

Sri Lanka in ASEAN

The role of the concept 'Southeast Asia' in Sri Lanka's bid for membership



27-01-27

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Master Thesis Asian Studies

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1. Introduction

In 2007 Sri Lanka joined the ASEAN Regional Forum of the Association of South East Asian Nations. Sri Lanka has been working towards this for forty years. Already in 1967¹ and in 1981 the government of the country voiced their desire to become a member.² It was rejected on the grounds that the country was not part of Southeast Asia. Myanmar, which was a part of the region, was accepted into the regional organization in the nineties. The question that these developments raise is why does Sri Lanka not belong to the region of Southeast Asia? How did the representatives of the member states know where the borders were?

My research questions will be: Why was Sri Lanka not allowed to join the ASEAN and Burma was? My sub questions will be: How was the concept of Southeast Asia born and why is this concept still relevant? How did the representatives of the member states of ASEAN know where the borders of Southeast Asia were? What was the reason for the creation of ASEAN? How has the aim of the organization changed throughout the years? Why did Sri Lanka want to join? Why was it rejected? Why was Myanmar allowed to join?

2. Theory

The theory that I want to test in this thesis is that the reason why Sri Lanka was not allowed to become a member of the ASEAN was because the country is not regarded within ASEAN as belonging to the Southeast Asian region.

3. State Of The Field

No article or book has been written about Sri Lanka's attempt to join ASEAN in 1981. This is a gap in and of itself. On the subjects of two of my sub questions, scholars have written books and articles. I will analyze what scholars have written on these subjects and try to find a gap that I can fill with this dissertation. The subjects that these sources discuss is the origin of the term of Southeast Asia and the reason for creating ASEAN.

In this section, I will look at how the scholars have examined the region of Southeast

¹ De Silva, Mervyn, 'Sri Lanka: Operation ASEAN', *India Today*, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/sri-lanka-expresses-wish-to-join-asean-eyebrows-raised-in-new-delhi/1/401849.html>

² Reuter, 'Sri Lanka: We Want To Join ASEAN', *New Straits Times* - Apr 28, 1981

Asia over time. In the first part of the paper, I will discuss the different ways in which scholars have approached the concept of Southeast Asian. I will start with looking at what has been said about the origin of the term in scholarly research and whether or not scholars have looked at how the people living within the region of Southeast Asia have named the region in the past. I will look if whether or not scholars have researched if the people in the region started to use the term as well around the same time that Western scholars did and if they started using it for the same reason. In the second part, I will focus on what scholars have said about the reason why ASEAN was created.

The reason why in this first part of the master thesis I will be looking at sources that have been written about these two subjects and I will not be looking at the articles and books that have been written about the other subjects that I touch upon with my questions has to do with my main research question. The aim of this master thesis is to look at how the concept of Southeast Asia influences the decisions that the ASEAN makes. Sri Lanka is not considered as being a country that is part of the Southeast Asian region. Is this the reason why Sri Lanka was denied its wish to become a member? Or did the refusal had something do with the aim of the organization? In order to answer these questions in this master thesis, I first have to look at what has already been written about the concept of Southeast Asia and the reason why the organization was started in the first place.

3.1 The concept Southeast Asia

In this section, I will discuss what has already been written about the origin of the term Southeast Asia. There are different explanations proposed by scholars. I have grouped the books and articles according which explanation they give.

The first explanation given by scholars is that the term Southeast Asia was coined during the Second World War. One of the scholars who proposes this explanation is Christopher Roberst. He published an article titled 'Region and Identity: The Many Faces of Southeast Asia' in 2011 and in it, discusses the origin of the term Southeast Asia elaborately. According to Roberts, some scholars have concluded that the origin of the concept of Southeast Asia was created during the late 19th century. Most scholars date the origin of the concept during the Second World War. He discusses whether or not when looking for the origin of the region of Southeast Asia, scholars should look at the interaction between the

states within the region as well as the similarities of these states. By only looking at when the term was first used in academia, the search for the origin of the region becomes Western centric. If you do look at the similarities between the states within the Southeast Asian region, the origin of the region goes as far back as the end of the first millennium BC. During that time, India and China exerted influence on different countries of the region.³ Roberst concludes that the differences within the region outweigh the similarities and this prevented the region to be considered as an unity by its inhabitants prior to colonialism.⁴ What he does consider as being the date of origin of the concept of Southeast Asia is during the Second World War.⁵

Kristina Jönsson also believes that the origin the term Southeast Asia was during the Second World War. In her article 'Unity-in-Diversity? Regional Identity-building in Southeast Asia', she discusses briefly the origin of Southeast Asia as a region. She uses the scholar Amitav Acharya as a source. She too attributes the origin of Southeast Asia to the Second World War. She also discusses whether or not one can talk about a region when it comes to Southeast Asia. She is of the opinion that while in the past, one could not consider Southeast Asia as one region, due to globalization, integration and social-economic disparities, one can now.⁶

The article by Terence Chong titled 'Reconciling Area Studies with Globalisation Theory' discusses the origin of Southeast Asian Studies. According to him, this field of studies was created during the Second World War. The reason for creating was because it could help the allied forces in their fight against Japan.⁷ The source does not discuss the origin of the term Southeast Asia itself, but I decided to include this source because creating a field of study for a specific region, is an indication that this region is considered as falling under one concept. This source only discusses the emergence of the concept of Southeast Asia in the West, as its main concern is the reconciliation of Area Studies with Globalization. The focus is not on the origin of the field of study itself. I consider

³ Christopher Roberst, 'Region and Identity: The Many Faces of Southeast Asia', *Asian Politics & Policy*, 3.3, (2011), pp. 368-69

⁴ Christopher Roberst, pp. 371

⁵ Ibid, pp. 377

⁶ Kristina Jönsson, 'Unity-in-Diversity? Regional Identity-building in Southeast Asia', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 29. 2, (2010), pp. 46-7

⁷ Terence Chong, 'Practising Global Ethnography in Southeast Asia: Reconciling Area Studies with Globalisation Theory', *Asian Studies Review*, 31, (2007), pp. 212

Terence Chong as belonging in the group that believe that the term was first used during the Second World War.

The book written by David L Szanton, discusses the history of Area Studies in the United States. Szanton places the origin of the term Southeast Asia in the intellectual sense in the United States during the Second World War. He does not look at the use of the term Southeast Asia in other states because this is not relevant for the book. He also only looks at the use of this term by intellectuals. Whether or not the term was also used by politicians or the military is not discussed. This is also due to the aim of the book. As it looks at Southeast Asia Studies, it is only concerned with academic developments.⁸

Rodolfo C. Severino has written a book on the search of Southeast Asia for an ASEAN community. In the second chapter, he discusses the question: Who belongs in ASEAN? In this chapter, he briefly discusses the origin of the term Southeast Asia. He says that several scholars have determined that the concept of Southeast Asia has been created through the interaction between Western academics and the military. I conclude from this that Severino too believes that the term Southeast Asia was first used during the Second World War⁹

The last scholar who belongs in this group is Ioana-Bianca Berna. In her article that she wrote in 2013 titled 'The Imperial Element In Southeast Asian Identity-building: Imbibing a Legend' she discusses how Imperialism has influenced identity building in the region of Southeast Asia. She looks at the different names that were given to the Southeast Asian region. The Europeans called it Further India while the Chinese called it either the Southern Ocean or the Southern Seas. Only during the Second World War, was the region called Southeast Asia. The Allied forces were the ones that gave the region this name. Lord Louis Mountbatten called the region the 'Southeastern flank of the East Asian theatre of Operations'. He became the Supreme Allied Commander of the Southeast Asian Command. This was in 1943.

A second group of scholars believe that the term 'Southeast Asia' was used before the Second World War. According to them, the term was created because a name was needed for the region that was between Japan, China and India, but what was culturally different from these three powers. Park Seung Woo and Victor T. King are scholars who

⁸ Szanton, David L., *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, (University of California Press, 2002), pp. 386

⁹ Rodolfo C. Severino, *Southeast Asia in search of an ASEAN community : insights from the former ASEAN Secretary-General*, (ISEAS Publishing, 2006): pp. 41

belong in this group. They are written a book on the history of Southeast Asian Studies around the world. King is a Professor of Southeast Asian Studies at the university of Leeds and has written books about Anthropology and Tourism in Southeast Asia. Woo is a professor of Sociology and director of the multicultural education and research institute at Yeungnam University in Korea. The book 'Historical Construction of Southeast Asian Studies' was written in 2013. The aim of the book was to address general issues in the development of Southeast Asian Studies. According to the book, the first time the term Southeast Asia was used was in 1839 and it was used by an American pastor. Scholars started to use the term at the beginning of the 1920s. The Japanese and Chinese came up with their own terms for the region in the interwar period. The writers propose that both the Western scholars as well as scholars from other parts of the world started to use the term because they needed a name for a region which was culturally different from India, China and Japan. But the region only became what it is today during the Japanese occupation. King and Woo do seem to agree that the Second World War was an important turning point for the region of Southeast Asian itself, but King and Woo are of the opinion that the birth of the term was earlier.

A second scholar who belongs in this group is Russell H. Fifield. In his article, titled 'Southeast Asia as a Regional Concept' that he wrote in 1983 he briefly touches on the subject of the origin of the term Southeast Asia. Russell is an American scholar who has written several books about Southeast Asia. The topics he discusses in his research are of a wide range, from diplomacy in Southeast Asia to the histories of Americans in the region. Finding information on the author himself is difficult. The article that I will discuss below is about Southeast Asia as a regional concept.

According to Fifield, the concept Southeast Asia was coined because of convenience. The period before the Second World War, scholars needed a term to describe a region that was between India and China on the map. They started to use the term Southeast Asia.¹⁰ The term was already in use in 1839 but it only became a fixed term during the Second World War. During the Second World War, American soldiers needed a name for the region that was occupied by the Japanese. They decided to use the term Southeast Asia.¹¹ The

¹⁰ Fifield, Russell H., 'Southeast Asia as a Regional Concept', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 11.1 (1983), pp. 1- 2

¹¹ Fifield, Russell H., pp. 2 - 6

inhabitants of the region themselves did not have a name for the region, so the term Southeast Asia was not an European version of a name already in existence.¹²

Anthony Reid also belongs in the group that places the date of birth of the term Southeast Asia earlier than the Second World War. In his article titled 'A Saucer Model of Southeast Asian Identity' that he published in 1999 he argues for an 'indigenous origin of the Southeast Asian idea'. In this essay, he discusses the origin of the term Southeast Asia. According to Reid, the first time the English used the term Southeast Asia was indeed during the Second World War but the French and the Germans started to use the term earlier. There were German scholars who used the term 'Sudostasien' as early as the late 19th century. These scholars mainly discussed the bronze age, art history and 'architectural continuities' when they used the term. According to Reid, because Germany did not have colonies in the area, they were able to see the region as an unity. The French scholars did not use the term Southeast Asia to describe the region but they did consider the region as having distinctive features. They started calling it 'Indochine et l' Indonésie' in the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1930s, the first Vietnamese scholar used the term Southeast Asia.

A third group of scholars take it even further. Instead of looking at the scholarly origin of Southeast Asia, they look at the concept of Southeast Asia itself. They look at whether or not there is an idea of a shared identity in Southeast Asia. Amitav Acharya has done research on this subject. He has written a book that looks at the international relations in Southeast Asia with a focus on identity. This book was written in 2000. Acharya is an Indian-born Canadian scholar, and professor of international relations at American University in Washington. The aim of the book is to explain the shared identity that unites the members of the ASEAN. In the introduction, he discusses scholars that have approached Southeast Asia as a region that is so diverse that it unites them. Once again, Southeast Asia is seen as a region that is defined by culture. These scholars are of the opinion that the countries in Southeast Asia may not have a common culture, but they are one region because they have so many cultures, which makes them different from India, China and Japan. Acharya, however does not agree with these scholars. He believes that there is a shared identity that binds the states in the region of Southeast Asia together. This identity is based on a common culture which consists of a blend of cultures that makes them different from either China or India. This is what Benedict Anderson calls an imagined community. People feel connected

¹² Fifield, Russell H., pp. 2

to other people who live in the same region because they have things in common. People who feel like they have something in common will start feeling like they have a common identity, which is what Anderson calls an imagined community. Anderson, however, uses this idea to explain nationalism and the formations of states.¹³ Is the term imagined community applicable to Southeast Asia? Southeast Asia is not a state and whether or not people from Southeast Asia feel like they are part of a Southeast Asian nation is debatable. Acharya appears to believe there is an imagined community in the Southeast Asian region none the less.

If we keep in mind the different ways that were discussed above, in which scholars look at Southeast Asia, the origin of the regional international organization of ASEAN may be explained. If the region is indeed united in diversity, this unity may be the reason why the states that are part of it, decided to work together.

3.2. Reasons for an Southeast Asian Regional Organization

When in the past scholars approached Southeast Asia as an abstract region, due to the ASEAN, scholars are now interested in the roots that this political and economic association provides for the region as well. In this part of the state of the field chapter, I will look at what has been written about the reason why the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was founded. Like with the origin of the term of Southeast Asia, there are also different explanations given by scholars when it comes to the reason for the creation of the ASEAN.

One group of scholars believe that the creation of the ASEAN was due to security reasons. Richard Pomfret is amongst them. He wrote an article titled 'ASEAN's New Frontiers: Integrating the Newest Members into the ASEAN Economic Community' and in it he discusses the development gap between the old member states of the ASEAN and its newer member states. He only briefly touches on the origin of the ASEAN. According to him, the organization was created to provide a front against communist states within the region as well as to keep the peace between Malaysia and Indonesia. He also seems to imply that another reason for creating the organization was to prevent conflicts. He states that after

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (Verso, 2006)

independence, there was the danger of disputes about territory and minorities breaking out.¹⁴

Ulaş Başar Gezgin has written an article on the Southeast Asian regional news network and its influence on the identity forming within the region. He briefly touches on the reason why the ASEAN was created. According to him, it was created due to communism. Because the countries that established the organization were anti-communist, they decided to create the ASEAN.¹⁵

Another article that tells the reader that the ASEAN was created because of security reasons is titled 'The origin of intra-ASEAN economic cooperation'. It was written by Kazushi Shimizu in 2004. The article discusses the origin of intra-ASEAN economic cooperation. Shimizu is a Chinese scholar. His main academic interest is the global economy with a focus on Asia. According to Shimizu, ASEAN was created for political reasons. What these political reasons were, is not stated in the article.¹⁶

According to Alice Ba, the non-interference principle was added because a regionalism that was based on nationalism was the only type of regionalism that would be accepted in Southeast Asia. The reason why the ASEAN was founded, according to Ba, was because the founding members believed this would protect the states from external interference as well as aggression from the other members.¹⁷

Sree Kumar and Sharon Siddique too believe that security was a reason behind the creating of the ASEAN. But according to them, there were also other reasons. What these reasons were is not stated in the book. According to these scholars, the founding member states of the ASEAN believed that closer links between countries was important with the Vietnam being fought on their doorstep. These states believed that creating the ASEAN would help with making these links closer.¹⁸

Another group of scholars believe that the ASEAN was created for economical

¹⁴ Richard Pomfret, 'ASEAN 's New Frontiers: Integrating the Newest Members into the ASEAN Economic Community', *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 8.1, (2013), pp. 26

¹⁵ Ulaş Başar Gezgin, 'Regional Journalism in Southeast Asia and ASEAN Identity in Making: Asia News Network as a Case for International and Intercultural Communication', *İstanbul Gelişim Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 1.1, (2014), pp. 48

¹⁶ Kazushi Shimizu, 'The origin of intra-ASEAN economic cooperation', *Economic journal of Hokkaido University*, 33, (2004), pp 113

¹⁷ Alice D. Ba, in *Legitimizing International Organizations*, (Oxford University Press, 2013): pp. 143-144

¹⁸ Sree Kumar; Sharon Siddique, *Southeast Asia : the diversity dilemma* (Select Publishing, 2008): pp. 67

reasons. An article in which this reason is given is written by Chia Hock Hwa and A. Pecotich in 1988. It is titled article 'Multinational Management Strategy And ASEAN Regional Development'. Hwa is Economics scholar. He has a PHD from Cranfield University. Other educational institutions he graduated from are the University of Chicago and The Graduate School of Business. Pecotich is an Australian scholar whose academic field is marketing. Hwa and Pecotich had held a survey and in the article, they discussed the result of that survey. The aim of the survey was to link the development of ASEAN regionalism to MNC - which stands for Multinational Corporation – management, and the strategy that is applied to the ASEAN region by the MNC. The article states that one of the reasons why the regional intrastate organization ASEAN was created was because it was seen as a way to accelerate economic development in the region. Another hope the founding member states had was that the organization would make the region more competitive in the international economy.¹⁹

There are scholars who believe that the reasons for creating the ASEAN was twofold. On the one hand, the founding member states hoped it would bring more stability within the region and on the other hand, the founding member states wanted to accelerate economic growth. This twofold reason is discussed in the article 'The ASEAN Way and Community Integration: Two Different Models of Regionalism', written in 2007 by the French scholar Laurence Henry. In it, she compares the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. There is not a lot of information on her on the internet. In the article itself it is stated that she is at the time of the publication a lecturer at the University of Grenoble. It also states that her current research focuses on, among other things, integration in East Asia. According to the article, states decide to work together because there are certain problems that can only be solved if states work together. This may be the reason why the founding member states of the ASEAN decided to work together. According to Henry, ASEAN was created because the member states wanted to 'accelerate economic and social progress and the cultural development of the region, and to work towards regional peace and stability'.²⁰

Kristina Jönsson also believes the reason to be twofold. She discusses the creation of

¹⁹ Hock Chia Hwa and A. Pecotich, 'Multinational Management Strategy And ASEAN Regional Development,' *Asia Pacific Journal Of Management*, 6, 1 (1988), pp.162

²⁰ Laurence Henry, 'The ASEAN Way and Community Integration: Two Different Models of Regionalism', *European Law Journal*, 13.6, (2007), pp. 859

the ASEAN in her article 'Unity-in-Diversity? Regional Identity-building in Southeast Asia'. The focus of the article is on the attempts of ASEAN to create a common identity. She touches briefly on why ASEAN was formed. According to her, the regional organization was created for the purpose of economic, social and cultural cooperation. Security also played an important part. They were afraid that communism would spread throughout Asia and they believed that by creating ASEAN, they could prevent this from happening.²¹

Rajaratnam believes that the two reasons are connected. The founding member states of the ASEAN wanted to promote economic growth because they believed it would bring security in the region. In the book 'S Rajaratnam on Singapore From Ideas to Reality', Rajaratnam talks about Singapore's relationship with the ASEAN. One of the topics he touches on in the book is the reason why the ASEAN was founded. Rajaratnam puts the birth of the ASEAN six years earlier, in 1961. Back then, it went by the name Association of Southeast Asia (ASA). The Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand were the countries that created this association. When in 1967, Singapore and Indonesia joined, the name changed into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. He does not mention all the aims of the organization, only that one of them was to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development because they believed it would help keep the peace in the region. They believed that by insuring these developments, their citizens would respect justice and the 'rule of law among countries in the region, in adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.'²²

The article written by John Stirling in 1980 discusses the treats to the unity of the association. Like the book discussed above, in this article the reason for the creation of the ASEAN that is given is that its member states wanted to stimulate economic, social and cultural growth in the region. Stirling too states that the wish for peace and stability motivated the member states to stimulate the economy, culture and the socioeconomics in the region. According to Stirling, the association also wanted to stimulate growth when it came to academia. Training, research and regional studies were encouraged. He acknowledges the history of Southeast Asia with the anti-communist movement but according to him this history is not the reason why the ASEAN was created. Before there was

²¹ Kristina Jöhnson, pp. 44

²² Kwa Chong Guan; Rajaratnam, S., *S Rajaratnam on Singapore From Ideas to Reality*, (River Edge, 2006): pp. 82

an association that went by the name ASA, another international organization was created in Southeast Asia. This organization went by the name SEATO. The aim of this organization was to stop the advance of communism in Southeast Asia. SEATO was created after the Second World War, back when in the West the spread of communism was a big security concern. According to Stirling, around the 1960s, it became less of a security concern and because of this, SEATO lost its international backing. The effectiveness of the SEATO was very much dependent on outside sources. When the ASA was created, this was with the hope that the success of this organization would not depend on states that were not part of the region. This association would be for the region by the region.²³

The last source was written by Michael R. J Vatikiotis in 1999. The title is 'ASEAN 10: The Political and Cultural Dimensions of Southeast Asian Unity'. The main argument of this article is that the roots of regional cohesion in Southeast Asia is primarily based in security concerns. The states are primarily working together so that they are safer. According to Vatikiotis, the founding of the ASEAN was not so much based on cultural and economic cooperation as it was based on security concerns. According to Vatikiotis, the official declaration of the aims of the organization was not as important as what happened behind closed doors. The 'diplomatic culture' that resulted from the founding of the ASEAN, was more important. Decisions that concerned the ASEAN were mostly decided on the 'golf course'. He mentions the threat of communism together with conflicts between states as security concerns that the ASEAN tried to tackle. If diplomacy was indeed very important when it came to decisions that concerned ASEAN, one may wonder if it also has had an influence on the decision to refuse Sri Lanka when it applied for membership.²⁴

Another group of scholars believe that the ASEAN was created because of other political reasons than security. Amitav Archarya believes that the ASEAN was founded so the regimes of the member states could survive. The principle of non-interference was supposed to shield the member states from pressure to become more democratic. According to him, socio-economic concerns were merely superficial reason for the creation of the ASEAN that

²³ John Stirling, 'ASEAN: The Anti-Domino Factor', *American Review*, 7, 5, (1980), pp. 273-77

²⁴ Michael R. J Vatikiotis, 'ASEAN 10: The Political and Cultural Dimensions of Southeast Asian Unity', *Journal of Social Science*, 27. 1, (1999), pp. 80

the member states presented as a core reason to the outside world. The real 'core reason' for the creation of the organization was the idea that it would help the regimes survive.²⁵

By reading these sources, it seems scholars attribute a wide range of reasons for the creation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. On the one hand, economic reasons are mentioned. They wanted to be more competitive in the international economy; they wanted to accelerate economic growth in the region. On the other hand, there is the reason of wanting to create peace and stability in the region. Another reason mentioned is that regimes thought they could hold on to their power by creating ASEAN. The non-interference clause would protect them from outside pressure to become more democratic. Some scholars state all three reasons, some of them only mention one. At the end of the first part of this chapter, it was mentioned that the reason for creating the ASEAN might have to do with a sense within the region of a shared identity. This identity was not based on similarities but rather on the differences. Most of the sources do not state this shared identity as the reason for the founding of the ASEAN. Rather, they state economic and security reasons.

4. Methodology

I will conduct archival research. The archives that I will be using are that of the Swarajya Magazin, International Policy Digest and Sunday Times. I will look into newspaper articles on ASEAN. I will look at what scholars have written about a shared identity within the Southeast Asian region. I will do this to try to determine if the concept of Southeast Asia is important to the people living within the region. I will study sources that state why the ASEAN was created and I will also look on the site of the organization. I will also look into what Sri Lanka has done to convince the member states of ASEAN to allow Sri Lanka to join the organization and why Sri Lanka wanted to join the organization. I will use newspaper articles as well as academic books and articles as my sources.

5. The Tale of Two Candidates

In this section I try to answer why Sri Lanka was refused when they applied for membership into ASEAN but Myanmar was accepted. As can be read above, there has not been anything written on the subject. Research has been done on where the term Southeast

²⁵ Amitav Archarya, 'Democratisation and the Prospect for Participatory Regionalism in Southeast Asia', *Third World Quarterly*, 24.2, (2003), pp. 379

Asia came from as well as why ASEAN was created. The gap that I will try to fill with this master thesis has, as stated in the introduction of this thesis, something to do with the influence that the concept of Southeast Asia has on the decisions on which countries can become a member of this organization. I will look at the reason why Sri Lanka was rejected when its government applied for membership of the ASEAN. I will also look at the application progress that a country that is as a current member of ASEAN went through. This country will be Myanmar. Myanmar is considered a part of the Southeast Asian region. In this section, I will also discuss these two subjects before moving onto the specific case studies of Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

5.1 The Birth of a Region

The origin of the term Southeast Asia has been discussed by a number of scholars. Some of them are Western scholars while a smaller number are scholars of the region itself. Most of these scholars believe that the concept of Southeast Asia was created during the last part of the Second World War. The Japanese troops had conquered most of this area and American troops needed to defeat them. A term for the area they needed to free was needed. This was why the term Southeast Asia was created.

Some of the sources believe that the term Southeast Asia was coined to describe the area that was situated between China, Japan and India. There was no particular shared culture, but the cultures in the countries that were part of this region were different from the cultures in Japan, China and India. These differences were what bound them together. As can be read above, some of these scholars believe that the origin of the term Southeast Asia is in the necessity to have a name for the region that was occupied by the Japanese while the others scholars believe that the name was created to denote the region that was situated between and which was culturally different from Japan, China and India.

I have discussed the development of the concept of Southeast Asia in the West as well as in non-Western countries that are not considered as being part of Southeast Asia, I will now look at what scholars have written about a shared identity within Southeast Asia. Are the boundaries of the region important to the people living in the region? Only after the Cold War did the concept of Southeast Asia as a region become important. During the Cold War, the countries in the region were more concerned with decolonization, nationalism and

the Cold War itself. As can be read above, one of the main reasons why ASEAN was created was the halt the influence of Communism in Southeast Asia.²⁶

Rodolfo C. Severino has looked, in the second chapter of his book at what determines which state can become a member of the regional organization. In this chapter, he also discusses what Southeast Asia is. According to Severino, the Southeast Asian region can be seen as what it is not. It is not Japan, China and Korea, or New Zealand and Australia, or Pakistan or India. He comes to the conclusion that when it concerns granting membership to states, Southeast Asia is what the ASEAN determines it is.²⁷

The question that rises to the surface is whether or not the Southeast Asian countries believe there is a reason for grouping the countries in what is considered Southeast Asia together. Do they believe that there is a common identity that is shared with the other countries? According to Jönsson, the leaders of ASEAN have had in the past, a vision to create a common identity within Southeast Asia in 2020. Their key word is create. The common identity is not there yet, it needs to be created. It is a concept that has no base in reality yet.

Southeast Asia is then to borrow Benedict Anderson's term, an 'imagined community'. According to Jönsson, this imagined community came about because of globalization. One could say that the member states of ASEAN know where the borders of Southeast Asia were because these were the borders of their imagined community.²⁸ This, however, does not explain how the region of the Southeast Asia they see as their imagined community stops at the borders that were drawn by the West. If this imagined community was created by globalization, surely there would be a discrepancy between what the West thought of as Southeast Asia and what the countries themselves considered the Southeast Asian region.

The origin of the Southeast Asian identity was the shared experiences of the elite during the Second World War. Other experiences that also contributed to the development of a shared identity was that of colonialism as well as the lack of stability in the wake of independence. But these experiences also caused a divide between the states at the same

²⁶Kristina Jönsson, pp. 50

²⁷ Rodolfo C. Severino, pp. 41-42

²⁸Kristina Jönsson, pp. 50

time. According to Roberst, the states knew more about the countries that had colonized them than the countries that had been colonized as well.²⁹

5.2. Aims and Goals of a Regional Organization

As can be read in the state of the field section of this thesis, there are two reasons ascribed to the creation of ASEAN. Most scholars believe the reason is an economic one, while others believe there is also a cultural component or that it was created to either stop the spread of Communism. In this chapter, I will look at what the ASEAN itself has stated as the reason why the organization was created. In 1997, the speech of the Indonesian foreign minister Malik that he held in front of the Gotong-Royong House of Representatives was published. During this speech, he declared the aims and the purposes of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The aims were as follows:

1. 'To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours [...] in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asia.'
2. 'To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.'
3. 'To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields.'
4. 'To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres.'
5. 'To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transport and communication facilities and the raising of the living standard of their people.'
6. 'To promote Southeast Asian Studies.'

²⁹ Roberst, Christopher, 'Region and Identity: The Many Faces of Southeast Asia', *Asian Politics & Policy*, 3.3, (2011), pp, 375

7. 'To maintain close and beneficial co-operation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer co-operation amongst ourselves.'³⁰

The same aims are listed on the site of the organization itself. The attend to stop the spread of communism is not mentioned. The aims and purposes mostly have to do with the economies and peace within the region. One could argue that by keeping the peace and ensuring stability, Malik meant combating the spread of communism but it is not stated directly, so it cannot be assumed that this was what he meant. Economic prosperity and ensuring peace may be the aims of the ASEAN in the beginning, but those aims might have changed as global politics evolved throughout the years.

Carlyle A. Thayer is a professor at the University of New South Wales. He has an MA in Southeast Asia Studies and a PhD in International Relations. In 2000, he held a seminar on the policy of constructive engagement. During this seminar, he discussed the relationship between Myanmar and the ASEAN and the process that Myanmar went through to join the regional organization. At the beginning, he discusses the developments that the organization went through when it came to what they wanted the organization to do. According to Thayer, ASEAN has gone through several stages of development. When these stages started and ended, is something that academic and ASEAN officials do not always agree on. What they do agree on was that the first stage was during the period between 1966 and 1976. In this first period, ASEAN's main purpose was to survive. But in 1976, communism spread through Indochina and this caused the ASEAN to adopt a more active aim, this aim was to help economic development. The members of the organization wanted to work closer together. They signed several documents to achieve that end. One of them was the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. The new purpose of the organization ushered in the second stage. During this period, ASEAN started to grant membership to other countries. The first to join was Brunei in 1984.³¹

In 1978, another new development took place. Vietnam invaded Cambodia. The

³⁰ ASEAN, *The association of South East Asian nations: A.S.E.A.N.*, (Department of Information Republic of Indonesia, 1997), pp. 12

³¹ Carlyle A. Thayer, 'Challenges to ASEAN's Cohesion: The Policy of Constructive Engagement and a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea', file:///I:/S/103248217-Thayer-Challenges-to-ASEAN-s-Cohesion-The-Policy-of-Constructive-Engagement-and-a-Code-of-Conduct-for-the-South-China-Sea%20(1).pdf, pp. 3

ASEAN reacted to this by adopting diplomatic responsibilities. During the next ten years, the ASEAN's main focus was on resolving this conflict.³² Thayer does not consider this period as the third stage of the ASEAN. This is something that one could criticize. As the purpose of the organization has clearly changed and this new purpose of providing diplomacy in a conflict is one the organizations has not adopted before. I think one can argue that this brief period can be considered the third stage.

What Thayer considers the third stage, started in 1992 during the Singapore summit. In this stage, economic aims once again became the main focus. The issues on the agenda of the ASEAN were trade liberalization, the idea of a free trade area and growth triangles. Stopping the advance of communism seemed to have disappeared from the same agenda when in 1995, Vietnam – a still communist country – was granted membership to the organization.

It can be assumed that the aim of the organization changed because of the end of the Cold War. With Vietnam having joined the ASEAN, a country that still has communist features, this assumption seems to be based on reality. According to Jönsson, the enlargement of ASEAN, can be viewed as an attempt to battle the influence of China as well as the attempts of the Thai to increase their influence in Southeast Asia. A third reason was the competition over natural resources. The new ASEAN members are rich in natural resources.³³

According to Thayer, during the ASEAN Ministerial meeting in 1994 July, the organization made its hope that all states in Southeast Asia one day would be a member of the ASEAN, known.³⁴ As most regional organization, the ASEAN wants the whole region to work together. While at first, it wanted to work together to stop the spread of communism or help with diplomacy to resolve conflict, it now wanted to work together so that the economies of all countries could improve by integrating them more.

In 1997, two new members were admitted to the ASEAN. One of them was Myanmar. This enlargement took place at the same time as the financial crisis. This makes one wonder if they were correlated. Thayer is not sure of the enlargements can be seen as the beginning

³² Carlyle A. Thayer, pp. 3

³³ Kristina Jönsson, pp. 44

³⁴ Carlyle A. Thayer, pp. 5

of the fourth stage.³⁵ The article by Thayer was written in 2000. Any new stages that the ASEAN went through after this year, cannot be gathered from this article.

In 2003, there was an ASEAN summit in Bali. During this summit, the further integration of Southeast Asian region was discussed. It was decided to help the progress of integration along, they needed to establish ASEAN Communities. Two of these communities were created, namely the ASEAN Security Community, and an ASEAN Social and Cultural Community. The reason why integration was important to the ASEAN members was because they wanted to be able to compete with India and China. The reason for creating the Security Community was the threat of terrorism and the negative effect this may have on the economies of the member states. Military conflicts were no longer seen as security threads. One can conclude from this that economic motives were the most important at the summit. The primary reason why these communities were created was because the member states of ASEAN wanted to have a single market in the region in which there was a free flow of goods, services, investments, capital and skilled labor. Their wish was that this would become reality by 2020.³⁶

As can be read above, the aim of the ASEAN has changed throughout the years. While in the beginning the security in the area was the top priority of the organization, it has adopted an agenda of regional development in later years. At both stages, the organization wanted to stimulate the economy but in the beginning this was considered as a means to an end rather than an end itself. Economic development was supposed to insure security within the area.

Regional integration became an aim as well, in later years. This is mostly due to the success of the European Union at the time. In the Vision 2020 that the ASEAN published in 2002, they stated that they wanted to start preparations that would make integrating the region easier.

5.3. A contested candidate

Before I am going to look at what Myanmar has done to become a member of the

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 3

³⁶ Kristina Jönsson, pp. 46

ASEAN, I will first look at the country's relationship with the regional organization before they became a part of it. The reason why they were granted membership may be explained by looking at this period.

Already in 1967, Myanmar and the ASEAN started to interact. In this year, the ASEAN had asked Myanmar if it wanted to join the organization, but its government declined. The reason for this refusal had to do with the Vietnam War. Two of the member states of the ASEAN allowed United States troops to use their military bases for the war effort. In the early '90s, the Myanmar government received critic from the Malaysian government because of the increase of refugees into Bangladesh due to Myanmar policies. When in 1992, the Philippine government proposed to grant Myanmar ASEAN observer status, the Malaysian government opposed it. A year later, Myanmar was still invited to an ASEAN summit as a guest.³⁷ A reason for this might be the economic interests of some of the ASEAN member states. Myanmar was economically open and some member states took advantage of this. In 1998, 50 percent of the Foreign Direct Investment come from ASEAN members, according to Shaun Narine.³⁸

In 1990, there were elections in the country and its government decided to ignore its results. A year later, during the annual ministerial meeting, the ASEAN adopted what Thayer calls: 'a policy of constructive engagement'. It can be assumed that he means by this that the ASEAN was not going to berate the Myanmar government for ignoring the results of the elections that took place the year before but they were going to give them advice. This advice would not be the opinion of the organization itself but of the individual ministers. In 1993, the ASEAN institutes that were responsible for studying security and International Studies, informed the ASEAN foreign ministers about the steps they needed to take if they wanted to implement a policy of constructive engagement. What these steps were, was something that opinions on differed. The reason why there was a policy of constructive engagement was needed in the first place was twofold. Both reasons had to do with Myanmar. On the one hand, there was the idea that the domestic developments in one country in Southeast Asia would influence the domestic developments in other countries in the region. On the other hand, the fear that Myanmar would grow closer ties with China, made this new policy important as well. As argued above, this fear of the growing influence

³⁷ Jürgen Haacke, 'Myanmar and ASEAN', *The Adelphi Papers*, 46. 381, (2006), pp. 41-42

³⁸ Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002): pp. 114

of China was an important motivator for the decisions that the organization made during this period.³⁹

What the Myanmar government thought of the approach of constructive engagement is something that Jürgen Haacke has researched. According to him, the advantages were threefold. Firstly, they could use it to deflect international criticism on how they were running the country. Secondly, there were economic benefits that working together with ASEAN could bring and there would be nominal interference from the member states when it concerned Myanmar's domestic politics. Thirdly, with a closer relationship with the ASEAN, they were less economically dependent on China. With the sanctions from the West, the ASEAN countries were the only other option left.⁴⁰

ASEAN has an 'informal process of dialogue and cooperation with Europe',⁴¹ that goes by the name of ASEM. Because of this, European states have influence in the region of Southeast Asia. They used this influence when the ASEAN member states were considering letting Myanmar become a member. The governments of the ASEAN member states argued that through strengthening economic ties, economic and political changes could be achieved. Therefore, it was important to let Myanmar become a member. By doing so, Myanmar would be influenced to respect human rights. And compromise was achieved between the European states and the Southeast Asian states. High-ranking Myanmar officials were barred from participating in meetings.⁴²

In 1996, the repression of the democratic movement within the country sparked a new debate on human rights in Myanmar. Not only members of the ASEAN took part in this debate but Europe and the United States did as well. This is not surprising of course as both Europe and the United States are of the opinion that it is their task to promote human rights and democracy in the whole world. Europe and the United States wanted the ASEAN to cease with its constructive engagement and to pressure Myanmar to undergo political reforms. The ASEAN was to deny Myanmar membership until its government made the desired changes within the country. During the time that this debate took place, Myanmar took formal steps to acquire membership to the ASEAN.

The first step was to attend the ASEAN Annual Ministerial Meeting in July 1996. It's

³⁹ Carlyle A. Thayer, pp. 6-7

⁴⁰ Jürgen Haacke, pp. 42-43

⁴¹ 'About the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)', Accessed on 25 Nov. 2016, <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/about>

⁴² Kristina Jönsson, pp. 53

representatives were at the meeting as observers. Though only present as observer, the meeting proceeded in Myanmar's favor. The next two steps were taken in the next three months of the same year. In August, Myanmar officially applied for ASEAN membership.⁴³ In October, it was announced that a new department would be opened within the country's Political Department of the Foreign Ministry. This new department would deal strictly with the preparations for ASEAN membership.⁴⁴

In the month that followed, the foreign ministers of the ASEAN member states gathered in New York. During this meeting, they discussed Myanmar's application and concluded that they needed to postpone the decision on whether or not Myanmar could become a member. They issued public statements in which they gave technical difficulties as the reason for postponing. Some people believed that these technical difficulties were not the real reason why Myanmar could not become a member at that point. According to them, the foreign ministers only cited this reason because they did not want the rest of the world to think of the ASEAN as either weak because they gave in because of the pressure that the United States and the European Union put them under or as an organization that did not respect the sovereignty of states.

The pressure that the United States and the European Union put the ASEAN under was not the only reason why the ASEAN member states were reluctant to give Myanmar full membership. They were also afraid that the government of Myanmar would use the ASEAN as a shield. The country was heavily criticized by the United States, the United Nations and the European Union because of its human rights violations and the ASEAN member states were afraid that Myanmar wanted to become a member so that the Western criticism would be deflected to ASEAN. If that happened, the image of the ASEAN would be tarnished.⁴⁵

At the ASEAN Standing Committee meeting, in October of 1996, the application of Myanmar was discussed. Out of this discussion no set date for Myanmar's full membership emerged. Later that month, Myanmar's membership was once again discussed. This time, the ASEAN officials discussed whether or not to push the deadline forward to 1997, instead of 2000. This suggests that they were planning to grant Myanmar membership and they even had an theoretical deadline. They discussed the technical steps that Myanmar had to

⁴³ Mya Than, *Myanmar in ASEAN: Regional Cooperation Experience*, (ISEAS Publications, 2005) : pp. 83

⁴⁴ Carlyle A. Thayer, pp. 8

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9

take in order for the state to become eligible to become a new member. They also invited Myanmar and Cambodia and Laos – who were also trying to become members of the ASEAN – to attend the informal summit that would take place in Jakarta in November.

Another summit that took place the same month was the ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting and during this meeting, Myanmar's membership was once again on the agenda. A few weeks before, on the 2nd, ASEAN Secretary General Ajit Singh arrived in Myanmar to see the preparations that the countries were making to ensure membership. He did not leave until the 9th. At the end of Sing's trip, he was of the opinion that Myanmar was advanced enough to become a member. Other signs that Myanmar was ready to join ASEAN were the fact that Myanmar had established embassies in most of the ASEAN member states, their financial records were digitalized and they had translated into English and made available the documents that concerned the laws of the country when it came to trade, investment and companies. According to Thayer, Sing also noted that Myanmar had subscribed to all the ASEAN political documents that they needed to sign before they could join ASEAN. They were also prepared to pay the money they needed to in order to become a member. And as far as a language barrier was concerned, the ASEAN member did not need to worry. All the officials who would be with and within the ASEAN could speak English well enough.⁴⁶ Myanmar had made all the necessary preparations, the ball was now in the court of the ASEAN.

On the 20th of November, there was another meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN member states and during this meeting it was decided that they would admit Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos at the same time. When this would happen, they had not decided yet. Thayer proposes that this determination of the ASEAN member states to admit Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar at the same time may be attributed to the ASEAN's wish to not been seen as an organization that could be pressured into a decision. They did not want to be perceived as giving into the pressure of the West when it came to human rights. How admitting the three countries at the same time would help against these accusations is not stated in the article. It may be that the answer is in the countries' track records when it comes to human rights. Both Myanmar and Cambodia had in the past or at the time violated human rights. By allowing two countries who had a bad reputation when it came to human rights, to join ASEAN at the same time, they could show that Human Rights – the issue that

⁴⁶ Carlyle A. Thayer pp. 10-11

the West had wanted them to take into account when deciding whether or not these countries could join the organization – were not as important to them as economic prosperity and security within the region. Another reason for admitting the three countries at the same time was that the ASEAN did not want to be forced to make a distinction between the countries that wanted to become a member based on the politics within the country. As I have discussed above, the aim of the organization has changed since its inception. While in the past, a distinction between countries based on the type of government was the *raison d'être* of the organization, at the time that Myanmar was applying for membership, the Cold War was over and the aim of the organization was now to promote economic development.⁴⁷ The economy of Myanmar itself was not the only one who would benefit from a closer relationship between Myanmar and the ASEAN. As I have discussed above, ASEAN member states were responsible for a lot of Foreign Direct Investment in the country.

The lack of importance given to human rights when it came to granting Myanmar membership resulted in both international as well as domestic backlash. Within ASEAN itself, there were also people who protested.⁴⁸

As can be seen above, Myanmar became a member of the ASEAN even though there was a lot of controversy surrounding the decision to grant Myanmar membership. Some member states wanted to postpone granting Myanmar membership for reasons concerning human rights but none of the member states promoted the idea that Myanmar should not become a member at all. During the period in which Myanmar applied for membership, the member states wanted all the countries in the Southeast Asia region to become members of the ASEAN eventually. Myanmar was a country in Southeast Asia, so it was only a question of when, not if. Though there were economic interests that may have swayed ASEAN members to grant Myanmar membership, I do believe that the fact that Myanmar is part of the Southeast Asia region was the reason why it has become a member of the organization. Another reason why the ASEAN wanted Myanmar to become a member are discussed in the book by Mya Than. According to her, the ASEAN wanted to stop China from having more influence in Southeast Asia. Myanmar already had ties to China and the ASEAN wanted to prevent China from using those ties to assert influence in Southeast Asia.

⁴⁷ Carlyle A. Thayer pp. 11

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 15-16

They believed by granting Myanmar membership to the organization, they could do this.⁴⁹ This reason is also influenced by the concept of Southeast Asia. The ASEAN is afraid of China gaining more influence in this particular region. The ASEAN was worried about the influence of China in Myanmar because that country was a part of the Southeast Asian region.

The concept of Southeast Asia is important to the ASEAN, as can be seen above. Sri Lanka is not a country in this region, so one can argue that this would make any attempt of Sri Lanka to join the ASEAN inherently unsuccessful. In the next section of the paper, I will look at whether or not this is true.

5.4.1. *Sri Lanka, an Southeast Asian State?*

As stated in the previous chapter, the concept of Southeast Asia appears to be important to the ASEAN organization. It can be assumed that this concept plays a big part in the ASEAN's decision to not grant Sri Lanka membership. Whether or not this is true, I will look at in this chapter.

I will look at the newspaper articles that were written about Sri Lanka's attempts to join ASEAN. These articles will either be published during Sri Lanka's attempts to apply for membership or during the periods after or in between.

In 2013, Sri Lanka stated that it wanted to become a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁵⁰ This desire to join the ASEAN group did not come out of the blue. Already in 1967, the year that the ASEAN was created, the government of the country voiced their desire to become a member.⁵¹ The Senior Officials were the ones that were chosen to decide on the matter by the chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee. According to Rodolfo Severino this is where the Sri Lankan bid for membership 'died a natural death'.⁵² He does not mention that this happened because Sri Lanka was not part of the Southeast Asian region but according to A. Broinowski, it was the reason behind the rejection.⁵³ This explanation will be the core hypothesis of this paper. Sri Lanka has been rejected by the ASEAN because Sri Lanka is not seen as being a part of Southeast Asia.

The relationship between Sri Lanka and the ASEAN goes back far. According

⁴⁹ Mya Than, pp. 86

⁵⁰ De Silva, Mervyn, 'Sri Lanka: Operation ASEAN', *India Today*, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/sri-lanka-expresses-wish-to-join-asean-eyebrows-raised-in-new-delhi/1/401849.html>

⁵¹ Reuter, (Apr 28, 1981), Sri Lanka: We Want To Join ASEAN, *New Straits Times*

⁵² Rodolfo C Severino, pp. 47

⁵³ A. Broinowski, *ASEAN into the 1990s*, (Macmillan, 1990): pp. 21

to C. Severino, at the time of the formation of the association, in 1967, the Sri Lankan Embassy in Thailand was instructed to ask Thai Foreign Minister if Sri Lanka could become a founding member of the organization. The Foreign Minister told them that he was going to ask the other foreign ministers if there were of the opinion that Sri Lanka could become a founding member. The same evening, the Foreign minister reported to the embassy that the member states were 'happy' to have Sri Lanka as a founding member. All that had to do is put the request on paper. Sri Lanka never did this, so a day later, the founding of ASEAN proceeded without Sri Lanka. Severino uses notes made by an diplomat in 1996 as a source for the events described above. The name of the diplomat is unknown but Severino is certain of the notes authenticity. This diplomat has an idea about where the blame for this missed opportunity lays. According to the diplomat the request was not put on paper because of the opposition of Leftish parties. These parties not only include the regional political party called the Sri Lanka Freedom Party but also China and the Soviet Union. China and the Soviet Union did not like that states in Southeast Asia were founding an regional organization. They were afraid that it would be used as a tool by the West. India was also not pleased that Sri Lanka wanted to be a member of the ASEAN. They had influence and hegemony over Sri Lanka and they were afraid that if Sri Lanka became a founding member of the ASEAN, they would have less power within the country.⁵⁴

According to a newspaper article written in 2007 by Walter Jayawardhana, the former Foreign Minister of Singapore Sinnathamby Rajaratnam was the one who prevented Sri Lanka from becoming a founding member. The article was published on the Asiantribune site. The article discusses another article that was published in the Thai newspaper The Nation. In this article an aid to the former Foreign Minister was interviewed and in this interview, he told the reporters that Rajaratnam made objections to Sri Lanka joining the ASEAN. The reason why he objected was because the domestic situation in Sri Lanka was unstable. He feared it would have negative effects on the ASEAN. According to the aid, the other member states wanted to include Sri Lanka. "It was Rajaratnam of Singapore who opposed the inclusion of Sri Lanka. [...] He argued the country's domestic situation was unstable and there would be trouble. Not good for a new organization". The reason for why the other states did want to include Sri Lanka was because, according to the aid, the country is near Southeast Asia and a Buddhist country. "Indeed, we would have welcomed Sri Lanka

⁵⁴ Rodolfo C Severino, pp. 46

as a member. If you look at the map, it's not far from Southeast Asia. It is also a Buddhist nation.” The notes of the diplomate does not mention the opposition of Singapore. One can argue that this is because the diplomate was not present during the meeting between the founding members. According to the aid, it was the fault of the former foreign minister that Sri Lanka did not become a founding member, not because Sri Lanka did not hand in their paper work in time.⁵⁵

In 1981, Sri Lanka once again tried to become a member of the ASEAN. This time, the association itself rejected the proposal. The reason why Sri Lanka wanted to become a member of the ASEAN was, according to the then prime minister Jayewardene, economical. The reason why he had to look at the ASEAN to stimulate the Sri Lankan economy was because the foreign policy of India made it impossible to work together economically with that country. He approached the prime minister of Malaysia to make his case for a ASEAN membership for Sri Lanka. The prime minister died before they could meet.⁵⁶

If one looks at the newspaper article as well as the chapter that was written by Severino, one can wonder if the fact that Sri Lanka was not part of the Southeast Asian region was really the reason why Sri Lanka was rejected in 1981. The first hypothesis that I will test in this thesis is: Sri Lanka was not granted membership of ASEAN in 1981 because it was not part of Southeast Asia. According to Severino, which states were considered to be part of Southeast Asia when it came to membership of the ASEAN, was up to the organization itself.⁵⁷ According to S. R. Nathan –former president of Singapore – Indonesia considered Southeast Asia as being in between India and Pakistan and China.⁵⁸ Every country that was part of the region could become a member as long as they subscribes to the aims, principles and purposes of the organization. The theory that the answer to the question which countries are part of Southeast Asia and therefore can become a member of the ASEAN, is up to the organization itself, might explain why it was not adverse in 1967 to Sri Lanka becoming a founding member. So why then was it determined in 1981, that Sri Lanka could not become an ASEAN member? Maybe they had reservations about granting Sri Lanka membership because its government had at the last minute rejected the invitation to

⁵⁵ Walter Jayawardhana, ‘Singapore’s Rajaratnam prevented Sri Lanka joining ASEAN – The Nation’, *Asian Tribune*, <http://asiantribune.com/node/6856>

⁵⁶ K.M. de Silva, *Regional Powers and Small State Security: India and Sri Lanka, 1977-1990*, pp. 64

⁵⁷ Rodolfo C Severino, pp. 42

⁵⁸ S. R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency*, (Editions Didier Millet) Chapter 5, pp. 56

join the organization after they had asked for it themselves. Or maybe the domestic situation was just as unstable in 1981 as it has been in 1967.

The second hypothesis that I will test is that Sri Lanka was seen as being too unstable and conflict-ridden and that it was rejected because of this. I will look at the domestic situation in Sri Lanka in 1967 as well as 1981, to see if this instability was a contributing factor in the rejection of Sri Lanka. To put it in perspective, I will also look at the domestic stability in Myanmar when the country was granted membership of the ASEAN.

After Sri Lanka had gained independence in 1948, one of the two ethnic groups in the country gained the upper hand. According to a newspaper article that was published on the *International Policy Digest* on the 1st of June 2010, the Sinhalese majority marginalized the Tamil minority. They did this by denying the Tamil minority jobs and basic education. This caused tension between the two ethnic groups. This animosity only got worse when Buddhism was declared to be the national religion. The Tamils are primarily Hindu. There are also Christians and Muslims who live on the island. The reason for the hostility towards Tamils can be traced back to the colonial period according to the newspaper article. The Sinhalese minority perceived preferential treatment of the Tamil minority by the British. The Tamils were seen as collaborators. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was an organization that wanted to create a separate homeland for the Tamils. To achieve this end, they used acts of violence. Some of them were successful. In 1991, they assassinated the former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi. He was not the only one who became the victim of the Tamil Tigers. Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, Member of Parliament Neelan Thiruchelvam, Industry Minister C.V. Goonaratne, Highway Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, Nation-Building Minister D. M. Dassanayake, and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar were killed as well and an attempt was made to kill Chandrika Kumaratunga too. The newspaper claims that 70,000 Sri Lankans were killed since 1983 up until 2009, when the war against the Tamil Tigers was declared over.⁵⁹

I was unable to find reports about riots in the year 1967 in Sri Lanka. There were riots in the country during the fifties. In 1956, there were riots in the Eastern Province. This was the first reported outbreak of ethnic violence in the country. 150 people were killed. The violence was repressed quickly, according to a newspaper article published in the *Sunday*

⁵⁹ John Lyman, 'Statelessness in the Aftermath of the Sri Lankan Civil War', *International Policy Digest*, 2010, <https://intpolicydigest.org/2010/06/01/statelessness-in-the-aftermath-of-the-sri-lankan-civil-war/>

Times in 2005. But, according to the newspaper article, the unrest remained 'severe' in the Eastern Province due to inadequate police resources. The article states that this led to the collapse of government authority. The army was sent to the province to stop the violence from spreading. Once again, in 1958, riots broke out. This time, it was ethnically motivated too. The army spread out over the whole island to contain the violence. There were still 300 people who died. Even though there were no riots in 1967, there had been in the past and as the domestic situation when it came to politics had not changed, the former Foreign Minister of Singapore might have indeed seen Sri Lanka as instable and a danger to the ASEAN.⁶⁰

Might the same reason lie behind ASEAN's refusal to grant Sri Lanka membership in 1981? There was an attack on a library in Jaffna that year. The attack was described in an article that was published on June 01, 2016 on the Swarajya magazine website. At the time of the attack, there were elections. Tamils hoped that after the elections, they would have more representation. According to the article, the Sinhalese UNP party did not want this. They wanted to control the results of the election. Police, paramilitaries and thugs were sent to intimidate Tamil voters. On the 13th of May, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) held a rally. During this rally, three Sinhalese policemen were shot at. Two of them died. The Sinhalese police retaliated the night that followed. The pogrom lasted for three days. The Tamil United Liberation Front headquarters was burned. The offices and press of the Tamil language newspaper met the same fate. Statues of Tamil cultural and religious figures were attacked as well. An Hindu temple was looted as were over one hundred Tamil-owned shops and houses. Four Tamils were taken from their houses and they were killed. During the first night, uniformed police and Sinhalese gang members set fire to the Jaffna Public Library, according to witnesses. Two Sinhalese Cabinet members saw the library burn and while they watched they claimed, according to the newspaper article, that the burning of the library was the result of a drunken looting spree of a couple of police men. According to them, the police men had decided on their own to go on the looting spree. The violence that was perpetrated by the police during the three day long pogrom was not reported by the national newspapers. There followed a parliamentary discussion during which Sinhalese

⁶⁰'An evolving army and its role through time' *Sunday Times*, 2005, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/051016/plus/4.html>

politicians did not show remorse. They even used it to promote the idea that if the Tamils were not happy about the situation in Sri Lanka, they should go home to India.⁶¹

The domestic situation was still unstable in Sri Lanka when they applied for membership of ASEAN for a second time. The same year they applied, riots had erupted that had resulted in a library being set ablaze. Whether or not this happened after or before the ASEAN decided on granting Sri Lanka membership is not clear. The riots broke out on the 13th of May but on which date or even during which month the ASEAN members made the decision is unclear. It is clear from the Reuter article that Sri Lanka applied for membership in the month of April but between applying for membership and becoming a member is a long stretch of time, so these riots happened after Sri Lanka applied for membership but that could have taken place before the ASEAN had decided on whether or not Sri Lanka could become a member.

The domestic situation in Sri Lanka was instable, as can be read above but how was the domestic situation in Myanmar when it applied for membership of the ASEAN? Like Sri Lanka, as soon as Myanmar gained independence, violence broke out. A civil war broke out between the new government and different ethnic minorities and communist movements. This civil war resulted in the military running the country. In 1990, seven years before Myanmar become an ASEAN member elections were held and the military did not win these elections. They reacted to this by prevent the leader of the other party, to take office. There was a widespread crackdown on political opposition within the country. The leaders of the opposition were either arrested or exiled.⁶² Lee Morgenbesser considers Myanmar during this period stable. A few years into the nineties, the government established a National Convention. This organization was supposed to draft a new constitution that would guarantee that the military would still have an important role in political affairs. The government did this to legitimize itself to its own citizens. Internationally, the government legitimized itself by joining ASEAN, according to Morgenbesser.⁶³ Myanmar was considered stable while Sri Lanka most likely was not. There is a change that this might have influenced

⁶¹Swarajya Staff, 'Remembering The Jaffna Public Library Destroyed By Sinhalese Extremists', *Swarajya Magazin*, 2016, <http://swarajyamag.com/world/remembering-the-jaffna-public-library-destroyed-by-sinhalese-extremists>

⁶² Lee Morgenbesser, *Behind the Facade : Elections Under Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia*, (Sunupress, 2016): pp. 85

⁶³ Morgenbesser, pp. 108

the decision of the ASEAN on whether or not Sri Lanka could become a member of the organization.

Another explanation might be that the ASEAN did not want to anger India by granting Sri Lanka membership. India might have feared that their influence in Sri Lanka would diminish. The third hypothesis that I will test is whether or not the ASEAN refused to grant Sri Lanka membership because Sri Lankan membership was seen as potentially being damaging to ASEAN because it might offend other non-ASEAN countries, in the first place India.

Before I look at if the fear of a bad relationship with India might have been the reason why the ASEAN granted Sri Lanka membership, I want to look whether or not the reason why Sri Lanka wanted to become a member could be because it wanted to escape from India's influence. Before the ASEAN was officially created, India declared they wanted to become a member of the association if the member states wanted them in the organization.⁶⁴ If India announced their willingness to become a member of the organization, it seems reasonable to assume that Sri Lanka did not want to join the ASEAN in 1967 to escape the influence of India. But one could argue that if both states were members, this meant with the non-interference policy, that the influence of India in Sri Lanka would decrease. The economical reason that the Sri Lankan former prime minister gave for the application for ASEAN membership may have only been one of them.

If Sri Lanka did not want to become a member of the ASEAN because it wanted to decrease the influence of India in the country, this does not mean that India was not afraid that an Sri Lankan ASEAN membership would erode their power in the region. And India may have put pressure on the ASEAN to not accept Sri Lanka as a member in the hope to stop this from happening. Before Sri Lanka applied for membership of the ASEAN in April of 1981, there had been talks between all the South Asian foreign secretaries in February of this year to create a regional organization in South Asia. Bangladesh was the country that proposed to create this organization. They hoped that it would boost development in the country. The talks took place in Sri Lanka. Another meeting took place at the capitol of Sri Lanka in April of the same year. India was also represented at the meeting, even though its government was apprehensive about the idea of working together with the other countries in a regional organization at first but at the end of the meeting, agreements had been made that were'

⁶⁴ Nicholas Tarling, *Southeast Asia and the Great Powers*, pp. 39

mutual acceptable to all parties.’ If Sri Lanka had been accepted into ASEAN, this might have affected the agreements that were reached in the SAARC talks. It might have been an incentive for India to put pressure on the ASEAN.⁶⁵

Now that I have talked the possible reason why the ASEAN refused to grant Sri Lanka membership, I will now look at how the organization itself has approached Sri Lanka and the attempts of the country to join the organization. In the book written by S.R. Nathan, he describes the meeting between the founding member states in 1967. According to him, the founding member states were willing to hear from delegates from Sri Lanka why their government believed that it would benefit all countries that were represented in the room, to allow Sri Lanka to become a member of the ASEAN. But these delegates never showed up. Sri Lanka’s former high commissioner to Singapore Gunasingham divulged in later years why Sri Lankan delegates had not been present during the meeting in 1967. According to Nathan, Gunasingham blamed the pressure that was put in the Sri Lankan government by Leftist groups inside and outside the country. India put pressure on the Sri Lanka government. Sri Lanka wanted to escape from India’s influence by joining the ASEAN and India was not pleased.⁶⁶ So, there appears to be an argument for India putting pressure where needed to stop Sri Lanka from becoming a full-fledged member of the ASEAN. In 1967, they put pressure on Sri Lanka, they may have put pressure on the ASEAN in 1981.

Could it be that the ASEAN was indeed unwilling to risk India’s disapproval? The ASEAN asked Sri Lanka in 1981 if it would support its viewpoints on Kampuchea, Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war during a summit in New Delhi. Their opponent was India. In this instance, the ASEAN was not afraid of angering India by working together with Sri Lanka.⁶⁷ One could argue this was only a discussion and that the consequences of working together economically will be greater than those of working together during a summit.

6. Conclusion

The origin of the term Southeast Asia can be traced back to the Second World War. The American troops needed a name for the region that was occupied by the Japanese. Some scholars trace the origin further back, namely the 19th century. It was used by an

⁶⁵ Lawrence Saez, *The South Asian Association For Regional Cooperation (SAARC): An Emerging Collaboration Architecture*, (Routledge, 2011): pp. 12-14

⁶⁶ S. R. Nathan, pp. 62

⁶⁷ K.M. de Silva, pp. 65

American priest. The term was not used by scholars up until the 1920s. The reason why they started using the term was because they needed a name for the region that was situated between China, Japan and India, but which was cultural different from these three large countries. The term Southeast Asia was important to the politicians within the region itself. They wanted to create a shared identity. They also created an organization that has the term in its name. Where the boundaries are of the region that falls under this concept some scholars argue depends on where the ASEAN puts these boundaries. This shows that the concept of Southeast Asia is still important.

The reasons why the Association of South East Asian Nations was created were varied, according to scholars. In the speech that was given by the Indonesian Foreign Minister, he declared that the aims of the organization were to provide economic growth and security within the region. The fight against communism, that has been escribed to have prompted the creation of the ASEAN is not mentioned in the speech. The aim of the Association of South East Asian Nations, has changed throughout the years. When at first, according to some scholars, the organization was created so that the states in the region could fight the spread of communism in the region, the economic aims have become their main focus after the Cold War ended. The organization is no longer concerned with stopping the spread of communism, instead it now wants to ensure overall stability in the region. If fighting the spread of communism was not the aim of the organization, one can wonder if the aim of the organization has changed through the years. The answer is yes. One of the aims of the ASEAN in later years was to stop China from gaining more influence in the region. In later years, regional integration has also become a focus of the ASEAN. This was due to the success at the start of the European Union. What kind of governments that run the member states, is no longer as important. The ASEAN is more concerned with preventing conflicts through economic integration and stopping the influence of China in the Southeast Asian region. The fear of China gaining a foothold in Southeast Asia is not because of the country's communist background. Vietnam has a communist background as well and this country is a member of the organization. The fear of China probably has to do with a big country having influences on smaller countries. The non-intervention, an important ideal of the organization, though criticized from time to time by the member states of the organization itself, is still being upheld.

The concept of Southeast Asia is important to the ASEAN. The term, according to

some scholars coined during the Second World War, has influenced decision as well as dreams of the member states of the ASEAN. During the period that Myanmar applied for membership of the organizations, some of the politicians of the countries that were already a member declared that they wanted all the countries in the region to join the organization.

Myanmar, a country that is part of the Southeast Asia region but with a bad reputation when it comes to human rights, was granted membership in 1997. There was opposition when it came to the date that Myanmar could become an ASEAN member, but almost nobody – NGO, political party or scholar – was of the opinion that Myanmar should not become a member in the first place. The arguments they used for why Myanmar's membership should be postpone had to do with whether or not Myanmar was ready to become a member of the ASEAN or the negative effect that granting membership to a country that had a bad reputation when it came to human rights can have on the global reputation of the ASEAN. Myanmar ended up joining the ASEAN in 1997.

Sri Lanka, not a country situated in the region of Southeast Asia, was denied membership in 1981. There was no reason given as to why but an easy assumption is that the country was rejected because it was not a part of the Southeast Asian region. This, however, did not stop the ASEAN from agreeing to Sri Lanka becoming a founding member in 1967. Sri Lanka has informed the organization that it wanted to become a founding member and the organization had told the Sri Lankan embassy that they could. But because they did not hand in their paper work in time, the ASEAN member states created the ASEAN without Sri Lanka. Another sources suggests another reason for why Sri Lanka has not become a founding member of ASEAN. According to an newspaper article on the site of the Asian Tribute, the reason why Sri Lanka as not present during the founding of the ASEAN was because the foreign minister of Singapore had voiced a negative opinion on the inclusion of Sri Lanka. He was afraid that the unstable domestic situation would have a negative influence on the ASEAN. Because it was such a young organization it would not be able to handle the problems that allowing Sri Lanka to become a founding member would bring. The situation in Sri Lanka was instable at the time. There was a civil war raging in which two ethnic groups were pitted against each other. When Sri Lanka, once again, tried to join the ASEAN, the domestic situation had not improved. Myanmar, though not democratic was considered stable in 1997, when its government applied for ASEAN membership. The reason that was given for why Sri Lanka wanted to join the ASEAN was because it wanted

economical benefits from working together with other countries and because of India's foreign policy, Sri Lanka could not work together with that country. Another reason, thought it had not been given by the former prime minister, might have been that Sri Lanka wanted to escape India's influence. The reason why Sri Lanka was not granted membership to the ASEAN that was given was that the country was not a part of Southeast Asia but I believe that a case can be made that the domestic situation in Sri Lanka has also played a part in the decision. As can be seen in this thesis, the domestic situation in Sri Lanka in 1981 was not stable. If they granted Sri Lanka membership, it would pose a lot of risks that I believe the ASEAN was not willing to take. The organization might have been willing to reconsider the size of the region that falls under the concept of Southeast Asia if Sri Lanka had been more stable. Almost all scholars do not believe that there are commonalities that bind the countries within the region together. Because of this, which country is situated within the Southeast Asian region is not clear. The ASEAN could say that Sri Lanka is part of Southeast Asia and there would be no prove to the contrary. As stated in this thesis, Sri Lanka has cultural characteristics that can also be found in Southeast Asian nations. India might in 1981 have put pressure on ASEAN not to accept Sri Lanka as a member but I could not find any evidence for this. I could not find any proof either of the ASEAN being persuaded to reject Sri Lanka because they did not want to make India angry.

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