



CULTURE AND INTEGRATION

How can we promote greater cultural awareness
and integration in ASEAN?

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1. Background Information

1.1 Definition

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognises the definition of culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society” (UNESCO, 2015)

2. Genesis

In 1997, the ASEAN community decided on ASEAN Vision 2020 which is based on the three ASEAN pillars - [ASEAN Political-Security Community](#), [ASEAN Economic Community](#) and [ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community](#). The goal of ASEAN Vision is to create a community of cohesive, equitable and harmonious societies, bound together in solidarity for deeper understanding and cooperation. According to Mr Ong Keng Yong (former ASEAN Secretary- General), “culture is ASEAN’s legacy and future and ASEAN draw upon it to shape its identities – as individuals, as a nation and as a region”(Asean.org, 2015) . This shows that culture defines ASEAN heritage and helps in ASEAN personal and national development.

Cultural awareness and integration is important in ASEAN as greater cultural goodwill would enhance its economic integration. The long-term economic sustainability of ASEAN is very much dependent on the peaceful coexistence, harmony, goodwill and unity of its multi-cultural people with its rich and diverse heritage. Promoting multi-cultural heritage and diversity would also help to counter and neutralise extremist and ultra-nationalist tendencies within ASEAN, whose destructive ideas and actions are out of sync with the ASEAN spirit of mutual respect and complete acceptance of multiculturalism and peaceful co-existence (Thesundaily.my, 2015). This will assist ASEAN to reach the goal of regional economic integration which includes the following area: (a) a single market and production base, (b) a highly competitive economic region, (c) a region of equitable economic development, and (d) a region fully integrated into the global economy (ASEAN.org, 2015).

2.1 Sequence of Events

2002 to 2005:

ASEAN Foundation organised a series of 10 workshops on Managing the Integration of Culture into Development into Development. (Asean.org, 2015)

13 and 14 of October 2003:

The First inaugural meeting of ASEAN Minister's Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The main objectives of the AMCA Meeting included strengthening ASEAN cooperation in the field of culture and arts in order to further enhance mutual understanding among the peoples of ASEAN (Asean.org, 2015).

3 and 4 August 2005:

The Second Meeting of the AMCA and the AMCA Plus Three (People's Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea) were held in Bangkok. The Meeting highlighted the importance of exploiting the experience gained over the past years to improve the efficiency of future cooperation activities (Asean.org, 2015).

2007:

The Third Meeting of the AMCA and the AMCA Plus Three was held in Yangon (Asean.org, 2015).

2008 to 2011:

Cambodia and Thailand were in conflict due to disagreement on who claims the 11th-century Preah Vihear Temple, one of the largest cultural monuments (Thesundaily.my, 2015).

25 and 26 March 2010:

The Fourth Meeting of AMCA was then held on in the Philippines at Clark, Angeles, Pampanga. The Meeting's objective was to place the well being, livelihood and welfare of the people at the centre of the ASEAN Community. Furthermore, the Meeting also covered the building process, including underscoring the importance of incorporating the cultural ingredient in disaster management and emergency response, as well as dynamically applying our wealth of cultural diversity (Asean.org, 2015).

19 and 20 April 2014:

The Sixth meeting was held in Hue City, Viet Nam. H.E. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, who opened the Meeting, wished the Meeting to discuss a possible ministerial declaration to further promote culture and the arts cooperation and harness it for the sustainable development in the region (Asean.org, 2015).

20 April 2014:

The recent Culture and Arts Meeting held in Hue City, Vietnam showed that there is great progress in cultural awareness and integration in ASEAN. During the plenary session, the Ministers welcomed the progress in implementing culture and art measures in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint, people-to-people exchanges in the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, and outcomes of joint activities in cultural expressions to reflect ASEAN unity in cultural diversity with the view that all of which are important enablers towards building a people-oriented ASEAN Community (Asean.org, 2015).

4 Problems

4.1 Culture may be a source of conflict among ASEAN members. For more diverse multi-cultural members, it can also be a source of disunity and conflict among these countries. For example, Thailand's past claim to the 12th century Angkor Wat, one of the largest cultural monuments ever built and its war with Cambodia from June 2008 to December 2011 over the 11th-century Preah Vihear Temple (Thesundaily.my, 2015).

4.2 Cultural entrepreneurs are constantly needed to learn new skill sets to make transition to a market based economy. There is a growing awareness of culture, development of cultural and traditional products of various aspects such as performing arts, architecture and business incubators are essential. Thus, there is a need for member countries to consult their respective relevant authorities on liberalizing the trading of ASEAN cultural products. In addition, regional cooperation in the cultural aspect could greatly depend on human resource development. It is important to ensure the skills and values in the field of culture and the arts are preserved and sustained (Asean.org, 2015).

4.3 In the second meeting of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) and the AMCA Plus Three, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand mentioned that they there was a need to build a cooperation framework on human resource

development and development of small and medium enterprises in the culture sector. This is to further enhance cooperation between ASEAN and ASEAN Plus Three Plus (Three Countries include People's Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea) (Asean.org, 2015).

4.4 ASEAN recognised culture as being closely linked with information and communication technology and acknowledged the significance of developing local content such as local films and arts. The Ministers encouraged further involvement of Plus Three Countries with ASEAN Member States through collaborative projects and activities. The ASEAN Ministers welcomed the prospect of an ASEAN Plus Three Work Plan, containing concrete programmes and projects to steer cultural cooperation between the ASEAN Member States and the Plus Three Countries (Asean.org, 2015).

4.5 As ASEAN countries face global crisis of economic downturn and climate change disasters, AMCA Ministers believe that there is a greater need for arts and culture. They understand that to connect the masses, cultural symbols should be dynamically applied as a learning tool for capacity and confidence building to protect ASEAN bio-cultural diversity, strengthen the spirit and nourish the memory of kinship among ASEAN peoples to triumph over adversity (Asean.org, 2015).

4.6 ASEAN's economic stability is greatly dependant on the peaceful co-existence and harmony of its multi-cultural people. Unfortunately, ASEAN and its members do not often recognize this as a priority. It is important that ASEAN promotes a multi-cultural heritage and diversity to eliminate or neutralise extremist and ultra-nationalist tendencies within ASEAN, whose destructive ideas and actions out of sync with the ASEAN spirit (Asean.org, 2015).

4.7 The ASEAN identity issue needs to be seriously addressed. There is a danger that the ASEAN Community will only exist at the elite level and not be keenly felt by the majority of citizens. There are five possible contributing factors to explain the lack of an ASEAN identity (Abdulrahim, 2014).

4.7.1 General lack of media interest in ASEAN, even among the regional media.

4.7.2 Diversity in political, cultural, religious and ethnically systems among ASEAN nations

4.7.3 Diversity of languages is another contributing factor which deserves to be considered

4.7.4 ASEAN countries themselves face many problems related to the ongoing process of nation-building. Some have argued that ASEAN countries remain inward-looking and overwhelmed by their own domestic problems and

- 4.7.5 Lack of funding for ASEAN awareness activities. This may explain why the ASEAN Foundation set up to promote awareness about the organisation.

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