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# Indonesian Perceptions of China's Threat to ASEAN
# Will the PRC's Influence Split ASEAN?

## Introduction

In 2012, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) suffered a setback with a failed consensus over the South China Sea at the first ASEAN Summit in April 2012 and at the ASEAN-Post Ministerial Meeting., when Cambodia, acting in favour of Chinese interests, unilaterally blocked the Philippines demand to include the South China Sea issue in the Chairman's Statement. Already before the Summit, commentators warned of the possibility that China might exercise its influence over Cambodia, ASEAN's chair in 2012, to prevent the emergence of a common ASEAN stance on the South China Sea dispute

Emmerson (2012) stressed the symbolic damage caused by Cambodia by the failure of Hun Sen's government to even try to *agree on disagreeing*, an important norm of ASEAN'S consensus driven processes and the *ASEAN Way*. This paper argues that the negative symbolic effect on ASEAN identity should not be underestimated. The ASEAN (Cambodia's) chair's unwillingness to maintain such consensus led many in the association to question the sincerity of Cambodia's commitment.

The thesis presented here is that China's lobbying on Cambodia presents a new threat to ASEAN by frustrating ASEAN's consensus building-process. Using Social Identity Theory (SIT), this paper will analyse the significance of the failed consensus from an Indonesian perspective. This paper draws on quantitative and qualitative data gathered during

two research trips to Indonesia. The first trip was conducted in June and July 2010 and hosted by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta; the second trip from October 2012 until March 2013 was hosted by Universitas Katolik Parahyangan (UNPAR) in Bandung. The datasets include in-depth interviews with Indonesian diplomats, parliamentarians and foreign-policy advisers as well as a quantitative survey on foreign policy attitudes. After presenting the theoretical framework based on SIT, the paper will analyse the quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) datasets for evidence on the perception of a threat posed by China to Indonesia's social identity as a member, and self-perceived leader, of ASEAN. The final section will discuss the results and answer if such a new threat perception exists in Indonesia.

## Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory holds that an individual's identity is not solely determined by that individual's personal characteristics and relations to other individuals, but also by a person's membership in groups (social identity) (Giessner and van Knippenberg, 2008: 15). In international relations, SIT positsthat the identification with particular groups has implications for an actor's self-image (Tajfel, 1969), because "people strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity […]" (Brown, 2000: 747). Group membership is primarily motivated by an individual's desire for self evaluation as well as by self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 1979: 47; Turner, 1982) and self-enhancement (Tajfel, 1972: 438).

Three variables affect intergroup differentiation according to SIT: "people must be subjectively identified with their ingroup; the situation should permit evaluative intergroup comparisons; the outgroup must be sufficiently comparable (e.g. similar or proximal) and that pressures for distinctiveness should increase with comparability" (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 13). Previous research suggested three determinants of an in-group's psychological utility: the in-group's perceived value, its self-relevance, and its entitativity (Correll and Park, 2005: 346). A social group's perceived value changes depending on the evaluation and re-evaluation by members influenced by their particular motives and perception of the group's overall influence and strength. Five elements were identified as especially important for self-evaluation: a group's *merit*, p*ower*, *reputation* and

(distinctive) *consensus* as well as the (meaningful) *belonging* generated by membership. (Correll and Park, 2005: 347–349.)

Voci (2006) argued that a threat to social identity would trigger a threat evaluation in intergroup relations, because such a threat would threaten the in-group's values, distinctiveness and directly target the group members'self-image. The felt intensity of the threat would vary depending on the individual degrees of identification. Members strongly identifying with their group will be inclined to defend it, thereby, protecting their self-image. (Ibid: 265–284). Social identity in terms of SIT however, is context dependent and the intensity of the in-group members'reaction varies based on the importance of the threatened object, such as a value, and between members of the threatened group depending on their individual degrees of identification. (Atran and Axelrod, 2008; Bazerman, Tenbrunsel and Wade-Benzoni, 2008). If a state is unsatisfied with its social identity, it can adopt one of three strategies to improve its social identity: 1) social mobility (leaving a group for and/or becoming a member in another more prestigious group: exit option), 2) social dominance (actively aspiring leadership of a group: dominance option) or 3) social creativity (improving a group's status by investing creatively into the group: creativity option). (Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish andHodge, 1996.)

## Analysis

The data comprises a total of 34 interviews and focus group discussions accumulated during both trips as well as quantitative data from an online survey (N = 236; about 60,3% male and 39,7% female; one participant did not disclose gender) conducted during the second trip. The survey includes 109 items: 108 of these had to be answered on a Likert scale (5 point scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree and strongly agree, plus the option to refuse answering the question) while another item was a simple multiple choice question. Overall the survey sums up to 158 variables. Correlations were made using Pearson and probability was checked with confidence intervals and p-values.

The majority of survey participants (72,8%) were students, while Indonesian academics and IR practitioners comprised the remainder. At the time of questioning, 76% held or pursued a degree in IR. The online survey is, therefore, not representative for the whole population, but rather

for those groups of Indonesian society involved in foreign policy making and students from those universities with the best IR degree programmes, an important recruiting pool for government institutions in the IR and in the NGO field. The survey data is biased in two ways. Firstly, an over-proportionate amount of participants aged 25 or younger (81,62%) which is due to the large number of student participants. Secondly, an overrepresentation of Christians (47,75% total: 28,35% Catholics and 19,37% Protestants; 40,45% Muslims; 11,8% other religions) in a country with a Muslim population of about 88% (German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013), which can be explained by the fact that many participants were enrolled at a Catholic university, which attracts a larger proportion of Christian students. Because the participants of this survey are largely students from Indonesia's major universities in the IR field, they offer an interesting comparison to the qualitative interviews which focus on foreign policy elites. The comparison of attitudes allows for observations on whether change in Indonesian world views occurs between the current and future generation of the IR elite.

## Quantitative Data and Hypotheses

This paper began by arguing that three factors are central to the threat perception that China will split the ASEAN (*China threat*): 1) Indonesia's strong identification with ASEAN (*ASEAN identity*), 2) the perception of Indonesia's leadership role in the region (*Indonesian leadership*) and 3) the focus of ASEAN in Indonesian foreign policy. Assuming a link between *ASEAN identity* and *Indonesian leadership*, these factors should be mutually reinforcing, and together should aggravate the perception of *China threat*. Therefore, our three core hypothesis should be:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1)***:** Strong identification with Indonesia's regional leadership, results in high identification with ASEAN.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2)***:** High ASEAN identification, increases the threat perception that China will split ASEAN.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3)***:** High perception of Indonesia's regional leadership role, increases the threat perception that China will split ASEAN.

At the same time, the perception of the *China threat* should intensify if trust in China is low and if Indonesia's foreign policy is perceived

as lacking assertiveness in dealing with external challenges (e.g. China's rise), an frequently expressed criticism.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Low trust in the Chinese government, increases the threat perception that China will split ASEAN.

**Hypothesis 5 (H5):** The perception of a lack of assertiveness in Indonesian foreign policy, increases the threat perception of China.

Due to ASEAN's focal position in Indonesian foreign policy, low identification with ASEAN and increasing threat perceptions of China should support the view that Indonesia is in need of a *post-ASEAN foreign policy* (the exit option) and should result in greater tendencies to challenge traditional foreign policy thinking in Indonesia.

**Hypothesis 6 (H6):** Low identification with ASEAN causes greater approval for a *post-ASEAN foreign policy*.

**Hypothesis 7 (H7):** High threat perception that China will split ASEAN causes greater approval for a post-ASEAN foreign policy.

**Hypothesis 8 (H8):** High threat perception that China will split ASEAN causes increasing rejection of traditional foreign policy concepts in Indonesia.

## Data Analysis

Figure 1 on table 1 illustrates the five currently most discussed foreign policy issues in Indonesia, among which "China's rise and military modernisation"was nominally ranked the lowest. "The rise of China" also ranks nominally the lowest among the greatest challenges to Indonesia's own rise (figure 2 on table 2). It must be emphasised that these rankings are only nominally the lowest and still received majority agreement on the suggestion that China is an important foreign policy issue. Overall, China ranks as the second biggest threat to Indonesia, behind Malaysia and followed by the US, out of 17 important global, regional and emerging powers (selection on table 3). All these items correlate strongly with the perception of China as a threat (table 3). Hence, the data generally indicates a possible relationship between threat perception and e.g. the proximity and perceived might of these countries as well as the influences of historical factors.

## ASEAN identity and Indonesian leadership

H1 predicts a relationship between the perception of an Indonesian leadership role in ASEAN and high identification with the association. The data (table 4) suggests a positive relationship between ASEAN identity and the perception of an Indonesian leadership role as exemplified by the positive correlation between the main variables I (ASEAN member states share a common identity [further used as *ASEAN identity*]) and II (Indonesia is the leader of ASEAN [further used as *Indonesian leadership*]). H1 is also supported by similar correlations between *Indonesian leadership* and other identity variables (for example variable VII and VIII on table no 4). This is also represented in the high correlation between the perception of Indonesia's ability to represent ASEAN on the global level with *ASEAN identity* and *Indonesian leadership* (correlations with IV on table 4). However, some items on identification with ASEAN show different results when correlated with *ASEAN identity* and *Indonesian leadership*. Variable III (table no 4) has a very strong negative correlation with *ASEAN identity*, but a significant correlation in the different direction with *Indonesian leadership* (hence not supporting H1). Again the variables VI and X, both challenging ASEAN's cohesion and ability to manage the regional order, show a similar tendency. These variables correlate negatively with *ASEAN identity*, but positively with *Indonesian leadership*. These two later cases, however, do not refute H1. Instead they support the assumption that *ASEAN identity* and *Indonesian leadership* were positively valued despite ASEAN's shortcomings in its internal cohesion and possibilities of bottom-up participation. Accordingly, the data (compare table 4) overall supports H1's prediction of a strong relationship between *Indonesian leadership* and *ASEAN identity*.

## ASEAN identity and threat perception

H2 assumes a link between *ASEAN identity* and the perception of a Chinese threat to ASEAN ([further used as China threat]). As table 5 shows the survey data does not support H2, because high *ASEAN identity* results in a low China threat (V and VI with I) and a generally lower perception that ASEAN-led multilateralism is dominated by great powers (I with IV). Contrary to H2, lower *ASEAN identity* increases China threat

(IV and V in correlation with II and III). The data suggests that the level of identification with ASEAN is less important regarding the perception that China's influence could split ASEAN, while *ASEAN identity* was more influential regarding the perception of a Chinese threat to Indonesia's role as a regional leader. Overall, the data could imply that the extent of ASEAN's perceived entitativity is more important regarding the threat perception.

However, looking on the data presented on table 6 it can be argued that H2 cannot be completely rejected. The data shows strong support for the view that ASEAN is crucial to regional stability and order and the responding variable (II) correlates strongly with *ASEAN identity*. Simultaneously, the perception of ASEAN as a talk-shop (I) correlates significantly with ASEAN's perceived lack of power vis-á-vis the European Union (III). Similar to table no 5, these items produce strong negative correlations with *ASEAN identity*, suggesting that weak identity results in the perception of ASEAN as generally weaker. Similar observations can be made regarding the ASEAN Community (AC) project's importance to ASEAN. Weak *ASEAN identity* resulted in negative perception of the AC's importance, while positive perception correlated strongly with *ASEAN identity*; the exception here is the comparison to the EU.

Table no 6 shows a similar patter regarding threat perceptions as table 5 by splitting the participants into two main groups. Those suspecting that Chinese influence would possibly split ASEAN (IV on table no 6) were equally strong in their perception of ASEAN as a talk-shop and lacking power in comparison to the EU (I and III). The perception of China as a challenger to Indonesia's role as a regional leader (V), however, correlated more strongly with the perception of ASEAN as crucial for regional stability and order (II). Table no 6 suggests that the influence of *ASEAN identity* on the threat perception appears most important in relation to positive evaluations of ASEAN (II) and *Indonesian leadership* (VI and VII). In summary it can be argued that the survey does not completely support H2's prediction of a link between *ASEAN identity* and the perception of a Chinese threat to ASEAN. Rather, it indicates that there are two different threat perceptions. Firstly, that of a direct Chinese threat to ASEAN's cohesion intensified by the perception of ASEAN's general weakness and low *ASEAN identity*. Secondly, a threat to ASEAN's ability to manage regional stability and order which is linked to *Indonesian leadership* and high *ASEAN identity*. The second threat might be representative for

those participants that see ASEAN as more influential and powerful, and as a crucial platform for Indonesia to exercise power and leadership in the region.

## Indonesian leadership and threat perceptions

The third hypothesis (H3) argues for a link between the perception of a Chinese threat and high *Indonesian leadership* in Southeast Asia. The data (table no 7) supports H3 (I with IV), but two interesting observations can be made by comparison with other correlations displayed on table no 7. Those between *Indonesian leadership* and the perception of a Chinese threat to 1) ASEAN cohesion (III and V) and b) Indonesia directly are statistically insignificant. This observation is similar to those made earlier (table no 5) which supported H2 (link between *ASEAN identity* and the perception of a Chinese threat to ASEAN), but showed, despite similar levels of *ASEAN identity*, different patterns regarding the perception of a Chinese threat to a) ASEAN cohesion and b) Indonesia's role as a regional leader.

## Perception of a Chinese threat to Indonesia

H4 predicts that a lack of trust in the Chinese government aggravates the perception of a Chinese threat to ASEAN, which is supported by the data (table 8). The correlation of variable II (trust in the Chinese government) with the two items inquiring on the perception of China's negative influence on ASEAN cohesion (III and V) were particularly significant. Correspondingly, both variables (III and V) have an equally significant or stronger correlation with the general perception that China is a threat to Indonesia (I). The data does not only support H4 but also indicates a link between the perception of China being a threat to ASEAN and immediately to Indonesia. However, no significant correlation can be made between the level of trust in China and the perception of a Chinese threat to Indonesian leadership in the region. This could imply that China is perceived as a challenge to Indonesia's regional leadership, but is not expected to deliberately undermine this position.

## The China threat and a lack of assertiveness in Indonesian foreign policy

A relationship between a Chinese threat to ASEAN and/or Indonesia and the perception that Indonesian foreign policy lacks assertiveness was predicted by H5. Significant correlations occurred only with those items that represent a direct threat to Indonesia (table no 9). Items regarding the perception of a threat to ASEAN cohesion (IV and VII with I) produced weaker correlations. Based on these findings we can argue that a perceived lack of assertiveness in Indonesian foreign policy primarily influences the perception of a direct threat to Indonesia while it appears less important regarding the perceived Chinese threat to ASEAN cohesion (compare to table no 11).

## ASEAN's place in Indonesian foreign policy

H6 predicts that low identification with ASEAN results in a favour for a post-ASEAN foreign policy and demands for a stronger global role for Indonesia. If H6 was true it would mean a break with Indonesia's traditional foreign policy principle of "concentric circles"which bases ASEAN at the centre of Indonesian foreign policy. As predicted low *ASEAN identity* increases favouritism for a foreign policy that puts less emphasis on ASEAN (I with VII on table no 10). High *ASEAN identity* did not go hand in hand with a desire to focus on regional politics (I with III and VI). At the same time a high level of *Indonesian leadership* reinforces the need for the policy of concentric circles and Indonesia's regional role while simultaneously aspiring a global role as well. However, the correlation between II and III shows the aspiration for a stronger global role in response to high *Indonesian leadership* does not occur on the cost of Indonesia's regional role. At the same time, high levels of *Indonesian leadership* correlate strongly with support for president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) policy of "Rowing between Two Reefs", which emphasises the need to balance Indonesian foreign policy between the interests and influences of China and the United States without bandwagoning with any one against the other. While lower *ASEAN identity* results in disapproval of "Rowing between Two Reefs", high *Indonesian leadership* reinforces the importance of Indonesia's role to balance the interests of the great powers in the region.

## Threat perceptions and demand for a "post-ASEAN foreign policy"

H7 predicts that higher perceptions of a Chinese threat to ASEAN cause a higher demand for Indonesia to develop a post-ASEAN foreign policy. Table no 12 shows high perception of a Chinese threat to ASEAN (I and II), relates in increasing favour for Indonesia's traditional foreign policy concept of the "concentric circles". The same accounts for the effect of direct Chinese threats to Indonesia (I, II and III on table no 11) on the support for the "concentric circles"concept. Similarly, all threat related items on table no 11 (I, II and III) and no 12 (I, II and III) have no significant effect on a preference for a post-ASEAN foreign policy (VI on table no 11 and no 12).

## The China threat and Indonesian foreign policy performance

The final hypothesis (H8) predicts that high threat perceptions of China cause an increasing challenge to traditional foreign policy concepts in Indonesia. Similar to H5, H8 is linked to the perception of Indonesian foreign policy performance. In support of H5 the data (tables no 11 and no 12) shows that a perceived lack of assertiveness only affects the perception of a Chinese threat to Indonesia's role as a regional leader (III with VIII on table no 12), while it has little effect on the perception of a threat to ASEAN (I, II and III with VIII on table no 11; I and II with VIII on table no 12). None of the China threat items had any significant correlation with approval for "Rowing between two reefs" (VII), implying that such approval is not much affected by this specific threat perception. More significant is the relationship between the perception of a Chinese threat to ASEAN and the evaluation of Indonesian foreign policy as messy and chaotic (I and II with XII on table no 12). The opposite can be said about the perception of a threat to Indonesian leadership (XII and III on table no 12) and a perceived threat posed by China's rise and military modernisation (I, II and III with XII on table no 11). Overall, Indonesian foreign policy was largely regarded as far-sighted, especially in relation to the possibility that China could split ASEAN (II on table no 12) and the challenge posed to Indonesia's regional leadership role (III on table no 12).

Significant here are the correlations between the threat to ASEAN, and to a lesser extent the threat to Indonesian regional leadership, and the view that Indonesia's traditional *bebas-aktif* foreign policy is an archaic concept that does not fit the 21st century (I, II and III with XV on table no 12). These results imply that despite a generally rather positive evaluation of Indonesian foreign policy in relation to the China threat, an increasing perception of this same threat results in a challenge to the traditional non-aligned policy. SBY's particular version of *bebas-aktif*, the "million friends, zero enemies"policy, was regarded as harmful by those perceiving a risk that China could split ASEAN (I and II with XVI on table no 12).

## Discussion

In support of H1 the statistical analysis of the data shows a strong link between ASEAN identity and Indonesian leadership. There is only limited support for the assumption of H2 that high *ASEAN identity* aggravates the threat perception that China will split ASEAN. Quite the opposite low *ASEAN identity* aggravates the threat perception. Hence, H2 receives only limited support due to the very strong link between *ASEAN identity* and *Indonesian leadership* on basis of the outcomes of H3. H3 predicted that high *Indonesian leadership* would result in higher threat perceptions. A claim that was strongly supported by the data. However, H3 is also only partially confirmed, because high *Indonesian leadership* correlates only weakly with threat perceptions that China will split ASEAN. On the other hand, it correlated strongly with perceptions of Chinese threats to Indonesia's role as a member and leader of ASEAN. Trust was a significant factor regarding threat perceptions (H4). A lack of trust in the Chinese government aggravated the fear that China will split ASEAN, but was rather insignificant to the perception that China challenges Indonesia as a regional leader. The opposite relationship can be observed between China threat and a lack of assertiveness in Indonesian foreign policy (H5). While a perceived lack of assertiveness had no significant effect on the perception that China will split ASEAN, it intensified the perception of a Chinese threat to Indonesian leadership. H6 and H7 predicted that low identification with ASEAN (H6) and strong threat perceptions of China (H7) would result in approval for a post-ASEAN foreign policy. Such predictions are particularly interesting in the context of SIT because favouritism for a post-ASEAN

foreign policy would indicate support for social mobility and the opinion that Indonesia deals with contemporary challenges such as the rise of China by leaving ASEAN for more powerful groups. If confirmed these predictions would pose serious challenges to the claim that ASEAN is central to Indonesian foreign policy. Despite the fact that H6 was strongly supported by the data, the opposite can be said for H7. High perceptions of a Chinese threat reinforced the importance of ASEAN in Indonesian foreign policy. This went hand in hand with support for Indonesian efforts to manage great power rivalry in the region. Overall, the data supports the dominant argument in the field that ASEAN is regarded as central to Indonesian foreign policy and crucial to exercise power in the region and to deal with great power influence. The results suggest that Indonesians prefer social dominance and social creativity approaches that strengthen ASEAN over the "exit option". H8 gained more support from the data and showed an overall tendency that strong threat perceptions result in an increasing tendency to challenge traditional foreign policy thinking, such as Indonesia's non-aligned stance formulated by *bebas-aktif* and "million friends, zero enemies".

## Qualitative Data

The interviews conducted with diplomats and foreign policy-makers showed results similar to those of the quantitative survey. Although none of the informants were able to answer the question of whether there is a common Asian identity, all agreed on the existence of an ASEAN identity. Despite their common inability to define the binding elements of this identity, the majority regarded historical reasons as most important. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 27.11.2012). Their definitions of ASEAN identity clearly excluded extra-regional powers like China, which was repeatedly explained with the argument that even more than a decade after the fall of Suharto, communism is still an issue in Indonesia that influences perceptions of China. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 19.11.2012; Interview by author, Bandung, 5.12.2011). Another common observation was that the commitment to ASEAN varies between member states, between old and new members in particular. According to one informant, Indonesia places ASEAN at the core of its foreign policy, but he expressed doubts that other ASEAN members, especially Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar,

do likewise. Hence, with ASEAN identity still being 'under construction', it was difficult for informants to imagine a broader and more inclusive identity beyond ASEAN. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 27.11.2012). The lack of unity is seen as one of the main challenges facing ASEAN. One informant stressed the need to develop common "benchmarks"for ASEAN cooperation and to increase member states'awareness of the costs of defection when they decide to put their own short term (national) interests above their common ASEAN interests as demonstrated by the failed consensus of 2012. The same informant stressed that it was in all ASEAN members'interest to keep ASEAN strong and, thereby, Southeast Asia stable and prosperous. If ASEAN failed to do so he questioned whether the association would be of any further use to Indonesia. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 1.02.2013.)

The same informant emphasised that benchmarking was an important part of the AC project. After the Asian Financial Crisis when ASEAN members realised that global interest in the region was decreasing, ASEAN leaders became concerned as how to respond to the situation. Identity building, primarily through the increase of communication and exchange within ASEAN, became a crucial aspect of the AC project. According to the informant's analysis a stronger "we-feeling" would have prevented the crisis in Phnom Phen, because member states would have been less likely to put their national interests above common interests. By successfully implementing the ASEAN Community, the association would gain a platform to better align members'interests, thus, strengthening ASEAN's bargaining position. The ASEAN Security Community (ASC), for example, creates a good basis for a security cooperation based on the idea that security pressure faced by a single member is regarded as a problem for the whole association. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 1.02.2013). Another informant stressed that it is important to prioritise unity, solidarity and common action, which he defined as the core ideas behind the ASC. However, he also expressed concern that not all member states are at the same level of readiness to embrace this project. (Interview by author, Jakarta 28.11.2012). Similar to an observation made on ASEAN identity, a junior diplomat pointed out that while Indonesia locates ASEAN at the centre of its foreign policy of concentric circles and does its best to strengthen ASEAN cohesion, the same may not be true for other states like Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. He insisted that future development necessitates that other members'national interests favour

ASEAN over outsiders, because such progress is dependent on successful multilateral negotiation which requires the political will of all parties involved. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 27.11.2012). Statements like this indicate the perceived need for a strong ASEAN to face the global powers and outside interference as well as the need for Indonesian leadership. At the same time the statement is typical for those aspects of Indonesian diplomacy which are frequently criticised: a tendency to bide time and a lack of assertiveness.

Other informants agreed on the crucial role that ASEAN plays in preventing open conflict in the region and the positive effect on its members'capability to concentrate on domestic development by shifting attention away from the military sector. All informants were in favour of a strong ASEAN and saw need for continuing Indonesian leadership. However, here we can perceive a gap between the foreign service, the coalition government members and other civil servants on the one hand and independent policy-advisers/experts and opposition members on the other. The later always emphasised the lack of assertiveness in Indonesian foreign policy. (Interviews by author, Jakarta, 17.12.2012, 13.12.2012 and 01.02.2013; Interview by author, Bandung, 5.12.2011). A leading Indonesian ASEAN expert explained his view that Indonesia clearly holds a regional leadership role that allows the republic to exercise power through ASEAN. However, he stressed that the government lacks in leadership to use and fulfil this role, arguing that Indonesia could have prevented the (foreseeable) diplomatic deadlock in Phnom Phen by pro-actively lobbying for ASEAN's common interests instead of acting as a fire extinguisher when it was already too late. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 17.12.2012.)

It can be argued that ASEAN's weakness and its lack of cohesion are attributed to the lack of leadership within ASEAN, a position that arguably could be well played by Indonesia. As one parliamentarian argued, Indonesia could play two crucial roles within ASEAN, one formal and one informal. Firstly, Indonesia should formally propose and initiate a variety of cooperation projects within the existing multilateral frameworks. Secondly, the parliamentarian emphasised that Indonesia should informally stimulate constructive cooperation among the ASEAN members as a form of internal lobbying that promotes cooperation and cohesiveness. At the same time, this informant argued that the current Indonesian government lacks the leadership to play such a role which subsequently resulted in the gradual decline of Indonesia's leadership role within ASE-

AN. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 13.12.2012). Another informant replied in a similar fashion to the author's argument that Indonesia lost its leadership role in the eyes of other ASEAN members: "No, they consider Indonesia to be the leader, accept that Indonesia has [no] leader to play that role" (Interview by author, Jakarta, 17.12.2012). A similar criticism of president SBY's lack of leadership was made recurrently by pointing out that, as a former staff general, SBY lacks the tendency to make quick and bold decisions that characterise a field general. (Interview by author, Bandung, 5.12.2011). Similar to the quantitative data the interviews showed a preference for social dominance and creativity instead of social mobility.

All informants agreed that the increasing influence of external powers, especially the U.S. and China, in the region is unlikely to change; the challenge is to find the right approach to deal with these external powers. The fact that ASEAN was able to encourage the great powers to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) as a requirement to join the East Asia Summit was regarded as important for ASEAN. Such initiatives are seen as a way to keep ASEAN relevant and in the driving seat of regional multilateralism, thereby allowing its members to influence the emerging regional multilateral framework to their liking. (Interview by author, Jakarta, 17.12.2012.)

## Conclusions

Despite broadening and deepening cooperation between China and Indonesia, threat perceptions and a lack of trust remain important factors in the bilateral relationship. The results of this study however provide only limited support to the argument that China's increasing influence is regarded as a threat to ASEAN's social identity. China at best may be considered a symbolic rather than a real threat to ASEAN cohesion. Threat perceptions appear more salient regarding Indonesia's identity as an active member and regional leader within ASEAN, which implies that the perceived threat is perceived as directed at Indonesia's national identity as much as its social identity. The discussion on China's challenge to ASEAN is more concerned with ASEAN's old problem on how to deal with great power influence and its role as a platform for Indonesia to exercise leadership and power in the region.

Both datasets showed that participants/informants with high identification with ASEAN perceive the association as able withstand any threat

of China splitting it. Instead, the problem is seen in the lack of leadership within the organisation, also represented in the stronger threat perception of China to Indonesian leadership than to ASEAN as a group. The datasets imply that it is more about Indonesia developing a stronger and more measured approach to secure its national interests with those of ASEAN's, by assuming a more assertive leadership role.

A leading Indonesian expert on China has argued that while China's economic and political influence develops, the window of opportunity for ASEAN is closing. This research concludes that ASEAN is in some degree of danger of losing its central role in managing regional order and stability, less so because of the influence of China or other great powers and more so due to the lack of action of ASEAN and its members. In 2011 Indonesian Foreign Minister Natalegawa opined that Indonesia would aggressively wage peace in the region (Nartalegawa, 2011), however, Indonesia's foreign relations while peaceful, lack such "positive aggressiveness". The aftermath of Indonesia's 2014 presidential elections will show if the successive government will assume that role within ASEAN to ensure its cohesion, progress and especially its future as *the* manager of regional order and stability.

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