Mahidol University

MULTICULTURAL ASEAN

Diversity in Identity, Language, Memory and Media

Edited by
Morakot Meyer & Zhu Tingshu

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Multicultural ASEAN Center Project
Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia
Mahidol University

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Cover: A female visitor is looking at "Stormy Weather", an art installation by Felix Bacolor (Installation view: "SUNSHOWER": Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2017) — Photograph by Morakot Meyer.

Multicultural ASEAN Center Project

Editorial Board

To all contributors

Contents

Multicultural ASEAN Center Project (MU-MAC)

The Multicultural ASEAN Center Project (MU-MAC) at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA) was established under Mahidol University's ASEAN policy that recognizes the importance of the ASEAN community for the development of Thailand under this common regional political architecture. The center was officially launched on 24th January 2017 at the 1st Multicultural ASEAN Workshop Talk Series on the topic of "Pivot in Peril: Trump Presidency and ASEAN Community" at the Thai House, Mahidol University, Salaya.

The main mission of MU-MAC is to encourage and support research as well as develop research networks in academic fields that influence the dimensions of social change, economy and politics in ASEAN+6 and Taiwan. The areas of MU-MAC's research include, but are not limited to, multicultural issues, migration, multicultural competency, language and culture, cultural policy, heritage, tourism and creative economy in ASEAN+6 and Taiwan. The center aims to disseminate knowledge and provide policy recommendations in those research areas to policy leaders and practitioners as well as to the wider public - both locally and regionally - so as to contribute to the strengthening of civil society in ASEAN. Moreover, the center supports Thailand's policy on creative economy by promoting cultural innovation and products derived from its research.

In order to drive the advancement of the ASEAN community forward, MU-MAC acknowledges that active multicultural and cultural research networks and communities within ASEAN have long been anticipating the establishment of the ASEAN Community in the expectation that the deepening of economic, social, and security ties will contribute to higher living standards on the one hand, but recognizing that there will also be negative impacts on the other. Hence, the purpose of the center is to achieve a truly fair and just ASEAN community by helping promote the

work of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, which will act as:

1. A mechanism for mitigating the negative effects of economic development;

2. A mechanism for activating the awareness, support and participation of the citizens of ASEAN in advancing the ASEAN communities;

With the determination and support of the multifarious parties and organizations contributing to and benefiting from its efforts, MU-MAC aims, ultimately, to achieve a "Multicultural ASEAN for all."

Preface

Associate Professor Dr. Kwanchit Sasiwongsaroj

Director
Research Institute for Languages
and Cultures of Asia

On the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, or RILCA, in 2017, we have been able to launch the Multicultural ASEAN Center Project (MU-MAC). I would like to congratulate and thank the Multicultural ASEAN Center Project, editors and authors of this book for their contribution. As its name indicates, MU-MAC is engineered to expand RILCA's research and academic networks in the field of ASEAN+6 and Taiwan among universities and research institutions in the region and in the global academic community.

In the past 36 years, our institute has been blessed with supportive and constructive collaborations with our domestic and international academic partners. Academic solidarity and professional commitment have lead us to where RILCA stands today as one of the leading research institutes in Thailand, with promising prospects for greater academic integration within ASEAN, and most significantly, with the establishment

of the Multicultural ASEAN Center Project that represents the consolidation of academic convergence and endeavor in ASEAN members.

Our vision is inspired by the urgent need for policy development and institutional capacity-building in order to better accommodate emerging scenarios in transnational mobility within ASEAN, especially in the new era of super-diversity which is imminent. We strongly believe that through such project, we will be able to nurture and promote an inclusive, "Multicultural ASEAN for All."

MULTICULTURAL
ASEAN

Chapter 1

ASEAN:
A 'Space of Diversity'?

Morakot Meyer and Zhu Tingshu

In August 1967, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines founded the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Seventeen years later, Donald K. Emmerson still asked "Southeast Asia: What's in a Name?" (1984). He began his article by explaining that the name that is used to refer to an object is important because it can identify a difference between a natural and man-made item. He used 'rose' and 'unicorn' as examples. While the 'rose' is natural, the 'unicorn' is an imagined figure in western mythology. Emmerson compared 'Southeast Asia' to a unicorn in that it had been created and created only recently, despite its well-known geographical location among intercontinental traders in past centuries. In the course of WWII, the British army first used the term 'Southeast Asia' to refer to a specific military unit. Later, during the Cold War, 'Southeast Asia' became widely known as a world region. Thus, this demonstrates that 'Southeast Asia', as a region, has only recently been named as such, and not by its own member countries themselves. In this context, the emergence of ASEAN can potentially contribute to a new regional identity that reflects its new historical trajectory, as well as the spatial complexity of the region.

In August 2017, ASEAN Community celebrated its 50th anniversary. Through past institutional endeavors conducted in the political, economic, social and cultural realm of ASEAN's daily practices, signs of cohesion prevail, so do signs of disconnectedness. Scholars often portray ASEAN's early history as chaotic and suggest that the organisation lacked a sense of regionalism and identity (Robert, 2011; Ong, 2012; Korhonen, 2008). However, studies of ASEAN's recent development demonstrate the contri-

bution and positive impacts of integration on the issues of peace and regional identity construction (Acharya, 2014; Mahbubani & Sng, 2017).

ASEAN, to be sure, remains very much a project of the elites, lacking public participation and sufficient efforts to address issues like human rights, social equality, democratization, etc. Nevertheless, in recent years, ASEAN has made considerable progress in strengthening the cohesion between its member states as the adoption of the ASEAN Charter at the 2007 summit demonstrates. At the same time, the processes of economic integration and globalization bring challenges to regional cohesion to the forefront of ASEAN's development schedule. These challenges, both old and new, have recently gained so much in intensity as to impact the prospects for ASEAN integration. Put succinctly, while ASEAN members strive for the greater regional cohesion envisioned by the ASEAN framework, it should be acknowledged that the aspiration has yet to be fully achieved.

Problems and limitations of integration notwithstanding, ASEAN has grown into a 'space of flows', to use a term coined by Castell (2010). ASEAN is now experiencing a proliferation of connectivity, networks and patterns of interaction. On both the intra-regional and international levels, flows of people have grown beyond traditional modes of mobility in the economic, social, cultural and political domains. Numerous historical factors have contributed to this development, resulting in a state of diversity.

Old and new forms of diversity coexist within ASEAN. Southeast Asia has long been rich in different ethnicities, languages, cultures, identities and histories. In recent decades, the impact of globalization has further increased diversity within the region. Perhaps even more importantly, the process of ASEAN integration has stimulated flows of capitals, goods, people and services, which contributed to the construction of ASEAN as a 'space of diversity.' While ASEAN is committed to intra-regional exchange and mobility, the resulting increase in diversity poses significant political, social and cultural challenges for ASEAN and its member states.

On the occasion of ASEAN's 50th anniversary in 2017, a number of Japanese and ASEAN cultural institutions and

government agencies joined forces to organize an art exhibition in the Mori Art Museum and the National Art Center in Tokyo. Under the title 'SUNSHOWER', the exhibition exemplified the characteristics of ASEAN's old and new diversities as well as the resulting challenges facing the member states. A number of artists used multi-media installations to present stories of diversity and multicultural society affected by state-building efforts in the immediate postwar period. Works included a video installation by Ariani Darmawan, an Indonesian artist, who presents conversations of Sino-Indonesians bewildered as to why presidential decree No. 127 of 1966 forced their families to give up their Chinese names. In thinking about the diversity of Southeast Asian past, artists from ASEAN also gave several accounts of commentaries on contested interpretations of colonial and post-colonial histories advanced by others.

Moreover, the exhibition addressed the new diversity and diasporic experiences that are the product of past and present migrations. Thai artist Navin Rwanchaikul tells the story of the four generations of his family of Indian immigrants in Northern Thailand. Reconstructing the family's now defunct fabric shop, Navin captures a history of migration and diaspora that the national narrative neglects in spite of the size and significance of the Indo-Thai community. Some artists take up the issue of migration and transnational life through video and other visual techniques for allowing migrants to share their touching stories of being on the move in ASEAN. Amongst others, Sherman Wong, a Malaysian artist now based in Singapore, shows his video installation "The Sea Will Sing and the Wind Will Carry Us." The work features six migrants telling the stories of their lives, linked by the common theme of the hardship and adaptations, the endurance and frustrations characterizing migration in ASEAN.

The SUNSHOWER exhibition epitomizes attempts by ASEAN artists and Japanese curators to construct another ASEAN identity in the space of art and representation. Stories of ASEAN told in this exhibition contrast sharply with the visionary image of ASEAN highlighted in ASEAN's official rhetoric. ASEAN is therefore not only a contested term, but a contested space of interpretations. The question here is: How can a diversity of interpretations be

heard and taken seriously at ASEAN's policy level?

In other words, under the overriding theme of ASEAN solidarity introduced by ASEAN leaders, disparate spaces which are claimed by a variety of identity groups constantly exist and emerge. How can these spaces be constructively incorporated into the future of the ASEAN community which promotes a space for vibrant interaction and unhindered integration? It is the thematic intention of this collection to present some of the efforts being made to promote the public's reckoning on the space for diversity within the framework of ASEAN.

The conception of space addressed in this volume consists of not only the geographical configuration of a physical region, but also the dynamic economic, social and political structures it incubates. Focusing his argumentation on the capitalist mode of production, Henri Lefebvre (2009) avers that "space has always been political and strategic" (p. 170). Accordingly, the appropriation of space by actors at all levels — global, regional, national or local — is realized through the four functions of space, namely using space as means of production, as an object of consumption, as a political instrument and as an avenue for class struggle (Lefebvre, 2009, pp. 188-189). Hence, space contains simultaneously the physical spatial layout and the emerging economic, social and political practices attached to that particular spatial site.

Similarly, Anthony Smith (1998) argues that the attachment of a particular group identity to specific spatial locality — the historic land or the ancestral abode — is not restricted to the physical shape of the place per se, but pertains fundamentally to the content that the piece of space bears in the relation to the abiders (p. 83), or the imagery that has been discursively constructed upon the space. Moreover, when the phenomenon of our inquiry involves contention or conflict in a particular spatial locality, we have to be fully informed of the differences between structures of the space where opposition arises, with the structure of space referring to "the relatively stable system of roles or positions, and the tasks and activities" allocated to actors in a specific economic, social and political formation (Gellner, 1987, pp. 12–13). Therefore, space contains not only the geographical configurations of a place, but also the political, economic and

social activities being undertaken there, along with the structures they are situated in. It is from this definition that the exploration into a space for diversity in ASEAN in this collection starts.

In this volume, all contributors approach the issue of diversity in space from distinct perspectives and on a variety of spatial localities. Mark Stephan Felix casts light on the intersection of ethnicity, religion, and sexuality in Malaysia; Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn takes us to the diversified religious and political developments that are integrated into ethnic identity majorly in Myanmar's Kachin, Chin, Kokang and Wa communities; Mukda Pratheepwatanawong and Choltida Auikool adopt the perspective of virtual and media spaces: the former presents an investigation of the mobilization of online space by politicians during the 2013 Bangkok-governor election, and the latter encapsulates the contested realm in films regarding the discourse and legitimacy in coercive state violence. The contributors of our last chapter, Chinangkoon Suwannasri and Singhanat Nomnian, examine the ramifications of the use of English as the *lingua franca* in ASEAN on its internal coherence through literature research. What these articles exemplify firstly is the ongoing process of a construction and articulation of identity conditioned by the political, economic and social structures in a particular space, rendering that space a container of identity with a historically practiced boundary. Secondly, the scholarship of our authors indicates that boundaries which divide political, economic and social space in ASEAN are permeable and malleable.

In the second chapter of this collection (which follows this introduction), Mark Stephen Felix focuses on the promise of diversity and the fluidity that cultures provide and probes the cultural changes experienced within the context of sexual minorities in Malaysia. He argues that values, norms and mores within specific ethnicities define the level of acceptance that sexual minorities of different ethnicities receive after analyzing their experience of cultural approbation, marginalization and/or integration in the context of expectations of the minorities they are from. Specifically, Felix looks at the similarities and differences that gay men of different ethnicities in multi-ethnic Malaysia experience in terms of their sexual identity as gay men. His findings

indicate that while sexual minorities are part of the multi-ethnic mélange in Malaysia, they feel both a part of and rejected by the cultural expectations of their ethnic group. Therefore, the space of homosexuality in Malaysia is both contained and suppressed by the social structure and practices shaped by their own ethnicity and religion. Hence, Felix advocates an investigation that begins with the nuanced practices of sexual identity in the context of each ethnic group against the backdrop of a multi-ethnic Malaysia. Such a research agenda counters interpretations of diversity that assume the vantage point of a dominant culture.

Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn looks at the lineage of ethnic communities scattered along Myanmar's northern border with India and China. She investigates the emergence of ethnic identity through the practices of an inherited boundary that has been defined and modified gradually over time. This category of boundary is by no means demarcated by fixed rules or principles in a spatially and temporally synchronized manner. Heikkila-Horn demonstrates how Kachin ethnic identity has become diversified by linguistic differentiation or religious divisions, how the Chin ethnic community has been impacted by the recent introduction of Christianity and how the Kokang and Wa ethnic communities in Shan State are building their own enclave that thrives upon local economic circuits. In all cases, ethnic identity constitutes the boundary of inclusion and exclusion in the mobilization of military force for political empowerment. The boundary is essentialized through claims to an inherited area of land, which belongs at the same time to the territory of the state in which they now live. In this way, the ethnic space becomes a structural component of the state territory. Introducing her argument with a vigorous debate of the implications of Furnivall's concept of 'plural society' (Furnivall, 2011), Heikkilä-Horn explores the fluidity of ethnic identities in colonial Burma and present-day Myanmar and ends by examining the intersectionality between race, religion and religious space.

The articles by Felix and Heikkilä-Horn outline local landscapes of sexuality, identity, and ethnic diversity in Malaysia and Myanmar. Their articles help us to re-think the significance of the cultural politics of gender, sexuality and ethnicity for both

the national and ASEAN levels. Both authors address the role of religions for diversity in ASEAN. Felix shows how a religion can influence the practices and ways of thinking about sexuality among gay men in Malaysia. Heikkilä-Horn begins her chapter with an amazing image of a mosque, a Hindu temple and a Sikh gurdwara coexisting peacefully in a Myanmar setting. Such an image seems unreal, considering religious and ethnic conflicts on the global stage.

In chapter four, Mukda Pratheepwatanawong contextualizes her research in the social media space created during the 2013 Bangkok gubernatorial election campaign. She collected her data by interviewing candidates and public relations personnel on their use of social networking sites (SNSs) during that year's election campaign and conducting multi-modal analysis on the Facebook pages of the top two candidates for the election. In her article, Mukda describes the emerging trend of politicians using SNSs as a channel for political communication and election campaigns in many countries apart from Thailand. Juxtaposing developments in Thailand's media space with the political dynamism constituted in the local context of Bangkok and national conditions of Thailand, this paper argues that overall strategies for effectively using Facebook during Thai election campaigns are yet to be fully developed. Although Bangkok hosts a staggering 8.6 million Facebook users, the practice of online political communication is still new and mainly evident in candidates' use of different social networking platforms for distributing election information and organizing followers. Beyond that, this paper sets out to map the mutually constitutive connection between SNSs and mainstream media during the 2013 Bangkok gubernatorial election campaign.

In Mukda's interpretation of SNSs as tools for political mobilization, we see the configuration of a new political space engendered by modern communication technology and in particular social media platforms, which proceeded in tandem with the political conflict in Thailand from 2010 to 2014 (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2014). The polarization in the country, which began in 2005, intensified the use of digital platforms for public mobilization. The Bangkok gubernatorial elections had always been crucial for party politics in terms of power distribution,