

Essay 1

After an extensive overview of the course itinerary as well as the rules and regulations of the classroom, there was a general overview and historical introduction of ASEAN's origin, evolution, and economic objectives. That being said, during the time that many of the Southeast Asian (SEA) countries were achieving independence from colonization, ASEAN was also founded in accordance with the 1967 Bangkok Declaration. This composition of unified nations has encouraged intergovernmental cooperation between Southeast Asian nations in order to achieve economic stability due to the political tensions that had escalated at the time of its establishment. The beginning phases of the economic integration in SEA countries promoted a more market-based economy. During the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) period, free trade became a significant objective that resulted in many gradual tariff reductions that would optimize the individual countries markets and resources in order to compete globally. It also was a period where foreign direct investment (FDI) became an important component of economic improvement. In more recent years, ASEAN has moved toward the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) due to the Asian Financial Crisis and the economic advancement of China and India, which have appeared to weaken the member-states ability to attract FDI. As of today, ASEAN has the seventh largest economy in the world, the third largest labor force, and the fourth largest in exporting commodities. This historical record of ASEAN and its economic capabilities has led to the prediction that ASEAN will eventually be the third largest economy in the world within a couple of decades.

This becomes really intriguing because as of recent years, ASEAN has expanded its relations with even more countries, such as China, Korea, Japan, India, and Australia-New Zealand. What I find extremely profound is the cooperation and synergism that exists within the underlying aspirations of ASEAN. The motto, which is “one vision, one identity, one community”, demonstrates that even though the member-states of ASEAN are extremely diverse in cultural, geographical, and political aspects; it is possible, and potentially even better, to cooperate with one another in order to achieve stronger, sustainable economies. The issues of economic cooperation in ASEAN stem from the wide variety and diversity that exists within the markets of each of the countries. Even with the limitations that arise from the all-inclusive and entirely harmonious mandates, ASEAN demonstrates that cooperation can be fortifying for a single country’s own economy. This incentive of prosperity for one’s own country has led to more cooperation within ASEAN, which then has demonstrated the robustness of collaboration. That being said, the interdependence between these countries has continued to enhance economic growth and social progress, and is especially noticeable when considering the prediction that ASEAN will one day become one of the strongest economies in the world.

## Essay 2

Mrs. Lay Chanrasmey, a counsellor at the Royal Embassy of Cambodia to Thailand, presented the bilateral relations between Cambodia and Thailand as a representative of Cambodia. Cambodia's economy has become one of the fastest growing ones in the world as of recent years. In regards to the history and relations between Thailand and Cambodia, it is known as long-lasting due to the similarities that exist within their cultures, languages, and religions. There have been several official as well as unofficial visits amongst the two countries, which has only furthered their relationship with one another. There are bilateral mechanisms installed to promote stability and cooperation, such as the Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation (JC) and the Joint Border Commission Meeting (JBC). Sometimes, however, there are conflicts due to the large number of Cambodians that cross the border for reasons like work, health care, and education. Immigration conflicts often stem from the volume of Cambodian workers that cross the border in search of higher wages and jobs that are not available in their country which then leads to the exploitation of their labor and even humanitarian violations. Nonetheless, bilateral trade is extremely favored between the two countries. Several Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have been established along the Thailand and Cambodian border to promote the trade value as well as encourage economic development. Cambodia also helped found the ACMECS program which was another collaborative method of obtaining sustainable, economic growth amongst ASEAN. Now-a-days, it appears that the bilateral relations between the two countries is strengthened due to the economic integration each country has with one another due to organizations and programs such as ASEAN and ACMECS.

This all being taken into consideration, it was extremely interesting to have Mrs. Lay speak to the class as a representative of Cambodia. What stood out to me is the different perspectives and biases individuals have based on their own experiences and values. For instance, my group's topic for the discussion was about workers from Cambodia in Thailand. The differences in our research versus the stance of Mrs. Lay was extremely contradictory and seemed to exhibit some kind of bias. The guest speaker appeared to take on a more positive perspective of the relationship between the two countries as well as a nationalistic sense of pride of her own. While that is not problematic to portray pride and positivity, it also belittled the conflicts and human rights violations that have occurred and are occurring between Cambodia and Thailand. In my opinion, this failure to raise awareness to issues and conflicts will only exacerbate the problems rather than improve them. Failure to give recognition of the exploitation that exists amongst Cambodian workers in Thailand also fails to aid those that are being exploited; it inhibits the progression of finding solutions to serious humanitarian problems. That being said, the perspective and reasonings of the guest speaker were hard to agree with due to the extreme fluctuations they had with several, notable organizations and news sources. To me, it would have been more self-fulfilling and knowledgeable to gain a better understanding not only of the positive aspects of the bilateral relations but the negative aspects as well.