



ASEAN, a multicultural kaleidoscope

IACCM 2013

Marie-Therese Claes Ph.D.

Louvain School of management

[ASEAN]

- Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- 1967 Founding Members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand
- 1984 Brunei Darussalam
- 1995 Vietnam, Lao PDR,
- 1997 Myanmar (Burma)
- 1999 Cambodia
- Future : East Timor

[ASEAN]

- “One Vision, One Identity, One Community”
- Promote
 - Regional economic growth,
 - Political stability
 - Social progress
 - Cultural developments

ASEAN 10 Member States



[Vast area]

- Over 4.5 million square kilometers
 - Indochina Peninsula
 - Malay Peninsula
 - Indonesian Archipelago
 - Philippine Archipelago
- More than 600 million people
- In the past:
 - Further India
 - The East Indies
 - Indo-China
 - The Malay Peninsula
- After World War II: Southeast Asia

Economic growth

- More developed regions:
 - Indonesia,
 - Malaysia
 - The Philippines
 - Singapore
 - Thailand
- Vietnam: recent economic boom
- Lagging : Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, East Timor

[Resources]

- Rice, coffee, rubber, tea, spices, coconuts
- Variety of minerals:
 - Most of world's tin
 - Oil and gas

[Population]

- Highest density in lowland areas
- Majority live in small agrarian villages
- Mega cities:
 - Jakarta,
 - Bangkok,
 - Singapore,
 - Manila,
 - Ho Chi Minh City

[Diverse region]

- Variation in terms of geography,
- population,
- languages,
- political and economic structure,
- Within each country, different ethnic groups, cultures and religions coexist.

Singapore, a multicultural kaleidoscope

- **Population:** 5.3 million, of which 4.8 are residents
 - ethnic Chinese 74.2%
 - the country's original inhabitants – the Malays 13.4%
 - Indians 9.2%
 - Eurasians, Peranakans (descendants of late 15th and 16th-century Chinese immigrants) and others 3.2%
- **Expatriates:**
 - 20% of them are non-resident blue collar workers from the Philippines, Indonesia and Bangladesh,
 - the rest include white collar workers coming from countries as diverse as North America, Australia, Europe, China and India.
- **Languages:**
 - one representative language for each of the four major ethnic groups, four official languages, English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil,
 - but in recognition of the status of the Malay people as the indigenous community in Singapore, the national language of the country is Bahasa Melayu, or the Malay Language.

Myanmar (Burma)



- **The Union of *Myanmar*** is made up of 135 national races, of which the main national races are Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Bamar, Mon, Rakhine and Shan.
- **Conflict in Kachin**
 - 800,000 Rohingya live in Myanmar.
 - According to the UN, they are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.

Cultural differences and similarities

- cultural differences and their origins in the region
- is there such a thing as an ASEAN culture that bounds these countries and makes them different from other Asian countries such as China or India?

[Population diversity]

- Ethnic composition, religion, history, culture
- Language families:
 - Tibeto-Burman,
 - Mon-Khmer
 - Malayo-Polynesian

[Diversity in beliefs]

- Animism
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Confucianism
- Islam
- Christianity

Thai Spirit Houses



Importance of religions and beliefs

- The many religions and philosophies have been adapted by local peoples to their local cultures
- Ideas and rituals have been added, integrated into existing ones, and mostly live side by side.
- In western eyes, this way of integrating the new into the old may seem contradictory or confusing at times
 - the use of fortune tellers and 'auspicious times' to start or to manage a business,
 - or the multiplicity of systems existing at the same time.
- Spirituality is seen as integral part of life and work:
 - compassion and humaneness are seen as a crucial value.

Mighty Neighbours



Historical Influences

- Trade route between China and India
 - Sanskrit language
 - Hindu-Buddhist cults
 - Confucianism
- Muslim settlements in India
- European colonisation:
 - Labour demand, mass immigration
 - State bureaucracy, courts of law, printed media...

[WWII]

- Battles between Japan and India
- Independent nations:
 - Political turmoil
 - Weak economies
 - Ethnic strife
 - Social inequities
- 1960s-1970s: Communist vs non-Communist factions

Mistrust of China but APT and APS

- Mistrust
 - Chinese imperial court's treatment of vassal states
 - Maoist China's support of communists
 - Territorial claims
- ASEAN Plus Three for economic coordination: China, South Korea, Japan
- ASEAN Plus Six: India, Australia, New Zealand

Ethnic Chinese in SE Asia

- Today mostly descendants of 19th c. migrants
 - Singapore - 80%
 - Malaysia - 26%
 - Thailand - 10%
 - Indonesia - 3%
 - Philippines - 2%
- Region's business class:
 - 80% companies in Thailand & Singapore
 - 62% in Malaysia
 - 50% in the Philippines

[Ethnic Chinese in SE Asia]

- Discrimination in Indonesia and Malaysia
 - Racial quota at universities
 - Discrimination in rights in land ownership and business
- Integration in Thailand and the Philippines
 - Cory Aquino and the King of Thailand have Chinese blood
 - In Thailand they must adopt local names to get citizenship

[ASEAN and AEC]

- 2015 will see a region that will be economically integrated into the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community), with free movement of goods and services, as well as free movement of capital and talents among the ten member states.

[Objectives of the AEC]

- to create a single market and production base,
- a highly competitive economic region,
- a region of equitable economic development,
- a region fully integrated into the global economy.

[Different economies]

- A distinctive feature of Malaysia's economy is the fact that Islamic banking and financial services have been fully integrated into the country's existing financial system.
- Malaysia has one of the most developed, interest free, financial systems in the world including an Islamic debt securities market, an Islamic equity market and an Islamic inter-bank money market.

ASEAN “One Vision, One Identity, One Community” ?



Southeast Asian Values

- Village culture:
 - strong collective spirit
 - strong relationships
- One's place= one's duties, responsibilities, obligations
- “Know your place and adapt to it”
- “*My name is Ali, I am son number one*”.

[Importance of the group]

- Security in return for loyalty
- Fitting in harmoniously
- Avoiding losing the other's face
 - Indirect speech
 - Preference for win-win situation
- Gratitude: favours are never forgotten
- Reciprocal obligations: loyalty

[Vietnamese in Multinational]

Vietnamese and expatriates are not only different in working styles, they are also different in handling and identifying problems in the office.

For example, Westerners always express their opinions and expectations directly and frankly while Vietnamese do not really want to say anything that might hurt employees or colleagues.

And the Westerners never believe in rumor of conflict until they receive a report from supervisors that mentions the problem in the workplace.

In contrast, Vietnamese employees very often do not make a report to their managers if they have not been asked to.

[Respect for authority]

- Children obey parents' orders
- Clear superior-subordinate relationship
 - Benevolent attitude
 - Teachers should be generous: taking into accounts students' efforts
- Comfortable with hierarchy
 - Clear structure and hierarchy
 - Formalized, procedures

[Vietnamese in Multinational]

There is a great invisible wall between foreign managers and Vietnamese managers as well as staff.

The Vietnamese managers always care about their own power, they require employees to ask them for permission to do every small job.

Thus, their staff have to do two jobs at the same time: work hard and guess what the manager is thinking and feeling.

Moreover, the Vietnamese manager sometimes asks staff to do her own personal things in working hours.

[Tips for expats]

- Be sensitive to the importance of attending to family-related needs that may arise during business hours.
- Take care of the team:
 - Take responsibility for mistakes
 - Also when personal problems arise
- Offering training and professional development is important as a means to reward good employees.

[Vietnamese in Multinational]

Westerners always separate work and relaxation. They treat the workplace as a serious area.

On the other hand, Vietnamese like to keep a workplace comfortable as if at home.

Sharing personal things in the office and strengthening relationships are the ways Vietnamese employees enjoy working.

[New generation]

- Especially in larger and international companies, there is a new generation of young qualified workers.
- Some of them educated abroad, in the United States, Great Britain or Australia,
- and value money and knowledge more than traditional values of seniority, and absence of mobility between hierarchical levels are changing.

[Common Culture (Tommy Koh 2012)]

- A Southeast Asian civilization “different from China, from India, and not wholly derivative”.
- Common culture of consensus, a culture of tolerance and forgiveness which the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans don't have.

[An anecdote]

- An anecdote told by a former Thai permanent secretary of foreign affairs on the punishment meted out to a group of young army soldiers behind an attempted coup in 2008.
- After a period of repentance, there was a parade to welcome them back into the Thai army.
- Witnessing this, the South Korean ambassador asked the permanent secretary why it was so. "In Korea, these people would be court-martialled and shot," the ambassador said.
- The Thai looked at him and said, 'My dear friend, that is the difference between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia'.

[An anecdote: He added...]

- "Although I'm not sure that would be true in Singapore. In Singapore, they would probably be court-martialed and shot."

THANK YOU

