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Article

Diagnosing ASEAN—Part 2: Theory Application

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Abstract: This is the second part of a 2-part paper that explores Regional Organisations (ROs), an RO being defined by a group of states that, through the formation of mutual relationships, work together for shared regional goals such as economic growth, social welfare, security, and democracy. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is one such organisation, of interest because of its well-known operative paradoxes. However, current theory to study ROs is both fragmented across the field of study of international relations, and inadequate. Taking ROs to be complex adaptive systems that exist only because of the relationships that occur within their population of nation states. In part 1 of this paper, theory was provided and developed from multidisciplinary sources that in particular centres on psychology. Set within metacybernetics, this was configured to enable ROs to be seen in terms of their formative traits that can explain their characters, and the social relationships that occur between their nation state membership. To diagnose ROs, and in particular ASEAN, the new theory was applied. The diagnosis that results shows that ASEAN has stability/coherence that result in operative paradox, difficult to address without a cultural shift with increased ASEAN authority over its membership that can respond to their inherent collective heterogeneity.

Keywords: regional organisation; ASEAN; configurations; metacybernetics; cultural agency theory; multiple identity theory; mindset agency theory; social organisation paradigm; social cognition paradigm; connective disposition; ASEAN

1. Introduction

This is the second part of the 2-part paper [ref to part 1] that seeks to explore how a Regional Organisation (RO) as an agency with a population of nation state agents, achieves its mission, this seen as expressions of its purposes and aspirations. It focuses on social organisation, seen to be influenced by the substructural attributes of the RO, which shapes the patterns of coordination and integration among the agents. The theory developed in part 1 of the paper will here be applied here to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), an RO with a mission of maintaining political security, economic integration and sociocultural quality of life in its community. It also considers how the values of ASEAN influence its strategic and behavioural outcomes.

It was argued in part 1 of the paper that studying ROs is challenging because of the lack of systematic and comparative research, the fragmentation of the field, and the tension between specific and generalised methods. It suggests that systems and cybernetic modelling can help to overcome these difficulties by organising and analysing ROs and their contexts in a systematic and reflexive way. It also advocates for a cross-disciplinary approach that can connect relevant theories from different fields to address the complexity and dynamics of ROs and their interactions with multiple environments. It focuses on the phenomenon of cooperation, which is central to RO mission and aims, and shows how theories from sociology, cultural anthropology and social psychology can offer complementary insights on how cooperation is influenced by various factors in different ROs. They are diverse organisations, which can create challenges for regional integration and cooperation among heterogeneous and diverse member states with different goals and logic. It has argued that ROs need to overcome the complexity and fragmentation of their arrangements, which can create

geopolitical tensions and distort trading incentives. It also proposed a metacybernetic approach that sees ROs as complex adaptive systems, which can help to explore and explain the hidden causation and multiple meanings of RO phenomena. It uses a realist ontology and a relativist epistemology to connect empirical observations with causative explanations, and a cybernetic perspective to recognise the patterns and interrelationships of complex situations. The theory adopted comes from the metacybernetic framework which models complex adaptive systems with multiple layers of meaning and hidden causation, and example of which is ASEAN. This, comes out of the critical realism stable, has a realist ontology and a relativist epistemology, and use a retroductive and cybernetic approach to inquiry. Then, Cultural Agency Theory (CAT) and its development is used to model ROs. CAT has two modelling derivatives: Multiple Identity Theory (MIT) and Mindset Agency Theory (MAT), which they use to analyse ASEAN.

This part of the paper should be seen as a development of Rautakivi and Yolles [1], and explores the nature of ASEAN. The structure of this paper is as follows. In section 2 examine ASEAN, apply the theory to analyse the organisation, and then provide a diagnosis for ASEAN. Finally, we will offer a discussion and some conclusions.

2. Understanding ASEAN

ASEAN began its regional existence in August 1967 with a meeting in Bangkok by the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, signing the ASEAN Declaration [2]. This defined its aims and purposes, concerned with the cooperation that included economic, social, cultural, technical, and educational fields, as well as the promotion of regional peace and stability through a common respect for justice and the rule of law, as well as an adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. ASEAN was seen to represent the collective will of the nations of Southeast Asia, and states would bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation. This would be done through joint efforts and sacrifices, and it was intended to provide peace, freedom and prosperity. How central these ideas are to ASEAN must be judged by their behaviour in the face of adversity. With the ASEAN Declaration, it set up permanent missions in Jakarta, Indonesia, each Mission headed by an Ambassador to ASEAN who serves on the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR), headed by a Secretary General. The council has the responsibility of local decision-making duties and coordination with their respective governments. ASEAN has many different working groups to coordinate efforts across different sectors and programs. Its Secretariat, also located in Jakarta, provides logistical and support services to the ASEAN working groups, representative bodies, and other ASEAN entities.

ASEAN has sought to improve the development of its region with respect to trade and diplomacy, but it is a weak organisation that makes grandiose statements that have little substance, no mechanism to enforce its agreements and treaties, unintegrated regional banking systems and capital markets, and where member states set their intellectual-property, land-use and immigration policies, and where there is a tension over issues of cooperation and competition [3,4]. ASEAN promotes its successful intentions of improving the quality of life in the region with people-centred opportunities that collectively deliver and fully realise a capacity for human development, and this includes areas such as [5]:

- (a) economic development plans
- (b) conflicts over border demarcations
- (c) problems with minorities within countries and border areas
- (d) human rights development
- (e) democratic development

Unfortunately, ASEAN is an operationally weak organisation [6], and there is little evidence that significant movement has occurred concerning any of these issues, and where some movement has occurred, actions have been quite modest. For instance: the different economies in the region remain competitive and externally oriented (with respect to ASEAN), rather than complementary and cooperative [7]; conflicts over border demarcations have resulted in little resolution, for instance

concerning border issues concerning Indonesia and Malaysia [8], and Thailand-Cambodia; problems with border minorities have not been resolved [9]; human rights developments have been stymied [10]; and democratic development has been stalled [11,12]. If ASEAN were to explain itself as a political body, it needs to address why it has been incapable of resolving such issues, or unable to manage or develop its operations. Despite high-flying rhetoric [13], the outcomes of ASEAN's political aspirations, while claimed to be at a high level, rather remain at a quite low level. ASEAN member states have been traditionally described as Collectivist countries [14,15]. This results from surveys using Hofstede's [16] cultural values model, which has had important criticism [17], and we shall explore this further in due course. In principle, Collectivist countries should be able to work well together, and we shall explain why ASEAN does not conform to this image, apparently with little ability to create collective actions.

ASEAN, as an intergovernmental organisation, is part of the public sector with its institutions, and hence it is a public organisation with a public administration. In systems like ASEAN, public administration literacy evokes negative images, and this leads to particularistic forms of decision-making, a managerial euphemism for favouritism and nepotism in public organisations, and this can easily lead to a lack of confidence and mistrust against the organisations ([18]: 58).

Perhaps because of the issues that ASEAN has, its ability to act as a coherent international strategic alliance has declined [19,20]. For Kurlantzick [21], in the 1990s and early 2000s the ASEAN region was perceived to be one of the world's bright spots for democracy. However, after the 2010 stalled Bali III Concord, democratic and human rights issues deteriorated. On page 4 of the Bali agreement, it states that an intention was to: "Promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as promote social justice" ([22]: 4). However, after the signing of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration of 2012, the human rights issues deteriorated further as illustrated by the Rohingya crises in Myanmar in 2017, the military coup in Thailand in 2014, and labour issues in Cambodia. Jones ([23]: 79) has underscored the incapacity of ASEAN to develop by saying it "seems to be taking steps backwards rather than forward". Related issues occur in democratic development, this being on the same page as the BALI concord III where a statement promotes and ensures a democratic environment. Some agreements also promote economic development and internal trade and intra-investment in the region: despite the agreements, ASEAN has a low level of efficacy in implementing its goals. It also has low levels of efficacy in its ability to implement actions that correspond to its aspirations and goals. The fact is that little economic importance is attached to ASEAN goals, with internal trade at around 25% and no significant changes in the last 25 years, though there has been a slight decrease in more recent years [24]. It is not only political and socio-cultural factors that result in ASEAN's inefficacy in manifesting its mission behaviourally as actions. The lack of an independent character is one of the principal reasons why ASEAN is slow not only to reach agreements but also in implementing them [25]. Before the passage of the ASEAN Charter, scholars had criticised ASEAN's organisational ineffectiveness due to its requirement of consensus and harmony for decision-making [26].

ASEAN was constructed as a diplomatic community and was never intended to be a body for functional integration [27] and even less for structural integration with institutionalisation. That ASEAN integration is based on regionalisation recognises that it embraces an Asian mercantilist philosophy that favours national sovereignty, and impacts the creation of institutions and institutional development. Although ASEAN has a secretariat, it is neither a decision-making body nor has it the power to implement policy decisions that are presented to it, and nor does the ASEAN Secretary-General have any political power, rather operating as a purely administrative bureaucracy and serving meetings.

In 1976, ASEAN adopted principles for regional stability and action, which included the creation of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) as a regional conflict-resolution mechanism ([28]: 313). However, the TAC has never been implemented [29]. It aimed to promote peace and mutual respect among ASEAN members and to prevent the escalation of disputes. Later, in July 1994, ASEAN established an institution referred to as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). This had two main objectives: to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common

interest and concern; and to make significant contributions in efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. It was hoped that the ARF would create a protocol and support the Dispute Settlement Mechanism. The expectation was that this would reduce uncertainty and risk by enhancing trust and cooperation among ASEAN agents, thereby freeing up resources to be used domestically. Part of its brief was to contribute towards transparency and improved monitoring of agent behaviour, while simultaneously offering increased opportunities for communication and side deals. Created to support security and sponsor annual high-level discussions within ASEAN and between ASEAN and external powers, it was set up as an informal regional body. And it was intended to reflect of principles of consensus, non-interference, incremental progress and moving at a pace comfortable to all (called the ASEAN way). But, it lacked any binding mechanisms and enforcement capabilities to foster compliance and implementation of ASEAN decisions and agreements, relying rather on voluntary actions and goodwill. This hardly offered great incentives for conformity to decisions and agreements by wayward agents. As an institution it was weak, having just five role positions under the special unit of the ASEAN secretariat, with its main responsibilities being storage, registration and administration of ARF agreements. There was also one part-time officer within this unit, whose role was to observe and determine whether member states followed agreements [30]. Even though an **edentulous** organisation, it was at least an improvement for ASEAN agents who were otherwise “unaffiliated, individual countries living cheek by jowl, surrounded by major powers with competing interests in their region” ([31]: 814).

Of the institutional bodies of the ASEAN agency, the ARF is the best-known and most significant. It services a membership that includes not only ASEAN agent membership, but also 10 dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States), and the other participants of Bangladesh, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste; and one ASEAN observer (Papua New Guinea). It functions as an instrument of security dialogue for ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific and facilitates discussions by members on current security issues. It also seeks to develop cooperative measures to enhance peace and security in the region. As such it can act as a stabilising body in the Indo-Pacific region. The ASEAN institutional structure is agreement centred, with agreements taking the form of declarations, as a form of ritualism. For Murray [28], these treaty-like documents are rather non-obligatory orders or EU-style directives that negatively influence the nature and efficacy of ASEAN intra-regional trade or common security policy or peace. It may be noted that the trade being referred to has not increased over the last 25 years [32]. Koga [33] explains that ASEAN is simply a set of forums where its institutional norms and rules operate, these being supported by mantras like the ASEAN Way or ASEAN Centrality. In so doing, ASEAN draws diplomatic attention from great powers, and since ASEAN is a 10-member state regional organisation that can (at times) speak with one voice, great powers find it attractive because if they support what they are doing, their actions are underscored by Southeast Asian labels of “legitimacy”.

2.1. *The ASEAN Mindset*

Djalante et al. [34] provide a detailed investigation of ASEAN's positioning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They identify failings there which include: a lack of regional cohesiveness in regional health frameworks to develop a coherent response to the pandemic, administrative fragmentation and decentralization, policy implementation ill-definition, inability to adequately formulate non-conflictual strategy, an unstable global policy initiative, uncertain relationships with health experts, shifting policy agendas, coproduction being subject to collective action challenges, legitimizing policy initiatives through emotions rather than cognitions, and the description of success or failure in policy initiatives is narrative rather than fact dependent. The use of CAT theory (as developed here) for the analysis of ASEAN can generate a better understanding of its inability to undertake collective action.

ASEAN is superficially a Patterned RO since relationships and coherence are said to be extremely important to it, as is the goal formation that it deems to be for the benefit of its collective membership. However, beyond these words, the actual relationship between its agents is Dramatist, as we shall

explain shortly. It is culturally Ideational in that it supports pragmatism with an externally related orientation, and its interest in greater integration does not extend to the creation of mechanisms that can facilitate this. Its strategic personality may be understood by initially referring to the ASEAN slogan indicated earlier of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community," and this highlights a *Gemeinschaft* sociocognitive organisation that is underpinned by Collectivist values and is theoretically comfortable with a Patterning trait value. The problem is that its inter-agent relations are problematic because the agents function in a way that satisfies self-interest and individual benefit. Such fragmentation does not sit well with the idea of ASEAN having "One (personal) Identity," so that its public identity becomes a false self, this indicating an identity schism. Pragmatically then, ASEAN operates with an incoherent sociocognitive style, this resulting in agency instability. This suggests that it is not capable of delivering pragmatic outputs that relate to the events that impact it. It also appears that ASEAN personality is essentially Individualism, though its sociocognitive organisation is one of *Gemeinschaft*. As already suggested, this could create issues that result in uncommitted Collectivism due to the inherent contradiction between personality imperatives and their operative social orientation. However, it must be said that its Individualist personality is Asian, this creating a particular stamp on its character. To explain this, Safitr [35] recognises that ASEAN embraces the Asian values of Confucian ethics in which harmony, unity, and community come first. She also includes consensus in this, but consensus bears a similarity to Confucian harmony [36], which is conditioned by the important Confucian dedication to hierarchy. Thus, to deal with hierarchy Asian cultures have developed their own manifestation of individualism. This is illustrated by Brindley [37], who explains how Confucian individualism does not stress an individual's separation, total independence, and uniqueness from external authorities of power, as tends to be adopted in Western individualism. Rather, it centres on an emphasis on power relationships as connected to unity (or harmony) with external authorities of power. Confucian individualism, unlike Western radical individualism, provides an agent with a holistic integration with the authoritative forces that exist in its agency environment. The agent is recognised as a significant integrated component of agency, where individual values, empowerment, authority, control, creativity, and self-determination have individualised attributes. These attributes are represented by the cognition mindset of Hierarchical Collectivism from Table 5, where Intellectual Autonomy is conditioned by Harmony and Hierarchy. The distinction between Hierarchical Collectivism and Hierarchical Individualism lies in the agency traits allocated (which are either Patterning, Dramatising and Sensate or Ideational). For instance, the distinctions between the Individualist mindsets are highlighted by the differences in individualism in the West or Asia. Western individualism might be typified as say the cognition mindset of either Hierarchical or Egalitarian Individualism, depending on the dominant agency political ideology. Confucian individualism is both relative and relational, giving agents the freedom to make their own decisions in a global agency, thereby shaping their own trajectories within the complexity of the existential interactive interrelationships. This gives agents the authority to satisfy their potential while negotiating environmental influences, commands, and responsibilities. This results in an agency-authority tension that many see as a paradox. It may be seen that this tension occurs in ASEAN. So, despite the promotion of its motto that supports a *Gemeinschaft* sociocognitive organisation, its Confucian individualism collides with its Collectivist values creating figurative intelligence pathologies, thereby failing to implement them either strategically or operatively. A likely association with the cognition mindset of Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism is the affect mindset of Defensive Choleric, with its personality traits of containment, protection and dominance, and agency traits of missionary and empathetic traits. Its interest in protection is illustrated by its report into fiscal matters characterised through a variety of measures that include: liberalisation intended to improve national investment, facilitation to ease administrative needs concerning fiscal and business matters, promotion through support by information flows and facilitation agencies, and regulations to enable an improved fiscal environment [38]. It also seeks to become a dominant regional influencer [39], consistent with the ideas from Zheng Guoxiang [40], who notes that Confucian independence is also subject to the extensive responsibilities and obligations that exist in a network of relationships. This illustrates the

inseparable relationship between the individual and the community whilst highlighting the independent personality, and achieving a distinctive self while penetrating the community. The self creates a relationship that is both internal and transcendent to society.

ASEAN is pattern-oriented, where key attributes are configuration and personal relationships, where Allocentric collectives are important, and where members operate subjectively and are culturally ideational. Hence, ASEAN is ideational, unconditionally embracing moral positions and creating an environment having the potential for increased integration. The figurative system shown in Figure 1 enables perception to result in mental imagery. It can provide preferred ideological images that may facilitate action, this is located in the operative system (hence, Egalitarianism) which provides the ability of an agency to implement values in action [41].

While post hoc analysis like this is very illuminating and useful to understand the capabilities of an organisation, understanding its collective mindset can suggest likely issues with its sociocognitive organisation from which issues can be anticipated, enabling the potential for anticipatory resolution. To illustrate how mindsets can be used in this way, we shall accept that ASEAN has a cognition mindset of Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism, and an affective mindset of Defensive Choleric, and show that its behaviour is consistent with these interactive mindsets. Summarising ASEAN traits, therefore, from traits from 7, we get the following:

ASEAN Agency Traits for the Cognition Mindset of Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism:

1. Agency cultural Ideationality: Idea-centred rather than pragmatic, unconditional morality, supporting tradition, a tendency toward idea creation, and self-examination self.
2. Personality cognitive Intellectual Autonomy: Supports notions of autonomy/uniqueness among agents, expresses internal attributes (like feelings), and independently pursues ideas/intellectual directions.
3. Personality figurative Harmony: As a pluralistic organisation, agents pursue their own ideas and intellectual directions independently, with mutual understanding and appreciation (not exploitation), unity with nature, and the world at peace.
4. Personality operative Hierarchy: Power is hierarchical, normally unequally distributed, and supporting a chain of authority.
5. Agency sociocognitive style it incoherent. This means that while its social relationship structure is Gemeinschaft, its actual cognitive style is Dramatism. This suggests instability in its autopoietic processes, making it problematic to create adaptive requisite responses to complex changes in its environment.

ASEAN Agency Traits for the Affect Mindset of Defensive Choleric:

1. Agency cultural emotional climate Missionary: the imposition of ideas on others, and idea converting, heralding, promoting, susceptible to propagandism and revivalism.
2. Personality affect Containment: dependability, restraint, self-possession, self-containment, self-control, self-discipline, self-governance, self-mastery, self-command, moderateness and continence.
3. Personality figurative Protection: safety, stability/security, protective shield, safety, conservation, insurance, preservation, safeguarding.
4. Personality operative Dominance: control, domination, rules giving supremacy/hegemony, power, pre-eminence, sovereignty, ascendancy, authority, command, susceptibility to narcissism and vanity.
5. Agency social operative Empathetic: accepting, compassionate, sensitive, sympathetic.

Consideration had been made as to whether rather than fear, ASEAN might be security oriented, which is a function of trust. However, according to Roberts [42], the frequency of interaction throughout the region has not strongly influenced the level of trust in each of the ASEAN agents.

While these characteristics predict behaviour, they do not predict pathologies. These depend on the self-producing stability of ASEAN and its capacity for self-stabilisation. This in turn depends on its network of processes that define its operative and figurative intelligence, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, where pathological filtering of figurative intelligence can be responsible for an inability to self-

stabilise, and a pathological filter on operative intelligence is responsible for strategy-operations stability.

The paradox that typifies ASEAN makes this RO a prime candidate for deeper exploration. Thus, in the next section, we shall examine ASEAN to determine whether its behaviour is determined by the proposed traits that depict its character.

2.2. *The Efficacy of ASEAN Performance and its Mindsets*

One way to assess the performance of ASEAN as an RO, as it seeks to promote developmental improvement through economic growth, social progress, and cultural development among its member states, is to use the concept of pragmatics. While pragmatism is concerned with the ability of an agency to undertake practical tasks, pragmatics enhances the concept by referring to the agency's ability to cope in its behaviour with complexity, uncertainty, and change in its environment [43]. Successful pragmatics can be measured by applying the criteria of development evaluation [44] [45], which considers the relationship between agency intervention and the context of that intervention, and can be used to determine the meaning and value of such intervention [43]. The criteria are: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, efficacy, sustainability, and impact. Relevance means how well the intervention addresses the needs and priorities of the ASEAN member states and the challenges and opportunities in the region and beyond. Efficacy refers to the ability of ASEAN to produce a desired result. Effectiveness means how well the intervention achieves the objectives and outcomes of the ASEAN agreements and decisions, as they conform to the ASEAN Vision 2025 [46], [41] and the ASEAN Community Blueprints [47]). The ASEAN Vision 2025 outlines the aspirations and goals of ASEAN for the following decade, while the ASEAN Community Blueprints outline the goals, strategies, and actions for each of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community: political-security, economic, and socio-cultural [48]. Efficiency means how well the intervention uses the available resources and capacities of the ASEAN institutions and mechanisms. Sustainability means how well the intervention contributes to the long-term development and integration of ASEAN, and to its peace and stability. Impact means how well the intervention creates positive changes and benefits for the ASEAN member states and for the region.

In addition to these criteria, we also introduce efficacy, which refers to the pragmatic attainability and feasibility to achieve an intervention, given the constraints and opportunities of a given context. Efficacy relates to the potential and capacity of the ASEAN institutions and mechanisms to implement and deliver interventions, as well as to the alignment and coherence of any interventions with respect to ASEAN values and principles. Efficacy also reflects the responsiveness and adaptability of the ASEAN institutions and mechanisms to changing circumstances and emerging issues. Efficacy can be seen as a precondition for effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, assuming relevance, as well as a criterion for evaluating the quality and value of the intervention (cf. [43]). This is so since efficacy refers to how well the intervention is attainable and feasible, given the constraints and opportunities of a context. If an intervention is not feasible or attainable, then it cannot be effective, efficient, sustainable, or impactful, regardless of how relevant it is. Efficacy may also be seen as a criterion for evaluating the quality and value of the intervention since it relates to the potential and capacity of the ASEAN agents and mechanisms to implement and deliver interventions, as well as to the alignment and coherence of any interventions with the ASEAN values and principles. Efficacy also reflects the responsiveness and adaptability of the ASEAN agents and mechanisms to changing circumstances and emerging issues. Such aspects of efficacy enable the assessment of the successfulness of an intervention in relation to any standards and expectations of ASEAN.

Alternative regimes might be used to evaluate ASEAN with respect to its pragmatic outputs. These should reflect agency learning and adaptive capacity, at least through inquiry and reflexive considerations [43], where learning enables prediction, problem resolution, and pragmatic action (cf. [49]). Pragmatics can be seen as an important aspect of assessing ASEAN's performance as an RO because it captures how well ASEAN responds to its complex dynamic environment, and its capability to achieve its intended outcomes. Here, we shall not concern ourselves with the

development evaluation criteria as such, but will be interested in preconditional efficacy that would permit further analysis to occur. To examine the efficacy of ASEAN performance, we shall reflect on our mindset model through qualitative arguments from the literature. As we shall see from this, ASEAN capacity towards pragmatics will demonstrate significant inefficacy.

Mindset agency theory can be used to explain the potential to satisfy pragmatics by providing an understanding of how an agency perceives and interprets the world, how it communicates and interacts with others, and how it adapts and is able to respond to changing environments. The theory provides a framework for such analysis, and can indicate how this affects the pragmatics of agency communication and behaviour. ASEAN has been qualitatively explored, and it has been deemed to have the cognitive mindset of Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism, with an affective mindset of Defensive Choleric. It may be realised, however, that under complexity, new parameters emerge that can better represent a given changing context, and mindsets may change to become more successful in responding to such changing contexts. This is in line with the realisation that an agency may in principle develop multiple mindset options that better respond to qualitatively distinct contexts defined by a distinct set of parameters. Its current mindset is truncated by its instrumentality, so that it is only capable of making “process not progress” through non-pragmatic trajectories [26]. At present, vague policy ideas are relatively prolific, but pragmatic policy initiatives (i.e., policy details and processes of implementation) reside at some distant inaccessible horizon [50].

Here, we shall keep in mind the theory so far introduced, and explore ASEAN through literature citations. We shall then reflect on the ASEAN culture. We recollect that a loose culture has weak norms and an emotionally high tolerance to deviant behaviour, few rules and heterogeneous beliefs, a weak culture occurs when core values are not clearly defined, communicated or widely accepted by agents, and a passive culture occurs when the values it espouses are not operatively manifested. We will then consider other aspects of the ASEAN’s agency cultural system, including its structure and its intelligences.

2.3. ASEAN Culture

Cultures can have an orientation, and this is determined by an agency political and social culture. It is influenced by the ambient host culture in which the agency is embedded. Cultural anchors are created that are represented within the paradigm that the agency carries. This enables the development of formal and informal norms for patterns of behaviour, modes of conduct and expression, forms of thought, attitudes and values that are more or less adhered to by its agent membership [51].

We have deemed that ASEAN has an ideational cultural trait. While agencies may take cultural traits that are ideational or sensate, following Sorokin [52], the traits are locked in an interactive dynamic embrace that can generate an outcome that enables one or other of the two traits to dominate, but where the other trait may have a sufficient presence to make an impact. ASEAN, however, is dominated by its Ideational trait, this being illustrated by its ability to generate ideas that it is unable to implement. This lack of pragmatics unconditionally supports the creation of ideas, morality and tradition [53]. Its ideational force operates beyond its normative underpinnings and plays a significant part in its self-maintenance. This trait affects its notions of regional integration and provides explanations concerning its collective identity, which can always potentially provide an influential approach to the analyses of subjective issues [54]. As an illustration of its ideationality, Cambodia (if taken as a representative agent of ASEAN) supports balance, stability and harmony, and this is achieved through moral and social control, tradition and conformism [55]. Moral positioning is also an attribute of ASEAN within its “ASEAN way” with respect, for instance, to its position on human rights and its duties towards community, where public morality plays a part [56]. The ideas-centred ideational culture is often unable to apply and then implement its ideas in action, and it may lack the practical capabilities or material governing controls necessary to manifest the ideas behaviourally [57].

ASEAN has a loose culture with: a low degree of normative conformity and lack of coordination among its agents with a low level of accountability and legitimacy of its mechanisms and institutions;

many sources of diversity and variability in its norms, such as different agent political systems, cultures, religions, languages, and interests; many sources of disruption and deviation from its norms, like disputes over borders, resources, and sovereignty, humanitarian crises, economic disruptions, and security threats. It projects a culture as an integrated identity framed through discourse that is delivered beyond the region of Southeast Asia, but this creates only an illusion of substance ([26]: 149). Its culture is also passive since the values it espouses are not pragmatically manifested in action. The nature of the cultural trait is that it determines what type of leader it appoints, what laws are created, and what rules are imposed and policed. The values that determine the trait are reflected in the political culture, which consists of not only norms and values, but also beliefs, and knowledge that includes the rules and procedures and rituals that they rely on [58]. These components are formulated as operative intentions, where all agents interpret rules and values as procedures from their own perspective, and this can change over time and with situational change. This does not define a strong or common ASEAN political culture that drives common ASEAN political behaviour and procedures. This is not surprising recalling the Jones and Smith realisation that ASEAN political culture is substantively illusory, and has only a set of competing agent cultures and no dominant influence to determine how they may work together as a whole.

ASEAN agency is also deemed to have a cultural emotional climate with a missionary trait, involving the imposition of ideas on others, and idea converting, heralding, promoting, and susceptibility to propagandism and revivalism. The imposition of ideas on others also appears to be a characteristic of ASEAN, as illustrated in Vietnam where managers tend to apply executive power according to the missionary trait, thus influencing technical, communication and information flow processes [59].

ASEAN member states are traditional top-down societies, and under normal circumstances, through the legitimisation of selected patterns of behaviour, top-down influences can constrain the nature of the interactions at the lower level [60]. However, such constraints by legitimisation may become ineffective in situations in which there is uncertainty, especially where crises arise [61,62].

Organisational culture determines how laws (which are longer-term social regulators) and rules (the result of shorter-term political regulators) are implemented and acted upon [63]. The legal formality of ASEAN does not specify any legal rights to do anything. Rather, it requires its 10-dialogue partners to sign individually when agreements are made on behalf of ASEAN, in a way similar to FTA agreements. This is in contrast to the EU, where it can sign as a unitary agency on behalf of its agent members to ratify agreements.

The fact that ASEAN does not function adequately as an independent unity is one of the principal reasons why it is slow, not only in reaching agreements but also in implementing them [25]. The ASEAN mercantilist and state-centric ideology, through figurative intelligence, can represent the cultural belief system (of values, attitudes and beliefs) as a coalescence of normative ideological and ethical standards of the culture that ultimately defines what it is that constitutes legitimate modes and means of behaviour [64]. This leads to the situation that ASEAN agents are not willing to adopt legal power for its control processes, thus diminishing their capacity to manage and direct their sovereign status. ASEAN leaders also lack explicit, legally-binding provisions. This has led to a situation where ASEAN statements are more like political communiqués without legal status, and that commitment need not be followed with implementation and action. The statements are intentions of what should be done, written in conditional forms, rather than commonly accepted agreement of what must be done collectively.

2.4. ASEAN and its Agents

ASEAN essentially disregards external influences, despite ASEAN member states signing up to international agreements and laws. This is a classic example of closed system behaviour as explained by Nulad [65], when she notes that ASEAN member states stipulate that domestic laws can trump universal human rights. This constitutes an extreme level of state-centrism.

ASEAN has a population of agents, each with its ideology. Collectively, this conforms to some form of Asian mercantilist economic policy with the idea of harmony and consensus following

ASEAN statements and concords. As such, ASEAN is an idea-centred organisation, rather than an organisation with problem-solving and implementation capacity. As such there is no mechanism to inhibit the creation of conflicts and obstacles that may arise where decision-making is to be manifested in operations. Lin [25] notes that although many of its agreements are technically binding, most ASEAN agreements have been dependent on the voluntary compliance of member states because those agreements provide no recourse for the ASEAN system on how state governments should implement the measures. There are also no mechanisms for calling member states to account in case of non-compliance with binding agreements. ASEAN has no central institutions, power and authority to uphold compliance with them and force action. Neither do the ASEAN agreements force member states to do anything, but rather recommend what ASEAN states “shall” do, and the statements it does make are more like intentions than agreements. Thirdly, as Kurlantzick [11] observes, in the ASEAN Charter 2007, ASEAN did indeed draft and sign a new charter in 2007, but it maintained most of the ideals of consensus and non-intervention of the original ASEAN Declaration. Though the new charter did commit to creating a “just, democratic, and harmonious environment in the region,” it did not define any of these terms and contained no provisions, as exist in other ROs, for agents to intervene in the affairs of other agents, for instance in the case of gross abuses of human rights [11]. Later, the 2011 Bali Concord III refers to the promotion of human rights, democracy and economic cooperation and disaster management, but still there is no definition of what human rights and democracy mean, or how to measure and define disasters. So, agents only have recourse to interpret and implement the statements independently, this possibly leading to contradiction and conflict. Lin ([25]: 836) note that ASEAN leaders lack explicit legally-binding provisions in most of their agreements, with no effective compliance mechanisms or credible dispute settlement systems. Further, ASEAN does not often carry out measures already agreed on to integrate the regional economy or deal with transnational problems.

As already noted, human rights and democratic development have even declined. Following a working paper of the Council on Foreign Relations [66], ASEAN was not able to create more coherent and interdependent economic ties between its agents, and for example, assist with the Philippine typhoon catastrophe in 2013, nor offer practical help to find the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 and the leading position of missing aeroplane rescue operations (noting that information came from Australia, not from ASEAN). ASEAN’s basic orientation is consensus with harmony, and Harmony arises from figurative orientation. Harmony is pluralistic, and within it, one tries to understand and appreciate rather than to direct or exploit. Harmony orientation organisations base their ideas on the notion that the world should accept it as it is and understand and appreciate (where its possible need to change is not a consideration), direct or exploit the environment and be static [41]. This is opposite to a Mastery orientation, which embraces the opposite idea of the world, where self-assertion is needed to master, direct, and change the natural and social environment to attain group or personal goals (values: ambition, success, daring, competence). Mastery organisations tend to be dynamic, competitive, and oriented to achievement and success and are likely to develop and use technology to manipulate and change the environment to achieve goals. These orientations arise from figurative traits including cognitive and cultural traits. Harmony is associated with Collectivism. ASEAN countries are represented by Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism from mindset theory ([41]: 41) being harmony and idea-centred, and tend to embrace the *creation* of ideas [67]. However, idea creators often tend to be unable to apply their ideas and may lack the practical capabilities or material governing controls necessary to manifest the ideas as behavioural aspects of the system. Agencies with a predominantly Ideational mindset generate possibilities through the pursuit and maturation of a variety of ideas, with little emphasis on how to use them materially. Thus, they create variety, but they cannot harness and apply it ([41]: 31).

Following the idea of harmony, an excessive *harmony* orientation may abolish all incentives to do anything. Thus, nothing would be achieved, no response is sought to survival challenges, and the delight in nature itself may also find its limits when the threats of nature are not mastered. Harmony ensures coherence of the social fabric because it makes social life enjoyable, in particular, if something is collectively achieved.

2.5. ASEAN Personality

Figurative images create mental models and abstractions that have been solidified from the strategic parts of an agency, earlier referred to as its normative personality. The personality is deemed to have a cognitive trait of Intellectual Autonomy, which strongly supports autonomy/uniqueness among agents, expresses internal attributes (like feelings), and independently pursues ideas/intellectual directions.

ASEAN offers a paradox that results from contradictions in its processes, permitted by its polity [68–71]. Thus, in the context of regionalism and integration, ASEAN paradox arises through the tension between the logics of regionalism (shared norms, values and interests underpinning regional cooperation) and the limits of integration (challenges that arise from the diversity of agent interests and priorities) [72]. The goal of ASEAN was to preserve long-term peace based on inter-governmental talks, without formal regional institutions, preferring a purely decentralized system. ASEAN members have agreed on a set of procedural norms which have become the principles of the “ASEAN way” [73]. These constitute a set of working guidelines for the management of conflicts that occur within the boundary of ASEAN. Norms lead to cooperation among states, but not to the establishment of institutions following the basic idea of mercantilism. However, ASEAN is not very effective in creating cooperation among its member agents. This is because while it is good at generating ideas that conform to its ideology, its inherent contradictions deliver paradox. These contradictions arise due to the informality of ASEAN [74], which has grown more fractured through its inability to deal with conflictual situations like the civil war in Myanmar or the admission of Papua New Guinea as a member, and where trust across the region is extremely low [75]. As an example, with security issues, ASEAN generates contradictory/paradoxical rather than pragmatic solutions [68], for instance concerning terrorism in the region, and where there are no mechanisms in place to deal with this [70].

Its figurative system is deemed to have a Harmony trait, and as a pluralistic organisation, its agents pursue their own ideas and intellectual directions independently, though there is a supposed mutual understanding and appreciation (rather than exploitation), and a search for unity and peace. Its plurality is reflected in the varying components of its different ethnic groups [76], but that plurality is heterogeneous, with variations in its institutions and regional political security based on the divergence of agent political cultures and historical experience ([77]: 2). As an RO, it adopts a principle of mutual understanding, predictability, trust, confidence, and goodwill among member agents [78]. The idea of agent appreciation within RO plurality arises historically with Asia's Buddhism which, while a minority religion in ASEAN, is a major factor there [79] that promotes principles that seek to enhance growth potential provided the content of growth reflects the broad principles of sustainability and nonexploitation [80].

The operative personality trait of ASEAN is Hierarchy, where power is hierarchical and normally unequally distributed, and a chain of authority is supported. ASEAN operates through a hierarchical power structure [81]. Power is also centralised and concentrated, and it is unequally distributed; for instance, a global leader and their subordinates working in Malaysia might rarely “think outside the box,” and would expect to be told what to do. They are also, therefore, individually less innovative, and avoid speaking to their bosses directly, especially with controversial positioning [82].

This brings us to the affect personality, the trait of which is deemed to be containment. It involves a need for dependability, restraint, self-possession, self-containment, self-control, self-discipline, self-governance, self-mastery, self-command, and both moderateness and continence. As Antolik [83] explains, ASEAN was a product of the combination of common fears and weaknesses rather than common strengths, and so to foster group solidarity, its leadership has adopted three tactics. The first of these is to create a stress on the virtue of dependability, followed by an incremental approach to decision-making and the promotion of community consciousness. Also, as a representation of ASEAN positioning, “moderateness” is a hallmark of Thailand [84].

Its affect figurative trait is deemed to be one of Protection, oriented towards safety, stability/security, the creation of a safeguarding protective shield, safety, conservation, insurance,

and preservation. It has already been said that the mission of ASEAN is to maintain political security in its community, and to provide for its well-integrated economics and a socioculture that enhances the quality of life among the citizens of its member states [85]. These are underpinned by its values, which may be identified as “respect, peace and security, prosperity, non-interference, consultation/dialogue, adherence to international law and rules of trade, democracy, freedom, promotion and protection of human rights, unity in diversity, inclusivity, and ASEAN centrality in conducting external relations” ([86]: 1).

Finally, the ASEAN operative trait of personality is deemed to be Dominance, involving control, domination, and the production of rules that are given to supremacy/hegemony, power, pre-eminence, sovereignty, ascendancy, authority, and command. There is also a susceptibility to narcissism and vanity. Hegemony, as a part of dominance, refers to the ascendancy or domination in an RO agency of one of its agents over another, can be argued to be an alternative approach to hierarchy in regional governance, but according to Misalucha [87], ASEAN hierarchy is projected as a benign hegemon in which dominant authority over others is applied in a benevolent or harmless way, so that there exist multiple types of regional rule that provides a demonstration of ongoing efforts by agents towards building and maintaining deeper relations with each other.

While ASEAN may be susceptible to narcissism, its benign form is self-serving manipulative, while its pathological form is also malicious, and creates maladaptive efforts to self-regulate. Pathological narcissism is likely to be seen when an identity schism occurs, and it is conceptualised by the two features of narcissistic grandiosity, and narcissistic vulnerability, where the former refers to specific deficits in interpersonal functioning, and the latter to vulnerability as associated with all forms of dysfunction [88]. Benign narcissism may be seen to occur in ASEAN as a “narcissism of minor differences” which describes its tendency to exaggerate the difference between it and others [71]. There is a connection between the narcissism of minor differences and the narcissistic personality. From a political perspective, certain political orientations, for instance, represented by forms of populism, differentiating between “us and them,” where the “them” are in some way inferior to our context, and this exaggeration is essentially a narcissistic position. The Freudian notion of narcissism of minor differences explains rivalry amongst people with common ties and, more broadly speaking, amongst neighbouring states, where there tends to be a focus on minor differences from others for defining their ‘uniqueness’ and thus their identity. It relates to “the ‘ASEAN way’” (that recommends sensitivity, avoidance of narcissism, and knowing one’s place: ([89]: 389) and which is a decision-making approach blind to alternative positioning concerning the cultural perception of the radical nature of the word ‘no,’ leading to its official exclusion. This exclusion limits the possibility of regional growth in terms of member states or diversity, and Timor-Leste does not fit into the ‘Asian profile’ because of its European influences, its democratic system, and its human rights records [71]. If it is perceived that ASEAN is susceptible to corporate narcissism, then an analysis must move beyond tangible attributes to its intangible corporate personality profile, seeking to identify any pathologies that might arise therein. One of the indicative signs of narcissism is self-contradiction [90], which ASEAN is guilty of [91]. Other attributes are personality characteristics like: excessive or grandiose self-importance, entitlement, exploitation of others, and a lack of ability to understand or care about others, this perhaps being reflective of ASEAN’s position concerning minorities like the Rohingya.

The cultural system includes self-identification information and functions as a self-stabilising/homeostatic control that regulates the relationship between the substructural metasystem and structural system. This involves values and norms which facilitate the development of strategic structures like goals, ideologies and ethics in the figurative system. Self-regulation defines and formulates goals, standards and motivations toward identifiable outcomes [92,93], like the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) of 2015. Without defining information or self-regulation, no progress can occur and development is difficult or even impossible. Thus, Kurlantzick, ([11]: 4) notes that “although ASEAN vowed to form one “Economic Community” by 2015, including a single market and production base, it likely will not realize that goal.” Neither is there any detailed information or definition of what the ASEAN Economic Community means. Benny et al. ([94]: 5) note that:

“Regarding the concept of Economic Communities, a review of the literature found no specific definition of it despite the many kinds of economic integration”. The ASEAN Economic Community was a goal intended to come into being on 1st January 2015 but was then reset to 4th January 2016. There are still unsolved problems like goods or products of origin and how to measure the origin of the product. So, ASEAN was able to create the notion of the ASEAN Economic Community, but was unable to respond to the issues that arise with its creation. Another problem is the origin of information, especially where “digger” information becomes available as illustrated by laws only being available in local languages. As is revealed on the ASEAN Secretariat’s website, there is no disclosure of any internal law that governs the being of member states. If there is no information and interaction between member states of ASEAN, it is difficult or even impossible to find real information about what, for example, a researcher needs, with no common language. Also, government offices are not willing to give any information to outsiders from inside the organisation. ASEAN defines its agreements in wide frameworks without clear and exact definitions, but seems to interpret and implement economic agreements with little coordination with its member agents [95].

2.6. *The Failings of ASEAN Political Culture*

Political culture is constituted through the political values and norms that a political organisation adheres to. The political culture may be strong when the values and norms are strongly manifested in strategic and behavioural attributes of the organisation, or weak when they are not. The political culture of an RO will affect its degree and scope concerning the kind of political integration that is possible, and political institutions will also affect (i.e., reinforce or change) the values of the political culture. Political culture and political institutions affect each other and have interrelated connections [96,97]. As noted earlier, ASEAN member states have been concerned primarily with state building rather than the building of an RO. States in a region that together build within a mercantilist philosophy may also limit the level and efficacy of regional processes, and the creation of regional institutions.

Naturally, this impacts the efficacy of ASEAN performance, and as a result, it suffers from weak state regionalism [98] and notably weak ASEAN identity [99]. Ayoob [100] also observed that a distinct subaltern (social/political marginalisation) realism practised among weak states ultimately aims at creating national rather than regional identities. As weak regionalism or weak member states, embracing harmony to support the notion of non-interference in other member states can be seen to be devoid of the potential to create an effective platform for social coherence between member states and their people. Despite ASEAN regarding itself as the most successful organisation in Asia since its inception 50 years ago [101], its achievements in the region during its existence leaves a lot to be desired. Since ASEAN has a general lack of interest in closer or ‘substantive’ direct political and economic integration for its agents, cooperation and a shift towards integration has occurred without any institutional frameworks [102]. ASEAN leaders and national ruling elites have not shown any interest in creating institutional frameworks that enable the creation of an Asian superpower, or a major national power [103]. ASEAN integration is at best shallow, proportional, or conditional. Also, ASEAN declarations, charters or agreements are written without specific meanings and definitions of issues. The ASEAN model is typical of other regional cooperative organisations operating through norms and statements. The mechanism is divergent like other regional cooperative organisations. A distinctive difference is the mechanisms (procedures and principles) of cooperation and the decision-making process. As already noted, ASEAN is a diplomatic community with private and informal procedures that seek to avoid institutionalisation.

There is thus considerable evidence to support the realisation that the ASEAN regional community is weak, and can account for very little of ASEAN’s actions [11,12,104,105]. Since its inception, ASEAN has not shown itself to be relevant, and may even be classed as a permanently nascent community with lots of unrealised potential. Its own principles and political culture, and the ASEAN way, are obstacles to its taking coherent action, as shown in the latest Myanmar military coup d’état occurring in February 2021. After the coup, ASEAN stated that there is “dialogue, reconciliation and the return to normalcy” in Myanmar while citing the principles of democracy of

the ASEAN Charter [106]. The coup also demonstrates the value of the principles of the rule of law, good governance, human rights, democracy, and constitutional government in the ASEAN Charter [106]. There is little reason to think that most ASEAN states will respect these commitments [21,104], since ASEAN charters are not obligatory, but are rather statements of aspirations [104] with no mechanisms provided for manifesting these. Seng [106] notes member state agents are left to manifest the values and principles of the Charter concerning their establishment, implementation and preservation, while ASEAN follows its principle of non-interference. When Thailand was informed by Myanmar that its coup d'état was a domestic internal issue and that it needed to resolve the problem on its own, the ASEAN organisation was quiet. Similarly, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen gave statements indicating that Cambodia would not comment on a country's internal issues, following the ASEAN basic principle of non-interference. Optimistically, Malaysia just hoped for peaceful negotiations. ASEAN had a similar response to Myanmar's Rohingya crisis, while the international community expected more than this from ASEAN [106]. If the RO could confront new challenges, then this could lead to a new framework of activities. For this, the Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi noted that to do nothing is not an option [106]. ASEAN's future accreditation in the international arena will depend on how it can handle such current issues. Pongsudhirak [107] predicted that Myanmar's putsch will likely become a lose-lose outcome for ASEAN credibility and centrality. He notes that similarly, ASEAN was quiet about Thailand's coup d'état earlier. He notes that so far, ASEAN's efforts have been unimpressive.

Since the onset of COVID-19 ASEAN member states suffered from the global pandemic at the same time that Myanmar had its political problems. The RO's collective action in response to Covid-19 was controversial, though Tan [108] notes that while ASEAN's response to the pandemic was underappreciated, relatively little data was obtained from member countries. Tan also notes that ASEAN agents are stepping up to cooperate substantively during a crisis, but there is still a problem of lack of information access and communication. The problem here is that there is an inadequate sharing mechanism in ASEAN, which leads to a lack of robust information that can mitigate the RO's collective effects. Despite this, Kliem [109] sees the situation differently, noting that the ASEAN region has done reasonably well in its response to the pandemic. As a caveat to this, he explains that ASEAN has been unable to match the resolve of its member states, and there is a substantial gap between timely and robust national pandemic management and inadequacy at the regional level. According to Almuttaqi [110] the ASEAN regional grouping appeared sluggish in developing a regional response to COVID-19 and had instead adopted what he described as a nation-first mentality. He criticises the member states for acting independently for their own interests, rather than for ASEAN's collective interest. Nandyatama [111] recognises an underlying problem due to the lack of shared information among the nation-state agents, and the problem of ASEAN leadership inadequacy since it does not have a leading country to provide leadership.

Earlier, we noted that ASEAN has a weak degree of cohesiveness, and as Buendia [112] notes, inter-state relations and regional cooperation consists of avoidance of formal mechanisms and legalistic procedures for decision-making and a reliance on consultation consensus to achieve collective goals. In an extension of this, Nandyatama [111] underlines that ASEAN never responds collectively to any regional crises when it occurs, but creatively is more willing to formulate a new ASEAN mechanism after a crisis has passed. He gave a similar example of the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), noting that the bloc's legacy from the 1997 Asian financial crisis, was only formed after 2000.

Probably the best example of ASEAN's weak political culture and level of efficacy is shown through the South China Sea dispute and the creation of a Code of Conduct (CoC). The South China Sea dispute has a history that begins with the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta in 1996 when the Manila Declaration was reaffirmed [113]. In 2002, Peking's comfort with the ASEAN process culminated in 2002 in the signing of a nonbinding Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and that declaration reaffirmed China's five principles of peaceful coexistence [113]. A weak constitution of boundaries, and a loose membership in the ASEAN framework, may have a beautifully designed façade, but very weak foundations (cf. [114]) that lead to ASEAN diplomatic limitations in the South China Sea dispute [113]. Gamas [115] explains the weakness of ASEAN

consensus and principles as ASEAN ritualism. Here, the role of ASEAN political culture is shown in the case of the CoC that resulted in a lack of consensus in the 2012 biannual ASEAN summit, chaired by Cambodia, which concretised ritualism rather than providing a clear pragmatic statement. He explained ASEAN's failure in the 2012 summits in Cambodia to provide a cohesive platform among its members and produce a binding CoC. This is due to the underlying political culture in South East Asia [115], despite the talk of unity among the members. Because of the absence of unity and coherence in ASEAN or even solidarity between member states, ASEAN came to suffer the effects of weak state regionalism. Both the Philippines and more remarkably, Vietnam, looked increasingly to the United States when confronted by China's renewed assertiveness [113].

Later, at the ASEAN Summit in Singapore on April 2018, the RO was again unable to manage the South China Sea dispute, when a divided ASEAN rather than a collective strong RO was shown to be in effect. Kurlantzick [21] observed that ASEAN 32nd summit took the same pattern as previous ASEAN summits, with a traditional consensus style that hampers the possibility of addressing issues. He noted that public statements made during the summit were meaningless since any language that could be construed as critical had been eliminated. After the summit, ASEAN was still unable to develop a position on the CoC in the South China Sea, but instead began negotiations with China on a code [21]. Heydarian [116] notes that it has been more than twenty years since the idea of a Code of Conduct had been raised, and 15 years since the signing of the (non-binding) Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DoC). However, ASEAN was still in the middle of what some see as a never-ending negotiation. The never-ending CoC story is also reflective of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). Since its appearance in 2005, AADMER has not been able to assist in the resolution of problems. It is better seen as more of a surveillance and observatory group organisation, rather than an organisation with implementation skills and action capacity, and where its financial base comes from voluntary fees. ASEAN catastrophe aid is based on bilateral aid, rather than ASEAN RO aid, with the illustration provided by South Thailand's floods of 2017. Malaysia wished to assist in Thailand, but ASEAN did not. ASEAN structure with harmony orientations does not favour action, and it prefers to make statements and provide ritual outcomes.

2.7. *The ASEAN Way as an Attitude*

The ASEAN way is an attitude constituted as a principle and hence functioning as a code of conduct, this then becoming the basis for the mindset of Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism. The attitude is a manifestation of ASEAN culture, and is contrary to pragmatism, cementing its commitment to ideationality. ASEAN was constructed as a diplomatic community [117], and its weak political culture is underpinned by the norm of non-interference in the affairs of member states. This formulates the "ASEAN way" which Jones and Smith [26] define as the process through which inter-member interactions occur, through a process of discretionary cultivation, informality, expediency, consensus building, and non-confrontational bargaining. The ASEAN way also includes an Asian mercantilist approach, where the sovereignty of international institutions is weakened even though formal ASEAN political institutions exist in theory [73]. The philosophical base that underpins ASEAN does not create a favourable platform for institutional development or the creation of a strong ASEAN political culture. This norm is consistent with a general tendency in Asia for interactive processes that are non-confrontational, with the avoidance of open disagreement between discussants. This is unpinning by the ASEAN principles that offer a code of conduct to govern inter-State relations in Southeast Asia, stated in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation from 1976, and defined as: (1) respect for member state sovereignty and territorial integrity; (2) non-interference in internal and issues and politics; (3) settlement of disputes by peaceful means, and the renunciation of the threat or use of force [73].

The goal of ASEAN was to preserve long-term peace based on inter-governmental talks, without formal regional institutions, preferring a purely decentralized system. ASEAN members have agreed on a set of procedural norms that have become the principles of the ASEAN way [73]. These constitute a set of working guidelines for the management of conflicts that occur within the boundary of ASEAN. Norms lead to cooperation among states, but not to the establishment of institutions

following the basic idea of mercantilism. The ASEAN way states that the principle of non-interference is the original core foundation upon which regional relations between ASEAN member-states are based [118]. Bizziouras [119] has described the ASEAN way as an informal, consensus-oriented decision-making process. Antolik [120] notes that this level of decision-making flexibility has been deemed necessary in creating a regional structure that has not assumed initiatives that are not fully and wholly supported by its member agents, thus increasing the chances for survival of the regional organisation. As a counter to this, ASEAN needs to carry out actions rather than aim at ends. Koga ([121]: 91) has made a strong statement about the ASEAN way when saying that it promotes an excuse for relegating ASEAN to a “talk shop,” or as Webber [122] notes, it offers high-flying rhetoric. Koga ([121]; 2022), recognising how contexts may change, notes that the ASEAN Way has been found to be a means for other ends.

An illustration of the ASEAN way can be seen in the RO's approach to issues of security, which appear to be most commonly seen in terms of contradictory, or more particularly paradoxical, positions. Leifer [68] is interested in ASEAN regional peace and security, recognising that it has not instituted a structure that is capable of fulfilling this need. Davies [70] in his discussion of security about terrorism in the region, notes that there are no mechanisms in place to deal with this. Hazri [69] is concerned with the problem of the Rohingya, in which the Myanmar Military government is accused of genocide against the country's Rohingya minority [123], and where while a more integrated ASEAN is being sought, groups like the Rohingya are peripheral entities that are disconnected from government-to-government affairs, and devoid of ASEAN interest. Another paradox, this time not concerning security, but rather membership eligibility, is considered by Sefixas et al. [71] in their examination of the case of Timor-Leste. This small state expressed its desire to join ASEAN in 2008. It was admitted "in principle" as the organisation's 11th member, but its full membership is pending [124]. Its difficulty in joining appears to be because of a perception in ASEAN that it is more European than Asian, despite broadly satisfying membership criteria. This presents an issue of paradox that centres on ASEAN's “narcissism of minor differences” which, as already noted, describes an agency's tendency to exaggerate the difference between it and others [71]. It signifies a differentiation that ignores important differences and pluralities among those in favour of differentiation based on trivialities, this being perceived as a threat to the sense of self of the narcissistic personality ([125]:184).

The ASEAN way is the second principle of non-interference for ASEAN [126], which exists together with a state-centric approach. This provides a weak platform upon which to build a strong and coherent connection between ASEAN agents, diminishing any ability to act as a global player in the international arena. The resulting incoherence [127] still occurs after half a century, and it is still an obstacle to closer cooperation, so it is nothing new. The same territorial conflicts still occur between Thailand and Cambodia, Cambodia and Vietnam or the Philippines and Indonesia, Indonesia and Malaysia and so on. There are also minority problems in almost all ASEAN member countries, and they have increased rather than decreased. Personal disputes between leaders have occurred between Malaysia and Indonesia. Conflicts related to the cold war are solved, but they were not resolved by ASEAN, but rather by the collapse of the Soviet Union and other external events. Incoherence also affects ASEAN Unity and its capacity to create a common security policy as the South China Sea dispute shows. While Vietnam and the Philippines protest China, aggression continues in the region, like that of the Spratly Islands and the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (Reuters, 2018). In these cases, ASEAN was unable to create any protection or show any solidarity or unity for Vietnam and the Philippines. From an analysis undertaken by Kurlantzick [21], the ASEAN summit of 2018 produced little substance on important issues like the South China Sea. Despite territorial problems, ASEAN was unable to give any statements about the South China Sea dispute or show any coherence and unity for its member states.

Heydarian [116] explains that ASEAN proposed a CoC in the year 1996 for long-term stability for the region. It has taken three years for ASEAN to submit a proposal to China. China agreed to the declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in the year 2002. It has taken a while for ASEAN to be able to respond to its own declaration in any way. The ASEAN summit in Singapore in

2018 had similar results concerning the South China Sea, as with previous summits. Kurlantzick [21,41] explains that ASEAN removed any language that could be critical. He also notes that it is unclear whether ASEAN member states will be able to unite to develop a relatively tough common position on a CoC in the South China Sea, having just begun negotiations with China on a code. All these actions from the past to the current time show a low degree of coherence, solidarity and unity between its member states.

The ASEAN Way had its uses during the early years of this RO, when its member agents did not have strong domestic bureaucracies and governance, and where RO coherence was a result of a shared fear of domestic instability and external interference. However, Thompson and Chong [128] argue that such instability has gradually reduced as the nature of the agent regimes and the challenges they face have developed through increasing complexity. As such, they argue, preferences for informal side-line engagements of ASEAN meetings are gradually being replaced by an institutionalized framework of regular summits and official meetings. However, while the shift may have consequences for the way that ASEAN operates, it is not a substantive. The reason is that in ASEAN, like in much of Asia, decision making is a two stages process, first stage is the result of informal/invisible decision-making, and the second is formal, instituted for the sake of appearance, which simply ratifies the informal decisions. However, this still constitutes a shifting position of, if what Thompson and Chong [128] say is true, that the formality is relatively new. This shifting position suggests a very slight tendency of movement in sociocognitive organisation from the incoherent sociocognitive style towards a *Gesellschaft*/Dramatising coherent sociocognitive style that is able to support ASEAN stability. This being said, currently, the fear engendered by lack of trust is still a motivator for ASEAN, a position consistent with findings by Roberts [42,129].

2.8. *The Sociocognitive organisation/Structure of ASEAN*

Consideration has been made of the nature of sociocognitive organisation through the relationship between *Gemeinschaft*/Patterning and *Gesellschaft*/Dramatising, and here it is useful to relate this more closely to ASEAN. In its social cognition trait of Patterning, social and other forms of relational configurations occur, with social influence in dynamic relationships, persistent curiosity, symmetry, pattern, balance, and collective goal formation being important, as are subjective perspectives. ASEAN is also classified as having a *Gemeinschaft* sociocognitive organisation where it operates through collective structural relationships with collective goals and understandings, and its agents are connected with shared customs and traditions [130].

Sociocognitive organisation is influenced by the affect cultural agency trait, which is the dominant emotion that defines the agency emotional climate. The trait therefore also influences how its agents act and interact with each other, and can have either direct or indirect influences on these aspects. Direct influences are those that are clear and immediate, such as the expression, communication, or regulation of emotions. For example, the affect cultural agency trait may influence how the agents display, convey, or control their emotions. Indirect influences are those that are subtle and mediated, such as emotional norms or external emotional factors. For instance, it may influence the emotional norms and values that shape agency sociocognitive organisation by influencing its hierarchy or decision-making process. The trait may also influence the beliefs and attitudes that affect both agency and its agent behaviour, and inter-agent relations, such as its trust, cooperation, or conflict. Thus, by interacting with the figurative affect trait it can influence emotion regulation that has consequences for its rules, laws and policies. The affect cultural agency trait may also internally influence its institutions, as well as its external actors that interact with the agency, such as its allies or rivals.

For ASEAN this emotional climate trait is Fear, and it can have both positive and negative effects on its agents. It can make them isolate themselves, avoid cooperation, feel insecure, anxious, and aggressive [131]. Fear can also make them act defensively or preemptively [132], and this can trigger conflicts among agents [132]. Fear can also lead to aggression when agents face high levels of perceived threat or danger from others [131]. However, fear can also motivate agents to seek cooperation and security through collective action and mutual support [133]. Fear can also foster

mutual empathy and understanding among those who share similar experiences and challenges [131]. ASEAN was founded as a trust-building mechanism for mediating disputes between its members [128], rather than as a platform for mediating disputes [134]. It has successfully reduced interstate conflict by adhering to principles of consensus, non-interference, and peaceful resolution of disputes [134]. However, these principles have also faced limitations and challenges in addressing new and complex issues and crises in the region and beyond [135]. The many meetings and informal social gatherings of ASEAN create interpersonal trust, and this enables disputes to be addressed without resorting to formal legal mechanisms. However, the approach adopted prevents the creation of effective interventional mechanisms into inter-agent conflicts which are then deemed to be domestic issues, and therefore not a concern for ASEAN. It is also unable to handle interstate disagreements which cannot be resolved on the side-lines.

The structure of ASEAN is different from other regional organisations and institutions. It cannot force member countries to comply with agreed regulations because there are no mechanisms for this, and there is an absence of sanction clauses, political power or authority, and a weak and only informal means by which disputes can be resolved [95]. More, ASEAN does not have the authority to enforce human rights, cannot manage natural disasters, and has no mechanisms for conflict resolution [95]. Such structural weaknesses generate a lack of confidence in the organisation or trust in its ability to pragmatically manifest goals.

ASEAN member states can be characterised as countries that are traditionally state-centric within their political culture [136]. By state-centric is meant that the state is of central importance and state sovereignty is undisputed. A state-centric approach together with a harmony orientation and non-interference principles become a weak basis and platform to create ASEAN as a strong and coherent unit between member countries, and it is still further away from being a global player in the international arena. This unfortunate combination of factors that leads it towards inefficacy has been referred to positively as “the ASEAN way.” This positivity simply permits political pathology that negatively affects ASEAN procedures and operative systems to be brushed aside with an empty phrase that distracts one from recognising reality and validates that negativity. So, rather than being in a stage of improving development concerning its aspirations, ASEAN may well be in a state of declining development. When ASEAN engages in intergovernmental discussions, the role of the state and its sovereignty needs to be implicitly considered, as well as its potential for interference in domestic member issues. ASEAN member-states are characterised as countries that are traditionally state-centric, and this may even extend to state fetishism [126]. The state-centric approach is embedded in the ASEAN hybrid governance system that underpins its loose, weak and passive culture, one that allows its values to create an agency anchor, but does not actively participate in strategic or operative functions concerning knowledge processes, learning or creativity [137,138].

2.8. ASEAN Intelligences

Agency operates through various process intelligences. From Figure 1, cultural figurative intelligence is an agency’s capacity to represent cultural values/beliefs as a coalescence of normative ideological, ethical and behavioural standards that ultimately indicate social legitimacy [60]. Efficaciousness improves system viability while inefficaciousness impedes it. So efficacious cultural figurative intelligence can moderate the potential for conflict and hence increase system viability under a plurality of competing cultural factions. Figurative intelligence enables the creation of appropriate and suitable policy instruments that are consistent with its ideology and ethics to deal with what it sees around it, so ‘figurative intelligence’ while a network of processes, embraces a set of figurative images (including mental models and abstractions). Normative agency personality is an agency’s capacity to choose and pursue its conception of a worthwhile life ([139]: 45). Normative agents must satisfy the regular notions associated with artificial agents and possess the capability to represent norms in a format that allows them to be reasoned over and modified during the lifetime of the agent, including (a) knowledge representation; (b) learning; (c) morality and law [140]. Normative agent architectures are largely based on belief, desire, and intention [141].

The figurative system is concerned with driving appreciation and goal formulation which should derive from data collection and involve the careful weighing of arguments as opposed to spontaneous decisions following from the spontaneous desires of the decision makers ([142]: 10). Figurative intelligences influence effective decision-making, but they may be subject to pathologies that inhibit the capacity of an agency to implement policies.

Such a pathology can be shown in the case of ASEAN. Thus, Kurlantzick [12] criticised Concord III concerning its incapacity to promote human rights, facilitate economic and democratic development and establish processes of disaster management. It did not help that ASEAN did not offer definitions of what these things meant to it. Similarly, criticism of the ASEAN Charter 2007 can be applied to the notion of a democratic and harmonious environment in the region, which had not been defined, and which contains no provisions to enable state members to intervene, as exist for other regional bodies ([11]: 5). An absence of such definitions also denies the creation of a measurement system including measures of outcomes [25]. This interconnected issue between definitions and measurement is important, for what is to be measured and how? The Herald Tribune, on December 15 in 2008, went as far as to say “Up until now, the 10-nation organisation has been little more than a talk shop, forging agreements through consensus and steering away from confrontation.” The Council on Foreign Relations in 2014, also noted that despite the statements about human rights and democracy, the fact is that both sectors are in decline.

It has been noted that ASEAN has high aspirations in producing statements and ideas and declarations but with little evaluation of those statements [143]. Smith further notes that the ASEAN Bali Concord II of 2003 was a recursive (or one might say regurgitated) statement that was regenerated from old ones. The same problem occurs in the ASEAN statement in 2007, which repeats ASEAN’s original declaration instead of creating a new charter with new ideas [11]. Indeed, ASEAN has not implemented measures and often does not carry out measures [25], nor does it provide detailed strategies or time frames to implement plans. The strategy should rise from figurative intelligences, and be pragmatically formulated through operative intelligence.

2.9. ASEAN Instrumentality

We have noted that instrumentality occurs in an agency when it has no anchors that enable it to maintain homeostatic self-sustainability. The anchors have both a cultural and operative dimension. The cultural dimension is the most important because this is where knowledge, values and norms are maintained, and it operates as a meta-self-regulative (or self-sustaining) influence that engenders homeostatic control of the agency. When culture is weak or loose, or in any other way passive, it does not provide the controls necessary for the network of figurative information processes that enable the agency to maintain homeostasis. The agency also requires a representative voice, and this is dependent on a coherent culture. This is because a coherent culture can create a sense of trust and collaboration among the agents, enabling them to express their views and concerns freely and constructively, and engender agency relevance. A representative voice may also emerge as a result of a shared vision and common values that guide the agency’s actions and decisions. This does not mean that a coherent culture will always result in a representative voice, especially if there are factors that influence agency culture. Such factors may include environmental complexity and diversity, including the different political systems, cultures, religions, languages, levels of development, and interests. In the case of ASEAN, another factor might be the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of any of the agents, and this limits the scope and depth of cooperation and dialogue on sensitive issues. Yet another factor might be the fact that decision-making is consensus-based, this requiring unanimity among all member states; this may result in delays or compromises. The influence and interests of external powers, such as China, the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, might also be a factor, and this may affect the unity and autonomy of ASEAN. The representative voice may arise from different mechanisms in ASEAN. For Inama and Sim [95], a strong executive is required for ASEAN to implement and enforce its agreements and decisions, and to coordinate and supervise the various ASEAN bodies and mechanisms it has. Such an executive would require certain aspects of agent sovereignty to be delegated to ASEAN, the nature of which

would be bounded by prior specification. However, Inama and Sim note that the ASEAN Secretariat is currently too weak and understaffed to perform such functions effectively. Rather it needs to establish a supranational executive body that is adequately resourced, and has sufficient power and accountability, as has the EU.

Whether the executive is strong or weak, it may be subject to pathological autopoiesis, damaging its potential for viability and autonomy, and may lead to poor performance, loss of trust, resistance to change, and inability to adapt to changing environments. This is also typical of an instrumental organisation. A weak executive is more prone to pathological autopoiesis, as it may lack the authority, resources, or accountability to monitor and correct the agency's behaviour and culture. It may also be more influenced by internal pressures or interests that reinforce the agency's self-image and worldview. The weakness of ASEAN is shown by its lack of a central authority to speak on its behalf with its agents in order to regulate processes, achieve agreements, or conduct actions. Seemingly consistent with a condition of autopoietic pathology, Jetschke [91] explains that ASEAN continues a rhetoric that declares its intention to enhance cooperation and devise projects the materialisation of which lies at some distant horizon. As an illustration, it has been devoid of major institutional innovations with limited levels of inter-agent interactions.

As an instrumental system, ASEAN has very few norms that are not shared and have not engendered a sense of unity in the face of transboundary threats, such a condition leading to a weak institutional structure [26] and a lack of structural cohesion. ASEAN faces a lack of integration and hence cohesiveness among its member states, and this impacts on communication and information flows, the potential for policy making, and creates fragmented responses to issues. ASEAN's weak degree of cohesiveness ([112]: 5) highlights that it has significant issues concerning its regional unity, given the cultural variation across the region, its ethnic diversity, its distinct stages of economic development, and the variety of political systems practised in Southeast Asian countries. This also implies a reduced capacity for ASEAN to develop any improvement in its institutions. An institution may be considered to assume connected values and structures, the latter formulated as collections of formal and informal norms, rules, procedures, protocols, sanctions, and habits and practices (cf. [144]), all of which contribute to behavioural coherence and the intersection of the workings of social norms. To develop improvement, institutions require evolving generic political structures and behaviours, and conventions or norms.

The non-intervention norm of ASEAN together with its harmony orientation and its weak political platform severely limits any processes for regional integration. It should be noted that the Myanmar coup d'état on 1 February 2021 is a classic example of ASEAN's incapacity to handle domestic issues. Consistent with the non-interventionism of ASEAN agents, Thailand's deputy prime minister Prawit Wongsuwanin has noted that Thailand does not express a view on this issue and that it is an internal one for Myanmar [145]. Consistent with this position the prime minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, said that they do not comment on any internal issues of any other country [146]. Similarly, Malaysia only highlighted the importance of a peaceful settlement, while Singapore and Indonesia only sought to follow the situation. Such positioning follows the principle of harmony between member states, and the non-interference in internal and domestic issues and politics. Before this conflict, neither ASEAN nor its member states commented on Thailand's coup d'état in 1999/2000.

Cohesive organisational groups, with common dominant values and norms, are better able to deliver information and generate normative, symbolic, and cultural structures that impact agency behaviour, according to Granovetter [147], who also states that (structural) embeddedness refers to the fact that economic action and outcomes, like all social action and outcomes, are affected by dyadic/pairwise relations, and by the structure of the overall network of relations. ASEAN may have a mindset dominated by a Hierarchical Collectivism personality that is led by the Embeddedness trait, with dominant Ideationality and Harmony traits that create issues for coherence and, curiously enough, embeddedness. Embeddedness is enabled in extended kinship and social trust network contexts through a Gemeinschaft sociocognitive organisation. The social trust network (called Guanxi in Chinese) develops as nonfamilial relationships are transformed into familial ties with a growth in interpersonal trust that enables the progress of complex transactions [148]. Its sociocognitive style is

incoherent because the Hierarchical Collectivist personality is operatively connected in the RO with a mismatch between the Gemeinschaft social relationships and the Dramatist cognitive style, thereby creating instability. As such, it becomes an instrumental agency. This means that its identity is undeveloped or inaccessible to its operative capabilities, and that it lacks self-organisational and adaptive capacity resulting in reduced viability. Reduced viability means that the agency has a lower ability to maintain its existence and functionality in different situations and contexts. It also means that the agency is more vulnerable to environmental changes, internal disturbances, or external challenges that might threaten its survival or performance. Additionally it means that the agency has a lower resilience, robustness, or sustainability in different situations and contexts. This is because it is effectively controlled by any residual strategies that it might have, the selection of which is likely determined by external forces or influences. Residual strategies are the strategies that the agency has left over from its previous identity or viability, but that are no longer necessarily relevant or effective for its current situation or context. Residual strategies might also be postulated strategies that the agency assumes or pretends to have, but that are not based on any evidence or reality. They may also be strategies that are empty of meaning. Here, agency has no understanding or appreciation of them, and they are imposed or expected by others. Since it cannot manifest operationally any goals or values it might have. This can mean that it is unaware or indifferent to its own situation and environment, and that any cognitive-affective processes that occur have no impact on its responses to changes in its environment. Such agencies may also be referred to as cleaver zombies.

While ASEAN may be an instrumental agency, its agent membership will likely not be instrumental agents since their cultures create anchors for their own developmental processes. As a reflection of this we can consider the cultural trait values of some illustrative agents, and ascertain how small differences in trait values can result in mindsets with minor mindset variations and hence behaviours, thereby explaining to some limited degree the distinctions that can be observed between the different characters of the ASEAN agents. For instance, consider the impact of small shifts in the cultural trait values between ideational and sensate cultural traits for ideationally dominated societies [149], recalling that sensate cultures are more focused on empirical evidence and material facts, while ideational cultures are more focused on spiritual or religious beliefs. Such respective orientations will contribute to variations in the agent characteristics. When expressing differences, it must be recognised that all the considered nation states (as agent members of ASEAN with their dominant Ideational trait values) have aspects of sensate culture that provides some degree of mix, as the Ideational and Sensate values interact through the daily sociopolitical and economic behaviours of individuals. This mix, according to Sorokin [52], can move towards an idealistic trait values (a fusion of ideational and sensate cultural trait values) that only occurs as the culture takes on a Sensate trajectory, where Ideational and Sensate values maintain a balance.

2.10. ASEAN and Dispute Settlement

The ASEAN Dispute Settlement Mechanism has been shown to be incapable of solving any controversial questions or issues related to economics and trade, security or border disputes among ASEAN member agents. Perhaps this is because, as Locknie (2013) explains, it exists nowhere other than on paper. To give it real functionality, Locknie suggests that its location should be moved from Jakarta to Geneva. It has already been noted that ASEAN prefers external bodies to resolve issues that it is connected with. This is supported by Sim (2008), who notes that international issues between ASEAN countries are currently resolved through the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The absence of dispute resolution mechanisms in every aspect of the ASEAN way has already been noted, and this impacts the possibilities of cooperation. A good example is the Phra Wihaan Temple border problems between Thailand and Cambodia. ASEAN was unable to address the issue, and the International Court of Justice made a decision (effectively on its behalf) in November 2013. In another case, Indonesia and Malaysia disputed Pulau Ligitan and Pulau Sipadan in 2002, and there was also the case of the Malaysian and Singaporean issue over Polyethylene in 1995. Like the Dispute Settlement Mechanism, many of the so-called ASEAN institutions exist only on paper (Jones, 2010) or in theory [73,150]. Jones [151] sees ASEAN's

institutional capacity and its existence critically. ASEAN has no range of internal mechanisms to foster its political co-operation, financial cooperation or socio-cultural cooperation. It does have, however, an internal-external mechanism to foster economic cooperation like AMRO or CMIM, and that means that force and pressure come from outside of ASEAN [152], and it is this that drives its behavioural responses.

ASEAN has a figurative orientation that arises from its preferred position of stability, and the acceptance of situations as they are, rather than directly exploiting them. ASEAN does not have any effective behavioural and operative intelligence due to the underdevelopment of its structure and its weak supportive institutions, therefore making it unable to adequately support collective actions. Weak states create weak institutions that create weak institutional and political structures. Where these states are members of an RO like ASEAN, they operate there independently, seeking their own interests in a way that is likely to be devoid of collective interest. The states operate, and independent states operate by the intergovernmental system, without ASEAN political culture. ASEAN does not include also political control, political direction or any control system which leads to a weak institutional structure [26]. Institutionalisation makes organisations more than just an instrument to achieve certain purposes [153]. Referring back to Figure 1, the pathology filter it has on its figurative intelligence is indicative of a culture that is either weak or passive, or both, when ASEAN then simply operates as an instrumental agency. We recall that a weak culture has core values that are not clearly defined, communicated or widely accepted by those working for the organisation, and where there is little alignment between the way things are done and the espoused values, this leading to inconsistent behaviour. We also recall that a passive culture is one in which cultural aspects do not actively participate in strategic or operative functions concerning knowledge processes, learning or creativity, and it is, therefore, unable to provide a stabilising mechanism to enable its autonomous decision-making. Thus, in such a case individual agents respond to ASEAN significant events through the local anchors of their own agent cultures rather than any common ASEAN culture.

Following Chilton [154], one can distinguish between political, economic and social cultures, each being a repository for values and norms that permit political, economic and social strategies and behaviours to develop. Irina [155] comments on these cultural classifications, noting that political culture determines what political behaviours are possible for whatever political persuasion is common, and this may, for instance, relate to political interactive alignments. Similarly, economic culture determines what economic behaviours are possible under, for instance neoliberalism, especially when connected to free trade agreements. Finally, agency culture relates to attitudes towards civil society, for example concerning human rights. There is an indication, however, that some ASEAN members are developing economically [156] (Hill, 1994). This may be the result of ASEAN's coordinated interventions, as opposed to individual regional states adopting similar but uncoordinated developmental strategies. This latter possibility is more likely since ASEAN has a lack of identity [157] that would be necessary for such coordination, and this would support the view that ASEAN has both a weak and a passive culture.

If it is the case that passive cultures exist for ASEAN, then this confronts the *Huntington paradox* [158] of political development - a tendency of political institutions to decay and become less effective over time as societies complexify. Here, policy innovations are encouraged by a distribution of power, which is neither highly concentrated nor widely spread. A study of the literature on innovation in organisations indicates that systems in which power is dispersed have many proposals for innovative reforms, but few adoptions, and vice versa ([158]: 85). In support of this, Jreaisat [159] suggests that what is needed in the development process is not the dispersion of power, but its centralisation. We shall return to this later.

The distinction between a developmental agency and one that is purely instrumental is that in the former it is capable of learning, while in the latter it is not, simply responding to its environment through a selected option in its existing repertoire of possible behaviours, whether appropriate or not [160]. All cultural agencies have their own active or passive culture, the former being the case for the EU, and the latter for ASEAN. If organisations are devoid of an active culture, it is problematic to create commonly shared values. Thus, in the case of ASEAN, it has an announced set of values (which

include cultural pluralism, peace and security, cultural understanding, prosperity, non-interference, consultation/dialogue, adherence to international law and rules of trade, democracy, freedom, promotion and protection of human rights, and fostering a common voice in tackling: extremism, lack of tolerance and respect for life as well as social disharmony and distrust: Mun, 2019). However, as already noted, none of these values has achieved a pragmatic outcome, indicating a stalled organisation, just as with such other attributes as human rights issues, democracy development, and equal distribution of income [21,95,106,136,161].

3. General Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has argued that an effective way to analyse complex adaptive systems such as ROs is through the use of a metacybernetics approach and Cultural Agency Theory (CAT) as a schema to explore the hidden aspects of these systems. CAT provides insights into how the agency's culture and social structures influence its agents and shape its identity, allowing the identification of strengths and weaknesses that can ultimately improve its performance in achieving its mission. To explore social relationships between its agents within complex agencies, the Tönnies social organisation paradigm is configured into CAT. The configuration-based approach provides a comprehensive analysis of complex agencies, identifying specific issue areas that impact functionality, including stability and coherence. Multiple Identity Theory (MIT) and Mindset Agency Theory (MAT) are introduced to address organizational paradoxes and contradictory tensions and provide an empirical setting for trait measurements that can help evaluate RO stability and coherence.

The paper uses the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as an example to apply this framework and diagnose the incoherence in its functionality. It presents an effective framework for understanding the complexities of ROs, with a focus on how cultural agency, mindset agency, and social organization interact to impact functionality. The Mindset Agency Theory schema offers a useful tool for exploring how the collective mindsets of ASEAN shape its political culture and capacity to act together in regional affairs.

The paper revisits the theoretical underpinnings of CAT as applied to ASEAN, recognizing it as a complex system grounded in principles of cybernetics and critical realism. ASEAN possesses emergent properties that arise from the interaction amongst diverse entities within the system, requiring in-depth understanding of underlying processes, systems, and agents. By applying the concept of mindset agency theory, the paper explores how the collective mindsets of ASEAN shape its political culture, which in turn shapes the organization's capacity to act together as a functional system.

To improve ASEAN's functionality, the paper recommends a shift towards a more autonomous, region-centric, and assertive sociopolitical-cultural orientation. ASEAN has a substructural cultural agency characterised by collectivist sociocultural orientation and a strategic personality dominated by incoherent hierarchical collectivism. The paper identifies the process intelligences of ASEAN, including its abilities to access and apply knowledge, self-organize, and create appropriate behaviour relative to contexts. ASEAN's passive culture and beliefs about authority inhibit self-sustaining responses to significant environmental situations.

The paper has examined ASEAN since it stands out through its inherent conflicts and paradoxes. To do this we began by enhancing CAT to enable it to explore sociopolitical relationships by creating a configuration for Tönnies paradigm of social organisation. On its own that paradigm was argued is inadequate to characterise an RO. In contrast CAT is concerned with complex adaptive systems, and investigates agencies in terms of a substructure, with dynamic variables constituted as formative intangible traits the values of which create structural imperatives. One of these traits proposed here, the sociocognitive style, derives from social relationships and cognitive style. While the former trait can take bipolar trait values of *Gemeinschafts-Gesellschafts*, the latter has bipolar values of *Patterning-Dramatising*. However, sociocognitive style has bipolar values of coherence-incoherence, and is capable of indicating the stability of an RO where its values could be determined.

Hidden substructure influences structure through formative traits. These are described by Mindset Agency Theory with its 5 parameters, 3 of which relate to personality, and two of which are

sociocultural through the original cognitive style traits of Patterning-Dramatising and Ideational-Sensate cultural trait values. The sociocognitive style trait arises from the degree of commonality between the trait values of *Gemeinschafts-Gesellschafts* and the mindset traits values of *Patternism-Dramatising*, in the same way as there is some commonality between *Gemeinschafts-Gesellschafts* and *Triandis'* trait values of *Collectivism-Individualism*. The Tönnies sociocognitive organisation trait is intimately connected with the operative system trait of mindset theory, and both theories may be envisaged to engage with interactive bipolar trait values. Mindset Agency Theory explains how the four metaphenomenal traits are able to influence the social relationship trait with values of the cognitive style trait, and it delivers the sociocognitive style trait which may take values of coherence or incoherence. We recall that by coherence is meant the degree of unity and coordination among ASEAN agents on regional issues. The ASEAN way is central to determining the mindset of ASEAN, recognising its principles and norms that guide the interactions between ASEAN agents. It implies an emphasis on the norms of consensus, sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of those agents, and adopts fundamental and fully practiced principles of non-coercion, core to the ASEAN way, and which means that the ASEAN agents do not use force or threats to influence or interfere with each other's internal affairs. The concept is related to the respect for sovereignty and non-interference, which are also part of the ASEAN way. The idea of non-coercion is that it can be used to promote peaceful and cooperative relations among the ASEAN agents, and to avoid conflicts or disputes that may harm regional stability and security. All negotiations involving ASEAN agents embrace the principles of the ASEAN way, this underlining the determined personality mindset that has been postulated for ASEAN.

The notion of coherence promoted by the ASEAN way is intended to: foster a sense of community and identity based on shared values and interests; enhance horizontal coherence among the various ASEAN-led mechanisms and initiatives, like the ASEAN Community and the ASEAN Regional Forum; and maintain vertical coherence between ASEAN and its external partners by promoting dialogue and cooperation on regional and global issues. However, while coherence is an expressed desire, it is not natural to ASEAN agents, since they have various factors that tend to create internal heterogeneity and tensions between themselves. For example, its organisational expansion in the 1990s was accompanied by a growing internal heterogeneity, resulting in internal tensions that the ASEAN way has not adequately addressed. Some of these tensions arise from different levels of economic development, political systems, security interests, and historical grievances among the agents. ASEAN coherence is also challenged by external pressures and influences from major powers, such as China and the US, with its divergent or conflicting interests and agendas in the region. Thus, coherence is an ideal that ASEAN has that never progress past its wish list. This supports the realisation that its Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism mindset is inherently unstable, so that it is incapable of recognising or delivering requisite pragmatic outputs to maintain itself, and hence raising its level of viability.

Looking at ASEAN technically, through our theoretical lens, it is an agency with an operative Dramatist-Ideational sociocultural orientation, and a personality mindset of Hierarchical Collectivism, and an agency mindset of Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism. The cognition personality is defined in terms of embeddedness, harmony, and hierarchy. The ideational cultural attribute sees reality as super-sensory. The strategic personality determines how ASEAN culture understands and responds to reality. The ASEAN mindset involves embeddedness, where values like social order, respect for tradition, security, and wisdom are especially important. The status quo is important, as are restraining actions or inclinations that might disrupt in-group solidarity or the traditional order. That these things may be important does not necessarily mean that they function well. This is due to the interactive interference of the different traits. Its affect mindset is Defensive Choleric, this having affect personality traits of Containment, Protection and Dominance. Its sociocultural agency traits take Missionary and Empathetic values, the former imposing perspectives on others, the latter being responsive to others. Its Protection trait value is manifested through its attitude, characterised by measures of liberalisation (intended to improve the situation for agent investments), facilitation (to ease administrative needs concerning fiscal and business matters),

promotion (through support by information flows and facilitation agencies), and regulation (to enable an improved fiscal environmental).

Collectivism-Individualism mindset outcomes are such that the Collectivism orientation tends to drive relational behaviour, with a tendency towards cooperative and harmonious orientations. The Individualism orientation tends to create more self-reliance, encouraging competitive behaviour. Balances may occur between these traits. Mindset Agency Theory is a formative trait psychology bedded in a substructure that explains how mindsets (patterns of affect, cognition, and behaviour) are formed and changed by interaction between agents and contexts. It is related to both the paradigms of Tönnies and Triandis. Mindset agency theory can be applied to different levels of analysis, such as individuals, groups, organisations, societies, and cultures. It can explain how different types of mindsets interact and influence each other across different levels and contexts. The Tönnies and Triandis paradigms are linked with Mindset Agency Theory by recognising that they are complementary and interrelated. They can be seen as different dimensions of formative traits that can be applied in related forms of analysis. The three paradigms can explain how different types of formative traits interact and influence each other across different levels and contexts, though the mindset theory is overarching. This means that it can incorporate the insights from the Tönnies and Triandis paradigms into a more comprehensive framework that accounts for the complexity and diversity of social systems and their personalities.

So, we have provided a more comprehensive theory related to sociocognitive organisation through Mindset Agency Theory that, as an metaphenomenal theory, can connect with both tangible and intangible variables, this having the potential for an improved RO analysis that can provide behavioural predictions for determinable contexts. This approach enables a substructural understanding of ASEAN that focuses on different kinds of intelligence, and that can explain ASEAN outcomes and its efficacy or inefficacy. ASEAN often boasts that it is the most successful organisation in Asia since its founding in 1967. However, its success is questionable, as its functionality as an RO has been poor. ASEAN has shown longevity, expansion, resilience, and influence over the past 50 years, despite various challenges. It has grown from five to 10 members, covering most of Southeast Asia. ASEAN claims that it is adaptive and flexible in responding to changing regional and international situations. It has become a key actor and platform for dialogue and cooperation in Asia and beyond, involving major powers such as China, Japan, India, Australia, and the United States. However, these achievements are overshadowed by ASEAN's operational inefficiency, which makes it a weak and ineffective organisation that has failed to deliver pragmatic outputs in its regional affairs. Its performance and credibility are hampered by: (a) its shortcomings and limitations, such as its lack of political will, institutional capacity, and enforcement mechanisms to implement or comply with its agreements or decisions (e.g., being unable to help resolve the South China Sea disputes, protect the Rohingya minority, restore democracy in Myanmar, or contain the COVID-19 pandemic); (b) its internal divisions, divergent interests, and external pressures that undermine its cohesion and centrality (e.g., being unable to present a unified stance or response to China's growing influence and assertiveness, the U.S. strategic rivalry and withdrawal, or the Indo-Pacific concept and strategy); and (c) its failure to adapt to changing regional and international environments and to meet the expectations and needs of its people and partners (e.g., being unable to address the challenges of digitalisation, innovation, and sustainability, or to promote human rights, democracy, and civil society).

ASEAN has a forum in which its institutional norms and rules (like the ASEAN Way or ASEAN Centrality) operate. In so doing, ASEAN draws diplomatic attention from great powers, and since it is a 10-member state regional organisation that can (at times) speak with one voice, great powers find it attractive because if they support what they are doing, their actions take on "legitimised" labels from Southeast Asia. Its external powers, then, support ASEAN diplomatically and financially, and even though the secretariat is small, it functions well. This means that ASEAN depends on attention deriving from the great powers, and if they ignore these, then the organisation will be weakened, and its dependency on external influences/forces will make its self-reliability limited. So, ASEAN

development and process are related to external forces and players, and these are therefore able to direct ASEAN, putting into question its degree of autonomy.

ASEAN's own basic principles seem to have been an obstacle to closer integration between its member states, examples being harmony, non-interference or a consensus-based decision-making process with a decentralised structure. All of these principles alone can weaken integration and co-operation in any organisation. Harmony organisation is idea-centred rather than problem-solving centred, so that they already have a predisposition not to be very pragmatic. This is a different condition to the serious pathology that arises when agency instabilities arise, disabling requisite adaptive strategies to change. ASEAN can create proposals with little capacity for adaptation and implementation, and in its decentralised system power is widely distributed. Following Huntington's proposition that *systems in which power is concentrated have few reform proposals but many adoptions*, there is an argument that for development towards improvement, centralisation is better than decentralisation, with a potential to create a burden across the population of agents that enhances such facets as knowledge deficits, goal conflicts, and miscommunication. A third distributed option is possible, this being decentralised since it has no central authority. Rather it consists of many independent and equal nodes that cooperate and communicate with each other. This can be more resilient and democratic than the alternatives that is beyond any single point of failure or control, though it can suffer from challenges concerning communication, coordination, security, and performance. ASEAN is challenged in all of these areas.

The institutions of ASEAN have a relatively low level of development for improvement as defined by their mission, and this is because of the state-centric approach to cooperation. This results in national interest being of greater importance than ASEAN common interest, and where national state sovereignty is unquestioned. ASEAN's autonomy has not increased significantly, it has not made any major institutional innovations, and no objective functional demand arises from any specific interactions between member states. We have already noted the comment by Jones and Smith that goes even further, indicating that ASEAN is making process rather than progress, and it can only offer a platform of limited inter-governmental and bureaucratically rigid interaction. Decision-making is based on consensus, making it difficult to reach conclusions, and this often results in policy detail being delivered later, at some unreachable temporal horizon. ASEAN's legal base also affects obstacles that inhibit the creation of positive outcomes, and the lack of an independent entity character is one of the principal reasons why ASEAN is slow, not only in reaching agreements, but also in implementing them ([162]: 18).

This is not to say that ASEAN does not implement agreements, and an example might be useful [163–166]. It established two centres to implement the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), which is a legally binding regional policy framework for disaster risk reduction and management, and intended to primarily act as a monitor for ASEAN. The humanitarian assistance centre and the coordinating centre for humanitarian assistance were set up in 2011 to facilitate and coordinate the delivery of humanitarian aid and disaster relief in the ASEAN region. These centres played a role in the 2017 crisis in Bangladesh and Myanmar, where the Rohingya people faced persecution and violence by the Myanmar military government. The centres provided rice, personal protective equipment, medical supplies, and food items to Rakhine State for the Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers. However, ASEAN's support for the crisis was insufficient and ineffective. ASEAN only issued statements that expressed concern but did not propose any concrete actions. It also sought dialogue to create trust and understanding between actors, but without any tangible outcomes. Moreover, it proposed a 5-point consensus plan that was unclear, voluntary, and lacked a timeline for implementation. A more effective approach would have been to apply sanctions to the Myanmar military government, as some countries outside ASEAN have done, to create negative consequences and incentives for them to stop their repression and violence. This would only work within ASEAN if there were a regulatory framework that could control the benefits that its agents receive from being part of the regional bloc. Such a loss would have to be more substantial than the huge reduction in trade that Myanmar has experienced (caused as a spontaneous response to protests over its violent behaviour). However, unlike the EU, ASEAN does not have such

a framework, and has been unable to create pressure to resolve the Myanmar conflict. In particular, while ASEAN has provided some humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya crisis, it has failed to address the root causes of the conflict or to hold the Myanmar military government accountable.

In order to avoid conflicts with its member agents, ASEAN adopts a wide frame of reference that is intended to take into account multiple attributes, perspectives, values, and interests. In principle, this should enable issues to be classified, where each classification has a general regulatory response that, with reflexive analysis, might be considered appropriate for conflict resolution. This would require specific local contexts to be explored in sufficient detail, enabling a set of rules to be created for local ASEAN action. However, this does not occur since, as we have argued, ASEAN does not delve into the detail of given situations. A wide frame of reference seeks a balance between responding to specific issues and maintaining regional peace and stability, thereby, it is claimed, allowing an adaptive and evolving approach to changing circumstances and needs. It also enables ASEAN to claim that it respects the sovereignty and autonomy of its membership by not intervening. A further claim is that this enables a dynamic and flexible response to situations. However, any said responses are meaningless since ASEAN does not intervene, and its lack of pragmatism means that it avoids action for specific issues. In place of this, ASEAN creates agreements that are dependent on the ad hoc voluntary compliance of member agents without the anchor of a common political culture. This is illustrated by the realisation that ASEAN declarations and statements commonly adopt the word “shall,” and this refers to intention. This highlights that despite conditional wording, definitions and statements are devoid of meaning, especially with respect to undefined terms like democracy, human rights, or integral economic development. ASEAN has not even been able to resolve tensions between member countries or respond to intraregional or regional military conflicts or issue common statements or adopt common policy/politics, for example in the current South China Sea conflicts. With the absence of definitions and a lack of a measurement system, it has no means of measuring outcomes against intentions. All of this taken together makes ASEAN integration rather shallow, with conditional statements that lead to proportional integration, which means statements without a plan and real aspiration for implementation. Processes of integration and an increased level of co-operation occur mainly on paper, but not in practice, and they are devoid of a legal basis. Proportional integration has led to poor performance. Such factors are normally adopted to measure degrees of regional integration. The level of integration it has managed, as well as ASEAN’s performance with respect to democracy and human rights, are seen to be regressive, and the level of economic cooperation it has is shown not to have significantly developed during the last 25 years concerning intra-trade or intra-Foreign Direct Investment.

The proposition has been offered that ASEAN’s development as an operatively efficacious organisation is only feasible if it can maintain a personality driven by a coherent political culture that is neither weak nor passive. Here, political culture orients the agent macroscopically, influencing its personality and potential for behaviour. We can explain the potential for a declining, increasing or stationary RO development in cybernetic terms. While declining or increasing development is dependent on the cultural orientation of an RO, stationary development (or non-development) occurs when the culture is incapable of change. While figurative intelligences can be used for ideational creativity, its pragmatic capacity is not supported and it may therefore suffer from learning inefficacy in this respect. This appears to be the case with ASEAN. Its member agents have all the factors that can establish it as a global-level player and an actor in international as well as regional affairs. It has a young population, a strong production base, a high number of foreign currencies in central banks, and fast economic growth. All these factors should create a strong and coherent platform for ASEAN cooperation. However, its member agents must increase their level of collective action, and it seems that the traditional ideas for a “collective ASEAN” that its agents still adhere to mean that it is unable to create state-level collective actions.

To enable ASEAN to overcome its stagnation (if not decline), it requires a language shift, referring to “must” rather than “should” or “shall” thus moving away from a weak political culture and identifying its figurative intelligence pathologies enabling it to maintain an active and pragmatic political culture, this requiring a degree of shift towards a sensate cultural trait. This would enable it

to develop a paradigm that enables it to operate coherently and an orientation that satisfies its potential for efficaciousness, moving from a state-centric approach to a region-centric one. This shift would depend on the ruling elites at the state level, and their willingness to support development and share power. Also, ASEAN member states must question the harmony organisation with a consensus-oriented decision-making process. When consensus is the priority over ASEAN efficacy, ASEAN will hardly be able to achieve any of its desires. ASEAN agents need to become more autonomous, so that their behaviour can shift from being an instrumental organisation, thereby enabling it to be less dependent in its functionality on arbitrary environmental events.

ROs relationships need to be such that collective action is feasible, and mindsets enable the potential for levels of cooperation and collective action. The collective agency operates through shared beliefs, pooled understanding, group aspirations, incentive systems, collective action, and efficacious processes and behaviours, associated with particular mindsets. Collective action refers to action taken together (collectively) based on a collective decision by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their condition and achieve a common objective. The traits that underpin the mindsets derive from the dominant values in a society. People and organisations with these values are therefore likely to do better in that society than those who have different values. Combinations of traits, expressed in terms of bipolar value pairs, are determinants for behaviour, though it must be realised that the traits can mutually influence each other. It cannot be assumed that some traits are "better" or more effective than others, they just create the tendential ambient characteristics indicative of individuals, organisations, or states, thus providing tools to predict how they might respond to given situations in given contexts. Eight different types of cognition mindset Collectivism/Individualism and affect mindset Stimulation/Containment have been identified. The type of these mindsets are trait dependent and guide how agents may interact together, and that interaction can in turn influence the agency mindset.

A summary of ASEAN can also be offered. It is Collectivist with a Dramatist-Ideational sociocultural orientation and the strategic personality dominated by Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism defined in terms of embeddedness, harmony, and hierarchy. As an agency, its social orientation is that of a patternner, where configurations tend to be important in social and other forms of relationship, indicating the relative positions individuals and groups have with one another, affecting the nature of society. Symmetry, pattern, balance, and the dynamics of relationships are important implying a trust role. ASEAN has a passive culture that is hardly capable of applying cultural knowledge or learning or creativity, such constrictions due to its beliefs about authority, inhibiting self-sustaining responses to significant environmental situations. It has an orientation that supports the ideational, for which reality is seen as super-sensory, and where the consequences of the psyche and thought are significant, morality unconditional, and tradition (nationality) is of importance. While ASEAN tends to rely on personal relationships cemented by trust in their ingroups, they are more careful with outgroups, implying that ingroup collective action is much easier to create than outgroup, for which there is little process of socialisation.

ASEAN agents have different orientations and preferences, and different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting when they communicate and relate to each other, and when they cooperate and coordinate with each other. These different ways are influenced by their culture, which is the shared values, norms, beliefs, and practices that shape their collective identity and behaviour. According to some studies, ASEAN agents tend to have a Collectivistic culture, which means that they value group harmony, loyalty, and solidarity over individual autonomy, rights, and interests. They also said to have a high-context communication style, which means that they rely more on implicit cues, nonverbal signals, and personal relationships, rather than on explicit words, verbal messages, and formal rules. Moreover, they tend to have an ingroup-outgroup distinction, which means that they differentiate between people who belong to their own group (ingroup) and people who belong to other groups (outgroup). As a result, ASEAN members tend to rely on personal relationships cemented by trust in their ingroups, while they are more careful with outgroups. This implies that ingroup collective action is much easier to create than outgroup collective action for ASEAN members. For outgroup collective action to be created, there needs to be more process of socialisation,

which means more interaction, communication, and exchange of information among outgroup members to build trust and understanding.

ASEAN has a weak, passive and loose culture that lacks strong influences or values. It also follows a principle of non-intervention, which means that it does not interfere with the internal affairs of its member states or other countries. This makes it appear to be an illusory rather than a real organization. ASEAN's process intelligences, which are its abilities to access and apply knowledge, to self-organise, and to create appropriate behaviour relative to contexts, are not effective. Its agency function through an ability to manifest its mission and goals pragmatically, indicates both organisational instability and inconsistency. It seems to be declining rather than improving as it faces increasing complexity and challenges from its environment, including conflicts, disasters, and globalisation. To survive, it has made some adjustments, such as adopting more formal meetings instead of informal ones. Formal meetings have more structure, preparation, and documentation than informal ones. However, this is only a small change that does not make ASEAN more pragmatic or proactive.

The complex adaptive model of CAT, and its derivative of mindset theory, have been used to illustrate that ROs, as cultural agencies, always have the potential to be dynamic, adaptive, self-organising, proactive, self-regulating socio-cognitive and socio-affective autonomous plural. They interact with their social environments, and from these they acquire intrinsic information [167,168]. This can be defined as the information that is inherent to a complex and uncertain structure or process that reflects its essential nature or character, and is valuable for decision processes regardless. It can be contrasted with extrinsic information, which is the information that is derived from or influenced by external sources, such as observations, feedback, models, or expectations. Intrinsic information enables agencies to maintain their stability, unless they are subject to inherent pathological conditions, as in the case of ASEAN.

This study could be enhanced by two possible steps. The first would be to conduct a quantitative evaluation of ASEAN, which would corroborate the qualitative evaluations we have developed. The second would be to further investigate Mindset Agency Theory with the aim of identifying the stability of the different mindsets indicated. It would seem, for instance, that the cognition agency mindset dominated by Incoherent Hierarchical Collectivism we have assigned to ASEAN is not inherently stable, though the Hierarchical Collectivism is likely stable. Maruyama's [169] inquiries originally identified 4 stable mindspace that have meaning equivalence to 4 personality mindsets [170], and so in investigation the stability of mindsets, some attention might be allocated there.

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