

Transformation of ASEAN's Image in the 1980s: The Cambodian Conflict and the Economic Development of ASEAN Member Countries

YUKAWA Taku*

Abstract

When we look at way ASEAN is perceived, it is easy to see that the organization has undergone a dramatic change in image over the past few decades of its activity. The aim of this paper is to systematically analyze the dramatic changes that ASEAN's image has undergone, by relying on documented evidence.

ASEAN came to be associated with an image of success in the 1980s, due to two main factors. The first was the organization's attempt to resolve the Cambodian dispute as a unified body, and the other was the rapid economic development of ASEAN member countries.

However, the process through which ASEAN's image of success was formulated was indeed a complicated one. In fact, the success of the organization's attempts to resolve the Cambodian dispute was limited, and the economic growth of ASEAN countries occurred independently of the organization's activities.

Keywords: ASEAN, image, reputation, Cambodian conflict, economic development

Introduction

This paper aims to shed light on how the image of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional organization has evolved over time. This includes the way in which ASEAN has been perceived and evaluated by actors involved in diplomatic ties with the region.

It is not uncommon to hear phrases such as "ASEAN is the most successful regional organization in the context of the Third World," or "ASEAN is the second-best success story of regional cooperation, immediately after the EU (European Union)." ASEAN has made outstanding achievements in the past decade, such as its proposal of the East Asian Community as well as its promulgation of the ASEAN Charter. Moreover, the understanding that ASEAN has taken on the role of a regional leader—not only

* 湯川 拓, JSPS Fellow; Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, The University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan
e-mail: taku.yukawa@gmail.com

in the Southeast Asian region but also in broader East Asia—has become fairly well established. In other words, ASEAN has come to occupy the driver's seat in spearheading regionalism in the East Asian region.

ASEAN member countries themselves have often praised ASEAN as being a highly effective organization, and they have stressed the importance of the role that ASEAN plays in aiding their development. However, the image of success attached to ASEAN's name was not present from the time of its inception. Far from it, the widespread belief during ASEAN's infancy was that the organization would be short-lived. How, then, has ASEAN's image come to be associated with success over the years? It is the aim of this paper to investigate how official evaluations of ASEAN's effectiveness as an organization have changed over the years. This scholarly attempt relies on the systematic investigation of official documented evidence.

A survey of the existing literature shows that there has been very little work dedicated to giving a fair representation of the manner in which ASEAN's image evolved over time. This is another motivation for conducting the research that is described in this paper. While there is no dearth of literature on attempts to conceptualize or theorize on ASEAN, attempts to analyze the process within a systematic framework—such as by studying the official political discourses of the leaders responsible for defining the actual turn of events in international politics—have yet to be undertaken. In particular, the existing literature on this topic of research is characterized by a void in terms of studies that illustrate how ASEAN's own member countries have perceived and evaluated ASEAN as an organization. This is a far cry from research being carried out on the EU.¹⁾ Indeed, this could be attributed to the scarcity of documented evidence in the case of ASEAN as compared to the EU. However, the possibility of investigating how actors involved in the actual political decision-making process evaluate ASEAN's effectiveness as a regional organization continues to exist. This possibility exists in the form of documented evidence such as official written agreements; speeches delivered during ASEAN summits or ASEAN Ministerial Meetings (AMMs); reports on the AMMs, ASEAN Post Ministerial Conferences (PMCs), and ASEAN Economic Ministerial Meetings (AEMs); ASEAN newsletters; as well as secondary sources such as newspaper articles.

At this juncture, it is apt to ask why there is a need to trace the manner in which ASEAN's image evolved over time. While it is true that such an endeavor has not been undertaken so far, that is not the only motivation for the current research. In this author's opinion, the reason for such an endeavor lies in the fact that there is a tendency to describe ASEAN's past based on the current viewpoint of the

1) Diez [2001], for instance.

organization's success. However, descriptions of ASEAN that are based on viewpoints fixated upon the organization's current image of success tend to neglect changes in the organization's image over time. Such descriptions are thus unable to give readers a fair evaluation of the way in which ASEAN's position as a regional leader has evolved over time, in the context of international society. To be more precise, descriptions of ASEAN that are based upon the organization's present-day image of success tend to exclude the fact that there were periods when ASEAN was viewed as a case of failed regionalism. On the other hand, they tend to give too much emphasis to the importance of ASEAN's role in spearheading regionalism in Southeast Asia. Having said that, it follows that the main preoccupation of this paper is to analyze the political background that led to the evolution of ASEAN's image from one of failure to one of success. In order to do so, it is necessary that we first abandon our fixed perception of ASEAN as a success story.

In addition, it is important to stress that ASEAN's image and reputation should not be detached from the range of analysis. The importance of considering ASEAN's reputation stems from the fact that such images and perceptions of ASEAN tend to impinge upon the quality of the organization's activities. For example, ASEAN came to play a central role in broad international attempts at regional cooperation, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in the 1990s. These attempts at regional cooperation often included large countries external to ASEAN. One reason that ASEAN member countries—which certainly did not wield great power in the international arena—were able to have such a great influence in the ARF was that ASEAN had earned for itself the reputation of being successful at regional cooperation. This was also the reason why large countries external to ASEAN, such as the United States, were willing to further attempts at national security through platforms such as the ARF, where ASEAN member countries played a central role. For the reasons explained above, this paper's attempt to scrutinize the changes that ASEAN underwent can be said to be greatly significant to future research on ASEAN.

ASEAN's image is broadly made up of (i) ASEAN member countries' perceptions of ASEAN as a regional organization,²⁾ and (ii) external parties' portrayals of ASEAN. The scope of this paper will be confined to the first category of evaluations.³⁾ Nonetheless, since ASEAN member countries' perceptions

2) Although the basis for this comprises mainly political elites' discourses that took place during ASEAN's diplomatic meetings, this author also considered news reports and government press releases of the various member countries, in order to shed light on civilian perceptions of ASEAN within Southeast Asia.

3) The term "ASEAN" may refer to the regional organization or to the various member nations that comprise the organization. In the context of this paper, the former shall be referred to as "ASEAN" and the latter as "ASEAN member countries" or "ASEAN members." However, when we consider references to the term "ASEAN" that surface in the official remarks of political actors, it is often unclear whether they are referring to ASEAN as an organization or to the individual members that comprise it. Specifically, references to "ASEAN" could include ↗

of ASEAN may in fact be correlated with how external parties evaluate ASEAN, this paper will briefly touch upon the impact of the latter category of ASEAN evaluations when relevant.

In this paper, the 1980s will be seen as the main time frame for considering changes in ASEAN's image over time. The rationale for this is that the 1980s stands as the largest turning point in ASEAN's history, when we view the organization in terms of its transition from failure to success. Undoubtedly, 1997 serves as an important year in ASEAN history, since the currency crisis that year dealt a severe blow to ASEAN's external reputation. Other events that followed—such as the establishment of the ASEAN Charter, the formulation of the East Asian Community, as well as the establishment of ASEAN+3—were also significant in enforcing ASEAN's presence in the international arena. However, this author believes that the 1980s should be defined as the turning point in ASEAN's history, since that decade witnessed the transition of the organization from a relatively unknown regional entity to an organization that set an international precedent. Moreover, since very little research has been conducted on the reasons that led to the change in ASEAN's image over the 1980s, it shall be this author's endeavor to fill that gap. Specific emphasis will be placed on the role of the Cambodian dispute, as well as the economic development of ASEAN member countries, in bringing about the change in ASEAN's image during the 1980s.

I Literature Review

The question of how to conceptualize ASEAN as a regional organization has become the main focus of research conducted on ASEAN. Examples of attempts to conceptualize the organization include defining it as “a security community where the use of military force on other fellow member countries is not to be considered” [Acharya 2001], or as an “international regime from the viewpoint of international political discourse” [Emmerson 1987]. Another example would be the definition provided by Emmers [2003], which describes ASEAN as a “cooperative alliance aimed at enforcing national security.” There

↘ a wide array of functions carried out by either the organization or its members. The reason for the ambiguity attached to “ASEAN” is that the organization took on a diverse range of functions depending on what was required or expected of it. As will be explained later, the expectations differed according to the situation that ASEAN was placed in. Nevertheless, despite the lack of consistency in references to “ASEAN” by diplomatic actors, the fact that these references point to a clear direction with regard to the image attached to “ASEAN” remains unchanged. The aim of this paper is to elucidate the factors leading to changes in ASEAN's image. In addition, this author's definition of the term “ASEAN” extends beyond the scope of the member countries and that of an organization. The purpose for adopting a wider definition stems from the observation that as ASEAN took on more and more roles, its function as a regional organization became increasingly complex. Because of this, the term came to assume broader meanings, including departmental bureaus—such as the ASEAN Secretariat—as well as “ASEAN regionalism” and “ASEAN community.”

have been more recent attempts to conceptualize ASEAN's role in enforcing diplomatic ties with non-ASEAN member countries as well [Katsumata 2009; Kivimaki 2011].

Research of the above nature has proven to be extremely significant in providing readers with fixed viewpoints from which ASEAN can be analyzed. These fixed viewpoints are no doubt important, as they serve as the lens through which ASEAN can be observed. They are also significant in the sense that they provide a theoretical platform upon which objective comparisons can be made between ASEAN and other similar organizations. However, while the benefits of such research cannot be ignored, it is also true that it has promulgated a sense of bias in the existing literature on ASEAN. In particular, there has been too much preoccupation with the way in which the researcher views, or defines, ASEAN. It is precisely due to this bias that researchers have not given sufficient attention to the dynamic changes in the way that diplomatic actors have perceived ASEAN over the years.⁴⁾ In other words, there has been hardly any research on the way that diplomatic actors who were directly involved in dealings with ASEAN viewed ASEAN over the years, much less on the theoretical lens through which these diplomatic actors perceived the organization. International evaluations of ASEAN's success remained largely negative all the way up to the 1970s. This paper traces the way in which perceptions of ASEAN evolved over the span of the organization's history. Such an attempt is important in helping us achieve an objective understanding of ASEAN's position in international society, as well as the way in which this position changed over the years.

Of course, not all research on ASEAN has evaluated the organization in a positive light. To begin with, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by an overall lack of interest in ASEAN by the external world. There was also very little research being carried out on ASEAN during this period. The few pieces of research conducted on ASEAN during the 1960s and 1970s tended to focus on the negative aspects of the organization. For example, they tended to criticize the organization's inability to take decisive action during times of need, as well as focus on its limited success in achieving substantial improvements in regionalism [Leifer 1973; Shee 1977]. Another aspect common to research conducted during the 1960s and 1970s was the heavy emphasis on the economic aspect of ASEAN. It will be elaborated later in this paper that the extent of economic cooperation that took place within ASEAN was extremely limited during the 1960s and 1970s. However, a consensus was also being reached at the same time that ASEAN had hardly played a noteworthy role in fostering political ties and national security within Southeast Asia. Due to the reasons listed above, evaluations of ASEAN both by the

4) Some recent works dealing with the history of ASEAN include Ba [2009] and Narine [2008], as well as *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (Vol.29, No.3). However, these works do not deal specifically with the changes that ASEAN's image underwent.

organization's diplomatic partners as well as by researchers were largely negative. However, present-day research that is based on ASEAN's current image of success tends to neglect the reality that the organization was once negatively perceived; and that the perception of ASEAN actually underwent a series of substantial changes before arriving at its present state.⁵⁾

Another crucial aspect that appears to be lacking in the existing literature on ASEAN is the question of how the organization was able to achieve such a drastic change in image. This paper will focus on the 1980s as the turning point in ASEAN's reputation. It is not the first in the literature to point out that the 1980s was a crucial period of time with regard to the substantial change in ASEAN's image. This observation has already been made by researchers such as L. Buszynski [1987: 764] and R. Stubbs [1988: 1]. However, previous research has not shed light on specific case studies or incidents that helped ASEAN rise to prominence during the 1980s. They were also lacking in terms of rhetorical analysis and empirical verification with regard to the above. Therefore, it is the aim of this paper to fill in the gaps in the existing literature.

II ASEAN's Image up to the 1970s

Although evaluations of ASEAN's performance as a regional organization vary widely from source to source, such differences can be thought of as stemming from the diverse ways in which one defines the very meaning of ASEAN's existence. In other words, divergences in view regarding ASEAN's performance can be thought of as coming from evaluations of what the organization set out to achieve rather than how well it performed.

Such differences can also be attributed to the ASEAN member countries observed in this research. The reason for this is that ASEAN started off without a grand design and underwent frequent changes in its structural form, sometimes assuming new roles and taking on new functions, in order to adapt to varying situations. The lack of a well-defined boundary regarding the scope of ASEAN's activities was especially prominent during the establishment of the organization in 1967. For example, in 1973 Singapore's foreign minister, S. Rajaratnam, commented, "At our first meeting then, we were confused as to what ASEAN was supposed to do" [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 159]. In 1974 he remarked, "at that

5) Of course, there is contemporary research that continues to evaluate ASEAN in a negative light. One example is Jones and Smith [2006], which describes ASEAN as nothing more than an "imitation community": a community that has no actual powers, as "evidenced by the organization's inability to resolve the 1997 currency crisis." It must be said, however, that even research of such a nature tends to focus on the "inefficiencies" of ASEAN as one generalized organization. In this light, these analyses are static, and not dynamic, in nature.

time we ourselves, having launched ASEAN, were not quite sure where it was going or whether it was going anywhere at all” [*ibid.*: 188].

Indeed, the expectations held by ASEAN member countries toward the organization were diverse during the early years of the latter’s formation. Indonesia, for example, which chose to place most of its emphasis on non-alliance and regional autonomy, strove to make ASEAN take on characteristics such as political and security governance, by including aspects such as “collective defense” and the abandonment of foreign military bases within the region, during the creation of the draft of ASEAN’s charter of establishment [Jorgensen-Dahl 1982: 37]. On the other hand, Singapore expected ASEAN to take on roles such as fostering economic cooperation within the region rather than dealing with political issues. In the face of such divergent expectations, ASEAN eventually became a mere meeting place for diplomats rather than an organization that could achieve any specific goals.

However, despite the huge diversity in the ideals of its member countries, ASEAN was unified by one common aim among its members—that of fostering intra-regional friendship—built upon the urge to improve the existing state of mutual distrust within the region. In other words, ASEAN was in its initial years an inward-looking organization that focused on the maintenance of intra-regional peace and security, rather than an outward-looking entity where member countries unanimously sought to defend their interests against those of non-member countries. Indeed, there is a tendency for ASEAN member countries to unanimously focus on the aim of fostering intra-regional friendship when they reflect on ASEAN’s years of infancy. An example of this is a remark in the *ASEAN Newsletter* of 1982, where the aim of fostering economic and socio-cultural cooperation within ASEAN members was referred to as “the wisdom of ASEAN’s founding leaders” [ASEAN Secretariat 1983: 6]. Further elucidating this point was a comment by Malaysia’s ex-prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad: “We came together initially because we had to have a forum to resolve border problems in the post-colonial period” [ASEAN Secretariat 1992: 21].

ASEAN’s role in providing a platform for its members to meet on a regular basis held special meaning from the perspective of fostering intra-regional friendship. First, this role allowed ASEAN to take on the function of cultivating mutual trust among its members. In other words, members were able to increase their understanding of one another’s needs and to deal with one another with an enhanced degree of transparency, because of their involvement in ASEAN.

During a foreign ministers’ meeting in 1972, Singapore’s then prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, pointed to ASEAN’s most valuable achievement as its ability to “help to lubricate relationships which could otherwise have generated friction” via the frequent regional meetings that it staged [Shee 1977: 758]. Furthermore, it was not a practice for the countries in the region to gather on a regular basis

prior to the establishment of ASEAN, given that the concept of (a united) "Southeast Asia" itself was a deliberate social construct that was coined only after the end of World War II.⁶⁾ From this perspective, the institutionalization of annual meetings within the region was especially significant for its countries, which were previously linked by an air of mutual suspicion.

Second, ASEAN enabled attempts to prevent regional disputes from worsening, through its inclusion of third parties in negotiations in disputes between two countries. An example of this is the dispute between Malaysia and the Philippines over territorial claims to Sabah, which erupted in 1968 and worsened to the extent where it threatened to disrupt the continued existence of ASEAN. Despite the strained diplomatic relations between these two countries, unofficial ministerial meetings held under the auspices of ASEAN, which allowed for urgent negotiations on the issue, prevented the outbreak of conflict between the two countries.⁷⁾

The provision of a platform for such diplomatic meetings among its member countries became ASEAN's primary function during the 1960s. Although the organization's scope of activities was expanded during the 1970s to include such efforts as economic cooperation and the sending of messages to non-ASEAN countries (such as via the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) declaration in 1971), ASEAN's achievements continued to be largely limited to the fostering of intra-regional ties all the way up to the mid-1970s.

What is significant here is the issue of national interests and relations within the scope of ASEAN's efforts at fostering mutual cooperation among its members. Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman commented, "Indeed, at this stage we do not expect member countries to undertake joint projects merely because they are regional but they may be at the expense of the national interests of some individual members" [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 76]; and Singapore's Rajaratnam remarked, "A careful study of the activities of ASEAN since its inception shows that ASEAN has been used by member nations as a device for promoting national rather than regional interests. This is understandable. National interests exist. We can define them and recognize them. Regional interests, on the other hand, are abstract concepts which ASEAN members cannot as yet clearly define or reach agreement on." Comments made by participants at ASEAN's diplomatic meetings seem to suggest that the actions of

6) For example, looking at regionalism in Europe, we see that prior to the formation of the EU, member countries already shared a common identity as a region called "Europe." In contrast, Southeast Asian countries did not share a common identity prior to the formation of ASEAN, and it can even be asserted that the formation of ASEAN was in fact the main impetus for the creation of a common identity among its members. Put simply, while a shared identity among various countries gave rise to regionalism in Europe, the converse is true in the case of Southeast Asia [see Acharya 2000].

7) See Jorgensen-Dahl [1982: Chap. 8].

ASEAN member countries were driven by the need to protect their own national interests above those of the organization as a whole. In other words, ASEAN's basic stance was not motivated by the need to achieve something "for Southeast Asia."

Within the backdrop of its members placing their national interests above the interests of the Southeast Asian region, it was not surprising that ASEAN countries strove to facilitate state building as their first and foremost priority. In other words, ASEAN's fundamental preoccupation was to stabilize international relations within the Southeast Asian region so that its members could focus on their independent state-building processes, including economic development. Indonesia's President Suharto asserted, "Economic development fosters stability in this region whereas, reversely, increased stability will facilitate co-operation in economic development" [Siagian 1975: 73-74]. Here, attempts to link domestic stability with international stability can be observed. While international security regimes tend to perceive disputes between countries as the greatest threat to security (this includes collective defense as well as collective security), it is characteristic of developing countries to perceive domestic problems as the greatest destabilizing force for their governments, and therefore as the greatest threat to their national security.

At this juncture, it is apt to address the question of how ASEAN's performance has been evaluated. First, it remains a fact that the organization has been often criticized as being nothing more than a "club of the foreign ministers" [Fifield 1979: 1200]. This has even been acknowledged by participants of ASEAN ministerial meetings themselves [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 238]. While the above may be true, it also remains a fact that ASEAN's true essence lay in the cultivation of transparency among its ministers, through their frequent meetings with one another. Perhaps the reason why this aspect of ASEAN has not received the praise it deserves is that official measures of success tend to be based not so much upon the degree to which the organization was able to achieve stable intra-regional relationships as upon the degree to which the organization was able to solve problems of an "outward-looking" nature, such as through the countering of external threats posed by socialist countries in the region, such as Vietnam. This is especially evident when we look at the arguments of Michael Leifer, whose works are representative of research on ASEAN. For instance, Leifer evaluated ASEAN negatively in a 1973 paper, his main reason being that ASEAN countries were highly unsuccessful in achieving a united stance in their dealings with external powers within the context of the Cold War [Leifer 1973]. Further evidence is presented in the form of an article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* that asserts, "Throughout its 12-year existence, ASEAN has been a mealy-mouthed organization . . . talking mainly about economic cooperation among themselves and their trading partners, and casting nervous but polite glances over their shoulders at the alarming developments in Indochina" [*Far Eastern Economic*

Review (FEER), 13 July 1979].

In contrast, positive evaluations of ASEAN seldom went beyond superficial praises for “its survival of almost nine years” [Indorf 1975: 54]. Considering that regional organizations that were in existence before ASEAN—such as ASA and Maphilindo—were all short-lived, it is inevitable that ASEAN’s survival for 10 consecutive years is viewed as remarkable. This is even truer if we consider the air of pessimism that existed during the time of ASEAN’s formation—in Rajaratnam’s words, “fashionable pessimism” [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 51]—that was born out of a general sentiment that ASEAN’s life span would be short. However, the overemphasis on ASEAN’s continued existence can, on the flip side, be interpreted as suggesting that the organization’s achievements in the 1970s did not go beyond the struggle to perpetuate its activities.

As explained above, ASEAN’s initial years were devoted largely to the provision of a common platform for the elites of its members to meet, so that they could make combined efforts at stabilizing international relations within Southeast Asia. ASEAN’s main role, as perceived by its member countries, was the facilitation of friendly intra-regional ties. However, it is interesting that ASEAN countries seldom refer to this period of time when they reflect upon ASEAN’s achievements and talk about the organization’s success stories. This could be because evaluations of ASEAN’s performance in the 1970s by international society were greatly negative, since the tendency was to evaluate the success of a regional organization based upon its dealings with external countries rather than its facilitation of intra-regional ties. Today, ASEAN is largely talked about as a success story, but current representations of the organization are a far cry from its image during the time of its establishment, or even up to the mid-1970s. ASEAN’s image began to undergo a major transformation only during the 1980s. The next section will be devoted to a discussion of one of the major contributing factors to ASEAN’s image change: the Cambodian conflict.

III The Cambodian Dispute and Its Impact on ASEAN’s Image

A border dispute between Cambodia and Vietnam erupted in the 1960s, and relations between the two countries remained strained even after a communist government was established in Cambodia in 1975. Tensions escalated to the point where there was a clash of military forces over national boundary issues during May and June 1975. Although there was a temporary ceasefire from the latter half of 1975 to 1976, Cambodia once again laid territorial claims over a region where Vietnam had effective control in 1977, even going so far as to announce a (temporary) break in diplomatic ties with the latter. Tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam climaxed in December 1978, when the People’s Army of Vietnam

invaded Cambodia, pushing the Democratic Kampuchea (Pol Pot) administration all the way to the capital. The Vietnamese military eventually ousted the Pol Pot administration and replaced it with a puppet regime under Heng Samrin, in January 1979.

The border dispute between Cambodia and Vietnam was not a simple problem regarding the legitimacy of Cambodia's territorial claims; nor was it confined to a bilateral dispute between the two nations involved. Far from that, it involved the entire Southeast Asian region—as evidenced by the rhetoric attacks on Vietnam, as well as the collective efforts launched by Southeast Asian countries, to question the legitimacy of the Heng Samrin administration. Moreover, if we were to see the issue from a global perspective, the Cambodian dispute was further influenced by the developments of the Cold War. The Soviet Union, which supported Vietnam, chose to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Heng Samrin administration, while China and the United States backed the Pol Pot administration. It was in such instances that the thawing of US-China relations was manifested within the context of Cold War power politics in Asia.

The resolution of the Cambodian dispute finally took place in 1991, in the form of the Paris International Conference on Cambodia. The strained relationship between Vietnam and Cambodia had continued for as long as a decade. This author will now proceed to explain the specific role that ASEAN played in its contribution to the resolution of the Cambodian dispute, before shedding light on how this helped to shape the image of ASEAN in the 1980s.

1. *ASEAN's Activities*

ASEAN was swift to act in response to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978. Within two weeks following the invasion, Indonesian Foreign Minister Mokhtar—who was at that time the head of ASEAN's standing committee—together with the entire board of participants of the ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting made requests for Cambodia to be given back its sovereignty and self-autonomy. In particular, ASEAN requested the withdrawal of foreign occupation forces from Cambodia, as well as for the United Nations Security Council to take swift action in resolving the dispute [*Daily Report*, 15 January 1979]. ASEAN's refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Heng Samrin regime, as well as its request for the withdrawal of occupation forces from Cambodia, were consistent with the organization's basic stance of mutual respect for other nations' sovereignty; non-interference in one another's domestic affairs; and self-determination. Such was the essence of ASEAN's approach toward the Cambodian dispute; and this basic stance remained unwavering, even in later joint statements made at the ASEAN foreign ministerial meetings.

In addition, ASEAN played an active role in lobbying the United Nations to achieve the above goals.

For instance, it submitted a proposal to the United Nations Security Council in March 1979 requesting for all countries involved in the occupation (or invasion) of Cambodia to withdraw their troops—but the success of this attempt was stalled by a veto by the Soviet Union. In November of the same year, ASEAN appealed to the UN General Assembly to take concrete steps to resolve the Cambodian dispute, such as by issuing a formal proposal for resolution, under the theme titled “Cambodian state of affairs.” The contents of the proposal were based upon ASEAN’s main precepts—(i) respect for one another’s sovereignty and mutual non-interference in domestic affairs; (ii) withdrawal of troops from Cambodia; and (iii) resolution by the United Nations—and it received support from many external parties, including China and the United States. Although Vietnam also submitted its own proposal to the UN General Assembly, this received support only from the USSR and a limited group of countries.

From the 1980s onward, the United Nations’ resolutions with regard to the Cambodian dispute came to be based mainly on proposals created by ASEAN, while the General Assembly assumed a generally critical attitude toward Vietnam and the Soviet Union. What is especially significant about ASEAN’s lobbying of the UN is its proposal that was submitted in 1980 and materialized the following year in the form of the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK). Although the ICK was intended to be a meeting among all the countries involved in the Cambodian dispute, the boycotting of the conference by countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and the USSR can be viewed as a reflection of the conference’s fundamental stance: criticizing Vietnam and working toward the reinstatement of the Pol Pot administration. Even more noteworthy is that the declaration regarding Kampuchea that was adopted by the ICK can be seen as a reflection of ASEAN’s basic stance in its lobbying messages to the UN.⁸⁾

Although it is difficult to think of the ICK as a major factor in the resolution of the Cambodian crisis, the fact that its organization was the result of ASEAN’s efforts to appeal to international society is definitely noteworthy. In addition, ASEAN appealed to its dialogue partners, such as the United States, the European Union, Japan, Australia, and Canada, to impose economic sanctions against Vietnam.⁹⁾ In 1982 ASEAN helped in the formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), which comprised three Cambodian political factions. The formation of the CGDK was favorable to ASEAN, since the Pol Pot administration’s international reputation had become tainted by its human rights violations. By setting up the CGDK, ASEAN was in a better position to back up an alternative

8) One example would be the setting up of a special interim committee. Initially, ASEAN proposed that total military disarmament be enforced, but this proposal was later excluded due to objections by the United States [Chandra 1986: 336–339]. There is also a United Nations [1981] report on the meeting held by this committee.

9) The first request was made by Singapore’s prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, on 23 December 1979 [Weatherbee 1985: 132].

government to replace the Heng Samrin administration in Cambodia, or at least to place a restraint on its activities [Kroef 1983].

Nonetheless, it is important to note that ASEAN's role in resolving the Cambodian dispute was constrained by two factors. The first was the lack of unity among its member countries in their approach toward the dispute. For example, Indonesian Foreign Minister Alatas pointed to the "widespread but historically incorrect assumption that Cambodia is the cement of ASEAN. Cambodia is divisive."

Thailand adopted the toughest stance toward Vietnam, due to the former's close geographical proximity with Cambodia. Within the context of the Cambodian dispute Thailand could be seen as the "frontline country," and Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia no doubt raised national security concerns in Thailand. The influx of refugees from Cambodia into neighboring countries presented yet another challenge to ASEAN. In response to this, Thailand assumed an active role in appealing to international society to persuade Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia's national borders. While there were other ASEAN countries that supported Thailand in adopting a tough stance toward Vietnam—such as Singapore, which saw Vietnam's receipt of foreign aid from the USSR as potentially threatening to the region—there were also members, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, that were less keen to condemn Vietnam.

As compared to the threat posed by Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, these countries were much more concerned with the possibility that China, which was opposed to Vietnam, might take advantage of its involvement in the Cambodian dispute to interfere excessively in Southeast Asian affairs. Because of such concerns, Indonesia and Malaysia preferred to adopt a softer approach toward the issue by focusing on conciliatory talks with Vietnam.¹⁰⁾

Such differences in ideology were especially evident in the Kuantan Declaration, which was established in March 1980. The declaration was the result of a series of discussions between Indonesian President Suharto and Malaysian Prime Minister Hussein Onn. What is particularly significant about this declaration is that although it adopted a critical stance toward the Soviet Union's support for Vietnam, it also displayed a certain degree of tolerance for Vietnam's continued involvement in Cambodia, so long as national security issues between Cambodia and Thailand were resolved (i.e., Thailand's national security was secured). This can be viewed as a derailment from the tough stance that ASEAN had adopted toward the Cambodian dispute until then. The lack of a united approach within ASEAN toward the issue became all the more evident after the Kuantan Declaration.

10) See Haacke [2003: 83–88] for more details on differences in the level of threat perceived by ASEAN member nations.

One example of the lack of a unified approach was Singapore's support for the provision of arms to Vietnamese resistance forces in Cambodia, and Indonesia's strong rebuttal of the proposal. Yet another example would be ASEAN's divided stance toward Malaysia's proposal of a "5 plus 2" approach for ASEAN, which was mentioned during the conference for non-member countries held in March 1983 in New Delhi. This proposal was put forth with the aim of creating an opportunity for ASEAN members (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) to hold dialogue sessions with Vietnam and Laos. Within the group of countries to which the proposal was targeted, Singapore and Indonesia were on the supporting side, while Thailand and China were on the opposing side, asserting that ASEAN ought to stick to its policy of isolating, or even negating, Vietnam's role as a dialogue partner. Given that such divisions existed, it is no surprise that Malaysia's "5 plus 2" proposal failed to materialize.

The second limitation ASEAN faced was its inability to influence Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union in a significant way. Despite ASEAN's active role in lobbying the UN and its persistent criticism of Vietnam during its annual foreign ministerial meetings, the resolution of the Cambodian dispute was at a standstill until as late as 1988. On the one hand, Vietnam, under the backing of the USSR, refused to expel the pro-Pol Pot regime from Cambodia. As opposed to this, the CGDK refused to engage in dialogue sessions with the Heng Samrin administration, while China showed no sign of supporting Vietnam's demands. ASEAN's response to this can be described as self-contradictory. In 1985, Malaysia proposed that "indirect reconciliatory dialogue sessions" should be held between the various countries involved. However, Thailand wished to abide by ASEAN's basic stance of reaching out to Vietnam and not the Heng Samrin government, asserting that the Cambodian dispute should not be perceived as a "domestic war" but as an "invasion" by Vietnam. Vietnam, on the other hand, refused all efforts at reconciliation, causing the dialogue sessions to stall. In the midst of such disunity, Indonesia chose to act on its own, proposing an informal meeting (or "cocktail party") in 1985, which Vietnam agreed to in July 1987. The proposal finally materialized in the form of the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) in July 1988, after being subjected to several amendments in response to the objections raised by Thailand and Singapore during the foreign ministerial meeting in August 1987.¹¹⁾

Vietnam's participation in the JIM was undoubtedly an example of ASEAN's success in diplomacy. However, it must be said that the breakthrough from the standstill in Cambodia-Vietnam relations was brought about not so much by ASEAN's efforts at diplomacy as by the change in the international political climate after 1988. The change in the political climate made it possible for (i) the CGDK's president, Sihanouk, to participate in direct dialogue sessions with Hun Sen, the president of the People's Republic

11) Subsequently, JIM II and JIM III were organized in February 1989 and February 1990, respectively.

of Kampuchea (and successor of Heng Samrin); (ii) an improvement in Sino-Soviet ties; and (iii) the birth of the Chachai administration in Thailand, which was much more open to reconciliatory talks than its predecessors had been. The most significant change in the international political environment was, however, the thawing of political tension between China and the Soviet Union.

Relations between China and the USSR began taking a turn for the better from 1988, as evidenced by Gorbachev's visit to China in May 1989. The improved relationship between these two powers can be seen as a decisive factor in bringing about the resolution of the Cambodian dispute, since these two countries were now in a much better position to make compromises with each other. In the rapid turn of events after 1988, ASEAN's role in bringing about the resolution of the Cambodian dispute was greatly diminished [Alagappa 1993]. By 1989 the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia was complete, and the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 brought the dispute to an end. Observing the end of the Cambodian incident, one cannot help but feel that by this stage ASEAN's role as a facilitator of reconciliation had become undisputedly small; it was the members of the UN Security Council that shouldered the bulk of responsibility in bringing the dispute to an end.

The above has been a description of ASEAN's involvement in the Cambodian dispute. Evidently, the role that ASEAN played was largely confined to matters such as preventing the Heng Samrin administration from becoming the legitimate government of Cambodia and preventing Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia from becoming justified and prolonged. The fact that the Cambodian situation continued for more than a decade, or that international society's attitude toward Vietnam became harsher during the 1980s, should not be taken matter-of-factly when we consider that Vietnam initially expected international society and the UN General Assembly to be more accepting of its invasion of Cambodia; or that India chose to officially recognize the sovereignty of the Heng Samrin administration in 1981. (Vietnam initially expected that it could justify its preemptive attack on the People's Democratic Republic of Kampuchea as being part of its national self-defense rights; or that the Cambodian dispute might at least be resolved within a relatively short period of time.)

Despite the difficulties involved in the resolution of the Cambodian dispute, the impact of ASEAN's activities was effective only to the extent of preventing the dispute from escalating into a more serious war within the Southeast Asian region. The effectiveness of these activities was greatly limited in scope; and as evidenced by the fact that ASEAN was unable to directly influence the decisions of Vietnam, the USSR, or China, it can be concluded that ASEAN was unsuccessful in bringing the Cambodian dispute to an end. In this light, it is reasonable to conclude that the way the Cambodian dispute ended had little to do with ASEAN's efforts.

2. *Change in Image: ASEAN as a Success Story*

The previous section was devoted to explaining the role ASEAN played in the Cambodian dispute. This section will shed light on the specific ways in which the Cambodian issue had an impact on ASEAN's image. In particular, this section will elucidate (i) that the Cambodian dispute served to raise international awareness about ASEAN, while at the same time improving the latter's reputation in the international arena; and (ii) how this in turn improved the manner in which ASEAN's own member countries came to evaluate the organization.

While it is true that ASEAN's role in the Cambodian dispute was greatly limited in scope, it is also true that the organization's involvement in the Cambodian dispute helped to greatly improve its international image. The basic reason for this was that through its efforts at resolving the Cambodian dispute, ASEAN adopted a new function as an actor, in addition to its existing function as a platform for regional meetings.

As explained in section I, the initial goal of ASEAN was to provide a platform for its member countries to improve their trust in one another through regular meetings. However, the way in which it sought to achieve its goals differed from situation to situation, depending on the international political climate of the time. For example, ASEAN showed that it was able to adapt to large-scale changes in the structure of the international political environment when it adopted the ZOPFAN declaration during the reconciliation of the United States and China; or when it responded quickly to the spread of socialism in Indochina, by organizing various foreign ministerial meetings that eventually led to the adoption of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (1976). In addition, ASEAN made attempts to include non-member countries by hosting foreign ministers of non-ASEAN countries and institutionalizing ASEAN PMC sessions in the late 1970s. The hosting of large countries by the small member countries of ASEAN via PMCs was an unusual phenomenon. However, considering that the role of PMCs prior to the Cambodian dispute was largely confined to the facilitation of economic cooperation and had minimal political impact, it is indeed difficult to link the role of PMCs directly to ASEAN's image of success.

Nevertheless, the Cambodian dispute remains a significant aspect of ASEAN's history, since it created an opportunity for ASEAN member countries to work actively toward a common goal, as one united body. This was extremely significant in shaping the way that international society perceived ASEAN. How the Cambodian dispute helped to change ASEAN's international image can be categorized into four occurrences.

The first was ASEAN's involvement with the UN. As previously mentioned, the Cambodian dispute created an impetus for ASEAN to actively lobby the UN, such as through the submission of proposals

for the resolution of the incident. ASEAN's efforts to reach out to international society since 1967 have been documented in the United Nations Yearbook in chronological order. Prior to the Cambodian dispute, the term "ASEAN" surfaced only once in the United Nations Yearbook: when Indonesia's foreign minister represented the organization in making a joint declaration. However, ASEAN entered the international arena as an independent and active political actor from 1979, as evidenced by an increased frequency in the number of references to ASEAN during UN General Assembly meetings. In particular, ASEAN began to present its own assertions to the UN, such as its assertion on the respect for national sovereignty and protection of territorial integrity. This represented a major change in ASEAN's reputation, and looking at ASEAN's relationship with the UN, it can be said that the Cambodian dispute marked a watershed in ASEAN's activities.

Second, the Cambodian dispute created an opportunity for ASEAN to play host to many bilateral or multilateral meetings. A classic example of this was the ICK. In addition, although it was mentioned previously that ASEAN made some proposals that failed to materialize, it remains an undisputable fact that through the organization's attempts to lobby the UN, ASEAN members began to assume a new identity as a unified body. In fact, Indonesian Foreign Minister Mokhtar remarked, "If it were not for Thailand, the Indonesian reaction [to Vietnam] would have been more flexible" [Antolik 1990: 122]. This signifies that being part of the same body came to assume a special meaning as a "framework" for member countries' foreign policies. Although it is strange that such a function should be accorded special attention in the case of most other international organizations, as far as ASEAN is concerned, its new role as a unified and active political body was definitely significant, given that its major role prior to 1979 was that of providing a meeting platform.

Third, ever since the onset of the Cambodian dispute, there was unified criticism of Vietnam on an almost annual basis at ASEAN's foreign ministerial meetings. Like the organization's attempts to lobby the UN, open criticism of this sort served as a form of appeal to international society. In particular, ASEAN appealed to international society to oppose Vietnam's violation of the UN Charter clause mandating non-intervention in the domestic political affairs of another sovereign nation.

Fourth, ASEAN repeatedly raised the Cambodian dispute in its agenda during PMCs and foreign ministerial meetings with non-member countries. This allowed ASEAN members to align their individual political agendas and to jointly criticize Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia as a violation of international law. In addition, through discussions on how to resolve the Cambodian issue, external parties such as the United States, the European Commission, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada repeatedly expressed their desire to cooperate with ASEAN and to support ASEAN's stance. This signifies that through its handling of the dispute, ASEAN came to be perceived as one unified body by the

international community.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the Cambodian dispute created an impetus for ASEAN to begin its activities as an “actor.” As described in the first section, ASEAN’s activities up to the 1970s were limited in scope and development, with the organization serving mainly as a “club” for its five member countries to gather on a regular basis. However, by attempting to solve the Cambodian dispute through lobbying international organizations, ASEAN made observable progress and emerged as an organization with visible results. Even Leifer, who is known for his criticism of ASEAN, began to conceptualize the organization as a “diplomatic community” in reference to the organization’s dealings with non-member countries [Leifer 1989].

As pointed out above, the fact that ASEAN achieved recognition in international society during the 1980s was evidenced by the substantial increase in the number of references to the organization’s involvement in the Cambodian dispute in the United Nations Yearbook. Moreover, if we consider the PMCs that were held in the latter half of the 1980s, it is easy to see that comments made by ASEAN’s dialogue partners began mostly with ASEAN’s involvement in the Cambodian dispute. Take, for instance, JIM, which was referred to earlier. In the context of JIM, Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Sosuke Uno commented in 1980, that “[he] would like to express [his] high appreciation for ASEAN countries’ initiative,” and that “[he] sincerely hope[d] that the meeting [would] achieve concrete progress” [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 62].

As previously mentioned, although JIM achieved very little progress after this incident, it did serve as an impetus for countries external to ASEAN to pay closer attention to the organization’s initiatives. The comments made by external countries on ASEAN’s role in the Cambodian dispute during the latter half of the 1980s are too numerous to be listed here. In this manner, through its involvement in the Cambodian dispute, ASEAN came to be recognized by external actors as an entity with a significant role in international society. Put more simply, through its involvement in the resolution of the Cambodian dispute, ASEAN was able to deepen as well as institutionalize its relationship with countries external to the region at the same time.

The Cambodian dispute did not only change the way in which foreign journalists and academic researchers perceived ASEAN. It also evoked a change in the way ASEAN’s own members perceived the organization. This was largely due to the fact that ASEAN member countries perceived Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia as being potentially destabilizing to regional order. For example, when making a reference to the Cambodian dispute during a 1979 foreign ministerial meeting, the foreign minister of the Philippines, Alberto Romulo, remarked, “ASEAN is in the midst of a dark passage in its life,” and “ASEAN is on red alert” [*FEER*, 13 July 1979]. Evidently, the Cambodian dispute served to raise

ASEAN's prestige as a regional organization. In 1980 Singaporean Foreign Minister S. Dhanabalan remarked on ASEAN's increased prestige: "This has been proved in the UN resolutions on Kampuchea" [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 351]. This was echoed by Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila: "ASEAN has earned worldwide recognition as a dynamic regional organization. It is also respected throughout the world as a cohesive grouping whose role contributes significantly to the cause of international peace, progress and stability" [*ibid.*: 474]. Similarly, when the Cambodian dispute was resolved in 1991, participating actors described it in terms such as the following: "Cambodia was ASEAN's springboard to a decade of remarkable political cooperation."¹²⁾

While its involvement in the Cambodian dispute allowed ASEAN to take on the added role of an actor, it must be re-emphasized that this role was greatly limited in scope. This is evidenced by the fact that while ASEAN was able to exert a significant influence on the ongoing developments of the Cambodian dispute, it was unable to exert substantial influence in bringing about a resolution to the dispute. In other words, while ASEAN's role in preventing the Heng Samrin administration from being legitimized was undoubtedly significant, the organization's role in enforcing peace in the Southeast Asian region was limited. This was not only because ASEAN was composed mainly of small countries. Another reason that cannot be ignored is that violent ideological confrontations that took place among ASEAN member countries often served to limit the organization's role as an actor.¹³⁾ No doubt, the Cambodian dispute proved that it was not wrong to label ASEAN as a "diplomatic community." However, it must be noted that the organization's role as a diplomatic community was greatly limited in scope. In fact, it must be noted that existing interpretations of ASEAN's involvement in the Cambodian dispute are not of a unified nature: there appears to be a split between research that emphasizes the positive aspects of ASEAN's involvement in the dispute, and research that is much less positive in its evaluation. This proves that whether a researcher chooses to focus on the fact that ASEAN was able to take on a new role (through its involvement in the Cambodian dispute) or on the way in which this role was limited has a great influence on the way in which the researcher evaluates ASEAN.

The fact that ASEAN's actual contribution to a resolution of the Cambodian dispute was limited can be further supported by analyzing the comments made by parties that were directly involved. Observing the remarks passed by ASEAN member countries such as those cited above, it is important to note that when ASEAN members talk about the image of success that ASEAN has come to be

12) Remark by Singapore's foreign minister at an ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting [ASEAN Secretariat 1991: 14-15].

13) The ideological confrontations that took place among ASEAN member countries will not be described in depth here.

associated with, there is a greater tendency for them to praise the organization for attaining international recognition (through its efforts to deal with the incident) rather than for contributing to the actual resolution of the Cambodian dispute. In other words, the fact that ASEAN members came to associate ASEAN with an image of success (and to assert the effectiveness of the organization's diplomatic and political roles) had much more to do with ASEAN's improved reputation in international society than the impact that the organization was able to exert upon the resolution of the Cambodian dispute.

Going one step farther, it seems apt to suggest that the Cambodian dispute bestowed ASEAN with renewed purpose, at a point in time when the organization's sense of purpose was waning. Through their commitment to the organization, ASEAN members improved their mutual trust in one another, and about a decade after the establishment of the organization they materialized their improved ties in the form of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. However, due to a period of stagnation in terms of economic cooperation in the 1970s, ASEAN's activities seemed for a while to be losing their international appeal. This period coincided with the Cambodian dispute, allowing ASEAN's efforts to deal with the incident to become the key function of the organization throughout the 1980s. In turn, the new role that ASEAN adopted allowed the organization to become highly regarded by international society. Concurrently, ASEAN members' perception of the Cambodian crisis evolved from that of a "severe threat to regional stability" into "an opportunity for the organization to assume an active role in international politics." In 1985 Indonesian Foreign Minister Mokhtar asserted that "if we had not taken the stand that we did then it could well be that ASEAN would have gone into oblivion" [Buszynski 1987: 765]. This sentiment was mirrored by Pacific A. Castro, the acting minister for foreign affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, when he referred to ASEAN's involvement in the Cambodian dispute as a rare case of successful ASEAN foreign diplomatic activity: "ASEAN's success was bestowed by external parties. Is it even possible to speak of ASEAN's success without referring to the Cambodian dispute?" [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 495].

In fact, one could even go so far as to suggest that there would be nothing significant left to consider about ASEAN's achievements in the 1980s if we were to take away the organization's involvement in the Cambodian dispute. On the other hand, it can also be said that ASEAN's image of success was heteronomous, having been bestowed upon the organization by Vietnam, a non-member country, when it chose to invade Cambodia. Although ASEAN's impact on the Cambodian dispute was limited in scope, the Cambodian dispute's impact on ASEAN was definitely significant and marked a turning point in ASEAN's external image.

IV Improvement in ASEAN's Image Brought about by the Economic Development of Its Members

The previous section elucidated how the Cambodian dispute served to improve ASEAN's international image. This section will focus on another factor that greatly improved the organization's image: the rapid economic growth of ASEAN member countries, which began in the latter half of the 1980s and continued until 1997. ASEAN members began experiencing tremendous economic development in the mid-1970s. Despite a short period of stagnation in the early 1980s, this process continued into the 1990s, allowing ASEAN countries to achieve record-breaking economic growth rates in the late 1980s that were fueled by foreign direct investment and growth in exports (Fig. 1).¹⁴⁾ Therefore, this section shall be devoted to studying developments in ASEAN that took place during the latter half of the 1980s.

The fact that the remarkable economic development of ASEAN member countries led to an improvement in ASEAN's image is not surprising. In fact, there are a number of studies that positively evaluate economic cooperation within ASEAN [Akrasanee 1987]. ASEAN member countries themselves have often linked ASEAN's success with the economic development that took place in the region. In fact, when we look at the documentation of joint declarations passed during ASEAN's annual foreign ministerial meetings, it is striking that the number of references to the benefits of economic development began to increase in the mid-1980s. (This is noteworthy if we consider that ASEAN joint declarations can be taken to be a fairly good representation of the voices of ASEAN members.) One example of how regional economic progress helped to improve the way in which members evaluated ASEAN is Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's assertion that "ASEAN's twenty-year track record of regional cooperation had contributed to economic growth, social progress and political stability and made ASEAN a credible organisation" [Joint Communique of the Twentieth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting 1987, para. 6].

In fact, Srikanta Chatterjee posited in 1990 that "ASEAN [had] to be regarded as an important regional group from an economic as well as a political point of view." In addition, he posited, "The economic importance of the association however could be said to derive more from the rapid economic growth and development performance of some of its member economies than the collective strength and cohesion of the association itself" [Chatterjee 1990: 58]. What is of particular interest here is a report issued by the ASEAN Secretariat in 1997, where three specific viewpoints on the nature of

14) This paper will not delve into the details of the rapid economic growth of ASEAN member countries. For more information, see Tan [2003]. It must be noted that the Philippines did not manage to achieve economic growth rates as high as the other ASEAN member countries during this period.

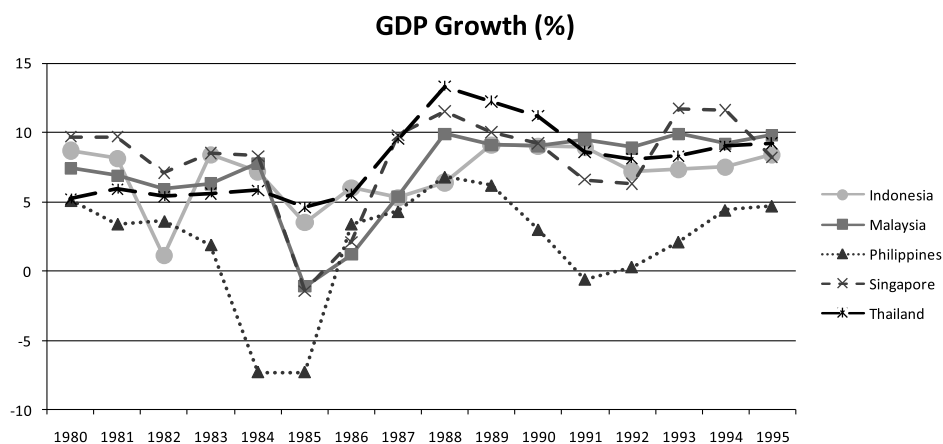


Fig. 1 Economic Development of ASEAN Member Countries from 1980s to mid-1990s

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators* (online database).

economic cooperation that took place within ASEAN were described [ASEAN Secretariat 1997: 38–39]. The first viewpoint focused on the limitations of ASEAN's role. In contrast, the second remarked that "the economic performance of ASEAN economies since the organization started is dubbed impressive, though not spectacular." The third, on the other hand, pointed out that ASEAN was experiencing an important turning point in its history. The crux of the above argument is as follows. The first two viewpoints show us that the way in which we evaluate ASEAN's performance impinges heavily on the type of indicator that is being considered. For example, if we were to base our evaluation on the analysis of ASEAN's actual performance, the results of our evaluation would undoubtedly be negative. However, if we were to focus more on the performance of individual member countries, then the results of our evaluation would be much more positive.

However, what warrants particular attention here is that the economic cooperation among ASEAN members contributed little to the economic development of individual member countries. In fact, ASEAN was recommended by a UN team to participate in a project for economic cooperation as early as 1972. During a summit held in 1976, ASEAN kick-started the liberalization of many of its major industries within the framework of several projects for industrialization. Examples of such projects include the ASEAN Industrial Projects, ASEAN Industrial Complementation, ASEAN Industrial Joint Venture, and Preferential Trading Agreements. In addition to these arrangements, ASEAN regularized economic ministerial meetings among its members. On the other hand, with regard to their dealings with external nations, ASEAN members assumed a new role as a unified pressure group when they engaged in negotiations with Japan and Australia in the early 1970s.

However, the success of such efforts in improving the economic growth of individual member countries was limited, due to frequent clashes in national interests. This was perhaps attributable to the fact that ASEAN's main goal was to foster good ties among its member countries. More important than economic cooperation was ASEAN's obligation to deal only with selected issues that would not cause friction among the competing interests of its members. In this sense, it may be observed that any failure to achieve economic cooperation by ASEAN as an organization had little or no impact on the individual economic development of each of its members. While it is difficult to speak about the postwar economic development of Western European countries without making reference to the EC (or EEC), it is striking that the rapid economic development of Southeast Asian countries, which has been termed "miraculous," had in fact little to do with the contributions of ASEAN. ASEAN's contribution to the economic development of individual member countries took place only in an indirect way, which was to stabilize the political climate of the region so as to allow members to concentrate on the building of their own economies.

The fact that ASEAN's attempts to achieve economic cooperation ended in failure has been recognized by ASEAN member countries themselves. For example, Singapore's Dhanabalan observed in 1981 that "there are critics, both within and without ASEAN, who lament the lack of progress in economic cooperation in ASEAN Such critics fail to recognize that ASEAN's most significant achievement has been the establishment of good neighbourliness among members" [ASEAN Secretariat 1987: 375]. In 1986 Dhanabalan again asserted, "Because of our satisfactory domestic economic growth, we were not particularly concerned with the lack of progress in intra-ASEAN economic cooperation" [*ibid.*: 528]. In a similar fashion, Malaysia's foreign minister commented that although ASEAN had come to be known as a successful regional organization, this was owing to its success in the field of political, social, and cultural cooperation, and not in economic cooperation. In this manner, the fact that ASEAN was successful in the political arena but not in the economic arena came to be common knowledge among ASEAN member countries in the 1980s. In other words, when ASEAN members attribute their economic development to the activities of ASEAN, they are referring to the indirect impact that ASEAN exerted on their economies through its contribution to regional political stability. It is often overlooked that there have been various studies illustrating the fact that ASEAN's attempts at achieving regional economic cooperation had limited success [Narine 2002: 24–34], and that this fact is well recognized among ASEAN members.

For the reasons described above, it is not surprising that ASEAN members began to demand that the organization shoulder more responsibility in terms of economic appeal, once the Cambodian dispute showed signs of resolution in the latter 1980s. For example, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir

commented in 1990, “our performance on the economic front requires substantial upgrading. For more than ten years now, ASEAN’s collective energy has been concentrated on finding a solution to the Cambodian problem . . . it is timely to give proper attention to economic matters” [ASEAN Secretariat 1991: 10]. This remark shows that ASEAN member countries came to see regional economic cooperation as the next item on the agenda, after the end of the Cambodian crisis. Moreover, it is striking that while references to the Cambodian dispute took up the majority of discussions during ASEAN foreign ministerial meetings in the 1970s, such references were being gradually displaced by discussions on how to improve regional economic cooperation after 1985 or 1986. Economic cooperation was valued as an important theme for discussion during the first foreign ministerial meeting to be held after 10 years (in 1987). However, there was no visible progress made during the meeting, and ASEAN’s achievement in the form of the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) was observed only during its fourth foreign ministerial meeting, held in 1992.¹⁵⁾

In short, while it remains true that ASEAN’s reputation as a regional organization was improved by the economic development of its member nations, the converse—that ASEAN member countries’ economic development was the result of ASEAN’s efforts—is not true. This fact was acknowledged by ASEAN members. Likewise, although external countries started to attribute member countries’ economic performance to the role of ASEAN, and to speak of ASEAN as a successful case of regionalization, they were often referring to the indirect benefit of member countries being able to concentrate on the building of their own domestic economies due to the political stability in Southeast Asia as a result of ASEAN’s activities. In this sense, ASEAN’s case was peculiar; it received a boost in reputation from the rapid economic growth of its members, which was something the organization did not directly contribute to.

The fact that the economic development of individual ASEAN member countries came to be so closely tied to the reputation of ASEAN as an entity has to do with the fact that the institution of ASEAN is, in reality, very loosely defined. It has already been explained that the term “ASEAN” can be interpreted as referring to the group of member countries belonging to the organization, as well as specifically to the organization itself. Moreover, since the level of institutionalism achieved by ASEAN remained fairly low throughout a substantial part of its history, it is often difficult to draw a clear line of distinction between the two possible definitions of “ASEAN.”¹⁶⁾ Due to this, several researchers find it

15) In fact, AFTA’s achievements were remarkably few. Even if we were to consider the period of time after AFTA was established, ASEAN’s efforts at economic integration remain a case of “failure” [Mattli 1999].

16) From the theoretical perspective of international relations theory, what this means is that analysis at the domestic level tends to overlap with analysis at the international level. See Singer [1961] for details on the level of theoretical analysis.

difficult to separate the success of ASEAN member countries from the success of ASEAN as a whole.

In the same way as the Cambodian dispute did, the rapid economic development of ASEAN member countries served to greatly improve the way in which external parties evaluated ASEAN. These two factors were also similar in that they boosted ASEAN's reputation among its own member countries. In fact, ASEAN members even came to perceive themselves as the "most successful case of regionalization among developing countries."¹⁷⁾ However, the impacts that these two factors exerted on ASEAN were also of a fundamentally different nature. On the one hand, despite being greatly limited in the role it was able to play, ASEAN reached out to international society as an "entity"; this allowed it to receive the same kind of attention from the rest of the world as large regional blocs such as the EU did. In this sense, the Cambodian dispute allowed ASEAN members to assume new responsibilities and broadened the scope of roles that ASEAN was able to play as an organization. In contrast, the effect of economic development on ASEAN members' perceptions of the organization was of a much more reserved nature, given that the members recognized that ASEAN's attempts at economic cooperation had ended in failure and that the organization's contribution to regional economic growth was a spillover effect of the latter's contribution to political stability within the region. To external parties that chose to focus only on the end result, however, the rapid economic growth of ASEAN members was seen as highly impressive. This allowed ASEAN to be well regarded throughout the 1980s.

V ASEAN in the 1980s

This paper has focused on the image of ASEAN and the way that the organization is perceived. When considering the various changes that the image of ASEAN underwent, specific attention was paid to the manner in which the parties involved perceived the organization during the specific time frames under study. Consideration was also given to the factors that brought about the changes in ASEAN's image. In particular, the Cambodian dispute and the economic progress of ASEAN member countries were shown to be the main factors behind ASEAN's image of success. These are issues that have not been addressed in previous literature on ASEAN.

The Cambodian dispute gave ASEAN the opportunity to bring its level of activity to the international level, at a time when the organization lacked a substantial role to play. It can also be said that ASEAN's image of success was "externally given," since it was to a large extent based on the actions

17) Taken from the speech by Prime Minister Ramos of the Philippines in a 1992 foreign ministerial meeting [ASEAN Secretariat 1992: 7].

of a non-ASEAN member—Vietnam—when it chose to invade Cambodia. Although it is true that the Cambodian dispute kept ASEAN members as one united entity in their dealings with external actors (and prevented them from splitting up despite the frequent clashes of interest within the organization), it should be kept in mind that the Cambodian dispute's impact on ASEAN's reputation was to a large extent exogenously determined.

On the other hand, the rapid economic progress of ASEAN members, which served to greatly improve ASEAN's reputation, was not a direct result of the organization's activities. Through the latter half of the 1980s, it was common knowledge among all ASEAN members that the organization was successful in attaining its political goals but not its economic goals. Nevertheless, for many external parties, the rapid growth of several Southeast Asian economies was used as an indicator of ASEAN's success throughout the 1980s.

In reality, the role that ASEAN was able to play in its attempts to resolve the Cambodian dispute was greatly limited in scope, such that the Cambodian dispute's impact on ASEAN's reputation was to a large extent determined by the actions of an external actor, Vietnam. On the other hand, it has been explained above that the other factor that led to ASEAN's improved reputation—the rapid economic growth of its member countries—ought to be considered separately from the evaluation of ASEAN's direct achievements. Nevertheless, regardless of the fact that ASEAN might not have had a direct impact in bringing about the resolution of the Cambodian dispute or in facilitating the rapid growth of Southeast Asian economies, these two factors served to greatly improve the way in which external parties evaluated ASEAN. Consequently, ASEAN's own members, too, came to see themselves as a case of successful regionalization because of ASEAN's improved image in the international arena. Put simplistically, the change in ASEAN members' evaluations of ASEAN in the 1980s was to a much greater extent the result of a drastic improvement in ASEAN's external reputation than the result of the organization's direct achievements. In this light, it can be asserted that the image of "successful regionalization" that ASEAN came to be associated with in the 1980s was the end result of a much more complicated process than is evident on the surface.

ASEAN's activity in the 1980s was centered mainly on the resolution of the Cambodian dispute, and it appears to have ended in a rather passive manner. Moreover, when we consider ASEAN's 40-year history, the 1980s seems to be too short a period for devoting so much attention to. However, this decade was especially significant to ASEAN, since it marked a turning point in the organization's reputation. Moreover, it was precisely because of the favorable reputation that it had gained in the 1980s that ASEAN was able to excel as a regional organization in the following years.

Subsequently, using the image of success that it had attained in the 1980s as a platform, ASEAN

greatly expanded its role in overseeing the regional order of the Indochina and Asia Pacific region in the 1990s, through the institutionalization of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and ARF. Although ASEAN came to be temporarily detached from the image of success that it had earned for itself thus far, during the Asian financial crisis of 1997 it quickly regained its reputation through a subsequent speedy recovery. The image of ASEAN as a success story that was created during the 1980s continues to this day. ASEAN reached a farther point of success with the enactment of the ASEAN Charter in 2008. For the reasons already noted at the beginning of this paper, ASEAN has come to be perceived as a successful case of regional cooperation, second only to the EU. This paper has been an attempt to highlight the fact that ASEAN's present-day image of success was not inherent to the organization right from its start; and that this image was constructed only during the 1980s, through a complex process.

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