

A Study of Factors Influencing Thais' Perception on ASEAN Economics Community

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This study primarily aimed to examine factors influencing the perceptions of Thai people on ASEAN economics community. Specifically, it investigates three main groups of factors including economic factors, political factors, and social factors and the relationship between these factors concerning the perception of Thai people on ASEAN economics community. This study employed a quantitative research approach. This study was undertaken for a period of 1 year between October 2014 and July 2015. The population included Thai people who lived in four sub-districts of Aranyaprathet district, Sa Kaeo province, Thailand including (i) Pa-rai; (ii) Pansuk, (iii) Khlong Nam sai, and (iv) Tha-kam. The research sample consisted of 400 individuals, obtained by simple random sampling. A questionnaire was used to collect the data and the data were analyzed with multiple linear regression. The research results showed that economics factors, political factors, and social factors all influenced the perception of Thai people on ASEAN economics community. The important factors included: (i) disaster perceptions; (ii) terrorism protection; (iii) international relations; (iv) cooperation between the member countries in the development of transportation and communication; (v) interdependence between the member countries; and (vi) labor movement. It was also found that these three groups of factors had relationships with each other, namely, the political factors depended on the economic factors; and the political factors and economic factors together influenced the social factors.

Keywords: Factors; perception; ASEAN economics community; Thai people

Field of research: Economics

1. Research Background and Significances

ASEAN economic community or AEC is an integration and agreement between member countries including Thailand, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Cambodia, and Brunei Thai-AEC (2014) with the aim to establish power in negotiation with other trade partners, to enhance the economic competitive advantages for the member countries, to exempt tax for some kinds of goods for the member countries, and to enhance the prosperity for the citizens of the member countries (Phoklang, 2012). The ASEAN economic community has a clear operational plan and steps to follow such as working together as a single community, creating and using the same production base and market, creating and permitting free flows of goods, services, investment, capital, and skillful labor. The establishment of ASEAN economic community has been successfully completed in 2015.

The four main goals of ASEAN economic community are: (1) creating and using single market and production base for the free flowing of goods, service, investment, capital, and skillful labor; (2) developing economic competitive advantages for the region by establishing related policies facilitating the cooperation, such as a policy on competition, a policy on tax, a policy on intellectual property, developing basic

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infrastructure, exchanging information among the member countries, and cooperating in providing training for personnel; (3) developing equality on economic development; and (4) integrating the cooperation into the global economic (ASEAN News, 2014).

Although Thailand has been a member of the ASEAN economic community, many citizens of country do not understand the situation of country and how the country can benefit from being a member of the ASEAN economic community. In other words, they do not have enough awareness on being a part of the ASEAN economic community. As stated earlier that for the ASEAN economic community to be successful as being a single community in which all member countries can enjoy the benefits equally together, citizens of the member countries have to have true understanding of the factors that have an influence on the operation of the ASEAN economic community.

With this reason, the research was conducted with the aim to examine the Thai peoples' perception on factors influencing their perception on ASEAN economics community. Specifically, it investigates three main groups of factors including economic factors, political factors, and social factors and the relationship between these factors concerning the perception of Thai people on ASEAN economics community.

2. Objectives of the Research

This objectives of this research are as follows:

2.1 To study the effect of economic factors (i.e. Trade cooperation, cooperation in transportation, and cooperation in communication) on the political factors (i.e. disaster protection, terrorism protection, and international relations).

2.2 To examine the effect of political factors (i.e. disaster protection, terrorism protection, and international relations), and economic factors (i.e. trade cooperation, cooperation in transportation, and cooperation in communication on the social factors (i.e. interdependence between the member countries; labor movement, and culture cooperation)

2.3 To study the effect of political factors, economic factors, and social factors on the perception of Thai citizens on ASEAN economic community.

3. Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this research are as follows:

3.1 The perception on the economic factors have an effect on the perception on the political factors.

3.2 The perception on the political factors and the economic factors have an effect on the perception on the social factors.

3.3 Perception of Thai citizens on the ASEAN economic community depends on the perception on the combination of three groups of factors including the economic factors, the political factors, and the social factors.

4. Expected Outcomes of the Research

4.1 To gain an understanding of the perception of Thai people, who live in four sub-districts of Aranyaprathet district, Sa Kaeo province, Thailand including (i) Pa-rai; (ii) Pansuk, (iii) Khlong Nam sai, and (iv) Tha-kam, on Thailand being a member of the

ASEAN economic community. This knowledge can be guidelines for the development and enhancement of the quality of life of people in these areas.

4.2 To serve as an important source for interested people, academic persons, students on the factors influencing the perception of people on Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community. This knowledge can be used to determine related policies.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Perception

Perception is one of the psychological factor that has an influence on Human behavior. It serves as a basis for learning activities because people's any actions depend on their perception on environments and their ability to interpret the meanings of those environment factors. Effective perception depends on various factors and stimuli including five senses and psychological factors (i.e. previous knowledge, wants, and feelings).

Perception consists of three processed: exposure, attention, and interpretation Regan & Noe (2014). Stimuli and motivations represent important factors leading to perception because these factors drive individuals to respond to them by taking actions that aim to gain clear understandings.

Perception also depends on the emotion or mental state. For example if an individual is tired or anxious, his interpretation may not be corrected. On the other hand, if he has clear mind, his interpretation is likely to be correct. When the interpretation of information is correct, the perception tends to be effective. (Keller, 2014) argues that people's perception consists of three main aspects which are experience, understanding, and feeling.

5.2 Political Factors

ASEAN economic community emphasizes the cooperation between member countries in maintaining peace and security of the region by encouraging these countries to pay attention and adhere to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation or TAC) which was established in 1976 (Raj Ramun, 2013). This document is considered to provide a guideline for the member countries to work together in protecting disasters and terrorism ASEAN (2014).

In addition to this treaty, the member countries also agree to countersign in other political documents including the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality or ZOPFAN in 1971, and Treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone or SEANWFZ in 1995. They also arranged a meeting to share their ideas and to discuss on the agreement and cooperation in terms of politic and security in Asia-Pacific region (ASEAN Regional Forum, 2014).

It can be seen that political factors that are related to the ASEAN economic community consist of disaster protection, terrorism protection, and international relations.

5.3 Economic Factors

In 1992, Thailand offered to have a kind of economic cooperation between countries in which the member countries can trade freely. Such cooperation occurred finally. It is

known ASEAN Free Trade Area or AFTA. It helps promote higher volumes of trades within the ASEAN region as well as reduce the cost of production, and encourage the foreign investment. The original six members of ASEAN economic community agreed to reduce the tax rate for goods in the framework of AFTA to be between 0-5 per cent by 2002.

Moreover, the member countries of ASEAN also set a goal of reducing the tax for all kinds of goods to be at 0 per cent by 2010 for the trades between original members, and by 2015 for new members. The member countries has extended their cooperation in terms economic from AFTA to ASEAN Investment Area – AIA so that the cooperation will be more complete and has clearer direction. The AIA also covers the cooperation in seven areas of service including sea transportation, air transportation, financial, business, construction, transportation, and tourism. They has set a goal that by 2010, the cooperation in all areas of services will be included in this agreement. ASEAN economic community also has agreement to cooperate in terms of creating transportation network in the region and logistics across the borders, and the project of Mae Khong development ASEAN News (2014). This can be concluded that economic factors influencing the individuals' perception on ASEAN economic community include trade cooperation, cooperation in transportation, and cooperation in communication.

5.4 Social Factors

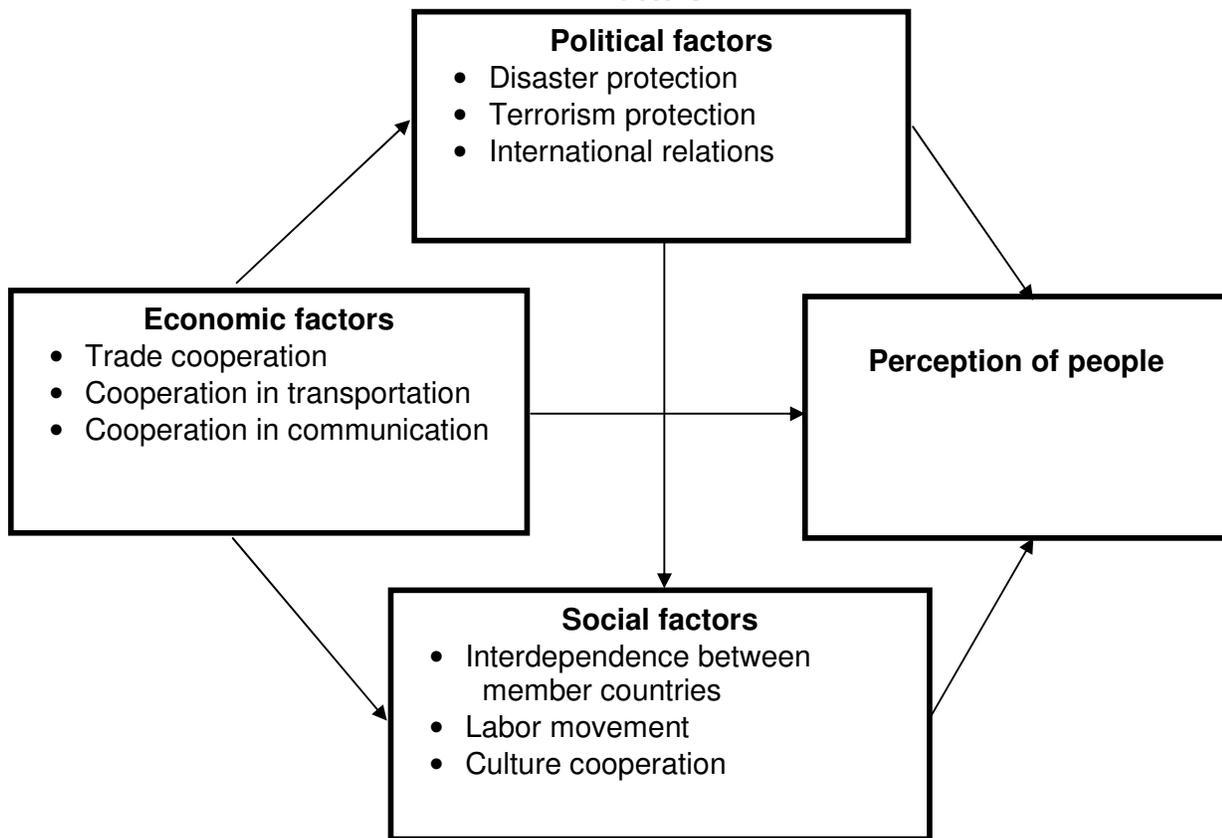
Social factors are those factors not included in the political and economic factors. There are five main areas of social factors including social development, sciences and technology, environment, drugs, and culture and information (ASEAN Social Forestry Network, 2014). The member countries of ASEAN economic community has agreed to cooperate in these social areas with the aim to promote quality of lives of people in the region. The cooperation in culture and information also plays an important role in promoting cross-understanding between citizens of the member countries and promoting awareness of being the members of ASEAN economic community.

Thailand as a member of the ASEAN economic community has a policy to encourage ASEAN to be an open society in which members have empathy to each other. According to this policy, foreign labors will be taken care of with fairness, and citizens of the member countries will have an awareness that they are members of the same community who will create and enjoy prosperity together. This will lead to the total human development in long term and can reduce the gap between the member countries (Public Relation News, 2014). This can be concluded that significant social factors that have an effect on the perception of ASEAN economic community consist of interdependence between the member countries; labor movement, and culture cooperation.

6. Conceptual framework for the Research

Based on the review of literature and related research, a conceptual framework for this study has been developed. This is shown below:

Figure 1: The relationships among factors influencing the Perception of people on Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community and the influence of these factors



7. Research Methodology

As this study aimed to study the casual relationship of factors, a quantitative research approach is deemed appropriate. This research was carried out or a period of one year between October 2014 and July 2015. Population of the research was Thai people who lived in in four sub-districts of Aranyaprathet district, Sa Kaeo province, Thailand including (i) Pa-rai; (ii) Pansuk, (iii) Khlong Nam sai, and (iv) Tha-kam. Based on the official record, there were around 85,696 Thai people living in these areas. The reason that these areas were selected as study sites is that Aranyaprathet has a border with Cambodia which is one member of the ASEAN economic community and it also one district of Thailand that has been enjoying high economic growth rate.

The sample size of the research was determined by using Tara Yamane formula with a confidential level of 95 per cent. As a result, 400 individuals were selected.

A questionnaire containing 50 closed-end questions on the perception on Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community as well as significant factors (political factors, economic factors, and social factors) influencing the perception was used as a data collection tool. The gathered data were then analyzed with ordinary multiple regression analysis or MRA, and hierarchical regression analysis.

8. The Research Findings

8.1 The relationship between political factors and economic factors

The data analysis showed that the respondents' perception on economic factors including trade cooperation, cooperation in transportation, and cooperation in communication had an effect on their perception on the political factors. Specifically, if their perception on these economic factors was high, their perception on the political factors was also high as well. Table 1 shows the result of the analysis on the respondents' perception on the economic factors.

Table 1: The analysis on the respondents' perception on the economic factors

Political factors	Beta coefficient	T	Sig.
Trade cooperation	.131	3.252	.000
Cooperation in transportation	.333	9.227	.000
Cooperation in communication	.574	19.499	.000
$R^2 = .78$, SEE = .35, F = 465.85, Sig. Of F = .000			

8.2 Factors affecting the perception on social factors

According to the data analysis, the respondents' perception on the political factors had an effect on their perception on the social factors which meant that if they had high perception on the political factors, they were likely to have high perception on the social factors as well. However, when looking at the effect on the respondents' perception on the economic factors on their perception on the social factors, it was found that there was no relationship between these two. The details are displayed in table 2.

Table 2 the result of the analysis of factors effecting the respondents' perception on the social factors

Factors	Standard regression coefficient	
	Model 1	Model 2
Disaster protection	.137***	.146***
Terrorism protection	.409***	.456***
International relations	.406***	.431***
Trade cooperation		-.022
Cooperation in transportation		-.069
Cooperation in communication		-.004
	R	.79
	R ²	.79
	SEE	.48
	F	213.23
		107.28

Remark: * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

8.3 Factors affecting the respondents' perception on Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community

The result showed that the respondents' perception on political factors had an influence on their perception of Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community. These political factors include disaster protection, terrorism protection, and international relations. It can be explained that if the respondents had limited perception on disaster protection, their perception on the ASEAN economic community would be high. On the other hand, if their perception on terrorism protection and international relations was low, their perception on the ASEAN economic community was also low.

When adding the perception of economic factors into the consideration, it was found that both the political factors and economic factors had an influence on their perception on ASEAN economic community. Specifically, it was found that if their perception on disaster protection and cooperation in transportation was low, their perception on ASEAN economic community was higher. The relationship between these two were in an opposite direction. For the perception on terrorism protection, international relations, and cooperation in communication, if their perception on these factors were higher, their perception on ASEAN economic community was higher as well. In other words, the relationship between these two aspects were in the same direction.

When add the perception on social factors into the analysis, it was found that the perception of these three groups of factors had an influence on the perception of ASEAN economic community. Specifically, if their perception on disaster protect, terrorism protection, and cooperation in transportation was low, their perception of ASEAN economic community was on the other hand high because the relationship between these two aspects was in the opposite direction. As for the perception on international relations, cooperation in communication, and labor movement was high, their perception on the ASEAN economic community was also high because the relationship between these two aspects was in the same direction. Moreover, it was also found that there were two factors that had no effect on the perception of the ASEAN economic community. They are trade cooperation and culture cooperation. The details are shown in table 3.

Table 3 the result of the analysis on factors influencing the respondents' perception on Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community.

Factors	Standard regression coefficiency			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Disaster protection	-.293***	-.388***	-.340***	
Terrorism protection	.228***	.129**	-.096*	
International relations	.773***	.687***	.267***	
Trade cooperation	.201***		.008	
Cooperation in transportation	-.105	*	-.098*	
Cooperation in communication	.140**		.446***	
Interdependence			.191***	
Labor mobility			.475***	
Cooperation in cultural			-.032***	
	R	.83	.85	.88
	R ²	.69	.71	.76
	SEE	.76	.73	.66
	F	296.79	166.21	142.77

Remark: * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

9. Discussion

The part will discuss the results of the hypotheses testing which mentioned earlier.

For the first hypothesis which assumes that the perception on the economic factors had an effect on the perception on the political factors, it was found that this hypothesis is correct because it was found that the perception on all economic factors, trade cooperation, cooperation in transportation, and cooperation in communication had an influence on the perception on all of the political factors.

For the second hypothesis which assumes that the perception on the political factors and the economic factors has an effect on the social factors, it was found that the perception of all of the political factors had an effect on the perception on the social factors, but the perception on the economic factors had no relationship on the perception on the social factors.

The testing of the third hypothesis showed that perception on most of the three groups of factors had an influence on the respondents' perception on Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community, except trade cooperation and cultural cooperation.

10. Suggestions

The suggestions of this research can be classified into two groups which are suggestions in terms of its implication or policy determination and those in terms of economic.

In terms of implication of the research results or recommendation for the policy determination, it was found that the perception on some factors have a high influence on Thai people's perception on Thailand being a member of ASEAN economic community, therefore the government should pay special attention to these factors and establish the policies that help enhance the understanding of Thai people on these factors. These factors include disaster protection, terrorism protection, cooperation in transportation, cooperation in communication, interdependence between member countries, and labor movement.

In terms of academic suggestions, the findings of this study can fill the gap in the literature on the factors influencing Thais' perception on ASEAN economic community. This study also suggests that more research should be conducted to investigate on the influence of other factors.

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