CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Southeast Asia as we know it today contains a diversity of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and government systems. It was the West that created and delineated the region as a single unit. The term ‘Southeast Asia’ was born and has been used since the 1820s and commonly referenced in British newspapers and magazines from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. It is not surprising then that the British government applied the term to the military organisation, South East Asia Command (SEAC), which was formed in 1943. The term was neither a brand new one nor an original one at the time. Although the term has long been used, the conception was not fixed nor clearly made at least by the 1960s.

Originally denoting the region located between China and India, the current region of Southeast Asia used to be regarded as consisting of two separate areas, namely ‘Further India’ referring to the mainland areas and the ‘Indian Archipelago’ or ‘Malay Archipelago’ for the maritime areas. These terms disappeared after the Second World War, and instead, the writers combined the two areas into a single region, employing the term ‘Southeast Asia’ since then.

The adjacent countries of the region such as India, China, and Japan continued with their own regional terms that had been in use since ancient times. In particular, China and Japan used the terms ‘Nanyang’ and ‘Nanyo’ respectively until prior to the Second World War. However, with the widespread use of the term ‘Southeast Asia’ in English, most countries subsequently adopted their translated terms from English. Thus, the term ‘Southeast Asia’ in various linguistic translations became the accepted term for the region, transcending different languages. Thus, the region of Southeast Asia is essentially a constructed framework outlined by outsiders.
Although it is easy to construct and delineate a region from the outside, a region will not be ‘created’ and constructed unless insiders of the region accept and agree to the concept. This thesis shows when and how local politicians and intellectuals in the four countries, i.e., Siam/Thailand, the Philippines, Malaya/Malaysia and Indonesia, were aware of a region they belong to, and that they in each country had different senses of consciousness and conceptions.

In the case of Thailand, the regional term ‘Southeast Asia’ was brought to its attention earlier than in other countries of the region. When a U.S. special envoy who cited ‘South East Asia’ requested an audience with King Rama III in 1850, it was the first time that the Thai royal officials encountered the term. Since Rama IV (King Mongkut) and his successors were knowledgeable in English, they would have been versed with some of regional terms conveyed in this foreign language, and could follow various Western concepts espoused during the colonial era.

However, the Siam court prior to the Second World War seldom used the term. King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn, his brother, Prince Damrong and King Vajiravudh would have recognised the term ‘Southeast Asia’ through their reading of English newspapers published in Bangkok and Singapore and in books written in English. Nevertheless, the term did not appear in a large number of palace documents that were written in English. Instead, the palace preferred terms such as ‘Asia,’ ‘East Asia,’ the ‘East,’ the ‘Far East’ and so forth. King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn were committed to a national transformation towards modernisation along Western lines in order to maintain its independence in the colonial era. For this reason, the Siam court followed the Western regional concept in the international politics. During the reign of King Vajiravudh, Siam conformed to Western ways of international diplomacy, including the adoption of regional terms and concepts used by Western writers under the League of Nations as an independent country. Even after the Constitutional Revolution
in 1932, following the abandonment of the absolute monarchy, the country’s foreign policy and a sense of regional consciousness among the military elites remained unchanged. Further, the lack of use of the term and regional consciousness was due partly to the historical conflicts with Burma and Vietnam and due partly to the religious and linguistic differences in the archipelago.

At the beginning of the 1940s, the Thai government acceded to an alliance with Japan. Thailand was subsequently subsumed into what Japan called ‘Greater East Asia’ and the ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.’ From this juncture, the Thai government put aside the regional terms used by the West, and deferred to the temporal ruler of the Asian region. To the Thai king and the military elite, maintaining national independence was of utmost importance. However, after the end of the world war, Thailand felt that it should keep in step with the ways of the victorious West. The Thai elites adopted the term ‘Southeast Asia’ into common use when they initiated early moves at regional co-operation, and the Thai people then came to recognise Southeast Asia as a geographical entity on the map.

In the case of the Philippines, the nationalists before the Second World War had no Southeast Asian consciousness, but Malay-stock regional consciousness. For example, Jose Rizal, who understood several languages including English and French, was presumably aware of the term ‘Southeast Asia’ through books or magazines published in the West, but there is no evidence for this. Instead, he and other nationalists adopted Malay consciousness and became aware of the ‘regional’ consciousness. It was mainly because geographically and religiously the Philippines was isolated from the Malay archipelago. Further, there was no shared history with the Malay archipelago at the time. By unifying with the Malay people in the entire archipelago, nationalists pursued liberty and liberation from the colonial powers. While Filipino identity constituted the core in pursuit of independence after the Philippines Revolution, some of the nationalists
continued to pursue the unification of Malay people and a single nation, which was converted from the Malay-stock region.

Even as a segment of the Philippine populace pursued their Malay identity, they hardly felt an affinity with the people in mainland Southeast Asia prior to the Second World War. This can be attributed to differences in culture, language, and religion. However, after the war, regional awareness of Southeast Asia gradually strengthened. The Philippine government held the Baguio conference for the purpose of countering communist attacks in 1950, but that ended in failure. Nonetheless, the conference contributed to the deepening of Southeast Asian consciousness to a certain degree, partly because it was the first meeting to be conducted in Southeast Asia and at least attempted to make co-operation with the immediate neighbouring countries. Further, a direct impact on Southeast Asian consciousness to the Philippines was the military alliance, SEATO, which was, strictly speaking, not a regional organisation, even though the alliance focused mainly on the region to counter communism terrorism. The Philippines was not active in indigenous regional co-operation within Southeast Asia before the formation of ASA in 1961. It was only with the subsequent failure of ASA and MAPHILINDO that the government began focusing on regional co-operation and, at the same time, building a regional identity within Southeast Asia.

Although many terms for Southeast Asia were coined by Westerners, such as the Malay archipelago, the Indian archipelago, Farther India, Malaysia (as a regional term) and so forth, Malays in the Malay Peninsula had their own spatial terms. Among them were ‘di bawah angin,’ ‘di atas angin’ and ‘Jawi.’ Although there had been spatial consciousness for centuries, at least by the nineteenth century, with the acknowledgement of Western superiority in military might and technology, local intellectuals in the Peninsula took to adopting regional terms created by the British since
the beginning of the twentieth century. One of these terms was ‘Alam Melayu’ (Malay World).

Originally the definition of the term was synonymous with ‘Malay Archipelago’ when R. O. Winstedt referred to ‘Alam Melayu’ (Malay World) in his book for the first time. However, Za’ba re-defined the term that drew on strong connotations with Malays, who were devoted to Islam and spoke the Malay language. This meant that the largely Christian Philippines was excluded from this grouping, such was the regional consciousness among the locals in the twentieth century.

When nationalism emerged in the Peninsula, Malay leftists such as Ibrahim Yaacob aimed to transform the spatial concept of the Malay World into the concept of a single nation-state – Melayu Raya. The concept of combining with Indonesia was to revive the glorious heritage of Sri Vijaya for a common unity of the bangsa. For the leftists, the concept included the Philippines, which were excluded by other intellectuals. Although the president of Indonesia, Sukarno, declared the formation of Indonesia without Malaya immediately after the end of the Second World War, some nationalists still pursued the concept by the 1960s.

On the other hand, UMNO and other alliance parties pursued independence in the 1950s and they gained popularity through local elections. This moment was a watershed for Malays to change their regional consciousness from the Malay World to Southeast Asia. The parties rejected the concept of Melayu Raya, though nationalists such as Dato Onn accepted it at its very early stages. UMNO rejected the concept mainly because of national security. As other countries faced a serious armed threat by local communists, the Federation of Malaya also had the same internal problems. Since Malaya is geographically adjacent to the borders of Thailand, the newly independent country has come to accept the regional concept of Southeast Asia, combining both the maritime part with the mainland. This is the reason the leader of UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman
together with the representative of Chinese, Tan Cheng Lock proposed a ‘Southeast Asian Union’ in 1954. Thus, although regional consciousness among Malays had concentrated on the archipelago prior to the world war, a consciousness of Southeast Asia emerged after the war from a point of view of national security. When the Tunku proposed regional co-operation with Southeast Asian countries in 1954, the regional consciousness of Southeast Asia among the elites was sealed.

In the case of Indonesia, people also had spatial terms for centuries such as ‘di bawah angin,’ ‘di atas angin’ and ‘Jawi,’ as the people in the Malay Peninsula were aware. Additionally, the archipelagic locals used the term ‘Nusantara.’ Although the terms were their traditional spatial terms, Indonesia, was only coined by the British in the middle of the nineteenth century. While the scope of the term was wide, encompassing Taiwan, the Philippines and New Guinea in the early years, a Dutch scholar applied the term to refer only to the Dutch colonial area at the end of the nineteenth century. With the development of nationalism, local nationalists employed this regional term for their nation-state.

With the independence in 1945, the territory of Indonesia became based on the former Dutch colonial territory, but Sukarno and Muhammad Yamin also pursued the inclusion of the Philippines and Malaya in a greater area called *Indonesia Raya*. *Indonesia Raya* was based on the traditional and spatial concept of *Nusantara*. However, the nationalists gave up on merging them into Indonesia because the former was already independent and the latter was to avoid fighting against other colonial power, the British. Thus, in this period between the 1920s and independence (1945), local politicians saw Indonesia as a space between a region and a nation because the area was still colonised and has not achieved independence.

Indonesian nationalists, who studied in the Netherlands and other European countries such as Mohammad Hatta and Sutan Sjahrir, were aware of the regional term
‘Southeast Asia’ prior to the Second World War. Sukarno also was aware of the term, but the president of Indonesia was not interested in co-operation within a small region. Further, he seldom used the term ‘Southeast Asia,’ and when he did, only in a negative context especially in his speeches on Independence Day.

Instead of Southeast Asia, Sukarno was keener on Pan-Asianism. Asia as a region was significant to the Indonesian independence movement because Indonesian nationalism had emerged from the harsh control of the suppressive colonial Dutch. This movement presented Indonesia with the opportunity to co-operate with other leaders of Asian countries that had been similarly under the rule of colonial powers prior to the Second World War. Sukarno’s advocacy of the concept of Pan-Asianism reflected the sentiments of the time. Asian sentiments greatly impacted the foreign policy of Indonesia after its independence, and at the same time contributed to strengthening the nationalists’ regional consciousness, especially Sukarno. Based on a Pan-Asian regional sentiment, Sukarno pursued cooperation with Asian countries. The culmination was the Asia-African Conference in 1955.

Afterwards, Sukarno pursued the formation of a political bloc/region with communist and communist-leaning countries following the souring of relations with India subsequent to his policy of Confrontation with Malaysia, but the attempt ended in failure with the coup d’etat in 1965. With the downfall of the president, the Indonesian government took a pragmatic line to shift and commit itself to closer regional cooperation. Indonesia’s reaching out to Southeast Asian countries was a key step that led to the subsequent formation of ASEAN.

After the Second World War, politicians and intellectuals in the four countries which achieved or pursued independence, deepened the sense of regional consciousness through regional co-operation between the end of the Second World War and 1967, in particular co-operation in the social and cultural fields. This laid the foundation for future
political co-operation.

The term ‘Southeast Asia’ had become a politically-connotative reference through its association with regional organisations such as SEAC during the Second World War and SEATO in 1954. Thus, naturally, ‘Southeast Asia’ had taken on a political image that people could be familiar and come to terms with. In the period between the end of the war and the 1950s, various forms of political and regional co-operation were put forward by Burma, Thailand and Vietnam, but all were in vain. Such ventures faced immense hurdles partly because of the Vietnam War that stretched into the 1970s. This made the involvement of political ideology unavoidable and divided countries into groups that were pro-Communism, anti-Communism, or neutral.

On the other hand, the formation and activities of various social and cultural regional organisations gave the term ‘Southeast Asia’ itself further exposure, which helped to soften its image as a political grouping. The SEAP Games and the educational organisation SEAMEO helped to dilute the political connotation of Southeast Asia. Their efforts helped pave the way to awakening the sense of regional consciousness, that of Southeast Asia as a geographical and political entity. Such regional co-operation was feasible because participating countries consciously avoided inflexible ideological elements in arriving at any agreement.

Under the circumstances, Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was the president of UMNO and the later first Prime Minister of Malaya/Malaysia, emerged as a key person for regional cooperation. It would seem that the Tunku realised that political co-operation would be too difficult to materialise after his proposal of a ‘South East Asian Union’ ended in failure. He then aimed for economic co-operation instead five years later.

With the shift in the Tunku’s approach, restraining the armed expansion of communism was de-emphasised, and the advancement of economic development became the frontline rationale for regional co-operation. This approach resulted in the
formation of ASA, the first indigenous economic regional organisation. Unfortunately, this operation was not sustained because of conflicts between Malaysia and the Philippines. Nevertheless, this attempt at co-operation showed that regional countries could work together in the economic field, separated though they were due to politics and ideology. The three-member nations, namely Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand, remained hopeful that a measure of political co-operation was not out of reach. MAPHILINDO was formed at the time ASA was dormant, but the Malay-based confederation for comprehensive co-operation too, disappeared after a few months because of irreconcilable political conflicts. While this short-lived organisation showed that political co-operation could be fraught with hazards, it was significant in that it succeeded in dragging an indifferent Indonesia into the sphere of regional co-operation within Southeast Asia. By this time political elites at least in four countries further deepened the sense of regional consciousness through cooperative relations, despite whether they were deemed a success or a failure.

Another important factor in the development of regional consciousness through co-operation immediately before the formation of ASEAN was that regional political co-operation was born in informal manner. It was the Bangkok Peace Appeal in 1966 to urge for an end to the Vietnam War that laid the path for a rekindling of serious attempts at regional political co-operation. By providing regional leaders a platform to discuss political issues in an informal setting, the leaders actively developed regional co-operation and moved forward to form ASEAN.

The formation of ASEAN was significant in terms of developing and consolidating regional consciousness. Although it was for cultural and economic co-operation, it emerged as the vital organisation to define the scope of Southeast Asia and deepen the regional consciousness through informal political co-operation.

Since an accepted definition for the entire region of Southeast Asia remained
elusive among European scholars, ASEAN stepped up to resolve the issue immediately after its formation. At the time of the formation of ASEAN, Ceylon was invited to join the grouping, but it did not join. Other surrounding countries wished to join, but they were rejected with one of the main reasons that it was located ‘out of Southeast Asia.’ ASEAN’s own definition helped to create a definitive Southeast Asian region and ASEAN region as a sub-region, and an ASEAN Community by and for the grouping.

After self-defining, the regional organisation aimed at developing regional consciousness by using the acronym ASEAN without translating by any languages through media since the time of the formation and attempted to penetrate it into the public psyche. Moreover, ASEAN members began referring to the ‘ASEAN region’ as a sub-region of Southeast Asia through statements at ASEAN meetings and speeches. The project contributed to awaken and develop the consciousness of Southeast Asia and at the same time helped to foster the consciousness and identity of ASEAN as a region, not as a regional organisation.

ZOPFAN as a neutrality declaration also supported the development of Southeast Asian consciousness. The declaration resulted from a series of informal political meetings among the members. In view of the history that political co-operation always ended with failure in the region, the declaration was remarkable. Five ASEAN members finally attained success in ensuring political co-operation. At the same time the declaration is the political expression to delimit their own region, though it did not exactly define the scope.

With the end of the Vietnam War in which the Communists emerged victorious, ASEAN members felt the pragmatic need to live with communism within the region. The ASEAN summit in 1976 was the serious turning point for co-existence among ideologies which took centre stage. Among the three documents to issue after the summit, the Bali Concord was the most important because it declared the aim of forming an ASEAN
community with the proposition to enlarge the membership of ASEAN. The founding members clearly intended to expand the ASEAN region as a sub-region to the main region by embracing all the countries in Southeast Asia. Thus, through a series of their projects the founding members initiated the programme to change the Western-coined name ‘Southeast Asia’ to their own regional name, ‘ASEAN,’ sought to create a single ASEAN community and ASEAN identity eventually, and consolidated the regional concept. ASEAN itself has pursued to create its own collective identity. This did not happen in other regions around the world except Europe by the 1970s. For example, the region of East Asia, which including the world economic powers, China, Japan and Korea, has no such an organisation to create regional consciousness and its identity even now. In this respect, ASEAN is a self-generating and unprecedented region in the world.

As this study focused on the four countries, namely Siam/Thailand, the Philippines, Malaya/Malaysia and Indonesia, the prevalence of regional consciousness in other mainland Southeast Asian countries such as Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam was not discussed. The four countries – Burma that were long controlled under India, Cambodia that has glory history of the Angkor empire, Laos that is landlocked by Cambodia, China, Thailand and Vietnam, and Vietnam that was politically, economically and culturally influenced by China for centuries – each has its own perspectives. By researching it, we will know how ASEAN was developed and consolidated in a comprehensive manner.