



INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS





Voices on the ASEAN Journey: Reflections and Insights from ASEAN Leaders and Officials

Ponciano Intal, Jr.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is usually viewed as leaders-led. Broadly, this means that Leaders and government officials have played critical roles in the development and evolution of ASEAN. There is a large grain of truth in it. This volume presents the reflections of several Leaders, ASEAN Secretaries-General, Ministers, and Senior Officials who have played significant roles in ASEAN. In addition, three special friends from Australia, China, and Japan provided their perspectives and reflections on ASEAN. This chapter draws key insights from their reflections, retrospectives, and perspectives.

The Early Years and Beyond: Context, Friendship, and Rapport

‘ASEAN will survive because it is ours.’ Thus starts the essay in this volume of Ambassador Delia Albert, former Secretary (Minister) of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines. Ambassador Albert is referring to the statement of the

then Secretary of Foreign Affairs Narciso Ramos on the future of ASEAN after signing for the Philippines the Bangkok Declaration establishing ASEAN on 8 August 1967. Ambassador Albert is the only contributor to this volume who was personally involved in the preparations for the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, as she served Secretary Ramos as his social and appointments secretary at that time. Secretary Ramos' statement appears to reference the other regional groupings at that time, specifically the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the Asia-Pacific Council addressing security challenges in the region – two organisations that were initiated by non-Southeast Asian countries but involved a few Southeast Asian countries. At that time, as Ambassador Albert writes, the desire not to be held hostage by the competing ideologies of the prevailing Cold War was growing. She also describes the active concern about the growing peace and security challenges in Southeast Asia at that time that demanded collective action with other countries – so much so that while the Bangkok Declaration spoke of economic cooperation, what was foremost in the minds of the signers was ‘... collective action to face the escalating challenges to the peace and stability of the region’.

At the same time, ASEAN was not established solely for peace and security considerations even if that was the immediate concern. At its core, ASEAN was about ‘coming together’ as its title indicates, an association of Southeast Asian nations that were historically largely isolated from one another because of colonial rule. Former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines, in her essay, describes clearly this impetus in the dream of her father, President Diosdado Macapagal, of bringing together the three Malay countries – Indonesia, Malaya, and the Philippines – and for them to work together on ‘Asian solutions for Asian problems’. President Macapagal fleshed out these ideas, first with President Sukarno of Indonesia and later with Malaya's Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. The resulting Maphilindo (from Malaya, the Philippines, and Indonesia) was short-lived, however, a fate that similarly befell an earlier grouping, the Association of Southeast Asia, consisting of Malaya, the Philippines, and Thailand.

President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines is the third person amongst the contributors to this volume who has a personal and emotional link to the key players in the genesis of ASEAN. President Ramos is the son of Secretary Narciso Ramos. The title of President Ramos's essay includes

‘sports-shirt’ diplomacy in the establishment of ASEAN. This emphasises the role of friendship amongst the Foreign Ministers of the five founding members of ASEAN in the founding of the Association and their husbanding of ASEAN during its first decade before the holding of the first ASEAN Summit in 1976. The establishment of ASEAN was not at all a walk in the park. President Ramos writes of his father’s recollection of the difficulty of the negotiations that ‘truly taxed the goodwill, imagination, patience and understanding of the five participating ministers’. Relatedly, Ambassador Albert also writes that the five Foreign Ministers held numerous bilateral meetings even after the end of the Association of Southeast Asia and Maphilindo, culminating in the Bangsaen and Bangkok meetings that led to the Bangkok Declaration. And the friendship amongst the Ministers extended to their families and diplomatic staff, as shown in Ambassador Albert’s example of the friendship between Secretary Narciso Ramos and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Razak.

Deepening friendships while working together is well illustrated in the essay of Lim Jock Seng, Second Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam. He writes about the lobbying missions on Cambodia in the 1980s that many officials of ASEAN Member States (AMS) undertook in many parts of the world. He recalls a mission with colleagues from Singapore and Thailand to Somalia, Swaziland, and Uganda, where they were stopped by armed boy soldiers at almost every junction because of ongoing civil wars in those countries. As Minister Lim writes, apart from getting votes of support for ASEAN at the United Nations with respect to the Cambodia issue, those missions also led to bonds of close friendship, understanding, and mutual tolerance. AMS representatives and senior officials at the United Nations evolved a culture of working together in the process of working on the Cambodia issue. Indeed, growing friendship arising from working together in the name of ASEAN is a common refrain in the stories of ambassadors of ASEAN countries stationed outside the AMS.

And arguably, the friendship and understanding that facilitated the formation of ASEAN are also the foundation of the ‘ASEAN Way’ of behind-the-scenes interpersonal interactions that underpin the process of consultation and consensus that defines the term. More than 1,000 ASEAN meetings are held each year. As Minister Lim writes, although such meetings cost time and money, they strengthen the ASEAN integration process, and

‘... more importantly, nurture and cultivate people-to-people bonds. In fact, the close personal rapport between ASEAN Leaders and Ministers and officials is a key component that has facilitated the success of ASEAN.’

Growing ASEAN Step by Step

Mari Pangestu, former Minister of Trade and former Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia, looks at ASEAN as a process in her essay. Viewed from a long-term perspective, ASEAN as a process starts modestly in terms of ambition and conservatively in timelines, but is often followed by increased ambition and even accelerated timelines when members are ready. ASEAN as a process also involves convincing key decision-makers towards higher ambition. The essay of Narongchai Akrasanee, former Minister of Commerce of Thailand, describes one special momentous case – the adoption of the ASEAN Free Trade (AFTA) and the element of fortuitous timing that went with it.

As he narrates, ASEAN created a task force in 1985 comprising three members each from the six AMS at that time. Their task was to make recommendations on how ASEAN could be made more competitive in the face of major international developments at that time, such as the fall of global oil prices and the global exchange rate realignments instigated by the 1985 Plaza Accord. Akrasanee was a member of the task force, while Anand Panyarachun headed it. One key recommendation of the task force was an AFTA. The recommendations were not presented during the Third ASEAN Summit in Manila because the summit was very brief due to the unsettled political situation in the Philippines at that time. Anand Panyarachun became Thailand’s Prime Minister in early 1991 during the time of dramatic global developments in both geopolitics and economic relations that led ASEAN economic officials to consider closer economic relations beyond the ASEAN preferential tariff arrangement. After a meeting with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore, Prime Minister Panyarachun set up a team to develop the AFTA concept and sought support for it from the ASEAN capitals. Seven months after the meeting with Prime Minister Goh, Prime Minister Panyarachun presented AFTA (underpinned by the Common Effective Preferential Tariff) during the Fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore, and it was approved. It is worth

noting that Indonesia had agreed to it during the ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting 2 months earlier, although internal debate in the country continued. Also worth noting is the suggestion from the essay of Ambassador Albert that the choice of Prime Minister Panyarachun to present the AFTA proposal was deliberate and ideal (from the point of view of the national ASEAN directors-general) because of his stature and because he heads a 'neutral' country (i.e. one not inherently pro free trade, such as Malaysia or Singapore).

Cynics called AFTA 'Another Fairy Tale Agreement' and dubbed the Common Effective Preferential Tariff 'Can't Explain in Plain Terms', writes Ajit Singh, former ASEAN Secretary-General (1993–1997) in his essay. The cynical view of ASEAN at that time was due to ASEAN's poor performance in the area of economic cooperation since the late 1970s. Yet, the pleasant surprise was that the AMS made good with their commitments to such an extent that, as he writes, the time frame for AFTA was shortened from 15 years to 10 years during the succeeding ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in 1995. Moreover, the Leaders signed the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Cooperation in Services and called for the establishment of an ASEAN investment area. This is an example of what Minister Pangestu considers the ASEAN process of starting out with a modest ambition or a conservative time frame that later would be upgraded in ambition or accelerated in time frame as AMSs become comfortable and 'ready'.

Clearly, ASEAN economic cooperation in the 1990s was at a much higher level than it was in the 1980s. And as Ajit Singh writes, the ASEAN Secretariat was a hive of activity then. AFTA was the 'baptism of fire' for the staff of the ASEAN Secretariat, many of whom were new and had barely any knowledge of ASEAN. Nevertheless, they rose to the occasion despite limited resources. This included limited budget for research which was a big challenge for Suthad Setboonsarng, who joined the ASEAN Secretariat as the Director of Research in 1993 before being promoted to Deputy Secretary-General of the ASEAN Secretariat during 1997–2000. The ASEAN Secretariat was also busy helping provide assistance to the CLMV countries (Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic [Lao PDR], Myanmar, and Viet Nam), including English language training, attachment at the Secretariat, and even improving connectivity and communications with them. His essay illustrates the extent of the operational work and support needed to make ASEAN work and move forward step by step.

Given the gradual step-by-comfortable-step process in ASEAN, the cause of moving ASEAN forward is better served if there are long-serving Senior Officials and Ministers to influence the pace and scope of ASEAN internal discussions and agreements. Rebecca Sta Maria must have had the longest stint in ASEAN affairs, from 1981 until her retirement from service with the Government of Malaysia in 2016. She was a critical figure in the ASEAN High-Level Task Force on Economic Integration and the ASEAN Senior Economic Officials' Meeting during the pivotal years of preparation and approval of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2015 and the AEC Blueprint 2025. At the ministerial level, Rafidah Aziz, Minister of Trade and Industry of Malaysia during 1987–2008, was a formidable figure in the ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meetings. Arguably, her leadership and influence in the ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meetings and of Rebecca Sta Maria in the Senior Economic Officials' Meetings and the ASEAN High-Level Task Force on Economic Integration contributed to the accelerated expansion and deepening of the measures embodied in the AEC blueprints. Minister Rafidah's essay highlights fundamental principles that shaped and underpinned the AEC blueprints, especially the 2015 blueprint. Rebecca Sta Maria's essay indicates the extensiveness of the technical work and consultations that had to be done to move from AFTA to the AEC, starting with the 2015 blueprint and then the 2025 blueprint. Her essay also brings out the discussion on, and the importance of, monitoring and review as well as of deeper engagement with the business sector in moving the AEC forward.

Forward-looking leadership has been, and will continue to be, critical in ASEAN's march towards progress. The essay of former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong provides an example. During the 2002 ASEAN Summit hosted by Cambodia, and against advice that the idea would not succeed, Prime Minister Goh floated the vision of an AEC for study by Ministers and officials. Just a few years after the financial and economic crisis in the region, the AEC vision was '... an attempt to change the tenor of conversation on economic issues in ASEAN and put it on a more positive footing.' Prime Minister Goh's hope was '... that the ASEAN Member States would coalesce around this concept and recognise the opportunities presented by a shared community.'

'Leaders Matter' is the title of the essay in this volume of Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, former ASEAN Secretary-General. For example, in the aftermath

of the 1997–1998 crisis and worried about the loss of foreign investment and competitiveness compared with China and India, ASEAN Leaders commissioned a study on the region’s competitiveness. The study stressed the benefits of integration and warned of the danger of eventual loss of competitiveness to China and India if ASEAN did not integrate. The Leaders ultimately decided to aim for an ASEAN economic community, as suggested in Prime Minister Goh’s essay. The Leaders decided to aim for an ASEAN Community embodied in the Bali Concord II despite, as Ambassador Ong writes, ‘their respective preferences and national priorities.’ He further writes: ‘... The leaders persuaded each other into doing what was best for ASEAN as a collective entity. This demonstrated ... in stark terms that ASEAN is a leaders-led organisation. The ASEAN Leaders had the foresight and vision to do the strategic thing.’

In sum, the essays referred to above suggest that growing ASEAN step by step involves a process of political consultations and consensus; much technical work and review; agreements on basic principles that underpin the AEC measures; engagement with stakeholders, especially the private sector; and above all, forward-looking leadership. And as will be shown in the discussion below, growing ASEAN further would need even more technical work, more robust engagements with stakeholders, more extensive and regular reviews, and, in the face of a more uncertain global environment, continued forward-looking leadership.

National Contributions and Perspectives

Seeing ASEAN in terms of process, as Mari Pangestu’s essay suggests, could lead to a more sympathetic view of ASEAN. More importantly perhaps, seeing ASEAN integration in this way would highlight the interface of ASEAN and domestic reforms in AMS, including their positives and challenges. And, indeed, the AEC blueprints are as much reform agenda as they are integration agenda.

In addition to the internal dynamic of the work programmes of the various ASEAN bodies embodied in the blueprints, the annual rotation of the hosting of the ASEAN Summit amongst the AMS allows each national host to highlight issues or areas for ASEAN that are of particular interest to the country. Four of the essays in the volume elaborate further.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's essay describes how the theme during Indonesia's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2011 was to emphasise the call for ASEAN to play a greater role in international affairs with a common voice. The essay also shows that what the chair country does during its chairmanship is also important for the region. Examples include Indonesia's mediation efforts between Cambodia and Thailand over the Preah Vihear Temple, its shuttle diplomacy amongst the AMS to reach a common position over the South China Sea issue, and its push to have Myanmar chair the 2014 ASEAN Summit. The Myanmar issue in particular illustrates Indonesia's quiet, low-profile diplomatic style. The essay emphasises that while Indonesia's efforts for Myanmar were bilateral, it was nonetheless critical work that needed to be done and ultimately served to strengthen ASEAN.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's essay emphasises the major accomplishments during the Philippine chairmanship in 2007 under her administration. These include the acceleration of the establishment of the ASEAN Community from 2020 to 2015; the blueprint for the ASEAN Charter, which set the stage for its signing in the subsequent ASEAN Summit in Singapore; the Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers; the ASEAN convention on counterterrorism; and inter-faith dialogue. The varied outcomes illustrate the wide range of areas that host countries tend to bring to the table during their ASEAN chairmanship, thereby helping articulate the meaning, scope, and substance of what an ASEAN Community would be or needs to be.

The Lao PDR's theme in hosting ASEAN in 2016 was straightforward. It was to turn vision into reality in a dynamic ASEAN Community. The main outputs were important follow-through of major decisions related to ASEAN community building: the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Work Plan III, and many strategic action plans that had to be developed after the approval of the AEC Blueprint 2025 in 2015. The Lao PDR example suggests that moving ASEAN forward does not necessarily entail opening new areas; follow-through actions of major initiatives and decisions are sufficiently weighty to advance the process.

Myanmar hosted the ASEAN Summit for the first time in 2014. The essays of former President U Thein Sein and Kan Zaw, former Minister of National Planning and Development and member of the ASEAN Economic Ministers'

Meeting, show the whole-of-government efforts required to ensure the summit's success. They also highlight the support provided by other AMSs, the ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Dialogue Partners, and the development assistance community, and the sense of pride felt by the bureaucracy and the people in the success of their summit hosting. Myanmar contributed substantively to the growth of ASEAN during its ASEAN Summit hosting through, for example, the Nay Pyi Taw Declaration on the ASEAN Community's Post-2015 Vision.

Nonetheless, it is the description of how ASEAN showed its solidarity with then-isolated Myanmar in the face of the devastation from Cyclone Nargis, and the extent of Myanmar's efforts to ensure the 2014 ASEAN Summit's success, that gives President Thein Sein's essay emotive pull and a sense of belonging.

President Arroyo's essay highlights another dimension at the national level that heavily influences ASEAN's progress: the implementation of the agreements and commitments. She is remarkably candid in stating that she expressly slowed the pace of tariff liberalisation in 2003 to what was required by AFTA because of the lingering effects of the 1997–1998 crisis, the fallout from the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, and the resulting fall in tax revenue in the Philippines. This exemplifies the reality of decision-making and implementation of agreements. While the long-term goal remains adhered to, short-term exigencies sometimes necessitate some slowdown or slight backtracking, which can be recovered later. To some extent, this need is also accommodated by the flexibility clauses of some ASEAN agreements such as the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services.

Making ASEAN Stronger

Several essays point to the significant challenges and to-do list for ASEAN to become stronger. Perhaps the most compelling messages relate to socio-cultural matters, such as those touched on by former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of Thailand in his essay. He sees the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) as critically important to the future of ASEAN. To him, at the heart of ASEAN Community is a community of people with a sense of shared destiny of peace and prosperity for all ASEAN people based on common values with an ASEAN identity. While raising awareness, especially

of the region's history and close cultural affinities, is important, it may be more important to look ahead and determine what kind of community ASEAN people would like to have. This includes deciding what kind of values and principles should characterise the ASEAN identity.

Prime Minister Vejjajiva asserts, '... we need to see how can we modify the ASEAN Way to drive the ASCC and the future of ASEAN forward ... [and thereby] ... make ASEAN meaningful to people's lives for them to truly care about ASEAN.' He suggests using the ASCC to redefine the ASEAN Way: '... the ASEAN Community must define itself by tapping into the region's characteristics drawn from commonality amongst the members and by framing its traditions and goals to conform to today's global challenges.' He also gives examples of how such traditions and goals can conform to today's global challenges, such as human rights or the environment. There is a lot more in his thought-provoking essay that challenges ASEAN, and specifically the ASCC, to define what ASEAN identity really is or what it stands for, and to help resolve a number of nagging regional problems (e.g. the haze). Then the ASCC can '... play a key role in strengthening ASEAN's future.'

The goal of making ASEAN more engaged with, and more meaningful to, the people is a constant refrain of several essays in this volume. Former Philippine President Fidel Ramos is equally emphatic in his essay that for the people to embrace ASEAN and its vision as their own, '... they must see it as a pervading, beneficial influence on their daily lives ... [through] ... reduce[d] ... poverty of their families and of their communities and ... better public health, housing, basic education services, and jobs as well as higher incomes for everyone.' This means that much of ASEAN's work in community building '... must focus on encouraging, assisting, and – if need be – pressuring the ASEAN members to promote good governance, strengthen the rule of law, build an inclusive economy, and defend human rights and representative democracy.'

In her essay, Alicia dela Rosa-Bala, former Deputy Secretary-General for the ASCC, also asserts that the ASCC is the heart and soul of ASEAN because the pillar deals with issues that directly affect the people. She gives examples of initiatives in the ASCC that have a potentially significant bearing on the region's people. Foremost amongst them was the ASEAN support for the rehabilitation effort after Typhoon Haiyan

hit the Philippines. Indeed, a number of the concerns above, such as the environment, engaging and benefiting the people, etc., are captured in the wide range of measures in the ASCC Blueprint 2025. The challenge posed by Prime Minister Vejjajiva and President Ramos on the ASCC blueprint seems to be how to communicate the cohesiveness (which also implies some element of prioritisation) of the various measures and prioritise implementation of the measures in a way that is consistent with the fundamental challenge of defining what ASEAN stands for as a community.

Deepening the unity amongst the AMS and their people in the face of past adversities and in the context of an increasingly uncertain global environment is a theme shared by several essays in the volume, especially those of the ASEAN Leaders. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi of Malaysia warns in his essay that ‘... global developments are testing ASEAN’s unity and cohesion ... [and] ... we must be steadfast in keeping our solidarity ...’ Similarly, Prime Minister Goh writes, ‘... given the geopolitical uncertainty, ASEAN must remain cohesive and not allow bilateral disagreements and regional disputes – which will surface from time to time – to divide them.’ President Ramos advises that ‘... for ASEAN, the imperative is to help maintain the strategic balance and not be drawn irrevocably into any one great power’s sphere of influence.’ Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan of Viet Nam writes, ‘... given the new changes in international politics and relations as well as the regional and global security architecture, ASEAN will not have an easy road ahead if it does not tighten its ranks and make necessary adjustments.’

Nonetheless, as Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei writes in his special message to this volume, ‘ASEAN has faced, and continues to face, its fair share of challenges. But when my colleagues and I sought to address these problems collectively by leveraging on our respective strengths, we came to realise that our countries were able to grow stronger together.’

At the same time, ASEAN Leaders and ASEAN as an organisation need to be cognisant of the opportunities offered by the shift in the centre of global economic gravity towards East Asia, and they need to make appropriate adjustments to capture the opportunities. Interestingly, but perhaps fittingly, it is Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia who raises the point of opportunities most cogently amongst the essays in this volume. Cambodia has been one of the fastest-growing countries in the world for nearly 2

decades and, as he writes, it is increasingly recognised as a ‘new emerging tiger in Asia.’ He lists priority tasks to be accomplished if ASEAN and AMS are to achieve their full potential in trade and production and adapt to the new technologies. In addition, he emphasises that those priority actions must be reinforced by further support for the process of regional integration, and that ‘... we do not lose sight of some essential things that drive our cooperation: **ASEAN Identity, ASEAN Way, ASEAN in Unity and Diversity.**’

Investing in infrastructure is one of the priority tasks that Prime Minister Hun Sen says that ASEAN needs to undertake to benefit from a dynamic East Asia. In this regard, ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan makes an interesting proposal in his essay to support infrastructure investments in this fast-growing region. He asserts that given the more than US\$1 trillion in foreign reserves held by ASEAN countries, 10% of the combined reserves could be set aside into a fund (managed by a trusted institution such as the Asian Development Bank) to provide concessional loans to finance infrastructure projects. This could go a long way towards bridging the funding gap for infrastructure in the region. And he writes that there is no risk involved, there is so much to be gained.

‘Future proof’ is how Minister Rafidah of Malaysia would call an ASEAN that can ‘... face and overcome various challenges, and seize opportunities as well, within its environment.’ Herein lies the final key message from the essays on how to make ASEAN stronger: strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat. Minister Lim of Brunei is the most ardent on this issue amongst the authors in the volume. He asserts that the ASEAN Secretariat must provide symbolic leadership when a natural disaster strikes; it must be given human and financial resources to effectively coordinate the increasing number of projects, meetings, and research required in the future; it should prepare research papers necessary in all the political–security, economic, and socio-cultural work of ASEAN; and it should build up a core group of intellectuals and academics who are involved with and committed to ASEAN.

Minister Lim is conceiving of an ASEAN Secretariat that is very different from the current one. A main constraint at present is budget and funds. In this regard, Ambassador Ong seeks innovative ways of raising funds for the ASEAN Secretariat. One possibility he suggests is a token charge on each traveller passing through ASEAN airports. He also raises the possibility

of issuing an ASEAN postage stamp. The key point of his suggestions is to initiate serious discussions on expanding and strengthening the funding source for ASEAN and the ASEAN Secretariat rather than merely relying on the annual contributions from member states. The growing demands on ASEAN and of deeper regional initiatives amidst regional and global risks and opportunities almost certainly demand it. The funds should not solely come from ASEAN Dialogue Partners, however generous they may be.

Voices from Special Non-ASEAN Friends

The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) invited three special non-ASEAN friends to each write an essay in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of ASEAN. They are special not only because they come from three of the closest and most important Dialogue Partners of ASEAN (Australia, China, and Japan) but also because of their individual contribution and support for ASEAN:

- Gareth Evans was Foreign Minister of Australia during a pivotal period in ASEAN's history (1988–1996). He worked very closely with ASEAN ministers in the creation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and the ASEAN Regional Forum, and in negotiating peace in Cambodia culminating in the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements. He is currently Chancellor of the Australian National University.
- Zhang Yunling is a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and Director of International Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He has been China's representative on ERIA's Board of Governors since ERIA was founded. He is arguably the person with the most knowledge about ASEAN in China's policy circle and has provided valuable advice towards opening and building up China's relations with ASEAN.
- Toshihiro Nikai was Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry and is currently the Secretary-General of the Liberal Party of Japan and the chair of the Parliamentary League for ERIA in Japan. He is also the 'father' of ERIA because he proposed the establishment of ERIA and has been very supportive ever since of the founding of the institution.

Prof Evans' essay is suffused with warmth, as if from a member of the family. He tells us that he was most comfortable with and felt closer to his ASEAN colleagues during his stint as Australia's foreign minister. And his ASEAN colleagues reciprocated when they told him 'you are one of us'. As a member of the family, he is forthright in his reflections on ASEAN and his worries about the challenges facing ASEAN today. These include maintaining cohesion in the face of a newly confident and assertive China; maintaining balance in the face of great uncertainties about ASEAN and East Asia's relations with the United States under President Donald Trump; maintaining its economic momentum amidst geopolitical stresses and the global backlash against globalisation; and maintaining the ASEAN tradition of non-interference and addressing the patent human rights violations in the region, which in his view has been tarnishing ASEAN's image and soft power.

It is worth noting that his concerns about ASEAN are reflected in the essays of the ASEAN Leaders and Officials, albeit sometimes framed differently. Thus, for example, Prof Evans is concerned about the tension between ASEAN's primacy of sovereignty and non-interference on the one hand and the violations of human rights in the region on the other hand. This is echoed in Prime Minister Vejjajiva's call for a reframing of the ASEAN Way from the socio-cultural angle to address the issue and not solely on the political-security angle.

Like any family member, Prof Evans is nonetheless ultimately positive and optimistic about ASEAN. This is reflected in his query as to whether a non-ASEAN southern neighbour Australia could become a member of ASEAN. In reality, this is not explicitly about membership per se; rather this indicates a call for an even stronger and closer relationship between ASEAN and Australia in the face of an uncertain geopolitical environment. It is an entreaty '... to work together to build more collective strength, both economically and politically' with the mantra: 'More self-reliance. More Asia. Less America'. That is as much a challenge for ASEAN as it is for Australia.

The second part of the essay of Dr Zhang provides a relatively optimistic view of the future of ASEAN-China relations based on bilateral relations since the early 1990s and the broad congruence of the 'Chinese Way' and 'ASEAN Way'. Dr Zhang describes the bilateral relations of about 26 years in terms of greater focus on economic development 'based on

open and cooperative principles’, management of differences and disputes ‘with good will and a spirit of cooperation’, as well as support for regional cooperation and institution building. The key challenge is managing the South China Sea issue without damaging the widening and deepening bilateral cooperation. Perhaps more fundamentally, as Dr Zhang highlights, ‘... trust and confidence on both sides need to be further enhanced against the background of China’s rise and the building of the ASEAN Community building.’ He recommends that ‘... new opportunities for cooperation ranging from economic development to political, social, and security areas should be explored by setting up working groups under the ASEAN–China cooperation framework.’

Mr Nikai’s essay gives the historical context and an overview of Japan’s growing support of ASEAN. His essay suggests that the anti-Japanese riots in 1974 that greeted the then Prime Minister of Japan Kakuei Tanaka are seared into the consciousness of Japanese policymakers, including Mr Nikai. The immediate impact of those riots was the so-called Fukuda Doctrine, which was stated personally by Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda during his meeting with ASEAN Leaders during the Second ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in August 1977. This later translated into solid support for ASEAN initiatives over the years, including for the new ASEAN members by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and then Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), as well as the Miyazawa Initiative in response to the 1997–1998 financial and economic crisis. That effort and the concurrent and subsequent policy discussions amongst ASEAN, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea led to the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization and the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office.

Mr Nikai also explained in his essay the genesis of ERIA. Conscious of the beneficial effect on Japan of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) when the country joined it in 1964, and, considering the greater diversity amongst AMSs compared to the OECD, Mr Nikai thought ASEAN needed an institution similar to the OECD to help ASEAN with the ‘... enormous amount of survey work and research as well as policy recommendations’ needed as ASEAN drew up and implemented the blueprints for the ASEAN Community and its three pillars. He was able to convince then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to provide 10 years of financial support at the establishment of ERIA. Mr Nikai has continuously and strongly supported ERIA over the years even after the 10-year initial

funding period had lapsed. He also established the Parliamentary League for ERIA in 2013 not only to support ERIA but also for the non-partisan committee of Japanese lawmakers to visit the AMSs and promote partnerships between Japan and AMS parliamentarians. Thus, Mr Nikai's essay indicates Japan's strong political support to ASEAN.

Concluding Remarks

The essays in the volume give us a flavour of and a chance to reflect on ASEAN's journey over the past half century and allow us to consider its future through the eyes of key players in ASEAN's evolution. Perhaps a way of ending this ASEAN journey is to quote the concluding paragraph of the essay in this volume by Ambassador Tommy Koh, the former chair of the High-Level Task Force on the Drafting of the ASEAN Charter:

‘A few years ago, the European Union was conferred with the Nobel Peace Prize for its contributions to peace in Europe. I believe that the Nobel Committee should consider conferring on ASEAN the Nobel Peace Prize for its contributions to peace in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Asia-Pacific.’