

Thailand and ASEAN
The Kingdom of Thailand and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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1. Preliminary Observations

The title of the present topic of study appears highly intriguing, to say the least. In the first place, it seems strange to conjure up a subject entailing the study of one Kingdom and the role, relations, functions and activities of that Kingdom in regard to the initiation and operation of a regional grouping for active economic cooperation, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. It may be of some initial interest to enquire as to the author of the acronym ASEAN. Its five founding members, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, must have been endowed with extraordinary far-sightedness to envision that within less than half a century, membership would redouble itself to grow to 10 nations by embracing Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

Much has indeed been written about the activities of this regional or sub-regional association for economic, social and cultural cooperation, not to mention the strength of its collective political power. The quality of neighboring states as the foundation of the invisible strength of the collectivity of these Southeast Asian nations has indeed provided what it takes to sustain its strong collective unity and powerful individual and collective existence with relative strength and natural timely growth as the result of uninterrupted economic development. This short study will be confined initially to the establishment, management and operation of ASEAN as an institution of durability, and to its activities within the purview and for the purposes for which it came into being, especially in regard almost exclusively to the perspective of the Kingdom of Thailand, as one of the co-founders of ASEAN in the mid-1960s. This topic may be divided into two separate but not unrelated parts, namely ASEAN and Thailand or the significance of ASEAN to Thailand, on the one part, and “Thailand and ASEAN”, and the importance of Thailand from ASEAN’s standpoint, on the other. These two parts could be followed up by a third: “ASEAN and Thailand in the World Community”.

2. Pacific calm in the pre-ASEAN era

Prior to the advent of ASEAN as a native regional association for closer economic and social cooperation, approaching regional integration, Thailand had been experimenting with a variety of different forms of regional cooperation, taking into consideration as possible models the establishment and growing activities of several groups of states in other regions of the world, notably the European Economic Community, European Common Market, Scandinavian or Nordic Group of States, European Free Trade Area, Benelux Communities, Pan American Organization and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), of which Thailand was an active founding member, though the organization ceased to function since Vietnam’s unification.

As a prelude to ASEAN, Thailand took the initiative to invite the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, originally known as “Asia and the Far East,” to be stationed more permanently in Bangkok, rather than return to mainland China, while the Chinese representation question was still pending as a perennial problem at the United Nations: which government was to represent China, the Republic of China or Chinese Taipei, earlier Taiwan, or the People’s Republic of China, or PRC?. At the height of this uncertainty, Thailand decided to provide the seat for the United Nations Economic Commission for the region, whose official name was formally changed to “Asia and the Pacific” following Carlos P. Romulo’s questions, “East of what?” and “Far from where?” These questions were raised at a UN meeting in Bangkok early in 1970, whereupon the acronym was formally changed from ECAFE to ESCAP in response to General Romulo’s questioning.

The region or sub-region of Southeast Asia itself was further confounded by overlapping conflicting interests of outside powers such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France, whose former colonial possessions included emerging new states such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, as well as the Federation of Malay States including Singapore, as a newly emerged sovereign island republic within the Commonwealth of the British Nations, and the Union of Myanmar.

3. The Birth of ASEAN

It is difficult to exaggerate ASEAN's significance to Thailand. As one of its original founding members and as a free and independent state, Thailand has always been able and relatively well prepared to preserve and protect her political independence and territorial integrity, not without a high price of significant sacrifices at some crucial periods of her national history, when Thailand had to weather the storm of territorial expansion, especially during the height of successive political waves of Western colonial expansion. The bitter lessons learned by the Kingdom have taught Thai leaders the art and skill of human endurance to be better able with respectable accuracy to evaluate the relative strength and weaknesses of Thailand's position in a given area or arena at various dark moments in her history. Since the advent of ASEAN, Thailand has been at relatively greater ease and has seemed better prepared to shield herself from the danger of colonial expansion. Unity is strength indeed. It would be harder to attack Thailand as an ASEAN member, as it would be easier to divide first and rule later than to attempt to rule one founding member of an organized collectivity of states such as ASEAN.

This research is designed to identify and shed further light on the connectivity between ASEAN as an international organization for regional or sub-regional economic, social and political or security cooperation and on one of its founding members, the Kingdom of Thailand. At the outset, it is highly pertinent to point out that Thailand initiated the concept and successfully brought into being an association for regional economic cooperation primarily to ensure Thailand's own survival as a free and independent nation, along and together with the other co-founding member states: Malaysia, originally Federation of Malay States; Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore. Each of these four states had barely joined the rank of the Southeast Asian group of "Newly Emerging Nations" since the close of World War II and the establishment of the United Nations as a world organization.

In this brief study, it will be shown that Thailand had the courage and the audacity to initiate the concept of today's ASEAN as early as almost half a century ago. Thailand was then aiming far wider and broader than Southeast Asia, more particularly to the newly emerged region of the Pacific Rim, which covered the Republic of Korea, Japan and the United States, as well as Australia and New Zealand. The last three nations were included in another regional association loosely founded in Seoul in 1966, just one year before ASEAN's birth. This association, the Asian Pacific Council, had the first draft of its constituent instrument in the form of the Seoul Joint Communiqué initially drawn up by Thailand and subsequently co-sponsored by Ambassador Kim of the Republic of Korea. This concrete result was the by-product of President Park Chung Hee's visit to Thailand in 1965, and Thailand's decision to turn this first attempt by Korea to bring Japan into the closer Pacific Grouping rather than face the danger of leaving Japan isolated in the region, thereby avoiding possible repetition of recent war history along the Pacific Rim. As it occurred, Foreign Minister Shiina of Japan also attended this historic session in Seoul, almost beyond the expectation of the native organizers of the occasion.

4. Thailand's role in the pre-natal care of ASEAN

This paper is intended to bring out some of the salient features in the special relationship between Thailand and ASEAN. Indeed this study's title has been reversed to read "THAILAND AND ASEAN" instead of "ASEAN and THAILAND" because it is more precise chronologically, historically and even logically. In one respect, the problem is akin to finding a more credible answer to the question: "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Thailand is more likely comparable to the chicken or rather, "the hen that laid the ASEAN egg". For the sake of politeness, it is not unlikely that the acronym ASEAN could well have preceded its framer, Thailand. For non-Thai members, it was probably more convincing to conceive of ASEAN as a more comprehensive unit, or a collective entity, originally composed of Thailand as well as

the other four founding members with the accession to ASEAN on successive dates by Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia in addition to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Thailand's part in actively bringing into being a new association for Southeast Asian economic cooperation can scarcely be exaggerated. To be modest, there would have been no ASEAN without Thailand's untiring effort and its genuine understanding and thorough appreciation of the general political, economic, social and cultural realities of Southeast Asian Nations. It is opportune at this point to give a more detailed account of the events leading to ASEAN's formation in Bangkok at Saranrom Palace on 8 August 1967.

Thailand almost single-handedly conceived and cautiously brought ASEAN into being. The association may be said to owe its conception and birth to one person, His Excellency Dr. Thanat Khoman, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, who had served as Thailand's head of mission to the United Nations in New York and on the UN International Law Commission in Geneva, Switzerland. Under Dr. Thanat's guidance, Thailand had earlier created the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASA) for Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, and had been active in the development of the Lower Mekong Basin, involving Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

Under the instructions and supervision of the Thai foreign minister, this writer, who had served as his Chef de Cabinet, accompanied the foreign minister on his visits to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta and Manila in an effort to persuade Thailand's southern neighbors to form a new grouping following the suspension of ASA after the Federation of Malay States became Malaysia and the United Kingdom released Sabah, which led to the period of "Konfrontasi" by Indonesia under President Sukarno and Foreign Minister Subandrio. An opening came after what Indonesian colleagues referred to as the "Gestapo". General Soeharto came into power in Indonesia in the nick of time, following Colonel Untung's unsuccessful attempt to seize power in Indonesia by assassinating almost all Indonesian generals. Luckily a few generals, such as General Sukendro and General Panggabean, survived as they happened to be in Hong Kong or otherwise outside Indonesia and avoided being caught in the mass killing.

5. Thailand's special visits to Southeast Asia in preparation for ASEAN's formation

Following the visit of President Park Chung Hee to Bangkok in 1965 and the formation of ASPAC, or the Asian Pacific Council, in Seoul in 1966, Foreign Minister Thanat embarked on another journey to visit Southeast Asian leaders to strengthen their collective hand with Thailand. By this time, two historic incidents had occurred: the "Gestapo" in Indonesia and the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. It should be recalled that during the difficult period of "Konfrontasi," Thailand fully exercised her good offices with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. Indonesia actually dropped parachutists into Malaysia and Singapore. Thailand provided the necessary good offices by way of an impartial third party to facilitate the repatriation of Indonesian parachutists and ease the growing tensions between Malaysia and the Philippines regarding Sabah. As a friend to every party concerned in the peace-keeping process, Thailand set out to propose and negotiate with her neighbors the successive steps leading to the formation and formal establishment of ASEAN.

5.1 Initial visit to Malaysia

On this exploratory mission, Foreign Minister Thanat first visited Kuala Lumpur and the Istana or the official residence of Tunku Abdul Rahman. The author was the only person accompanying Dr. Thanat, who presented the draft declaration in the form of a joint communiqué prepared by Thailand under the minister's instructions and close supervision. This writer happened to prepare the first draft with a number of operative paragraphs setting out the aims and purposes of the impending regional association. The Thai foreign minister had a long talk with the tunku.

After a good talk, Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman invited me to accompany him to a football match at the "Merdeka" national stadium. I accepted his invitation and went to the stadium with the tunku in his limousine. Before coming to Kuala Lumpur, I had known many Malaysian tunkus. For instance, at Oxford University, Worcester College, since 1950, I had been close to Tunku Ahmad of Pahang. At Wadham College the following year, I met Tunku Harlim and Tunka Malik from Kedah, the same home state as Malaysia's prime minister. I had also known Tunku Jaffa from a badminton game,

Tunku Nga as Malaysian Ambassador to Thailand and Tunku Razaleigh as Malaysia's representative during UN General Assembly sessions in New York. I had also learned that Tunku Abdul Rahman was adopted by King Rama VI of Thailand and spoke Thai fluently since the tunku also attended Thepsirin College in Bangkok. But along the way to the Merdeka stadium, the tunku never spoke one Thai word with me. In his limousine, he simply offered me a good choice of brandy with soda or water, as the automobile was well equipped with a refrigerator large enough to contain what appeared to be a choice of luxuriant fruit juices to suit the occasion, namely the football match.

5.2 Visit to Singapore

From Kuala Lumpur, the Thai mission continued to Singapore to visit Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yu at his official residence. The prime minister was accompanied by Harry Chan, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, and Nathan, Deputy Undersecretary. Dr. S. Rajaratnam was not present but later attended the inaugural Bangkok meeting. During the exchange, Prime Minister Lee made one observation that seemed astonishing. He confessed to Foreign Minister Thanat that he had a nightmare that one day Thailand might proceed to dig or construct a canal or made a maritime passage across the Kra Isthmus. Prime Minister was assured Lee that no such plan was contemplated by Thailand at the time, although the construction of a pipeline across the isthmus was not to be precluded. The prime minister appeared relieved and welcomed Thailand's initiative of a new economic grouping in which Singapore could play a significant role as a newly industrialized country centrally located within the group.

5.3 Visit to Indonesia

Indonesia had in almost every respect the broadest and widest land and sea area by far, covering a greater variety of islands, large and small, from densely populated to barely inhabited. As an indigenous population, Indonesia comprised principally Malay, Indian, Chinese and other native Asian islanders. It was to be recalled even in the 1960s that a decade earlier, Indonesia under President Sukarno and Foreign Minister Subandrio had organized a memorable meeting at Bandung in 1955 to adopt a document that was subsequently known as "The Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" or the Principles of "Pancha Sila", only to be superseded 12 years later by the Bangkok Declaration of the "Satta Sila" or the ASEAN Declaration of 8 August 1967.

In Indonesia, the Thai mission proceeded to pay respect to Bepah Suharto, then the new Indonesian Leader who had survived the "Gestapo" coup staged by Colonel Untung earlier. The Thai mission did visit Bung Sukarno in retirement in a wooded area, complete with his entourage. A new progressive group of experienced Indonesian diplomats had by now emerged in Indonesia, led by Dr. Adam Malik, former Head of Indonesian Mission in London and other European capitals. He was assisted by his right-hand man, Anwar Sani, a veteran jurist diplomat from the Asian African Legal Consultative Committee and the Sixth (Legal) Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and by a team of lawyers headed by Ms. Lawrence. It is noteworthy that most Indonesian legal experts had their basic legal education and training at Leiden University in the Netherlands. To the surprise of outsiders, especially from Thailand, Indonesian colleagues preferred to consult and exchange their views privately among themselves not in Bahasa Indonesia, but rather in Dutch or "Nederlandse Taal". It was fortunate that this specially exclusive language was not unknown to an international lawyer, whose first basic international law books must include "De Jure Belli Ac Pacis" in Libri Tres, or the "Law of War and Peace" by Hugo Grotius, first published in Leiden around 1625.

Dr. Malik took a quick look at the draft declaration and smiled. He then suggested an insertion of one sentence to serve as the final preambular paragraph of the declaration under consideration. The gist of this vital paragraph reads as follows:

"All foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the express concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of the States in the area or prejudice the orderly process of their national development."

His astonishing insertion was understandable from Indonesia's standpoint, as Indonesia had barely succeeded in closing all Dutch bases on its territories after their prolonged establishment and activities as Netherlands bases, military and naval, in Java and Sumatra.

This came as a surprise and the Thai mission needed time to consider it. Upon reflection, it became clear that this caveat did not apply to Thailand. All the air bases from which operated the B-29 and B-22, whether at Taklee or Ubol or Udorn, or from the naval base at U-Tapao, were exclusively Thai bases. Although on several occasions attempts were made to initiate negotiations on the status of forces agreement on the model of the US-UK Status of Forces Agreement, and in particular on the US-Japan bilateral arrangements, experience had shown that these agreements provided legitimacy for visiting foreign forces to remain outside the jurisdiction and control of the local administration of justice. As such, it would be far easier to be without such controversial agreements. In particular, examples were numerous for Okinawa and Atsugi in Japan, or arrangements for U.S. Forces in England, such as at Oxford, where American forces could visit for relief and rehabilitation, thereby exacerbating existing town-and-gown problems with the relaxation of foreign forces coming from and returning to active service.

Singapore had active British bases. Malaysia also had Fort Butterworth and the Philippines had a US air base in Manila and a large naval base at Subic Bay. On the other hand, Thailand never had foreign bases on its territory. U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin once assured Thai military leaders that American aircraft would only be allowed to use a Thai airfield with the permission of Thai military authorities and would remain under Thai jurisdiction. The U.S. Ambassador confirmed that U.S. forces in Thailand were at Thailand's command to help preserve and protect the territorial integrity of Thailand, including in particular, the bombing of North Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh Trail.

5.4 Visit to Philippines

Prior to this special visit to the Philippines, Thailand had very close relations and collective defense arrangements with the country, for instance, under the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) on the model of NATO, with the support of the military powers from the West, such as the United States on behalf of the Philippines, the United Kingdom together with Australia and New Zealand on behalf of Malaysia, and France on behalf of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. As such, the Philippines was as closely linked to Thailand's security as any other neighbor and clearly with the backing of the United States at Manila and Subic Bay. These U.S. air and naval bases were alluded to in Dr. Malik's insertion in the preambular paragraph about the temporary character of foreign bases that eventually would have to be removed from ASEAN soil. Thus they were removed after some four decades or so later, as he had anticipated.

For Thailand, former President Macapagal had visited the country earlier, and on the 10th anniversary of Bandung, Vice-President Emmanuel Pelaez, foreign secretary of the Philippines, came to visit the Thai foreign minister who happened to be at the Thai Embassy in Paris awaiting to attend the Asian-African Conference in Algiers that ultimately never took place, to compare their respective positions before going to the Afro-Asian Conference in 1965 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Bandung. On that occasion, the Philippines vice-president had with him a young assistant, Benigno Aquino, who became a teammate with this writer many years until his assassination.

These prior friendly personal relations between aides to the two foreign ministers had facilitated further broader negotiations between the two leaders, while discussing common regional problems with the Philippines. By that time in 1967, Benigno Aquino, or Ninoy as he came to be known, was governor of one of the provinces and was close to President Ferdinand Marcos. This author met Ninoy's wife, Corazon Aquino, at their home with their son, Benigno, or Ninoy Junior. Little did anyone know then that decades later, after Ninoy's assassination, Corazon would become the first lay president of the Philippines. Nor could anyone have predicted that Aquino Junior would also become president: two from the same family, although Benigno, the father, never had the chance to celebrate the ascension of his dear spouse or son, the current president. Ninoy was assassinated upon his return from medical treatment in the United States. He was a man of true courage and a hero who made his sacrifice and invaluable contributions to his nation, the region and to mankind.

Foreign Minister Thanat's visit to the Philippines succeeded in securing the Philippine's partnership in ASEAN's formation. The Thai special mission met with the president of the Philippines and Foreign Minister Narciso Ramos, who came to Bangkok for the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on 8 August 1967. The Philippines' delegation to Bangkok also included Ambassadors Pablo Pena, Narciso Reyes, Calingo and Mr. and Mrs. Manalo. Its team included Ambassador Jose Ingles, later undersecretary for foreign affairs. Manila had been the last stop for the Thai mission on its Southeast Asian tour to establish ASEAN or to resuscitate the former Association of Southeast Asia with the addition of Indonesia and Singapore. A newborn association came into being in Bangkok after meticulous pre-natal care by Thailand as the initiating founding member. The draft joint communiqué was thoroughly discussed by the working group and the drafting committee at Laem Taen near Bang Saen. This writer had the honour to chair both the working group and the drafting committee at Laem Taen, as he drafted the declaration upon clear instructions and under close supervision of Foreign Minister Thanat.

6. ASEAN in its early formative years

As it actually occurred at the preparatory meetings at Laem Taen, following Foreign Minister Thanat's visits to the four prospective founding members of ASEAN, two high officials from Sri Lanka were also present, ready, willing and waiting for an invitation to participate in the preliminary sessions in the founding process of ASEAN. However, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, Dr. Rajaratnam, born in Sri Lanka, conversant with its internal affairs and in his own way an international expert on Asian affairs, warned the meeting of the impending danger of including his home country in the geographical regional grouping. Whereas even from geographical viewpoint, Sri Lanka could scarcely qualify as a Southeast Asian nation, and more appropriately belonged to the southern region of Asia, subsequent turmoil, civil disturbances and insurgent movements clearly justified his earlier cautions.

At ASEAN's birth in 1967, the association was driven by the multiple motivations of the collective leadership of each peace-loving statesman of the Southeast Asian region, initiated by Thailand under the guidance of Foreign Minister Thanat. Seasoned by his personal political and diplomatic skills in international and regional affairs and strengthened by his broad comprehension and mature experience in United Nations Affairs, Dr. Thanat proved to be timely in his initiative to safeguard and in his untiring effort to secure the continuing survival of the emerging nations of Southeast Asia. Looking back half a century and more, any historian can see the looming danger surrounding the myth of the newly emerging nations, namely the Federation of Malay States, later Malaysia or Greater Malaysia, with the addition of Sabah and Sarawak, and the separation of the Republic of Singapore, together with the archipelagic state of the Philippines, each with its long history of subjugation from European or Western influence and domination. To compound the difficulties and add further complexities, another new archipelagic state, Indonesia, emerged as a new nation. Given independence by the Netherlands, it began its career by being admitted to the United Nations with the policy of "Konfrontasi" vis-à-vis the formation of the ASA, or Association of Southeast Asian States, composed of Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, which of necessity had to remain dormant in the myth of "Konfrontasi" by Indonesia and the burning question of Sabah, which had earlier ties with the Sultan of Zulu of the Philippines.

Thailand had to employ the best of her good offices to convert and turn the tide of this colossal crisis into an even greater opportunity. Under the leadership of her foreign minister, Thailand had the foresight to forestall this impending danger within the region by taking the initiative to prepare a blueprint of a new regional association in the form of a draft joint communiqué to serve as a constituent instrument or constitution of a new regional organization, and secondly to have this draft under negotiation for final approval and adoption by the other Southeast Asian ministers. This two-fold task Thailand had to perform with the blessing of Phra Siam Devadiraj, as Thailand was blessed with a long-standing and continuous possession and exercise of her sovereign independence with unmatched experience in the maintenance of its dignity and independence, surviving the waves of Western expansionism. Although not without heavy sacrifices, experience taught Thailand the art of survival and the skill of maintaining regional integrity through collective unity. Union is strength, and united ASEAN nations could better fare the sea of turmoil and weather the political storms in the Asia-Pacific region in the years and decades ahead. Strongly convinced and persuaded by these motivations, ASEAN nations each reviewed the draft prepared by

Thailand's foreign minister. As an expert jurist in international law and a member of the International Law Commission, Dr. Thanat took to the task of drafting and negotiating the draft. This writer had the double task of producing the first draft and starting the process of negotiations with the other founding members, including Indonesia's additional preambular paragraph about the temporary status of foreign bases on ASEAN soil.

In the first decade of ASEAN's formative years, it was experimenting with various projects and was liberal enough to call any project "ASEAN" if two or more of its members were prepared to adopt a project that eventually could be shared by others. ASEAN also rotated its annual ministerial meetings twice over in the first 10 years, when it decided to remain more durably anchored in Jakarta, where ASEAN now has its permanent headquarters, while maintaining national secretariats within each of the current 10 members.

If during the initial formative decade of ASEAN member states were experimenting on any possible proposed projects with greater or lesser economic results, the second formative decade with headquarters in Jakarta focused more on the operation and development of various projects already adopted, in development, in full operation or producing concrete results. At its beginning, the ASEAN way was characterized by simplicity and utility that appeared ideally appropriate to encourage and promote wider participation as projects began to attract wider regional attention and greater appreciation from constructive results. ASEAN with a permanent headquarters in Jakarta and with rotating secretaries general and members of the Secretariat, appeared to be serving the interests of both worlds. The association was blessed with rotation of personnel and variations of progressive ideas, and yet remained clearly better able to progress collectively as a united society in the collectively chosen direction to reach the final common goals and targets as set by member governments from the start. It has had the advantage of learning from the experience of earlier regional associations from other regions in the world such as Europe and the Americas.

7. ASEAN endeavours to attain economic community

If the first two decades of ASEAN were to be labeled experimental or exploratory, as it was trying to explore all ways and means to achieve meaningful economic developments, following or comparing the existing European and Latin American models, ASEAN concurrently had to indulge in discovering itself, i.e., its members had to learn more about each other so as to enlarge and expand intra-ASEAN trade, investment and developments in political, economic, social and cultural relations. In addition, it inevitably had to learn at the same time not only to cultivate intra-ASEAN relations, but to initiate and expand collective and individual cooperation in these fields with its immediate and distant neighbors, in particular, China, Japan, Korea, United States, Australia and New Zealand on bilateral, tri-lateral as well as multi-lateral bases. ASEAN members individually as well as collectively had to conduct relations of meaningful positive cooperation with all peace-loving nations. Its efforts were to avoid tensions and to prepare the groundwork for mutually fruitful cooperation with all peace-loving nations, close or distant, culturally akin or relatively unknown to be able to survive with honor in this world of diverse cultures and different forms of civilization, as all nations would have to learn how to live and co-exist in peace.

After the first two decades when ASEAN had to experiment with a wide variety of active economic cooperation arrangements among its members and with external friends and neighbors, reactions and results were mixed. Learning at the same time from the experience of other regional associations, to its surprise ASEAN discovered that different results were obtained by different associations despite similar pattern of activities. ASEAN was eventually persuaded to follow the trend of gradual economic integration with an accelerated pace of economic, political, social and cultural assimilation, and wherever practical also integration. The objective was apparent. At the end of the tunnel, there would be a ray of light to allow ASEAN's collective identity to replace the individual national variation within the collective. Eventually, its spirit should be synonymous with each individual national member so that, for instance, Thai, Myanmar, Malaysian, Indonesian or Filipino should equally be identified as "ASEAN", and a Thai or Laotian alike should be pleased to respond to the adjective "ASEAN". That should serve as a conclusive test to transform national existence to that of the community of ASEAN collectivity or association.

With the aim of effecting the ASEAN Economic Community by the end of 2015, ASEAN is learning practically how to live together in peace as one community and one market. From ASEAN'S birth in August 1967, it was felt that eventually the expression "ASEAN" should be identified if not synonymous with Thai or Singaporean or Malaysian or Indonesian or Filipino identity or indeed that of any of the newer members of ASEAN, such as Myanmar, Vietnamese, Laotian, Bruneian or Cambodian, in much the same way as the expression "European" could be identified with those who may also refer to themselves as Dutch, Belgian, Luxembourger, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, Spanish, Italian or Portuguese.

For these reasons, Thailand should be prepared to recover her pace in the race to become a perfect ASEAN national, as indeed ASEAN was conceived, formulated and brought into being almost singlehandedly by Thailand, whose farsightedness and mission it was to bring the organization to life, leading the founding members into accepting the creation of ASEAN with the original constituent instrument drafted in English by the hands of Thai international legal expertise. Now Thailand should have no complaint to pick up, not from where she left off, from the top of the five constituent members to almost the bottom of the existing ASEAN members, in English as well as in almost all activities that could have been contemplated by Thai leaders of the past, who provided birth and shelter for ASEAN. Thailand is duty bound to recover her own rightful place in the family of ASEAN nations, retrieving her rightful leadership within the association and continuing to lead it into the future of more meaningful active cooperation and fruitful relations of friendship and prosperity in its collective endeavors.

8. Concluding observations

It is with constructive thoughts and expectations that this essay should end with a clear and unshaken conviction and expression of hope and every confidence that once Thailand awakens from her slumber, she will realize what a colossal monument she had succeeded in created through her planning, architecture and actual construction. Thailand could now be persuaded to return to occupy her rightful place within this active association of cooperative and peace-loving Southeast Asian nations, that she had been at pains to conceive and deliver, and now cannot forsake the responsibility of continuing to nurture and to cultivate and ultimately to collect the fruits and reap the benefits of her constructive thought and effort.