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### LECTURE 1: INTRO TO ASEAN ORIGIN, EVOLUTION, AND ECONOMY

At the height of the Vietnam War, the five countries of Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines formed the original ASEAN organization in 1987. When these countries gained their independence after a long history of colonialism, they had to cooperate to ensure stability. Joining forces reinforced their economic growth, social welfare, and cultural development; in addition, working together meant they had more bargaining power. In the early years, what began with political cooperation eventually turned into economic integration. As Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia joined ASEAN, regional economic integration became a priority because it was important to be competitive in the global markets. Moreover, free trade among ASEAN countries (eventually AFTA) also became an objective. The main reason for increasing intra-ASEAN trade was to maintain competitiveness in attracting FDIs. The organization was collaborative which, in turn, made it effective. However, after the Asian financial crisis, the community looked toward other countries to increase movement of goods skilled labor, and investment. This became the ASEAN Economic Community. In addition to creating an integrated market, the purpose of AEC also included increasing competitiveness, reducing development gaps, and wider integration with a global economy. Together, the ten countries of ASEAN encompass a formidable economic powerhouse: their growth has been rapid and considerably stable since the 2000s. At this rate, it is projected that ASEAN will be the fourth largest economy by 2050.

ASEAN countries represent a very diverse group, with different cultures, economies, and levels of development. For instance, Indonesia represents nearly 40% of ASEAN's economic output whereas Myanmar is barely developing. I think it is undoubtedly important that their cooperation persists for this very reason. The group aspect incentivizes the more developed countries to help their lesser evolved neighbors. As the saying goes, "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link." As far as issues goes, I do not believe the group aspect proves major problems. For example, Cambodia's internal political problems are not a reflection of ASEAN as a whole; while their struggles deter tourism and negative impacts their citizens and economy, if anything, it just refocuses tourists' attention to other Southeast Asian countries, as they still have a lot to offer. On the flip side, it could be said that ASEAN's group aspect proves to be a problem when weighing the pros and cons of enlargement. Bigger is not always better. An expanded ASEAN could mean an increase geo-political leverage and population. However, it could also lead to potentially eroding ASEAN solidarity by making decision-making more difficult and creating a riff between the older, richer countries and the newer, poorer countries.

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### LECTURE 2: BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CAMBODIA & THAILAND

Cambodia and Thailand have had a strong bilateral relationship since Cambodia's first election in 1993. The relationship spans from the everyday Cambodian and Thai citizens to government officials to the monarchy. Their harmonious relationship is well known and publicized; in fact, Mrs. Lay said that in a few years time, their relationship could be considered "excellent." To foster and maintain this harmonious relationship, Cambodia and Thai's bilateral mechanisms include many joint commissions. For instance, there is a general JC on Bilateral Cooperation for all fields such as economics, culture, education, and tourism, but also the General Border Committee to discuss demarcation and borders and Joint Cabinet Retreat for all the ministers of both sides to negotiate. Thailand has given educational assistance, especially to the underprivileged, to Cambodia since 2001, and continues to do so, as there are many Cambodian students and officials working under scholarships provided by the Thai government. In terms of labour cooperation, Cambodians have sought work in Thailand since the 70s. Initially

it was to escape Cambodia's dangerous political conflict which made the job and consumer market very slim, but now people are still migrating to Thailand for work because the minimum wage is significantly higher. The vast number of checkpoints along the shared border makes it easier for sharing the wealth of labor and education. Thailand and Cambodia, in conjunction with Laos and Myanmar, are members of ACMECS. Its objective is to close the economic gap and further promote economic growth. To do so, they have narrowed down to eight priority areas: transport linkages, investment/trade facilitation, industry/energy, agriculture, HR development, tourism, public health, and environmental cooperation.

I think that Thai and Cambodian dynamic is very interesting and mutually beneficial. It is something that I knew nothing about before. However, I found that the Q&A session was just as insightful. When I asked Mrs. Lay what her opinions were on the effects of the political tension in Cambodia on the economy and their citizens, in my opinion, I feel that I received a very biased answer. In summary, she had said that outside media skewed public perception of Cambodia's political tension, and in fact, there isn't much tension at all. She insisted that the people were happy, doing their best to continue growing, and generally don't have a problem with the leadership by Prime Minister Hun Sen. Considering that she does work for the government in foreign affairs, it makes sense why she said that. I don't think she was lying, but I don't think what she said was an honest answer that encompasses the true public opinion. From the research my group did on the political tension in Cambodia, I learned that the PM, who represents the CPP (Cambodian People's Party), actively suppress independent media outlets and arrests and detains contrarians, such as advocates of the CNRP (Cambodia's National Rescue Party). Apparently, since the EU and the US backed away from funding Cambodia's election, China nearly funded it entirely. I think that given Cambodia's public suppression of opposition (dissolving the CNRP, kicking out member of parliament, and silencing dissenting media outlets speaking about democracy and human rights violations), it wouldn't be surprising if there was cheating or tampering in the 2018 election. Considering the CPP forced their only other main competitor to dissolve, the one-party election and victory does seem like a sham.