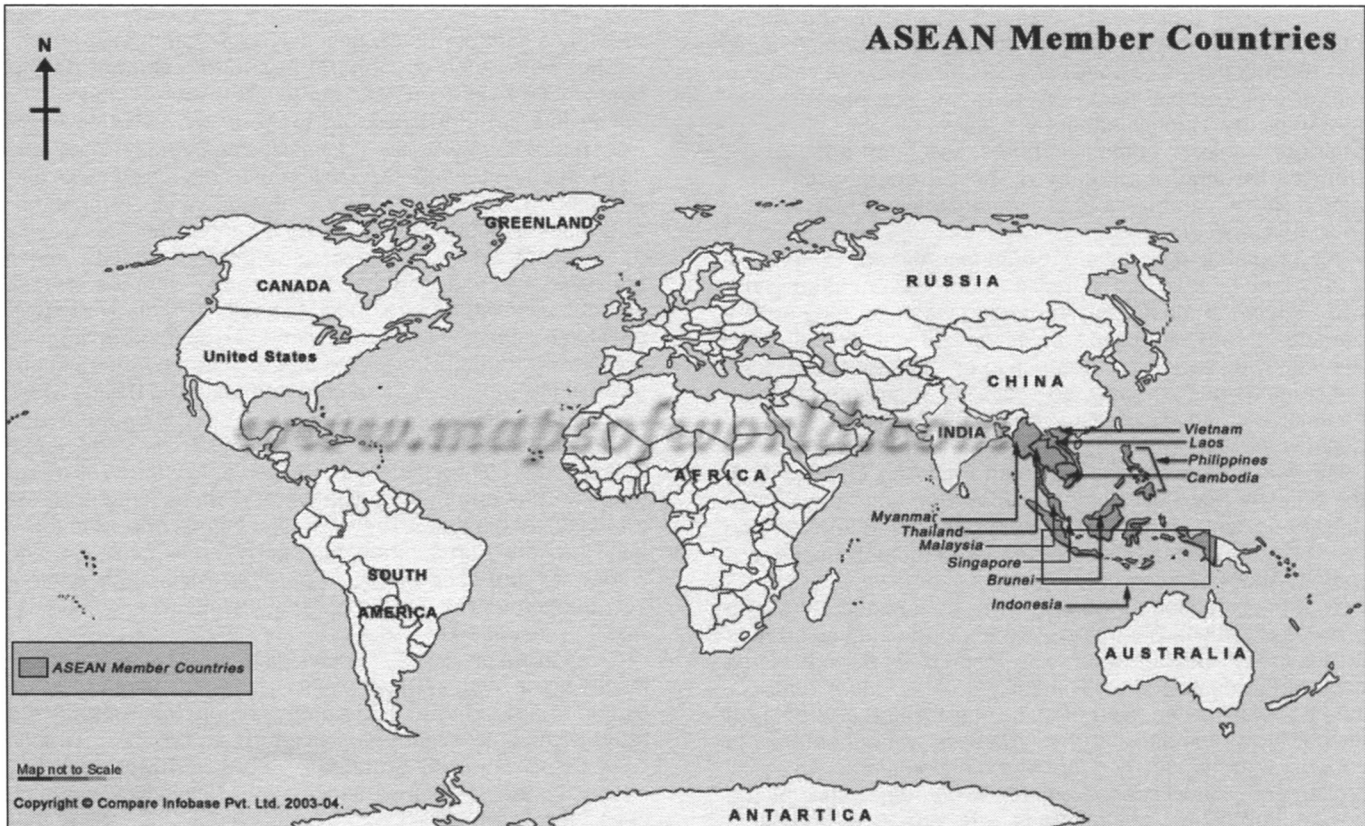
Fig. 1: The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the world. (*Source:* Infobase Pvt. Ltd, 2003-04).
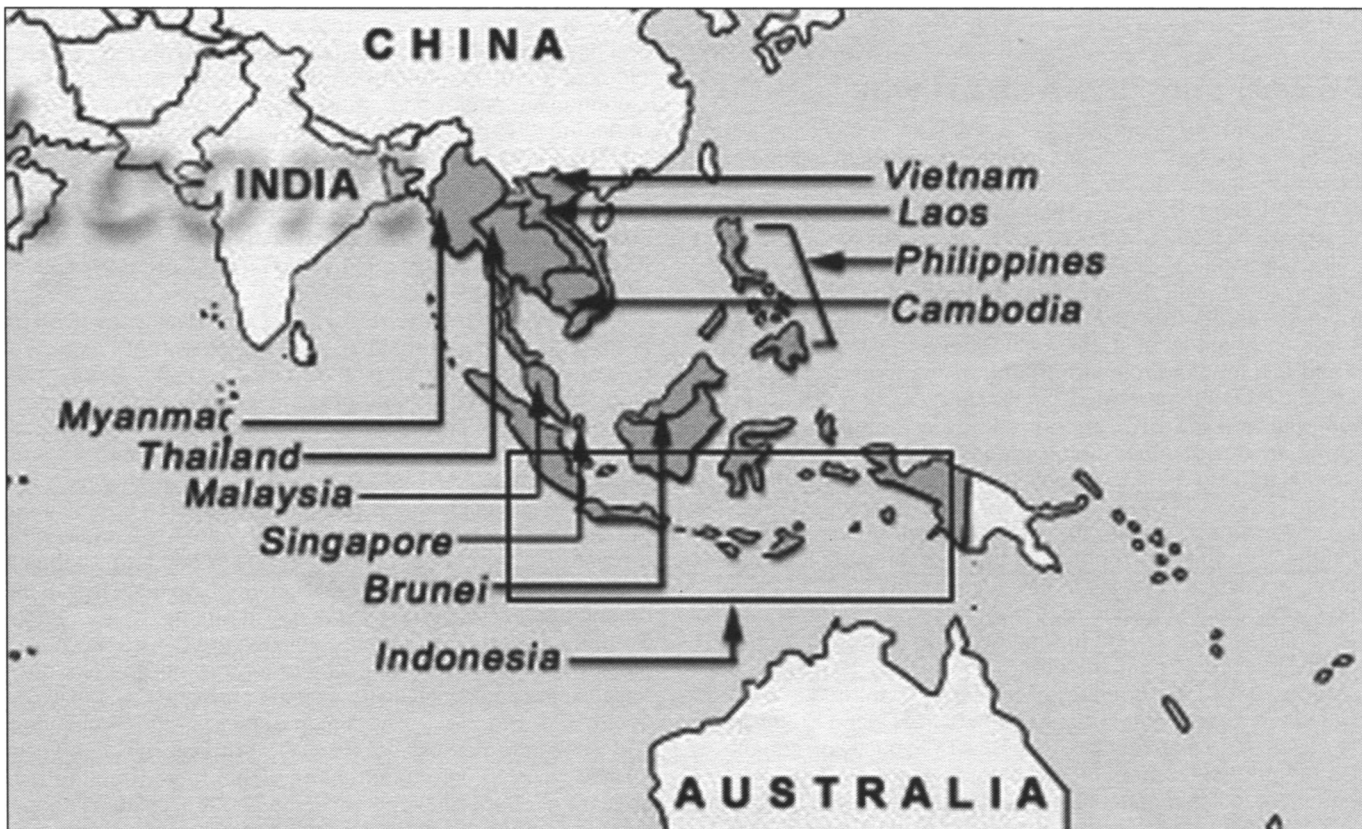

Fig. 2: "One Southeast Asia" – The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries. (*Source:* Infobase Pvt. Ltd, 2003-04).

authors, such as David Drakakis-Smith (1992), have proposed re-labelling the area as "Pacific Asia," in order to avoid any reference to its colonial past. But "Southeast Asia," colonial or post-colonial as it may sound, is the label adopted nowadays by its local leaders in order to officially designate their own regional context. Thus, it has been transformed from an incongruous legacy of the European-dominated period, into a contemporary icon of regional unity. As such, it must be considered today.

As a regional designation, "Southeast Asia" does not have a very long history. As Benedict Anderson remarked (1998, p. 5), it is no surprise that "the region was late in its unitary naming." From the outside it was very difficult to distinguish an underlying regional coherence in an area so diverse from the religious point of view, so politically fragmented by centuries of "mottled imperialism," so deeply riven by the internal rivalries existing among its many colonial masters. Only in 1943, with the creation of the South-East Asia Command by the Western powers, did the regional label emerge as a significant political term. In the same period, the term started being used by academics, to become common usage and "normalized" coverage only ten years later.

With the inception of the Cold War, commenced "the long process of making Southeast Asia the kind of imagined reality it is today" (ANDERSON, 1998, pp. 6-7). By then, the area could still be described as "The Balkans of the Orient" (FISHER, 1962): that is, as an area of cultural transition and political instability, whose striking ethnic diversity was apparently in contrast with the very concept of the nation-state. An easily broken geopolitical scenario, made even more fragile by the powerful pressures of Communism on one side, and Islam on the other. Against the specter of a possible "Balkanization" of the area, or the even more worrying menace of its homogenization under an overarching Communist umbrella, in that period the United States began to focus increasing attention on a section of the world they generally started to refer to as "Southeast Asia" (ANDERSON, 1998).

ASEAN and "the ASEAN way"

In the 1950s, the polarization of world politics following the end of the war had forced the various geopolitical entities in the area to take sides, or to officially adopt a neutral position (STEINBERG, 1987). In 1954, the United States, determined not to lose "Southeast Asia" as had happened with China, launched SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), with the intention of keeping the whole post-colonial region free from any Communist interference. However, of the local states, only Siam and the Philippines joined this institution – with the other members being the United States themselves, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Australia and the UK. In contrast, as a response to this American move, other Asian leaders, such as Sukarno, Sianouk and Nu, tried to establish their credentials as "non-aligned" powers in the course of the 1955 Bandung Conference. At the same time, the consolidation of China under Communist rule (1949) confirmed the reassertion of its traditional geopolitical interests in the region, particularly in Laos and Cambodia, but also in regard to the large groups of ethnic "Chinese" that for centuries had been living, as "immigrants," in every state of the area.

In the 1960s, the opening of a military front in Vietnam involved an even deeper engagement of the United States in the region. The manifest failure of SEATO's pacifying capacities led the government in Washington to promote a more permanent institution among the states of the area. Thus in 1967, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) was born. It included Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia (where the "ambiguous" Sukarno had been recently substituted by a definitely anti-Communist military leadership headed by General Soeharto). Burma, despite being invited, chose instead not to join the association.

The five countries brought together by ASEAN ranged from regional giants, like Indonesia, to extremely small port-cities, such as Singapore. Their ethnic composition was also enormously variegated. They contained varying proportions of Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Confucian creeds; and did not even share a common colonial past – since Malaysia and Singapore had been created after the dissolution of the British Empire, Indonesia following the collapse of the Dutch East Indies while Thailand had never been formally colonized. Further, they were differentiated by their various political systems, with Singapore and Malaysia having at the time some degree of democracy, the Philippines and Indonesia subjected to a dictatorship and Thailand governed by a group of corrupt generals. They entertained very little economic interchange, comprising less than 15 percent of the total trade of the area. They were not friends or post-colonial allies, because an acrimonious boundary dispute regarding Sabah still opposed Malaysia and the Philippines, while a very dangerous *Konfrontasi* between Indonesia and Malaysia had only just been ended.

Given these premises, "the establishment of ASEAN did not inspire much hope" (ACHARYA, 2001, p. 5). To many, the association appeared to be just another empty box, bound to a rapid demise, like other similar efforts in the area, namely: ASA (Association of Southeast Asia), and MAPHILINDO (Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia). Notwithstanding this pessimistic view, the countries it put together did have something in common: apart from Thailand, they were all post-colonial creations whose boundaries followed the boundaries of former colonial partitions. Thailand included, their confines encompassed many different ethnic groups. Altogether, they were the expression of the victory, in the decolonization process, of the big nationalist movements developed over the first half of the century (which were by no means the only ideological forces competing on the scene – the others being Communism, Islam and ethnic regionalism). They were all under the threat of Communist armed insurrections or Islamic, loyalist and ethnic minority rebellion. ASEAN, whose main purpose, as stated in the founding Bangkok Declaration (August, 1967),[1] was the promotion of "regional peace and stability" (that is, the conservation of the political status quo of its members as unitary nation-states) (CHRISTIE, 1996) had its own good reasons for survival.

In its early years, the Association was mainly involved in managing bilateral tensions among its members (with the cooling-off of the Sabah dispute being its first success). In contrast, the pace of its progress towards regional cooperation appeared to be very slow. The first ASEAN institutional act was the creation of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia (1971), which restated the principles of the Bangkok Declaration for ensuring the region's "stability and security." However, the addition of the phrase: "from external interference in any form of manifestation" infused a new geopolitical meaning into such aspirations. As such, ZOPFAN was a joint attempt to disengage Southeast Asia from superpower rivalry (GANESAN, 1995), albeit obviously a very difficult one to accomplish. Not only because the neutralization framework, envisaged by Malaysia, contrasted with the pro-American attitude of the Philippines and Thailand (members of SEATO), but also because such an objective, to be implemented, would have required the enactment of specific legal provisos about existing alliances and foreign bases (which it refrained from doing). Anyway, ZOPFAN can be considered as the first move towards

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regional autonomy (ACHARYA, 2001).

The First ASEAN Summit was held in Bali (24 February 1976) in the aftermath of Vietnam's unification to reaffirm the rationale behind the Association. On this occasion, two treaties were signed:

● The first was the ASEAN Concord, which emphasized the need for "the strengthening of political solidarity" and developing "a strong ASEAN community."
● With the second, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), ASEAN lay down the fundamental principles of intra-regional relations,[2] whose "cardinal rule" was the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.

The importance of this doctrine can be easily explained by the need for internal stability and regime security of the nation-states that had expressed it. From this perspective, non-interference can be considered "the single most important principle underpinning ASEAN regionalism" (ACHARYA, 2001, p. 57), a guarantee to prevent any possible attempt to criticize the actions of member governments towards their own people and to provide support to member states in their campaigns against destabilizing activities (a veiled reference to Communist insurgency). Non-intervention can also be credited as being the reason why no war-like tension has erupted among member states since 1967.

Another fundamental norm regulating intra-regional relations, even if not as overtly stated as the non-interference doctrine, consists in the so-called "ASEAN Way." This expression used to identify a "unique" ASEAN style in decision-making processes, does not have an official definition; it generally refers to the importance given to informality, consultation and consensus, instead of confrontation and majority voting. In the beginning, the phrase was applied in a derogatory manner, to criticize ASEAN's lack of institutions and its excessively personal approach, but later "the ASEAN Way" started to become recognized as one of the Association's "major strengths" (ACHARYA, 2001). The contrast could not be greater with Western-style multilateral organizations, where common decisions are taken by voting. Informality and "consensus building" in ASEAN are usually considered a good way to mediate national differences. ASEAN itself was founded as an "association," and not an "organization" in order to convey a sense of flexible informality, and its founding "act" was a "declaration," not a "treaty," so as to stress amity instead of "lack of trust." Moreover, "consensus building" became a way to reduce any form of coercion in collective conduct, "a safety device to assure member states that their national interests will not be compromised and nothing can be done against their will" (ACHARYA, 2001, p. 69).

Both "non-interference" and the so-called "ASEAN Way" to consensus are principles more suited to guaranteeing respect for the different "national identities" of member states, than promoting regional integration. They were adopted as such at the time by the Association, whose main purpose continued to be to crystallize the existing system of nation-states in the region (in spite of the ASEAN Concord recommendation to "vigorously develop an awareness of regional identity"). In particular, the non-interference doctrine prevented *de jure* regional integration, which would have necessarily interfered with the domestic jurisdiction of member states. In their search for a common heritage the "founding fathers" of ASEAN had stated in the Bangkok Declaration that they were joining a group of countries "already bound together by ties of history and culture." However, these ties later turned out to be quite hard to find, and the process of region building slowed considerably. Thus, in the early years of its life, ASEAN encouraged only a very bland form of cooperation among states.

"One Southeast Asia"

In the 1970s, ASEAN activities had been galvanized by the threats deriving from the Vietnam War; in the 1980s, a noteworthy shift into international policy relevance (and internal coherence) came via the significant role it assumed in facing the Cambodia conflict. Cambodia had been occupied by Vietnam in December 1978. Hanoi had presented the conflict as an internal struggle between the forces of the genocidal Pol Pot and the Cambodian "salvation" front, led by Heng Samrin supported by Vietnam. Instead, ASEAN considered the Vietnam troop presence in Cambodia as a patent violation of its norms of regional conduct and doctrine of non-interference. To deal with the situation, ASEAN resolved to punish Vietnam, with the double objective of preventing the establishment of a dangerous precedent in the area, and to pose as a champion of Cambodia's independence. At the same time, it wanted to reaffirm its policy of "regional settlement of regional conflict," that is to solve the situation without too much interference by external powers such as the U.S. or China (ACHARYA, 2001). For more than ten years, ASEAN maintained this position, and persisted in seeking a solution through formal diplomacy and informal contacts among the various conflicting factions – the so-called "Cocktail Diplomacy." With its regionalist formula, which eventually led to a peace agreement at the Paris Conference on Cambodia in 1991, ASEAN succeeded in acquiring unprecedented international stature. The new standing led it to launch the ASEAN FORUM (ARF) in 1992, to promote external dialogue and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region (ARF membership includes Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the United States, Canada, Russia, the European Union, as well as East Asian countries such as China, Japan and the Republic of Korea).

With the settlement of the Cambodia conflict, a new era had started for Southeast Asia regional unification. Vietnam, which in 1986 had already adopted *doi moi* and reformed its economy in a market direction, from being an enemy had now become a prospective ally. As early as 1992, the ASEAN Summit affirmed its desire to forge a "closer relationship based on friendship and cooperation with the Indo-Chinese countries." In this perspective, making "One Southeast Asia" became the new ASEAN vision for the decade.

Vietnam was formally admitted on 28 July, 1995, Laos and Myanmar on 23 July, 1997 – on the 30th anniversary of ASEAN's foundation – with Cambodia joining on 30 April, 1999. The ASEAN-ten now has a population of about 500 million and a total area of 4.5 million sq.km. It encompasses the whole region known, since the Second World War, as "Southeast Asia."

With the fulfillment of the "One Southeast Asia" vision, ASEAN geopolitical meaning has changed. With the disappearance of the political polarization of Southeast Asia, ASEAN, from being a simple association of local non-Communist states, has been turned into a regional association including all Southeast Asia and representing its interests on a global scale. For this reason, its political message now emphasizes a stronger sense of regional "unity" – to strengthen the still very feeble ties between the old and new members – and "plurality" – to guarantee full respect for the different political stances taken by member states. In this perspective, its official iconography has been enriched with new symbols, stressing both "unity" and "diversity" at the same time. The "ASEAN Song of Unity," for instance, is a hymn singing the praises of a plurality of voices rising "as one"[3]; the new ASEAN logo,[4] on the same theme, introduces the idea of "concentric" identity, whereby a single regional unity (symbolized by a circle) circumscribes a *padi* with ten stalks rising out from the same roots, representing each of the ten member states.

In its pledge for "unity," however, the enlarged ASEAN has to face new intra-mural divisions, the main one being the different levels of economic development between the older members and the new entries. As Acharya (2001, p. 123) has stated, "the addition of the three Indochina states and Myanmar creates a real danger of the emergence of a two-tier ASEAN of haves and have-nots." Such differences, however, can also provide the opportunity to increase intra-regional economic cooperation, formally praised for a long time but disregarded in practice by the former ASEAN members which, possessing more or less the same kind of resources and human skills, developed independent industrial capacities and competed with each other on international markets (STEINBERG, 1987).

Asian values

The "One Southeast Asia" slogan, addressing the issue of territorial enlargement, was not the only ASEAN catchphrase of the 1990s, with "Asian values" being the other iconographic motto of the decade. With its appeal to Southeast Asian cultural "uniqueness" and its reference to the excellent economic performance of (part of) the region in the first half of the decade, the "Asian values" campaign represented perhaps an even more powerful tool in the creation of a Southeast Asian "common identity."

Two local leaders, Lee Kwan Yew and Mahathir Muhamad, raised the "Asian values" issue in Singapore and in Malaysia at the beginning of the 1990s. The general argument was that Asia had a common set of values, different from those of the West. Broadly speaking, "Asian values" are assumed to include attachment to family, deference to societal interests, respect for authority, plus the habit of searching for consensus instead of confrontation, not to mention the importance given to education. Stressing consensus over confrontation, and authority rather than individualism, the "Asian values" debate rebuilt the Eastern/Western dichotomy from the other side, as it were. In this process of othering, Westerners were accused of being prone to mistaking their own ideas about individual freedom and liberal democracy for universal truths. In contrast, as pointed out by Mahathir, "hard work, discipline, a strong commitment to community, thrift and moderation are Asian values which have in fact contributed to the emergence of the Asian Tigers and Dragon" (quoted by MILNER, 2000).

On the same grounds, "Asian values" were praised by some Western observers in an attempt to explain Asia's amazing economic success, only to dismiss them in the aftermath of the 1997/98 crisis, or to consider them, reversing their original approach, as the real cause of the disaster – in this case, "attachment to the family becomes nepotism. The importance of personal relationships rather than formal legality becomes cronyism. Consensus becomes wheel-greasing and corrupt politics. Conservatism and respect for authority become rigidity and an inability to innovate." And so on ... (The Economist, vol. 348, 7/25/1998). In any case, "Asian values" are unlikely to be accepted as the keys to understanding the reasons behind the so-called economic miracles of the various dragons, tigers and geese of Asia. Conditions-of-possibility for the "miracle" are more readily found in the big efforts made by Washington to assist a region that, having been the hottest area of the Cold War, received more "aid" in various forms than any other world region; in Japan's geographical propinquity (and in war reparation agreements, funding Southeast Asian countries for purchasing Japanese manufactures), not to mention Communist China's lengthy absence from the global capitalist order (ANDERSON, 1998, pp. 301-302). "Asian values," if any, are also difficult to accept as causing the disaster. Despite this they have been instrumental in the creation of a new sense of Asian-ness that, putting together

economic pride and cultural complacency, has spread from ASEAN to the rest of the Far East.

Interpreted by many as a reversal of "orientalism" (TARLING, 1998), construed as a tendency to essentialize culture and identity (KAHN, 1998) with the basic intention of overturning former colonial prejudices, "Asian values" have represented an attempt to increase regional cohesion. They have been promoted in order to establish a cultural common basis inside a "regional club" such as ASEAN, which, unlike the EU, is not only without a shared religion, but now also includes Communist states, together with military dictatorships, an "Islamic monarchy" and parliamentary democracies of varying types (The Economist, vol. 348, 7/25/1998). They have also been a useful device in reframing the big issue of human rights and personal liberties which arose between ASEAN and the West during the decade on terms more favorable to the former. As an attempt to justify authoritarian rule, the espousal of such "principles" triggered a big debate, not only on the international level, but also among ASEAN's most influential Asian political opponents. However, "Asian values" are not only "new languages of state power" (KAHN, 1998); they must be understood "in the context of the long campaign against Western colonialism ... as a desire to reconnect with [an] historical past after this connection had been ruptured both by colonial rule and the subsequent domination by a Western Weltanschauung" (quoted by MILNER, 2000). As such, they can be transformed into a powerful, albeit debatable, post-colonial icon.

The making of a region

At the beginning of the new century, the region has faced new security menaces posed by terrorism and fundamentalism. As stated by the Bali Concord II, endorsed at the 9th Summit in Bali (October 2003), building an Asean Security Community (ASC) has become one of the Association's "three pillars." The concept of "security community describes groups of states which have developed the long habit of peaceful interactions and ruled out the use of force in settling disputes with other members of the group" (ACHARYA, 2001, p. 1). Since its foundation, ASEAN has witnessed no wars among its members, even if in the 1960s, "the outlook for regional security and stability in Southeast Asia was particularly grim" (ACHARYA, 2001, p. 4), with the whole region being defined as "the Balkans of the Orient" (with an interesting play of double stereotyping, along the way). Born with the intention of assuring political stability in the region, ASEAN has developed a set of norms that for more than 30 years have been a guarantee of the integrity of national sovereignty, at the same time helping its members to regulate inter-state behavior. In the 1990s, as a consequence of its enlargement, ASEAN changed its character, turning from a group of governments holding a convergent political outlook into a more differentiated entity, which needed to stress more emphatically both the "unity" and the "diversity" of its nature. Together with the other two pillars (concerning the building of an ASEAN Economic Community – AEC, and of an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community – ASCC), the ASEAN Security Community ASC is to be achieved by the year 2020. As pledged by the ASEAN leaders, it should enforce ASEAN's diplomatic role inside the ASEAN Regional Forum for multilateral dialogues, and in its relations with China, Japan and South Korea, which ASEAN had started meeting regularly since 1997, in what have been termed "ASEAN + 3" summits. ASEAN + 3 can be considered as a useful round-table, enhancing dialogue about some of the problematic issues in the area (such as the Spratly Islands dispute).

Inside Southeast Asia, economic integration for a long time has been just a mirage; regional economic integration was

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not a professed goal for ASEAN founders, and it became an issue of interest only at the beginning of the 1990s. In 1992 AFTA was founded (ASEAN Free Trade Area), in order to increase the competitive advantage of the whole region, but the application of its scheme for the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers among member countries has been very slow and intra-regional trade is still limited. However, greater economic integration inside ASEAN has been envisaged since 1997, with the so-called "ASEAN Vision 2020".[5] Accompanying the same "Vision," was an official proposal to reduce poverty and socio-economic disparities in the area. Already, however, socio-economic disparities between the original ASEAN members and its new entries are engendering new forms of economic "center-periphery" relations; with old ASEAN members profiting from "a cheaper source of raw materials and production location" (ACHARYA, 2001, p. 122). Other symptoms of growing economic integration are the so-called "growth triangles" which represent a form of trans-border cooperation, promoted between different states in geographically contiguous areas presenting useful economic complementarities. To date in Southeast Asia, the Singapore-Johor-Riau triangle, the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand triangle, as well as the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area have all been developed. Another form of sub-regional economic cooperation is occurring as part of the Greater Mekong Growth Area.

However, if economic integration in ASEAN is "on the move" and its international role appears to be central in the Far Eastern area, it is more difficult to establish whether, beyond a "security community" of states, the Association can also represent an "imagined community" of people.

In the 20th century, Southeast Asia generated some of the most influential nationalist movements in the world. But nowadays, the "nationalist project" seems to be under challenge in many corners of the region. On the one hand, the classic "blood and territory" discourse has been partly supplanted, both at the regional and state level, by a narrative based on the strengthening of ties between culture, identity and the economic sphere. In this perspective, economic success provides new sources of political iconography. On the other, increased circulation of ideas has produced new processes of cultural identification, which can be referred to supra-national even if territorially scattered communities, ranging from the Islamic *unmat*, to diasporic communities, like the "overseas Chinese," or to regional communities crossing current boundaries, such as the so-called "Malay civilization" (KAHN, 1998, p. 23).

In ASEAN's official discourse, the promotion of a "Cohesive Community of One Southeast Asia" represents one of the Association's future objectives. That means fostering an ASEAN identity and consciousness, in other words, deliberately creating an "acquired" iconography which, coherently with the institutional character of the Association, can "concentrically" include, but not supersede, its nation state members' iconography (just as the circle representing unity in the ASEAN logo embraces the *padi*, that is the sign for the ten – separated but united – countries of Southeast Asia). Nowadays, the accomplishment of such a task appears far away. It is very difficult to say how many of the 500 million people living in the area ever think of themselves as Southeast Asian, and in what sense, if any (ANDERSON, 1998; TARLING, 1998). In the ASEAN project, just as territorial integration is going to be promoted by the development of trans-ASEAN transportation and energy networks, regional "consciousness" has to be attained through the involvement of the media, educational institutions and via the intensification of regional cooperation among various sectors of the public.

Still, it remains debatable if, in the face of the contemporary proliferation of post-national cultural identities (KAHN, 1998), a significant role can be played by the "ASEAN identity" and its emerging iconographies in providing a new regional "resilience" to Southeast Asia. Alternatively, one may ask whether the region-building effort promoted at institutional levels is bound to remain just an elite agreement, confined to simply coordinating inter-state relations.

Notes

1. "The Association represents the collective will of the nations of Southeast Asia to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity."
2. "Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations. The right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion. Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another. Settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful manner. Renunciation of the threat or use of force. Effective cooperation among themselves."
3. The "ASEAN Song of Unity" can be downloaded at the website www.aseansec.org/song.htm. The whole text recites: "ASEAN, oh ASEAN. Our voices rise as one. From land to land from sea to sea. Reach out to every one. ASEAN, oh ASEAN. Let's link our arms and stand. Behold the sun has risen to the level of our eyes".
4. "The new ASEAN logo represents a stable, peaceful, united and dynamic ASEAN. The colours of the logo – blue, red, white and yellow – represent the main colours of the crests of all the ASEAN countries. The blue signifies peace and stability. Red depicts courage and dynamisms. White embodies purity and yellow symbolizes prosperity. The ten *padi* stalks represent the dream of ASEAN's Founding Fathers for an ASEAN comprising all ten countries in Southeast Asia bound together in friendship and solidarity. The circle represents the unity of ASEAN" (www.aseansec.org).
5. The vision statement proposed the creation of "a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN Economic Region, in which there is a free flow of goods, services, investments, capital and equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities".

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