

# GSAPS THE SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

## RECOGNIZING REGIONS

- ASEAN's Struggle for Recognition -

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Does recognition matter for a region as much as it does for a state and an individual? This dissertation examines the power of external recognition in shaping regional cooperation.

The role of recognition is an area which has been largely neglected in the study of regional cooperation. Between states, international law looks at how recognition of a prior-state confers legal status and international personality. International politics also shows how the process of recognizing states has been exploited by great and small powers alike as a form of diplomacy tool. A case in point is the recognition (or non-recognition) of Taiwan. Between people, sociologists and philosophers highlight the pivotal role recognition plays in shaping the identity and development of an individual. Given the centrality of recognition theory in these fields, there is a notable dearth of research on how recognition affects the growth of regional entities.

The key research question this dissertation aims to address is: how does external recognition influence the development of a regional concept? Departing from the traditional frameworks used by most political-economy theorists, it proposes a fresh analytical model based on the concept of recognition to explain the evolution of regional cooperation. Analyzing the development of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) during its founding years, the empirical evidence (based on archives of diplomatic telegrams) reveals that the strengthening of a regional concept is influenced by the willingness, and the extent, to which non-members acclimate to the regional entity. In short, external recognition and socialization with non-members matter as much as the internal process of acclimation between members of the grouping.

The literature review finds a tendency in existing scholarship, including those related to ASEAN, to account for regional cooperation based on analyses of why and how members cooperate with one another in the grouping - whether they be the case of member states cooperating with one another because of national interest, increased interdependence or a shared belief system of norms and ideas. Broadly summarized, current literature on regional cooperation focuses on addressing overwhelmingly one side of the equation, which is, why member states cooperate with one another in ASEAN. In other words, there is no or very little discussion on whether and how non-members can influence the development of the regional entity, which is the theme of this investigative research. The academic inquiry here is whether and how external actors are able to stimulate or retard the development of a regional concept.

On methodology, the research draws on recently declassified U.S. and Australian diplomatic records, covering the time period from the formation of ASEAN in 1967 to its institutionalization in 1976. The content analysis comprises approximately 8,800 archives of reporting on ASEAN by the foreign diplomats. The remaining information gaps or discrepancies are corroborated with primary data from first-hand accounts and news sources published during the period of analysis (approximately 500 articles). The use of secondary sources is minimized to retain the objectivity of this research to the extent possible.

With the above background, this research makes two key contributions to current literature on regional cooperation. As pointed out

earlier, there is a stark gap in existing scholarship on how external actors or non-members may influence cooperation in a regional grouping like ASEAN. The first contribution of this dissertation is therefore to cover such a gap in current discourse by elucidating the role and power of external recognition in shaping the development of regional concepts. This entails the offering of a new conceptual framework to examine the importance of recognition in regional cooperation. By viewing recognition as a tradable commodity and an independent variable, the discussion shows how the demand for and supply of recognition permeates beyond inter-personal and inter-state interactions to include the struggle for recognition by regions. It pieces together a coherent recognition model to understand how foreign powers' reactions to a regional concept may impact on its development.

Second, this dissertation is the first scholarly work on ASEAN based on newly released U.S. and Australian declassified diplomatic cables. Heretofore, most works on international relations, in particular on regional cooperation or ASEAN, are centered on what has been openly discussed or announced by national governments. In reality, what is externally expressed and internally discussed on any subjects by state apparatuses, in particular on a sensitive foreign policy matter, can be quite different, as the findings of this dissertation has shown. The analysis of the diplomatic records affirms that the strengthening of a regional concept like ASEAN also hinges on the willingness, and the extent, to which non-members like the U.S. and Australia have interacted with the entity.

As an overview, the chapter following the introduction proposes a framework to examine the role of recognition in the development of a regional concept. Going back to the research question, the model presented in Chapter 2 hypothesizes that the degree of external recognition accorded to a region directly affects the level of cooperation between member states. Drawing on the diplomatic archives, Chapter 3, 4 and 5 assess the soundness of the proposed model for the recognition of regions by analyzing ASEAN's struggle for recognition during its formative years in the 1960-70s with the major powers such as the U.S., Soviet Union, Japan, the European Economic Community, China and Australia. By explaining the reasons for the supply of recognition to ASEAN by the foreign powers, as well as the motivations driving ASEAN's demand for recognition, the discussion highlights the relevance of the model in accounting for the level of cooperation in the grouping. The empirical data suggests that external recognition has both a direct and compounding impact on cooperation within ASEAN. It also highlights the importance of cumulative recognition by external powers and reveals how the process motivated member states to increasingly view ASEAN as a feasible regional platform to solving national problems, rather than regional ones. The concluding chapter summarizes the key findings and discusses recent endeavors by ASEAN to secure external recognition. Finally, this dissertation does not claim that the proposed model explains the rise and fall of all regional concepts. It simply offers a new conceptual tool to discuss the development of regional entities based on its analysis of actual reporting by foreign diplomats.

### Reference

Ong, Bernard, 2012. Recognizing regions: ASEAN's struggle for recognition, *The Pacific Review* (forthcoming).