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### **ASEAN and East Asian Regionalism: A Cambodian Perspective**

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**Abstract:**

*The process of regionalization is seen in most parts of the world. There are many Asian regional cooperation mechanisms in the region, such as ASEAN, Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), Ayeyawadi-Chaopraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Scheme (ACMECS) and other regional development corridors. The East Asian regionalism is an emerging topic for discussion. The author tries to focus analysis on how to reconcile ASEAN with East Asian Community: whether ASEAN+6 or ASEAN+3 and +3. Is it possible to include more countries in the so-called “East Asian Community”? The paper presents a future scenario for East Asian Regionalism. While the East Asian Community is still a long way to go with many speculations and expectations, East Asian Summit should continue to be a political forum for leaders to frame strategic policies and visions.*

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# ASEAN and East Asian Regionalism: A Cambodian Perspective

By Chap Sotharith

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## 1. Introduction

A region is shaped by economic and social processes of regionalisation and by structures of regionalism. Regionalisation describes the geographic manifestation of international or global economic processes. Regionalism refers to the political structures that both reflect and shape the strategies of governments, business corporations and a variety of non-governmental organisations and social movements.<sup>1</sup>

In the post-Cold War and post-Sept. 11, 2001 era of the world, a great deal of attention and debates have been paid to multilateral cooperation in East Asia and to the formation of economic and political cooperation and dialogue mechanisms aimed at creating a sense of East Asian identity and broader Asia-Pacific community.

New Asian regional cooperation mechanisms in the region, such as Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), Ayeyawadi-Chaopraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Scheme (ACMECS) and other regional development corridors are well in the developing process adding to many others of rest of the world. The emerging Asian regionalism which draws much attention for the past decade is East Asian Community. Regionalism in East Asia is driven by historical patterns of cooperation, the common challenge of the West, the century-long quest for an Asian identity, and growing economic interdependence and integration.<sup>2</sup>

This paper is focused primarily on a how ASEAN and a larger regional setting, probably the “East Asian Community” and “East Asian Summit” can work together. There are some questions to be repeatedly asked and to be solved including: Will ASEAN-10 continues to steer the wheel of East Asian regionalism? If not ASEAN, then who will? Which countries or

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J Katzenstein (2000), **Regionalism and Asia in New Political Economy**, Abingdon: November 2000 , Vol 5, Issue 3, pg. 353.

<sup>2</sup> John Miller (2004), The Roots and Implications to East Asian Regionalism. Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies

parties to be included in East Asian regionalism? Is it an open regionalism or limited bloc regionalism related to geographical aspect?

## **2. ASEAN and East Asian Regionalism**

The end of the Cold War brought the cultural concept under critical scrutiny from a variety of angles. The demise of the Soviet Union indicates that the supposedly objective criteria used to define these regions instead reflected Cold War priorities and divisions, such as the separation of eastern and western Europe. Globalization—the accelerating flow of goods, people, and ideas made possible by modern technology—suggested that the culture area concept was too static and one-dimensional and ought to be replaced by a model of regions that took into account economic, social, and political interactions. New ideologies and intellectual fashions added to the ferment. Constructivists argued that regions were essentially mental constructs that could be invented and sold by elites regardless of objective conditions. A new breed of regionalists, inspired by the EU example, championed regional cooperation and identity building as the wave of the future to form supranational communities as well as end national rivalries and conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed in 1967 (this year marks its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary) by the founding members of Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia. At present, ASEAN has 10 members including later members Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. The main purpose of ASEAN is to bind countries in the region in promoting security, economic and social and cultural cooperation. In Bali Summit in 2003, ASEAN Leaders adopted the Bali Concord II to consolidate ASEAN through three pillars, namely an ASEAN Security Community (ASC), an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and an ASEAN Socio-cultural Community (ASCC) among ASEAN member countries.

The regional grouping has been enlarged to a bigger one, ASEAN plus three (APT) i.e. ASEAN plus China, Japan and Republic of Korea. APT met back to back with ASEAN Summit which has taken place every year since 1997. The current East Asian regionalism has related to the market-oriented approach and the rise of China. This trend of regionalism is apparently facilitating the formation of several regional economies involving with China's

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<sup>3</sup> John Miller (2004)

participation. China's surprising economic growth over the past two decades is evident and it presents more and more China's influence over regionalism.

The vision group was made up of two academics from each country. After a three-year study, they submitted an ambitious plan for a regional bloc during the "ASEAN plus three" meeting in Brunei in November 2001. It recommended an "East Asia moving from a region of nations to a bona fide regional community where collective efforts are made for peace, prosperity and progress" and identified several areas of cooperation, including economic, financial, security, environmental, social and cultural.

The concept of East Asia, which used to be defined by the ASEAN + Three (APT) process, has been challenged since the launch of the East Asia summit (EAS) which brings India, Australia and New Zealand into the new equation.

### ***3. An East Asian Community and East Asian Summit***

East Asian regionalism probably is centered on ASEAN, as a core initiative. Though there are many challenges, East Asian Community and East Asian Summit are both attracting debate and analysis. It is an idea whose time has come to be realized.

Increasing regional cooperation is often invoked as a necessary response to regionalisation elsewhere such as the EU or NAFTA. Yet East Asian regionalism has yet to be described adequately in form of formal institutions. In the political norms that form it and in the political capacity for collective action the Asian Regional Forum, for example, differs dramatically from its more interventionist European equivalents, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO. Equally, the superficial economic integration that is the aim of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) sets it apart from the deep political integration that characterises the EU. Lacking a functional base of binding commitments, ARF and APEC are considered primarily fora for the discussion of important policy issues and, thus, institutions and mechanism useful for increasing confidence building. They are designed to strengthen regional economic cooperation only in the long term.

Although the EAC was meant to jumpstart ideas into more concrete plans, it was in actuality the podium initiated for former Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohammad's vision of East Asian regionalism. Hailing him as the "first true East Asian" after the Second World War, the idea of a united East Asia has been attributed to him, together with the propositions for an East

Asian Economic Community and an East Asian Political Community. After all, PM Mahathir's vision of an East Asian grouping was first advocated in the 1990s but was neglected by the Japanese government due to the international political exigencies of that time.<sup>4</sup>

For more than a decade so far, the East Asian regionalism movement has been more and more attractive and states are more open to this idea, allowing P.M. Mahathir his second chance at pushing this issue, declaring his four principles of building East Asian regionalism successfully – mutual benefit, mutual respect, egalitarianism, consensus and democracy. Dr. Mahathir's vision for East Asia group has to be admired for not being introspective and exclusive, but rather quite outward-looking and hopefully, beneficial to all the East Asian countries in order for a stronger voice in the international arena.

The current East Asian regionalism has related to the market-oriented approach and the rise of China. This trend of regionalism is apparently facilitating the formation of several regional economies involving with China's participation. China's surprising economic growth over the past two decades is evident and it presents more and more China's influence over regionalism. China has maintained in average an annual growth rate of GDP at about 10 percent and foreign trade at about 15 percent since 1978. China ranked 34<sup>th</sup> trading nation in the world in 1978, but by 2002 it ranked the 5<sup>th</sup>. Perception of China's rise has been polarized between those who perceive it as a threat and those as an opportunity.<sup>5</sup>

The recent trends of East Asian regionalism seems to highlight a major shift in the region's altitude towards China, and ever more countries in the region have begun to focus on the rise of China more as an opportunity than threat, and they seem eager to build a long-term partnership with China and tap China's fast-growing domestic market.

The East Asia Summit is a pan-Asia forum to be held annually by the ASEAN member countries and participated by the leaders of 16 countries in East Asia and the region, with ASEAN in a leadership position.

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<sup>4</sup> Ms. Chang Li-Lin (2003) "An East Asian Bloc: Delivering the Promise", a paper presented in at the SIIA's Tête-à-tête on 5 September 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Wei Wei Zang, (2003) East Asian Regionalism: Implications for Cross-Strait Relations, Paper presented in Conference on Taiwan and China in Global Communities, London 17 October, 2003

After its inaugural in 2005, the EAS has served as a forum for dialogue on broad strategic issues of relevance to East Asia as well as other regional and global issues, with the focus on regional and International issues of common interest and concern such as international terrorism, energy, infectious diseases, sustainable development, poverty reduction and others.

The historic decision for the ASEAN to host the EAS was taken by the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, Republic of Korea) Summit, in Vientiane, Laos, in November 2004. The first EAS was inaugurated on Dec. 14, 2005 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and subsequent meetings were held after the annual ASEAN leaders' meetings. The recent EAS was held in January 2007 in Cebu, the Philippines. The East Asian Summit, which involves 16 countries, is the starting point for political commitment to establish the East Asian FTA. However, there is no clear indication about the scope of East Asian FTA, whether it will involve ASEAN plus three or ASEAN plus six or plus others. It will be possible East Asian FTA minus X, which means that if some countries are not well prepared, they are free to exclude from the FTA and wait until everyone is comfortable to join.

Russia and the United States are also very interested in this summit, but are shunned out, sources say. This is because of ASEAN's three requirements on participating countries: having substantial relations with ASEAN, being a partner of ASEAN dialogues and a signatory to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. To obtain an "admission ticket" to the summit, Australia followed India and New Zealand to say it would join the treaty as soon as possible. As a result, the First East Asia Summit was finalized and held at a 10+6 pattern in Kuala Lumpur in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

ASEAN turned the United States down, giving a technical reason that it is not a member of the treaty. Russia, although a signatory to the treaty, also failed to get entrance. It is learned that before the summit opens ASEAN will hold a separate 10+1 talk with Russia, whose entry into the summit is perhaps only a question of time.

#### **4. ASEAN as Leading Roles**

There are many speculations over the leading roles of ASEAN. Some scholars think that ASEAN countries have been adopting complex strategies of engagement, risk-hedging and

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<sup>6</sup> People's Daily Online, East Asia Summit: in the shadow of sharp divisions, 7 December 2006, at [http://english.people.com.cn/200512/07/eng20051207\\_226350.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200512/07/eng20051207_226350.html)

soft-balancing to the major powers.<sup>7</sup> While ASEAN is still struggling to solve all differences in the process of economic integration and trade negotiation, it is evident that ASEAN members are also competing among them to promote economic development and market accesses to the same main trade partners such as the US, China, Japan and the EU. Therefore, ASEAN has weakness in the many aspects including size of economy, human right violation and poor governance records. Hence ability of leadership in regional community building is questionable.

However, ASEAN's role in leading the integration process is agreed by all parties concerned because ASEAN—a group of ten countries—has a less sensitive and rejectable role of leading compared to other parties such as China, Japan, Korea and India. ASEAN's role is clearly defined as coordinator and facilitators to bring major powers and parties to meet and discuss for common interest. On the other hand, ASEAN is not the one voice in regional and international decision but it represents 10 votes and voices providing heavy weight in the international arenas, especially the United Nations.

## ***5. Roles of External Partners to East Asian Regionalism***

### ***Roles of the US in East Asian Regionalism***

What does the East Asian regionalism means for the United States? American interests in East Asian regionalism are threefold: that it be open and non-exclusionary; not undermine U.S. alliances and cooperative relationships; and contribute to regional economic growth and political stability. East Asian regionalism at present threatens none of these interests; indeed, it supports them.<sup>8</sup>

According to United States scholar, America's new security imperatives in East Asia are:

1. The US wants to ensure the unhampered movement of goods and natural resources through Southeast Asian waters and sea straits;

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<sup>7</sup> Tsutomu Kikuchi (2006)

<sup>8</sup> John Ravenhill "A Three Bloc World? The New East Asian Regionalism" *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 2 (2002), pp. 191-93.

2. The US wants to identify and prevent any possible terrorist actions, encompassing threats to the US interests and to local targets, but also extending to curbs on regional insurgencies;
3. The US is focused on the political and security implications of the rise of Chinese power, seeking to balance increasing Chinese influence across the region, without necessarily inhibiting China's pursuit of a larger regional role.<sup>9</sup>

The United States has been an active partner in some of these institution-building and/or community-building efforts and, in recent years (unlike the early 1990s), has been generally supportive of – or at least not actively opposed to – those in which it is not a member. In fact, the Bush administration, despite its (sometimes deserved) reputation for unilateralism elsewhere, has been particularly supportive of East Asian and broader Asia-Pacific multilateralism.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, it is difficult to discuss U.S. position toward East Asia regionalism or the development of an East Asian community since an East Asian community has yet to be defined – much less credibly emerge – and regional governance, even within the much more tightly knit Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community, has barely evolved, especially if one were to compare Asia to Europe or other regions. It is not even clear, at present, what constitutes “East Asia,” much less America's place (or lack thereof) in it.<sup>11</sup>

Some envision an “Asia for Asians” approach, arguing that an East Asia community should be restricted, at least initially, to the ASEAN Plus Three (A+3) members; i.e., the 10 ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. But, at the A+3 summit in Vientiane, Laos on Nov. 29-30, 2004, India was also represented (as it had been in 2003), with Australia and New Zealand also participating for the first time. These states were invited to the first East Asia Summit (EAS) in Malaysia in December 2005, even though former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir has made it clear that he personally does not believe Australia and New Zealand belong in the group (suggesting that they were quasi-European nations despite their location). Dr. Mahathir seems more favorably disposed toward New

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Pollock (2006)

<sup>10</sup> Ralph Cossa, et al., (2005) *The Emerging East Asian Community: Should Washington be Concerned?* Pacific Forum, CSIS, Honolulu, Hawaii.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Delhi, even though India's ties to East Asia, while growing, pale in comparison to those of Canberra or Wellington. Meanwhile, no one is quite sure what to do about North Korea and everyone seems to overlook Mongolia while trying to ignore Russia, even though all three are arguably East Asian nations.

The U.S, under President Bush administration, has initiated the so-called "Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative." That initiative, launched in October 2002, seeks to strengthen U.S. trade and economic ties with ASEAN as a force for stability and development in the Southeast Asian region. If the U.S is interested in participating in the EAC, its role can be "Strategic partner" or "observers."

### ***Roles of Russia in East Asian Regionalism***

Russia is keen in participating in the East Asian Regionalism. However, Russia needs to do more in qualifying to be a member. Russia has to promote a substantial economic cooperation with ASEAN, which at present is very minimal.

East Asian regionalism has its implications to Russia for following reasons:

1. China's Peace Offensive (CPO)
2. India's Look East Policy
3. America's Maneuvers aimed at restraining China
4. Potential marginalization of ASEAN

With the above reasons, Russia has observed the process of East Asian regionalization carefully and interestedly. Unfortunately, Russia's bid for membership in EAS was politely rejected in the reason of Russian economic tie with ASEAN is not substantial and unsatisfactory.

### ***Roles of Taiwan in East Asian Regionalism***

Concerning the role of Taiwan in the East Asian regionalism, economic and trade seems more appropriate than political one, which is very sensitive and complicated. Given the prolonged political hostility between Beijing and Taipei, it is understandable that Taipei has

its concerns over the rise of China, as Taiwan still perceives Beijing as its principal adversary bent on strangling its “international space” and taking it by force if need be.

However, despite political animosity between the two sides, many Taiwanese, especially businessmen, are believed to view the rise of China more as an opportunity. Taiwanese businesses have poured as much as US\$ 100 billion into the mainland over the last decade; more than 300,000 Taiwanese living and working in the Shanghai region alone, and recent years see over 3 million visits annually from Taiwan to the mainland, and since 2002, China has become Taiwan’s largest export market.<sup>12</sup> This cross-Straits “informal economic integration” is in fact one of the most dynamic and significant parts of the new Asian regionalism, especially ASEAN-China FTA. Even before these latest changes were brought into effect, cross-Straits economic ties continued to grow. Direct trade reached US\$107.8 billion in 2006, and through the first 11 months of the year, indirect trade, as measured by Beijing, stood at US\$593.9 billion—with the balance heavily in Taiwan’s favor. Taiwan’s investment in the Mainland also continued to grow rapidly.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, it is undeniable that Taiwan is already the member of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and World Trade Organization (WTO); hence there are trade negotiations within this global trade family.<sup>14</sup> Taiwan increasing FDI in Asian countries also plays an important role in exporting from host country and benefit to Taiwanese businesses. Though bilateral Free Trade Agreement with individual country is difficult according to China’s factor, Taiwan can find other way in promoting regional economic integration by focusing more in FDI, trade and humanitarian aid than politics.

## **6. Constraints in Realizing East Asian Regionalism**

The East Asian regionalism has many impediments. First, Sino-Japanese rivalry—although muted and partially offset by close bilateral economic ties—raises the question of how far and

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<sup>12</sup> For more details see Wei Wei Zang, (2003) East Asian Regionalism: Implications for Cross-Straits Relations cited in Chap Sotharith (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Alan D. Romberg (2007) Politicians Jockey for Position in Taiwan’s 2007–2008 Elections, While Japan Jockeys for Position Across the Strait. China Leadership Monitor, NO. 20. The Hoover Institution, cited in Chap Sotharith (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Taiwan is the WTO member by recognizing as a “Customs Territory” not as a country.

fast cooperation can proceed in a region where the two principal powers are potentially at loggerheads. The experience of Western Europe is not encouraging in this regard. Absent the Franco-German reconciliation of the late 1940s, it is difficult to imagine how European integration could have made much headway. There is little in the historical interaction of China and Japan to suggest that the Japanese would be willing to accept subordination to China.<sup>15</sup> Nor is it clear that Beijing is prepared to treat Japan as an equal partner. Sino-Japanese rivalry may, however, afford smaller countries the opportunity to draw Beijing and Tokyo into a “competing war” in regional cooperation. Many evidence, for example, shows that the prospective China-ASEAN FTA as providing leverage to coax Japan into similar initiatives toward ASEAN.

Another factor that may slow down East Asian regionalism is the diversification and differences in many aspects among the members. It is not necessarily relevant, however, to compare East Asia with Europe. Cultural backgrounds in Asia are so variegated and diverse; the political system is different from country to country; stages of economic development also are very different, and disparities in living standards and income are so wide. ASEAN as driver is a hard job as ASEAN, has so far forestalled this possibility by maintaining a united front, balancing China against Japan, controlling the agenda of regional cooperation, and—perhaps most important—keeping the United States and other extra-regional powers in play as balancers and hedges.

For all the signs that moves are speeding up toward an East Asian Community, every proponent is quick to add that the road ahead will not be an easy one. As a supposed model for the East Asian integration, the European Union is often cited, with its history of half a century from a modest start.

## ***7. Cambodian Perspectives in East Asian Regionalism***

After about 3 decades of international isolation, economic embargo and political strife, Cambodia has emerged as one of active partner in building regionalism and multilateralism. Being as equal partner of members of ASEAN and WTO, Cambodia has conducted a good foreign policy of good neighbor and peace-co-existence.

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<sup>15</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg “Will Europe’s Past be Asia’s Future?” *Survival* 42, 3 (2002), p. 152.

Cambodia adheres to policy of neutrality and non-alliance. It indiscriminately establishes relations with all friendly states worldwide. It conducts policies of mutual understanding, equality, respect, and non-interference in other state's internal affairs.

Cambodia would fortify bilateral friendship and cooperation with its neighbors. The border issues with its neighbors would be resolved through negotiations, and peaceful means.

Cambodia would establish bilateral and multilateral friendships with regional countries, especially with ASEAN. It wants to contribute as it may in jointly building the Southeast Asia to be a region of peace, tranquility, and prosperity.

When it becomes an active member of ASEAN and other regional groupings, Cambodia is committed within the principle of the agreements. Cambodia strongly believes that within the principle of regionalism it would benefit through increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation in all fields especially economic cooperation with the countries concerned.

As result, so far Cambodia enjoyed fast economic growth of about 10 percent for the past 5 years with the record of 13.5 percent in 2005. The main stimulus of the growth is trade, tourism and construction. The Foreign Direct investment is increasing year by year. Without economic integration, Cambodia can not achieve such a big achievement.

Due to narrow-based economy, however, Cambodia also faces challenges in the wave of globalization and regionalization including widening gap of wealth in population and regions, weak production base, weak position in competitiveness and lack of human resources in dealing with the economic booming and change.

## **8. Future Scenarios**

While the East Asian Community is still a long way to go with many speculation and expectation East Asian Summit should continue to be a political forum for leaders to frame strategic policies and visions.

The involvement of the United States is still unclear. According to an option, the United States should not be left out as the US is a main economic partner and security guarantors in Asia Pacific region. However, the mode of participation should be in a form of so-called “strategic partner” and observer.

The establishing of East Asian community requires more studies and analysis for East Asian regionalism starting from economic integration. In response to this idea, Japanese government through Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) proposed establishing Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). In August 2006 meeting in Kuala Lumpur, economic ministers tasked the ASEAN Secretariat and Japanese government to have further discussions on Japan's proposal to establish the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). As a part of this process, experts from research institutes in 16 countries from the region met twice in Jakarta to brainstorm on the ERIA concept.<sup>16</sup> Subsequent to those meetings, on January 10, 2007 in Cebu, H.E. Ong Keng Yong, Secretary General of ASEAN, presented a summary of the two meetings to economic ministers. On Jan. 15th, at the East Asian Summit, leaders also welcomed the idea of establishing ERIA. Now the ERIA is well on the way of starting and some kick-off projects will be finalized by early next year.

Non-state actors such as civil society and academia will play a crucial role in building East Asian regionalism, especially academics through Track 2 diplomacy and other dialogue mechanism. East Asian regionalism should be built on the basis of mutual interest and for the benefit of regional security and people's welfare.

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<sup>16</sup> The Author is one of the founding members of the ERIA.

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