USE OF THESES

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EMBRACING PROACTION:
THE ROLE OF SELF-PERCEPTION IN
THAILAND’S POST-COLD WAR FOREIGN POLICY

BY
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THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis is my own original work. It contains no material which has been accepted for the award of a degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Pongpnisoot Busdarat
21 October 2009
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Thai foreign policy since the end of the Cold War as a focusing period. In its essence, it proposes that Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy can be viewed as more proactive than what the conventional wisdom holds. Considering the strong influence of nationalistic sentiment amongst Thai people, this thesis suggests to look closely at the role of how this factor plays part in constructing Thailand's self-perception. In other words, it examines to what extent the way in which Thai policy-makers see their country, influences Thai foreign policy-making process and the possibility of transforming Thai foreign policy behaviour from reactive to proactive one.

This thesis traces back the origin of this self-perception. It argues that Thailand's self-perception is a product of social construction throughout its modern nation-state building process. It has resulted in a consensus view that Thailand and its people are in a better quality than its neighbouring countries. Coupled with its strong geopolitical position in mainland Southeast Asia, Thai policy-makers have been convinced that Thailand is a natural leading state in this area. This thesis argues that this self-perception has remained in its essence. The Cold War environment in which Thailand became a frontline state against communism accentuated this view whilst its surrounding neighbours were viewed with an antagonistic attitude.

The prevailing globalisation since the end of the Cold War did not alter this self-perception in its core. However, this thesis further contends that since the nature of the Thai state has transformed into the competition state model in which economic competitiveness replaced national security as an ultimate national interest. State's strategy then revolved into promoting its competitiveness. One way to achieve this goal was to promote economic co-operation. Operating within this logic, Thai decision-makers therefore maintained the perception that Thailand was in a suitable position politically and economically and should be a leading actor to foster regional co-operation.
This thesis shows that Thailand’s aspirations to play a leading role in Southeast Asia’s development arguably reflect in its foreign policy throughout the post-Cold War period. Regional economic co-operation schemes preoccupied most of Thai governments’ agenda since Chatichai Choonhavan until Thaksin Shinawatra. This thesis gives a detailed study of two major foreign policy cases in the Chuan government and the Thaksin government. They reveal that regional aspirations in both cases mattered in shaping foreign policy goals. Regardless of its success or failure to achieve these goals, this feature was a part of Thai foreign policy-making that shapes foreign policy direction and behaviour in the post-Cold War era.

Therefore, this research finds that Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era has gradually become more proactive partly based on the self-perception and a re-emergence of regional aspirations. Contrary to the conventional belief depicting Thai foreign policy as ‘bamboo bending with the wind’—a policy of accommodating external forces in order to preserve its national security and status quo, this thesis demonstrates that Thailand has increasingly played a regional leading role. This leadership involved an active role in regional agenda setting and facilitating regional co-operation. This leading role is expected to illuminate Thailand’s position in the region.
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List of acronyms and abbreviations
ACD Asian Co-operation Dialogue
ACMECS Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation Strategy
ADB Asian Development Bank
AFTA ASEAN Free Trade Area
AITC Annual International Training Courses Programme
AMF Asian Monetary Fund
APEC Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation
APT ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, and South Korea)
ARF ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN+3  See APT
ASEM  Asia-Europe Meeting
BIBF  Bangkok International Banking Facility
BIMSTEC  Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation
BIST-EC  Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Co-operation
CMI  Chiang Mai Initiative
CPT  Communist Party of Thailand
CRIC  Committee for Restructuring and Improving Competitiveness
DTEC  Department of Technical and Economic Co-operation
EMEAP  Executive's Meeting of East Asia Central Banks
ESCAP  United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU  European Union
FDI  Foreign Direct Investment
FTA  Free Trade Agreement
G-77  Group of 77
GATT  General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP  Gross Domestic Product
GMS  Greater Mekong Sub-region
IMF  International Monetary Fund
IMT-GT  Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle
JPPCC  Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee
JWG  Joint Working Group
MC  Mekong Committee
MERCOSUR  Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)
MFA  Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MNNA  Major Non-NATO Ally
MRC  Mekong River Commission
NAFTA  North American Free Trade Agreement
NAM  Non-Aligned Movement
NCC  National Competitiveness Committee
NCCSEC  National Committee for Co-ordinating Sub-regional Economic Co-operation
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>NEP</td>
<td>New Economic Policy</td>
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<td>NESDB</td>
<td>National Economic and Social Development Board</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
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<td>NIEs</td>
<td>Newly Industrialising Economies</td>
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<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
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<td>PAFTAD</td>
<td>Pacific Trade and Development Conference</td>
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<td>PBEC</td>
<td>Pacific Basin Economic Council</td>
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<td>PECC</td>
<td>Pacific Economic Co-operation Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>OIC</td>
<td>Organisation of Islamic Conference</td>
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<td>OTOP</td>
<td>One Tambon One Product project</td>
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<td>QEC</td>
<td>Quadrangle Economic Co-operation</td>
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<td>SARS</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome</td>
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<td>SEATO</td>
<td>South East Asian Treaty Organisation</td>
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<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small and Medium Enterprises</td>
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<td>SNC</td>
<td>Supreme National Council of Cambodia</td>
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<td>SOM</td>
<td>Senior Official Meeting</td>
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<td>STEER</td>
<td>Singapore-Thailand Enhanced Economic Relationship</td>
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<td>STEP</td>
<td>Singapore-Thailand Enhanced Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCDC</td>
<td>Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCTP</td>
<td>Third Country Training Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>THB</td>
<td>Thai Baht</td>
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<tr>
<td>TICA</td>
<td>Thailand International Development Co-operation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>TNC</td>
<td>Trade Negotiation Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRT</td>
<td>Thai Rak Thai Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDCP</td>
<td>United Nations International Drugs Control Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nation General Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>United States Air Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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## Glossary and terms

| **Ayutthaya** | A Thai empire ruling from 1351 to 1767 |
| **Doi Moi** | *lit.* ‘innovation’, Vietnam’s economic reform policy towards market economy started in 1986 |
| **Mandala** | Hindu-Buddhist metaphysical cosmology used here to describe the constellation of political power and the overlord-tributary relationships of the ancient kingdoms in mainland Southeast Asia |
| **Rachaphongsawadan** | A Thai historical writing focusing mainly on the past kings |
| **Ratthaniyom** | Cultural Mandates, an edict enforced during the Phibun government |
| **Seri Thai** | *lit.* ‘Free Thai’, the underground movement against Japan and co-belligerent Phibun government during World War II |
| **Suvarnabhumi or Suwannaphume** | *lit.* ‘Golden Land’, an archaic alternative name for mainland Southeast Asia |
| **Tambon** | Thailand’s sub-district level of local administration, higher than village but smaller than district level or *amphoe* |
| **Thai Rak Thai** | *lit.* ‘Thai love Thai’, the name of a Thai major political party established in 1998 by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra which gained the majority in the 2001 and 2005 general elections and was dissolved in May 2007 by Thailand’s Constitutional Court |
| **Thammachariya** | A textbook teaching moral values |
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis evaluates the changing nature of Thailand’s foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. It examines the ongoing debate over Thai foreign policy behaviour and offers a distinct explanation of how Thai foreign policy behaviour should be viewed. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that generally argues that Thai foreign policy is generally reactive, this thesis asserts that such a view has become somewhat problematic especially in explaining Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. This thesis therefore proposes that Thai foreign policy behaviour in this period has become more proactive. In this connection, this thesis is interested in examining an ideational factor—self-perception—as one of many sources of foreign policy proaction as opposed to only situating national interests exclusively in materialistic terms. It traces the ideational basis of foreign policy-making in association with the formation of the modern Thai state and addresses the social consequences of how Thailand views itself in its relations with the outside world. It asserts, moreover, that this ‘social construction’ of self-perception has certain influences on Thai foreign policy-making, particularly in terms of identifying policy preferences or strategies to achieve goals.

The main concern of this study is, then, how Thailand’s self-perception of being a leading actor in Southeast Asia relates to its foreign policy preferences in line with its desire to see Thailand playing a leading role in regional affairs. It contends that this self-perception has played a role in forming Thailand’s foreign policy preferences as it has attempted to influence the region on many occasions. It draws on the existing body of literature on Thailand’s foreign policy behaviour. It also incorporates assessments on the historical development of Thailand’s self-perception, selected theoretical concepts on the changing nature of the state, and detailed case studies of two major foreign policies in the post-Cold War initiated by different major Thai political parties in pre- and post-1997 Financial Crisis periods.

This introductory chapter develops a case for studying Thailand’s foreign policy in the context of the country’s leadership aspirations especially for mainland Southeast Asia and for Southeast Asia in a broader sense. It shows how this thesis is significant in
expanding the body of knowledge about Thailand's foreign policy behaviour which incorporates both theoretical and policy relevancies. It also develops key research questions within the context of a broad theoretical frameworks and a methodology that lead to drawing inferences and to identifying pertinent data to answer the research questions. The chapter's conclusion outlines the structure of this thesis and the main focus of each chapter.

1.1 The significance of the study of Thai foreign policy

Providing a general overview is necessary for understanding the importance Thailand has within the history of Southeast Asia's regional politics. It is suggested here that despite its significance as a leading actor in the region, Thailand's foreign policy has recently failed to attract sufficient attention. Academic debate on this topic can thus be reinvigorated by offering a fresh focus on ideational factors that are usually not taken into account in previous studies of Thai foreign policy analysis.

1.1.1 The role of Thailand in Southeast Asia

Throughout the history of mainland Southeast Asia Thailand has been a leading actor. This historical experience has added a distinctive characteristic to the modern Thai nation. Ancient Thai kingdoms were embryonic predecessors of the modern Thai state, and 'Siam' (the former name of Thailand) was a regional power in Southeast Asia (Brocheux & Hémery 2009, p.10), particularly after the fall of the Khmer Empire and the rise of Ayutthaya Kingdom in the mid-fourteenth century until the early nineteenth century. Therefore, noting the role of Siam is integral to the study of mainland Southeast Asia's history.

Siamese diplomacy played a very important role during the European colonial expansion into Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. This was due to its political influence and occupation in major parts of mainland Southeast Asia and in certain Malay archipelagic states. According to Thai official history and mainstream historians, Siam had conquered the Khmer Empire, the Laotian kingdoms and most of the less powerful Malay sultanates to its south (Waruni 2001). Siamese influence thus encompassed most of mainland Southeast Asia even before the European colonial powers expanded into Southeast Asia. The exceptions were Vietnam and a large part of
the Kingdom of Burma. By the nineteenth century Siamese vassal states covered a significant area ranging from the south of China to the Malay Peninsula. This was recorded in 1857 by Sir John Bowring, the Governor of Hong Kong who was dispatched to negotiate a treaty with the court of Siam (1857, pp.1-55). Siam had exercised political influence over these auxiliary territories until they were ceded to European control, so as to preserve their ‘genuine’ Thai parts. A major chapter in mainland Southeast Asia’s diplomatic history during this period was inevitably about how the European powers, especially Britain and France, interacted with and engaged with Siam in order to achieve their colonial objectives. In turn, Siam managed to be the only part of Southeast Asia that escaped direct colonisation and maintain its sovereignty throughout the nineteenth century. This historical background is a source of pride amongst the Thai people in contemporary times.

During the Second World War, Thailand was also seen by Japan as a key strategic actor for its further expansion into inland Asia, especially Burma and Southern China. Thailand’s decision to align with Japan in order to escape the Japanese occupation and to maintain its sovereignty underscored its highly developed sense of policy pragmatism. Despite its siding with Japan, Thailand was able to avoid being treated as a cobelligerent based on the recognition by the United States of its underground anti-Japanese movement and was thereafter able to join the United Nations. Thailand’s diplomatic skill therefore helped the country emerge from uncertainty after the war and resume its regional role during the Cold War under the American security alliance.

During the Cold War, Thailand’s regional role can be clearly understood in its relations with the United States’ strategic posture and its anti-communist expansion in the region. Thailand together with South Vietnam and the Philippines anchored the United States’ posturing strategic position in the region, notably its accommodation of the American military deployment during the Vietnam War. Thailand was also a founding member of ASEAN, the only enduring region-wide organisation, not to mention other regional groupings prior to ASEAN in which Thailand had actively participated. These included the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) and the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO). Moreover, it was Thailand that mobilised ASEAN to apply pressure against Vietnam as a result of the latter’s invasion of Cambodia in the late 1970s. This resulted in the imposition of international sanctions on Vietnam and its
puppet government in Phnom Penh. It also entailed a long process of international peace negotiations on the Cambodian issue that dominated regional and international discussions about Southeast Asia throughout the 1980s. Chinese regional influence intensified as a result of such negotiations, and the Sino-Thai relationship became a major driving force in Southeast Asia's regional affairs during the same period. Therefore, it can be surmised again that Thailand's role was also a significant component of Southeast Asia's regional order during the Cold War. This role is perhaps best captured by Barry Buzan's argument about security complexes (1988; 2003). He contends that Southeast Asia during the Cold War comprised two sub-regional security complexes: the 'Indochina Security Complex' and the 'Malay Archipelago Complex'. Thailand and Vietnam played a key role in the former while Indonesia dominated the latter (Buzan 1988; 2003, pp.133-136; Emmer 2006; Ganesan 2001). However, Thailand's role during this period cannot be viewed in isolation from the Cold War politics of the major powers in the region.

In the post-Cold War environment, the balance of power politics that played a major role during the preceding period was subordinated. This was, in large part, due to the absence of traditional security threats to the 'holy trinity' of the Thai nation, namely 'nation', 'religion' and 'king'. Although the rise of China has drawn Beijing and Washington into a political and strategic competition in the region, Thai policy-makers understand that such tensions will probably not reach a critical breaking point where the two contending powers engage in direct military confrontation (Kusuma 2000, p.334). In this situation, Thailand prefers not have to 'choose sides' but rather to shape its foreign relations based more on self-determination. One of Thailand's main foreign policy strategies is to promote its active role in the region that will ultimately create a regional setting in which Thailand's national economic and strategic interests are best realised (Buszynski 1989, 1994; Kusuma 2000, pp.334-5). This general trend is well observed by MacIntyre and Soesastro (2006), that the end of the Cold War and the impressive economic growth in East Asia gave a sense of 'national self-confidence and assertiveness' and a greater 'freedom of foreign policy movement' amongst policymakers across the region (p.266-7).

A major shift in Thai foreign policy revealed this self-confidence during the final days of the Cold War under the Chatichai Choonhavan government (1988-1991). Thailand
reconstituted its policy towards a rapprochement with Indochinese countries and promoted economic development in mainland Southeast Asia under the slogan of 'turning the battlefields into marketplaces'. However, some critics claimed that after the Chatichai government, Thailand's foreign policy had no significant regional impact, notably so during the Chuan Leekpai governments (Funston 1998d; Thitinan 2004b, p.3). Thai policy-makers had been increasingly concerned that their country had lost its ground as a leading actor in the region. This belief was enunciated by Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh in 1997. He feared that his country's role in shaping regional policy was being overshadowed, contrary to past times when other countries would have consulted Thailand about regional affairs (Bangkok Post, 17 March 1997).

1.1.2 The current stage of the study of Thai foreign policy
Parallel to the concerns discussed in the previous section, the study of Thai foreign policy behaviour after the Cold War has also been somewhat in a state of inertia. This can be attributed to several reasons. First, it has been almost a given that Thai foreign policy behaviour is best characterised as 'reactive'. This is due mainly to Thailand's high degree of adaptability and policy accommodation to the external environment, especially with regard to regional great powers inherited from the Cold War period. This foreign policy behaviour has been characterised as 'bamboo bending with the wind' diplomacy. However, after the Cold War's demise and especially following the conclusion of the Cambodia peace agreement in 1991, the focus of Thai foreign policy shifted to other issues, especially those related to economic and human rights. The economic boom and the rise of democracy during the early 1990s, and the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, accentuated this trend. Interestingly, however, the shift of focus has not changed the conventional view of security-oriented foreign policy amongst academia and observers, leaving the emerging significance of 'low-political issues' in a separate domain. Therefore, the general reference of Thai foreign policy behaviour has remained unaltered despite the changing nature of the Thai state and its other emerging foreign policy directions.

Second and related to the above development, the study of Thai foreign policy behaviour has been virtually abandoned. Recent trends in Thai foreign policy studies direct attention to the immediate issues facing Thailand. The general trend in the major literature in the early 1990s focused on several major issues. These included
Thailand's policy towards regional conciliation in the aftermath of the withdrawal of Vietnam from Cambodia, its foreign economic policy towards ASEAN economic integration under AFTA, and the emerging human rights issues in its foreign policy. During the 1997 Financial Crisis and its aftermath, Thai foreign policy studies mainly focused on how Thailand negotiated with its foreign lenders to obtain economic relief. At the same time, the revival of separatism in the southern part of the country and the global anti-terrorism campaign led by the United States after 11 September 2001 incident also shifted attention back to the security issue and Thailand's relationships with the major powers. However, no matter how Thailand has responded to these issues it remains an issue-based analysis. The longue durée study of Thai foreign policy behaviour in the post-Cold War has not yet produced significant debate.

Third, foreign policy issues still command insufficient public attention in Thailand. The study of Thai foreign policy is still in a 'twilight zone' in which only a few groups of people are interested, notably government officials and academics in the field. The private sector and non-governmental organisations have increasingly paid attention to the issue. The general Thai public is, however, still largely ignorant and disinterested how the government conducts its foreign affairs and believes that such matters are far beyond their daily life (Thitinan 2004, p.3). Moreover, recent troubles in Thailand's southernmost provinces bordering Malaysia have also heightened Thai people's interest in domestic affairs and the issue of terrorism. For these reasons, the debate on the factors underlying the enduring Thai foreign policy has not been evident within the discussion of Thailand's foreign relations for some time. This situation not only undercuts efforts to make the study of Thai foreign policy more rigorous but also fails to capture a fundamental understanding of the dynamics in Thai foreign policy. As a result, Thai foreign policy behaviour is seen as static and only a product of continuity from the past.

1.1.3 Re-invigorating the debate in Thai foreign policy behaviour: the key research questions

The recent history of Thailand's lackadaisical foreign policy debate combined with current concerns amongst Thai policy-makers over losing Thailand's leading position has a 'puzzle'. If the view of traditional posture of Thai foreign policy as reactive behaviour holds true for Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy, we should expect a
situation in which Thailand would be satisfied with its position when international politics no longer poses a direct threat to its security and sovereignty, just as it did during the expansion of colonialism in the nineteenth century, and the Cold War. Indeed, the legacy of Thai ‘reactiveness’, the dearth of foreign policy study, and the general lack of public interest in foreign affairs would all point towards Thailand adhering to a *status quo* posture.

However, the fact that Thailand has been involved in initiating regional policy throughout the post-Cold War period—notably regional schemes involving Indochina and sub-regional economic arrangements—may fit uncomfortably with this image. Therefore, the first set of key research questions arises:

> Considering the changing nature of the international environment after the Cold War, can Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy still be viewed through the conventional lens as ‘bamboo bending with the wind’, or a reactive foreign policy? If not, how can it be appropriately characterised, and why?

This thesis questions the validity of ‘conventional wisdom’ about Thai foreign policy behaviour when applied in the post-Cold War era. This thesis makes the case that Thai foreign policy has been increasingly proactive in the post-Cold War period. Instead of paying attention solely to material conditions as has been done in most previous studies, this thesis is interested in the role of ideational factors as a supplement to the whole picture in explaining Thailand’s increasingly proactive foreign policy. However, by focusing on ideational variables it does not mean that the importance of material aspects in foreign policy-making is downgraded. However, certain ideas developed in history are distinctive to Thai society and still exist in the minds of the Thai people and their perception. These historical legacies may in turn still influence Thai foreign policy-making in many ways.

As David Wurfel and Bruce Burton assert, most modern Southeast Asian states have inherited powerful pre-colonial legacies manifested in their self-images, their perceptions of external threats, institutions and culture, thus greatly affecting the decision-making styles of the political elite in the region (1990, p.2). Although Thailand
did not experience direct colonial rule, its historical record of regional affairs—mainly involving its interaction with the European powers during that time, including with the United States in the Cold War—would also impact similarly. The aforementioned comment by Chavalit (1996) on Thailand's fading leadership and his yearning for a greater Thai regional role signify this historical component of Thai policy-making. It demonstrates that Thai policy-makers' memories and certain ideas of how they view their country—self-perception—may play a role in foreign policy-making processes.

This thesis asserts that in the case of Thailand the above observation of Chavalit's comment may closely relate to a concept of 'Suvarnabhumi' or the 'Golden Peninsula', demonstrating the Thai political elite's vision of the country as an epicentre of mainland Southeast Asia. This ideational factor, though mentioned in the existing literature on Thai foreign policy, seldom attracts in-depth analysis. To offer an analogy, the issues of self-perception and regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy are treated like questioning the existence of gods in the mind of devout adherents to a religious belief. They believe in their existence but never seek any empirical evidence of how much gods influence men's daily lives.

Therefore, the second key question addressed by this study involves how ideational force has influenced the changing nature of Thai foreign policy behaviour in the post-Cold War period. To be specific:

Given Thailand's self-perception as a leading actor in Southeast Asia, to what extent and how does it play a role in Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy?

The answer to the second question is closely connected to and, in fact, further explains the first. It is set up in order to examine how such a self-perception influences Thai foreign policy-making. This thesis argues that Thailand's self-perception shapes or at least justifies a specific foreign policy preference that aims to advance Thailand's regional leading profile or so-called 'regional aspirations'. In other words, Thailand desires to exercise or project its leading role especially by promoting regional economic arrangements. Therefore, to show that Thai policy-makers in the post-Cold War period may select their policy options in accordance with that idea helps
underline the assumption of Thailand's increasing proactiveness stipulated in the first question.

By seeking answer to these two key research questions, this thesis addresses Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy in three related layers. Firstly, it fundamentally questions the suitability of the widely accepted typology of Thai foreign policy behaviour as a 'reactive' foreign policy particularly in the post-Cold War era. Then, it considers Thai foreign policy in parallel with the changing nature of a modern state in the context of economic globalisation and the end of the global political contestation that marked the Cold War. In this context, Thailand's self-perception re-emerged and has been adjusted. This self-perception generates a view of Thai foreign policy as a tool to achieve not only material objectives but also, ultimately, ideational goals. Thirdly, the thesis argues that this ideational factor facilitates Thailand's attempt to exercise its leading role in Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War environment, and certainly explains its active participation in the regional affairs.

The conceptualisation of Thai foreign policy behaviour by incorporating ideational aspects of policy-making leads to several significant implications for students of Thailand's foreign relations and Southeast Asian affairs. First, it helps explain the adjustment of Thailand to the new international environment after the Cold War in which a smaller state in the international system has more room to exercise its own policy direction. Considering Thailand's relatively close ties with both potentially contending great powers—China and the United States—the study of Thai foreign policy behaviour is an appropriate case through which to observe how such a country adjusts its position during times of substantial change. Moreover, a clearer and more proper characterisation of Thai foreign policy behaviour will help in understanding the contemporary Southeast Asian political and economic development in light of its trends in regionalism.

In the realm of policy-making, if these characterisations of self-perception and Thai regional aspirations are valid, we may expect Thailand to be at the forefront of Southeast Asian states in supporting the idea of regionalism. These characters suggest that the role played by Thailand will be indispensable to the success of the Southeast Asian regionalism process. Moreover, this implication can be extended to a broader
process in which Thailand’s role could be of importance as a bridging agent between the advanced and less developed nations or between potential antagonists within the region. This role can be equated to the notions of entrepreneurial and intellectual leaderships developed by Oran Young (1991). He suggests that apart from structural leadership exercised mainly by great powers, these types of leadership are also essential in articulating the solutions that ‘foster integrative bargaining and put together deals that would otherwise elude participants’ (p.293). The author shares this view along with those of other analysts such as Thitinan (2004) and Ganesan (2001, pp. 145-146) that evolving Thai foreign policy is important to the region in this context and thus deserves to be re-examined.

1.2 The central argument: a foreign policy with regional aspiration

The evidence presented in this thesis supports the view that Thai foreign policy since the end of the Cold War is not totally dominated by reactive behaviour. Thailand has been involved significantly and proactively in rearranging and directing regional political and economic development as seen in its rigorous support for regionalism at many different levels. This regionalist approach signifies a departure from a historically reactive foreign policy towards a more proactive one. It should be noted, however, that the reactive foreign policy behaviour as signified by accommodating posture in Thai foreign policy does not totally disappear, especially in relation to major countries with which power relations are often asymmetrical. Simply speaking, this thesis shows Thailand’s changing foreign policy portfolio towards proaction through exercising regionalist policy.

Considering the possible role self-perception plays in the proactive nature of Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, Thailand’s foreign policy proaction can be observed through its distinctive policy preference. Therefore, the central argument of this study is that: Thailand’s foreign policy in the post-Cold War period prefers to support and promote regional co-operation initiatives which allow Thailand to play a leading role either as an initiator or co-ordinator regardless of its different domestic political settings and structural changes.

Although the main focus of this thesis is Thai foreign policy, the analysis draws from wider relevant theoretical frameworks related to ideational factors in foreign policy
and international relations as a framework of analysis. This thesis specifically focuses on the need for directing greater attention towards ideational variables which has not been assigned much weight in traditional analysis of Thai foreign policy. Therefore, the author sees this study as a pioneer in opening up more sustained research on ideational factors in Thai foreign policy-making in the future, instead of as an absolute conclusion.

Since this thesis refers to diverse aspects of the ideational approach in its analysis, it needs to contemplate how the ideational literature views the significance of ideas and their influences on foreign policy-making. This thesis focuses on a core merit of this type of scholarly literature in that ideational factors shape policy preferences.

As asserted by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (1993) ideas can affect policy in three ways. First, ideas provide ‘world views’ in which possibilities for action are perceived. They also act as ‘principled beliefs’ defining certain criteria for action defining certain criteria for judging what is right or wrong, and as ‘causal beliefs’ offering guidelines on how to achieve objectives. (pp. 8-11). Therefore, by focusing on beliefs, Goldstein and Keohane suggest that ‘ideas serve as road maps’ to particular preferences whilst other possible alternatives are excluded (pp.13-17). Third, ideas also help determine the levels of cooperation and cohesion for particular groups or to ‘serve as focal points’. Policy-makers may resolve collective action problems and reach agreement based on ‘shared culture’ and other normative factors (pp.18-19). Over time, ideas become institutionalised whilst the levels of interest supporting certain initial ideas may fade or change (p.21). Therefore, according to Goldstein and Keohane, ideas certainly shape policy preferences. Moreover, certain shared ideas may dominate policy-making and generate certain types of policy options for a long period of time.

Constructivism in international relations theory, political psychology, and other variants of cognitive-based approaches also attach great importance to the power of ideas by sharing their view of endogeneity of both interests and ideas despite their detailed differences (or by expressing it in other terms such as ‘identities’, ‘self-perception’, ‘self-image’, and ‘role’). Therefore, these approaches generate certain common research enquiries of how ideas are shaped, and how these ideas, in turn, influence preferences, choices, or even interests in the policy-making arena. In short,
they agree on the impact of historical and social processes, whether they be experiences, memories, or social context, in shaping individual and collective views or perceptions about themselves (further discussion of these approaches on the aspect of how certain ideas are shaped is elaborated in Chapter Three where the formation of Thailand's self-perception and its persistence is discussed in detail). Over time, this self-perception, identity, or image is used to ascertain reality more simply and inform what role actors should perform in response to it. To apply this process to policy-making, it can be seen that self-perception or identity has a great impact on how policy-makers are interested in certain aspects of reality, hence their policy responses.

The perspectives of these ideational approaches on the relationship between ideational factors and policy preferences help shape the framework of this thesis' analysis. Thailand's self-perception as a leading actor especially in mainland Southeast Asia helps facilitate a certain policy preference. In other words, Thailand wishes to see itself as having an important role in the region. This preference plays out in the post-Cold War period through its promotion of regional development schemes. The persistence of this foreign policy preference in the post-Cold War period, as will be shown by this thesis' case studies, supports the thesis' claim that Thailand's foreign policy in this period has increasingly developed into a proactive behaviour.

However, by knowing that Thailand's foreign policy preference is mainly to advocate regional co-operation and the country's eminent role in this endeavour, one may enquire how this leadership is attained. In other words, this thesis further identifies how Thailand's foreign policy proaction is exercised. This study observes that Thailand's attempt to influence the region has some elements that can be viewed through the concept of international leadership, particularly in association with the 'middle powers' concept of Cooper, Higgo, and Nossal (1993) and the non-structural aspects of leadership in the work of Orang Young's work (1991). These perspectives can facilitate our understanding of a smaller power can actively build international co-operation.

In brief, the middle powers concept, in particular, asserts that medium-sized countries such as Thailand may exercise their international leadership based largely on their will and capacity. Their foreign policy tends to be 'active' compared to that of minor
powers, but by no means without constraints especially from the great powers' influence if the latter decide to obstruct the move of the former (Higgott & Cooper 1990; Cooper, et al. 1993). Due to this constraint, middle powers tend to exhibit specific behaviours, particularly prioritising and focusing on certain issues as 'niches' (Ravenhill 1998, p.311; Cooper et al. 1993; Higgott & Cooper 1990). Moreover, they also tend to 'pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, [and]...to embrace compromise positions in international disputes' (Cooper, et al. 1993, p.19).

The literature on middle powers is also generally concerned with what Young (1991) suggests in his analysis of regime formation. He argues that not only does structural leadership matter in sustaining any regime, but also entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership. Co-operation without hegemonic support is still possible if a country (or even non-state actors) develops enough policy entrepreneurship. This entrepreneurial leadership is exercised by brokering deals or articulating solutions acceptable to parties engaged in international bargaining (Young 1991, p.293; 1999, p.806). Therefore, both middle power theory and the entrepreneurial leadership concept agree that non-hegemonic powers may become 'natural leaders' amongst those countries interested in pursuing common functional issues. They can facilitate initiatives to build a coalition of like-minded countries to co-operate in pursuing common interests. Middle power diplomacy is persuasive rather than coercive since it is unsupported by sufficient material power to sanction would-be defectors in any coalition formed. Therefore, these concepts are useful in analysing in detail Thailand's proactive policy behaviour in cultivating regional co-operation as spelled out in the two case studies.

In short, this thesis argues that Thailand's self-perception plays a role in Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy. It partly shapes Thailand's policy preference for exercising its leading role through promoting regional co-operative arrangements. This leading role is mainly built through acting as a mediator in setting up regional arrangements.
1.3 Research methodology

This study is qualitative in nature due to its main focus being key policy-makers and their thinking. In order to provide a detailed examination, this thesis adopts two major strategies for examining self-perception and regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy. First, it investigates a 'horizontal picture' of self-perception and applies this to Thai policy-makers. It traces the possible connection between Thailand's political development and Thai people's construction of self-perception. It then examines whether the changing structural context of the political economy at the end of the Cold War altered previous Thai perceptions and how these regional aspirations took form amongst Thai policy-makers, including politicians and government officials. This approach offers a broad picture of the role of self-perception in shaping policy preference of building its leading role in the region. As will be explicated more comprehensively below, the author has relied upon archival materials and interviews with selected officials to support this analysis.

Second, the study 'vertically' traces to what extent this self-perception influences policy-makers in their decision making and policy directions. To achieve this, the thesis employs a case-study analysis method to examine in detail two major initiatives in Thai foreign policy after the Cold War: the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation Initiative (1993), and the Forward Engagement Strategy (2001). By utilising the case study method, the thesis draws a link between self-perception, regional endeavour, and the foreign policy preferences. With such a bridging of these factors, a conclusion can be drawn about the relationship between Thailand's self-perception and its attempt to influence the region which can be part of the explanation of Thai foreign policy's proaction after the Cold War.

As intimated above, accessible official documents are employed here to locate, test, and confirm the main argument in this thesis that self-perception and regional endeavour play a role in shaping Thai foreign policy direction and its proactive policy behaviour. By presenting evidence and drawing inference on the direction of Thai foreign policy, the thesis illuminates the potential applicability of self-perception as a factor in understanding Thai foreign policy.
The focus of this thesis is 'state-centric' in the sense that the level of analysis is mainly state. However, foreign policy represents the 'subjective perspective of the actor' (Rosenau 1980, pp. 7-8); therefore, it is important to see how actors involved in foreign policy-making think and act. Process tracing can be employed and can be modified to suit a strategy that requires the compilation and investigation of different aspects of 'the intentional behaviour of individuals and organisations' (Bennett & George 1997, p.17). These aspects include the policy-making process, policy-makers' motives, and the implementation of the policy. Through modified process tracing, Thailand's self-perception and regional aspirations featured in Thai foreign policy can be revealed at different stages of development. Therefore, ideas or thoughts held by policy makers or government officials are seen as part of the state whichformulates and implements foreign policy objectives.

The motives in foreign policy-making traced in this thesis are observed by operationalising the idea that Thailand is a regional leading actor in Southeast Asia. The thesis investigates whether or not this idea exists in the minds of Thai foreign policy-makers as a common denominator, and to what extent it has shaped foreign policy direction, particularly in the post-Cold War era. To argue that this regionalist idea has played a role in foreign policy, the study shows that Thai foreign policy makers consistently make a reference to this regionalist idea in various ways throughout the post-Cold War period regardless of the changes of government and structural shocks that have affected Thailand. Ultimately, this ideational element helps explain part of the proactive nature of Thai foreign policy. Then, the research demonstrates that this regionalist characteristic also makes Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War gradually depart from what the conventional wisdom about Thailand's 'bending with the wind' or reactive foreign policy implies.

Although these concepts are admittedly abstract and may not be able to be measured with a great degree of precision, this thesis attempts to set applicable benchmarks to enable these concepts to be operationalised. The following terms are essential to the interpretation and argument throughout this thesis; hence need to be clarified for common understanding.
'Regional aspirations' relates to the idea of desiring to influence a region or to play a leading role in regional affairs. This leading role is closely corresponding to Orang Young's leadership concept that 'refers to the actions of individuals who endeavour to solve or circumvent the collective action problems that plague the efforts of parties seeking to realise joint gains in processes of institutional bargaining' (1991, p.285). Therefore, in this thesis the concept of 'regional aspirations' covers 'ideas' that are designed to place Thailand in a leading role in the Southeast Asian regional arena. It can be expressed in such ways as 'centre', 'bridge', 'central player', 'facilitator'. The major objective of this idea is to adjust, solve, or change the current regional environment, or even to create a new environment in which regional interaction can be possible.

'Reactive' and 'proactive' foreign policies are employed here to illustrate a broad portfolio of policy objectives. The terms applied in this thesis are adjusted from Palmer and Morgan's 'Two Good Theory' of foreign policy (2006). This theory contends that foreign policy should not be viewed only as the state's apparatus to protect its security or the status quo. Instead, foreign policy consists of many policy objectives that help a state achieve its desired outcomes. These objectives can be categorised into two major stances—[first], 'to change something in the world that it does not like...[and second] to reinforce an existing outcome' (Palmer & Morgan 2006, p.4). To state it more succinctly, the theory assumes that a state pursues two broad foreign policy objectives—change and maintenance (Morgan & Palmer 1998; Palmer & Morgan 2006, pp.1-42). Therefore, this thesis conforms to the 'Two Good Theory' by referring to a 'reactive' foreign policy as a policy that aims at preserving or maintaining status quo; whilst a 'proactive' policy exhibits an intention to alter or adjust the external environment in order to elevate a state's position in the international order.

'Proactive', therefore, corresponds to 'regional aspirations'. Both terms imply a similar notion. According to the above definition, the term 'proactive' represents an action performed by a state to change the existing nature of its external environment, whereas the term 'regional aspirations' implies an idea of a state trying to shape the regional environment in such a way as to further its own interests. Thus, the purpose of exercising a leading role is to increase the country's influence in its external affairs. This leads to the conclusion reached in this thesis that regional aspirations entail a
proactive policy to adjust, modify and change current situations that will facilitate or enhance a country's leadership. By doing so, a country will be able to pursue its foreign policy initiatives that will eventually make its external environment more suitable to realising this goal.

While 'proactive foreign policy' may clearly involve active or assertive characteristics, 'reactive foreign policy' according to the Two Good Theory is more complicated than merely being passive. Reactiveness in foreign policy applied in this thesis is determined by foreign policy objective or motive, not merely an observed action. This focus also corresponds to the cognitive approach to foreign policy that aims to reveal 'mechanisms' or 'psychologic' attributes to political motives other than 'political thinking and action' (Wæver 1990, p.335). If a foreign policy aims at preserving status quo or maintaining an existing arrangement, it is thus regarded as reactive foreign policy. However, a reactive policy or maintenance seeking is not static; it can be pursued by either passive or active means. Palmer and Morgan (2006) give a good example of the United States and its allies' foreign policy in liberating Kuwait from Iraq in the early 1990s as maintenance seeking rather than proactive policy as generally interpreted. This policy is viewed as a 'reaction' towards the changing status quo in the Persian Gulf through 'assertive' actions of military intervention (p.24).

To obtain relevant information linked to the above factors, selected criteria constitute a 'guide' to the study of cases and the collection of data. These criteria include: (a) policy-makers' perceptions, especially about the role Thailand is entitled to play in regional affairs; (b) regional implications of selected foreign policy, whether or not these policies aim merely to adjust Thailand's position according to external pressures, or to change the environment in the region, or the pattern of regional interaction; and (c) consistency of certain policy preferences pursued by different Thai governments.

A comparison both within cases and between cases and the aforementioned horizontal picture are all useful to elucidate a number of generalisations about Thai foreign policy behaviour. They can collectively provide a link between the idea of regional aspirations of Thai policy-makers, the policy processes leading to the projection of such ideas into specific individual foreign policy, and policy outcomes in terms of a preferred policy direction to execute that particular policy.
Case selection

For this thesis, two major case studies—Quadrangle Economic Co-operation and Forward Engagement—were selected to examine and illustrate its arguments about the influence of ideational factors in Thai foreign policy-making. The case selection is based on three main criteria. First, both cases are situated in the post-Cold War environment. Therefore, these selections share a similar international contextual background, especially one without pronounced ideological conflict across countries. Both cases indicate that Thailand intended to exercise regional leadership. However, it is not certain whether this intent found in both cases is a coincidence or is dependent upon the inclination of specific political leaders and policy-makers.

Second, the two cases represent 'least-likely' and 'most-likely' episodes, considering the nature of the Thai government and its tendency to implement proactive foreign policy. This tendency is further influenced by the general public image a government cultivates in the process of initiating and implementing a particular policy. The Chuan administration, for example, was normally seen by the Thai public as more accommodating and passive to external pressures, and hence more likely to implement reactive policy. The Thaksin government, however, appeared to public as being more confident and assertive in international affairs and its foreign policy was expected to be more proactive. Therefore, if this thesis demonstrates that Thailand's self-perception and regional aspirations played a role in making both governments' foreign policy more proactive than generally expected, it confirms the study's main proposition about Thai foreign policy's proactivity.

Third, of the two cases one is pre-1997 Financial Crisis (Quadrangle Economic Co-operation); the other is post-Crisis (Forward Engagement). This difference provides the opportunity for a comparative analysis of both domestic and international shocks on Thailand's foreign policy behaviour in the two timeframes. The two cases also reveal detailed differences on how regional aspirations were sustained in and used to advance foreign policy before and after the shocks. If the thesis can illustrate that structural shock did not have a major negative effect on the existing self-perception and regional aspirations across times and cases, self-perception and its derivative regional aspirations can be identified as significant elements in Thai foreign policy with a reasonably high level of confidence.
The selection of these two cases also relates to the concept of ‘region’ in Thai foreign policy-makers. The cases signify the regional priorities in Thai foreign policy-maker’s view. Based on Cantori and Spiegel’s argument (1970), the identity of region is dynamic and not confined only within geographical boundaries. Region can also be shaped due to other elements such as nature of communications, level of cohesion, power, and structure of relations (p.406). At the same time, a state can also construct multiple regional identities that may reinforce its own identity (Jayasuriya 1994, p.411-412). Therefore, both cases reveal several implications. Foremost, it signifies that Thailand’s interest mainly focuses in mainland Southeast Asia. It is understandable regarding its geographical and historical backgrounds of dominating this area and its involvement in modern times. As it will be further elaborated in each case study chapter, mainland Southeast Asia still maintained its place in both policy initiatives.

However, the second case study shows how the concept of ‘region’ is fluid and could be expanded beyond geographical proximity. In this case, other elements in Cantori and Spiegel’s analysis—communication, power, and structure of relations—seem to also play a role in regional definition. Moreover, by expanding the operative region it allows Thailand more room to exercise its leading role in co-ordinating common interest amongst distant countries where a mediator was not existent. At the same time, it has an implication about leadership competition amongst major states in Southeast Asia. Although Indonesia is often seen as a natural leader of the region there is no official acceptance of this status. Several leaders from other countries always played a role in regional affairs such as notably Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia and Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, regardless of the size of their countries. Therefore, Thailand’s attempt to play its role beyond Southeast Asia can help lift its international profile effectively, if successful.

As noted above, this thesis utilises a combination of data and information including primary official documents, interviews of policy-makers, and secondary data from academic writings and newspapers. Official documents relating to foreign policies between the Chatichai government (1988-1991) and the Thaksin government (2001-2006) were collected and reviewed. These documents include declassified policy papers, meeting reports and minutes. Speeches of relevant dignitaries in various
circumstances such as policy statements to the Parliament, records of parliamentary debates, press releases, and newsletters issued by the relevant government agencies have also been incorporated. Such documents were obtained from archival collections, libraries, and direct enquiries to desk officers of selected government agencies, mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Office of the National Security Council, the Office of the Cabinet, and the Parliament.

Interviews were conducted with selected groups of current and former policy-makers, officials and individuals in relevant agencies, to ascertain whether the data/information found in archival documents corresponds to actual policy. The author was able to access a range of policy-makers including a former Deputy Prime Minister, various Foreign Ministers and deputies, retired and current senior officials, middle-ranking and desk officials in core agencies related to foreign policy-making including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Office of the National Security Council (NSC), the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and the Office of National Economic and Social and Development Board (NESDB). Some of the interviews uncovered undocumented information and enabled the author to search further for critical documents or key persons to cross-check this information. Interviews focused on how Thai policy-makers view Thailand's position and leadership in the region; they were asked what factors, in their opinion, appeared to be most important to achieving their foreign policy objectives. The interviews extracted their experiences of implementing the foreign policies under study to gain a general understanding of the opportunities and challenges that Thailand faced. These included the capability of relevant agencies implementing the policy, the roles of external powers and neighbouring countries.

The thesis has also made use of secondary sources, such as media analyses and reports related to the policies concerned, as well as interviews with area experts and academics in the field to obtain opinions and different perspectives on the issues. These secondary sources point to some key factors and aspects in which the research may have initially and unintentionally overlooked. The collected data and information from both primary and secondary sources enabled the author to understand to what extent self-perception and regional aspirations were important in Thailand's foreign policy-making, and how the issues were handled and implemented. The data and information also shows the difficulties and challenges during the courses of policy
implementation. Moreover, they have yielded insights into how Thailand responded to other countries' reactions towards its policies, and how adept its diplomats and government officials were in advocating the policies in order to gain support both within and outside the country. The assessment of this data and information has not only helped reveal details specific to each individual case, but has also facilitated the author's ability to delineate commonalities and patterns amongst cases.

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis develops its argument concerning Thai foreign policy behaviour by firstly demarcating the specific parameters of the debates in the literature. Therefore, Chapter Two provides a broad understanding of this debate in the existing literature on Thai foreign relations. It discusses three broad categories of how scholars view Thai foreign policy behaviour based on its key factors affecting Thailand's external relations with foreign countries—that is reactive foreign policy, the foreign policy based on universal principles, and the foreign policy with regional ambitions.

The mainstream of Thai scholars views Thai foreign policy behaviour as reactive. In this view, Thai foreign policy exhibits a high degree of adaptability in the external environment, where Thailand's policy has been dubbed 'bamboo bending with the wind' diplomacy. This feature reflects its struggle for survival and security orientation, from the colonialism period up to the Cold War when external powers played an important role in regional politics. Notwithstanding the end of the Cold War, this conventional school of thought asserts that this behaviour continues.

Other typologies of Thai foreign policy behaviour include additional variables—notably the universal principle of democracy and human rights, and specific political leader's ambition—reflecting the political and economic developments in the early 1990s. Despite introducing other new factors in Thai foreign policy analysis in the post-Cold War, these typologies still view the role of new factors fluctuating between different governments; hence they ultimately accept the primacy of the conventional view as a suitable generalisation of Thai foreign policy. This chapter therefore concludes that the current typologies of Thai foreign policy behaviour leave no room for viewing the increasingly proactive nature of Thai foreign policy after the end of the Cold War.
Cold War. The chapter points to shortcomings in each explanation and seeks to describe this changing character based through ideational factors—self-perception—that cut across actors and time in the post-Cold War period.

**Chapter Three** traces the development of self-perception in Thai history focusing on Thailand's nation-building process. Based on a 'cognitive argument' drawn from pertinent literature as a loose framework of analysis, the intention is to establish a link between Thai modern state-building, nationalism, and the construction of self-perception shared amongst the Thai people and their policy-makers as a collective idea. It shows that nationalism is a critical tool for the Thai state to consolidate its power over the modern territory and people especially through mass education. Nationalism not only successfully helped modern Thailand escape colonisation but also created the 'self' and 'other' frame of reference. Based on this reference, the Thais conclude that their country and people are 'superior' to other nations in the region.

Thailand's experiences during the Cold War also reinforced the country's sense of significance. Thailand's status as a close ally to major powers such as the United States, Britain, and later China, and its role in regional organisations strengthened the idea of being an 'important state'. Therefore, this chapter takes the view that this self-perception was consolidated throughout modern Thai history. Due to the regional political environment Thailand could not fully express or translate this idea into policy action independently without the involvement of regional great powers. Thailand's foreign policy throughout the Cold War era mainly aimed at protecting its security and sovereignty by actively seeking or strengthening allies against national threats. The chapter further argues that the lingering self-perception gradually revealed itself at the end of the Cold War when it started to seek change in the regional environment.

**Chapter Four** examines the interaction between idea and materials in the globalisation context as a critical juncture towards its post-Cold War foreign policy. This chapter examines whether and how the changing economic and political environment affects the core element of Thailand's self-perception. It initially draws a connection between economic globalisation and Thailand's economic and political transformation along with the 'competition state' model. It argues that these changes have a direct impact on the Thai state's foreign policy objective in which strengthening
its economic competitiveness became an important goal. It further shows that Thailand's self-perception continued with some adjustments in its peripheral elements. That is, its core perception still holds that Thailand is a leading state in the region and should remain its influence while its policy strategy needs to adjust for facilitating economic interdependence. This trend reveals in Thailand seeking to play a leading role for regional co-operation especially in mainland Southeast Asia. The chapter assesses this emerging trend in Thai foreign policy after the Cold War and shows its regional focus. This proposition is closely examined in detail in the succeeding chapters.


**Chapter Five** analyses Thailand's role in a particular sub-regional economic co-operation in mainland Southeast Asia namely the 'Quadrangle Economic Co-operation' initiative under the two Chuan governments. This chapter points to some anomalies in Thailand's proactive role that are unsatisfactorily explained only by analyses based purely on rationalist approaches and material interest. This chapter therefore provides a supplement explanation by referring back to the influence of Thailand's self-perception and its regional aspirations. Only by incorporating these ideational elements in Thai foreign policy analysis does the chapter clarify to what extent the exercise of regional leadership was important in this regional initiative. These key ideational elements arguably made Thailand's behaviour proactive notwithstanding a regional great power and other key external actors such as China, ADB, and ASEAN. This chapter offers the view that Thailand perceived its active involvement in regional institutionalism as a means to fulfil its ideational vision and to 'sell' it to its regional neighbours and other stakeholders. This chapter also reveals that these aspirations were broadly shared rather than specific to any certain elite despite the existence of a domestic 'push-pull' process at the implementation level. Although the Chuan government's general image recalls a reactive working style and policy routinisation in which general observers may not expect any significant regional leadership in its foreign policy, its management of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative paints a different picture.
Chapter Six examines the 'Forward Engagement Strategy', a Thai foreign policy strategy formulated by the Thaksin government. In general, this chapter addresses to what extent regional aspirations were a core element in Thailand's foreign policy strategy considering the domestic and regional settings at the time of Thaksin's rise to power. It is shown that the immediate mission of the Thaksin government was to restore the Thai economy from the consequences of the Financial Crisis in 1997 in which financial assistance from international institutions was a reasonable last resort. At the same time, a strong backlash domestic coalition against the Western countries also emerged as another constraint in public policy calculation. However, the Thaksin government's foreign policy neither reverted to accommodating Western great powers in return for their assistance nor totally dwelled the domestic outcry for inward orientation. Instead, Prime Minister Thaksin chose to cultivate regional co-operation as an essential way to economic recovery. In this contest, the domestic backlash and internationalist coalitions were manifested in the government's 'dual track' approach through its regional strategy. However, what made Thai foreign policy during this time interesting is that, instead of utilising and supporting various existing regional fora, Thailand again initiated its own version of regional co-operation. Thai foreign policy strategy was crafted to ensure that Thailand played a leading role in bridging various regional actors in Asia and promoted Asian regionalism centring around three major initiatives: the Asia Co-operation Dialogue (ACD); the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC); and the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation Strategy (ACMECS). Moreover, Thailand's interest in mainland Southeast Asia continued, and could be seen in its exercise of leadership in economic development projects and renewed financial assistance under the ACMECS scheme. Without the influence of Thailand's self-perception as a leading actor, these regional initiatives may not have materialised and been pursued. Thai foreign policy may have been much more reactive than it was amidst the thirst for a strong economic revival.

The final chapter, Chapter Seven, summarises the thesis' findings and explores their significance and implications. The conclusion reiterates the main argument developed throughout the thesis, that Thailand's ideational factors—self-perception and its derivative regional aspirations—have a potential merit in explaining the development in Thailand's foreign policy behaviour especially in the post-Cold War era. Without
these ideational elements in Thai foreign policy-makers, Thailand’s foreign policy preference may not have sustained its regional orientation. Also, domestic and structural changes would have changed the course of Thai foreign policy into different postures. The chapter also discusses the contributions of this study to the literature on Thai foreign relations, particularly its theoretical and policy implications. It finally proposes further possible research for understanding Thai foreign policy in the future.

To reiterate, the ultimate intention of this thesis is to offer a supplementary view in explanation of Thai foreign policy behaviour particularly after the Cold War. It provides a room for incorporating ideational factors into Thai foreign policy analysis that could loosen the rigidity of the conventional analysis. By doing so, this thesis re-invigorates the debate over Thai foreign policy behaviour in several respects. First, it argues that reactive foreign policy behaviour no longer dominates the general posture of Thailand’s external relations, but that, on the contrary, Thai foreign policy after the Cold War can be viewed as increasingly proactive. Second, this study also establishes that how Thailand views itself, that is, in its self-perception can also influence its foreign policy behaviour. The emphasis on the role of ideational factors is novel and not unique in previous studies in Thai foreign policy. This thesis can thus be regarded as a significant step towards understanding Thailand’s international relations as they contribute to Southeast Asia’s overall political stability and economic progress.
CHAPTER TWO

THE EXISTING DEBATE ON THE PATTERN OF
THAI FOREIGN POLICY BEHAVIOUR

The most important thing is when we know that great powers always compete for power we must fall into nobody's arms but maintain the policy of equidistance—not leaning too much towards anyone who will tie us so tight that we cannot breathe comfortably. This is the policy that I always followed when I was responsible for Thai foreign affairs (Thanat Khoman 1999, pp.186-187)

The above statement by Thanat Khomán, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, neatly captures a general view of Thai foreign policy amongst observers and experts in the field. This view represents a legacy of Thailand’s diplomatic successes in contemporary history. These achievements are partly owed to Thailand’s adept diplomatic skills that have throughout history helped the country escape from major direct external threats to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This legacy has resulted in the formation of the dominant view of Thai foreign policy behaviour amongst scholars of Thai foreign relations, which focuses on the country’s flexible and accommodating attributes, dubbed as 'bamboo bending with the wind' diplomacy. This conventional wisdom also has an important implication, that Thailand’s accommodating posture to external pressures is equivalent to ‘reactive’ foreign policy. The main policy objective is to preserve Thailand’s security and maintain its stability. This view has prevailed as a core assumption about Thai foreign policy behaviour.

The challenges or attempts to explain Thai foreign policy behaviour from other perspectives also emerged after the Cold War, mainly due to the change in global and domestic politics towards the end of the Cold War. These propositions also try to give a view of the general trend toward proactiveness in Thai foreign policy based on the expansion of universal principles of democracy and human rights, and the vision of certain political leaders.
The political development inevitably introduced other factors apart from security threats in Thai foreign policy-making. The economic transformation since the 1980s and the emerging role of non-state actors in international and domestic politics gained more attention in both academic and policy-making domains. These two new elements were symbiotic. The stronger economic condition gave rise to the business and middle classes, hence greater demands for democratisation in many parts of the world, particularly following the collapse of the communist bloc. Thailand was no exception to this global trend. With the help of modern information technology, the proliferation of universal norms and ideas underpinning democracy could make their way into Thai politics. This democratic value began to be seen in many aspects of political development in Thailand especially after the retreat of the military from direct involvement in politics in the early 1990s. The spirit of democratic values and principles could be felt notably in the 1997 constitution (Kuris 2003, p.10), as well as in Thai foreign policy of the time.

The other emerging idea in the study of Thai foreign affairs attempts to analyse Thailand's role in the region in the post-Cold War era based on certain idiosyncratic factors of its political leaders. This third tenet focuses on the ambitions of some Thai politicians for Thailand to become a leading regional actor considering its economic success. However, this group of scholars sees this ambition mostly as a way which allows businessmen-cum-politicians to exploit their political powers for their economic and political advantages. Due to its particular focus on personality this line of idea does not sufficiently generate a common characteristic of Thai foreign policy behaviour. This explanation is limited to only certain political leaders who are thought to have conflicts of interest and use foreign policy rhetorically to boost their own domestic popularity.

Against the background of world and domestic political development at the end of the Cold War, as briefly described above, Thai foreign policy analysis in the post-Cold War period has manifested itself and been portrayed in the existing literature and in debates on Thailand's foreign relations. This has resulted in a loose categorisation of the literature on Thai foreign policy into different ends of spectrum: 'reactive versus proactive' foreign policy based primarily on their different objectives and emphases on factors influencing foreign policy-making. At one end, the 'conventional wisdom' of
reactive foreign policy posits that Thai foreign policy aims at preserving an environment suitable for continuing or sustaining Thailand's sovereignty and security. At the other, the challenging explanations argue for emerging proactive foreign policy behaviour based on 'universal principles' and 'personal ambitions of political leaders'.

However, this chapter demonstrates in detail that although the conventional wisdom is convincing in explaining the general posture of Thai foreign policy before the end of the Cold War, that conventionality is becoming increasingly unable to capture the post-Cold War era where dynamic changes took place at both systemic and domestic levels. At the same time, while giving credit to attempts to explain this changing nature in Thai foreign policy through the impetus of universal principles and personal ambitions, this thesis contends that these emphases are short-lived and unable to offer a sustainable explanation of Thailand's increasingly proactive nature. Such debates normally conclude in favour of the conventional school of thought that Thai foreign policy even in the post-Cold War period has been continuously reactive.

This chapter is therefore structured to explore the essence of each existing general explanation of Thai foreign policy. Moreover, it examines and assesses the validity and weaknesses their explanation and the extent to which they can explain Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy behaviour. Showing the drawbacks of each school of thought will suggest the gap in the literature which this thesis is also trying to fill.

2.1 Conventional wisdom: the reactive foreign policy for security maintenance

The idea of Thai foreign policy exhibiting a reactive behaviour is well established in the study of Thailand's foreign relations. This conventional school of thought derives its strong argument based on Thai diplomatic history especially since the introduction of Western colonial powers in Southeast Asia in the middle of the nineteenth century. This section reviews how this reactivity has strongly established within the study of Thai foreign policy especially through historical records of Thai diplomacy. Finally, it points out the weaknesses of this view in understanding Thai foreign policy in the dynamic of the post-Cold War era.
Before looking closely at the historical evidence it is useful to clarify some concepts that are normally found in association with the explanation of reactive foreign policy of Thailand—flexibility and pragmatism. Flexibility and pragmatism in the literature of Thailand's foreign relations resemble those described in American philosophers notably Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. The concept of American pragmatism describes the American worldview with regard to its international affairs that prefers following the middle path between preserving the status quo and preventing sudden and radical changes inspired by any political or ideological position (Crabb Jr 1989, 93). It accepts changes but only with 'gradual' and 'incremental' pace that is based on the realistic development of a society, whereas revolution and radical changes are thought to lead to losses and insecure international peace and stability (Crabb Jr 1985, 1989). Moreover, based on this pragmatic notion a foreign policy tends to be ad hoc and serves as a solution for a particular arising problem (Kissinger 1969, pp.29-34). In this view, American anti-communism policy during the peak of the Cold War can be discernable as a policy that tried to prevent such revolutionary upheavals.

This description is, in many ways, closely linked with Palmer and Morgan's 'Two-Good Theory' in explaining foreign policy portfolio of maintenance seeking objective as explained in Chapter One. To reiterate the operationalisation of concepts employed in this thesis based on 'Two-Good Theory', this thesis differentiates not only reactiveness and proactiveness but also proactiveness and mere activeness or assertiveness. In connection with the flexibility concept, it views reactive foreign policy behaviour as able to be pursued through active or assertive actions as long as the main policy objective is to preserve status quo. It can be pragmatic or flexible to make 'rapid changes...[in] actions and statements, goals, aspiration, or abandoning bargaining positions, coercive strategies, or set patterns of activity' (Mitchell & Druckman 1995, p.213).

Martin Stuart-Fox (2004) posits that the flexible nature in Thai foreign policy can be thought of as having emanated from the 'mandala', an ancient concept of inter-state relations in mainland Southeast Asia. This state system was based on the tributary relations in which smaller states recognised the superiority of the more powerful kingdoms. More importantly, loyalty was not exclusive to one but multiple powers as
long as they were perceived as potential threats and effective balancers to guarantee the autonomy of the less powerful kingdoms. Therefore, it resulted in the system in which there existed overlaying spheres of influence over small kingdoms. For example, the Khmer kingdom recognised both Siam and Vietnam as its patrons by sending ‘golden and silver trees’ as symbols of acceptance of their suzerainty over Cambodia.

This system was difficult to comprehend for the European powers whose idea of states was the Westphalian system in which a single suzerain power or authority was recognised, with a clear and well defined demarcation of borders. Stuart-Fox relates this concept with Thailand’s balancing strategy since the arrival of the European powers in the mid nineteenth century, and then concludes that ‘the concept of the mandala underlines the flexibility of Thai foreign policy. The support of one power to balance that of another ‘is always in the interest of Thailand’ (2004, p.142). The tendency to accommodate external powers in order to protect its vital interests—sovereignty and territorial integrity—is thus a core value in Thai foreign policy behaviour. It was external challenges to the Thai state that shaped Thai foreign policy to follow this direction. Consequently, the conventional argument perceives as an important aspect of Thai foreign policy, that it is mainly reactive and seeking to preserve the status quo.

According to this typology, flexibility and pragmatism in Thai foreign policy in practice can be seen throughout history and can be conceptualised in several dimensions. Firstly, the flexibility allows Thailand to maintain its status quo in terms of sovereignty and security. Secondly, it tends to avoid conflict with major powers, but retains good relations with all. Despite its attempt to cultivate cordiality with most major powers, Thailand understands that it is relatively insignificant in the great power politics and may be abandoned at any time. Thus, Thailand expects only temporary arrangements and prefers diversifying its alignment with various external powers. Consequently, some scholars have concluded further that Thai foreign policy is opportunistic and free from firm principles. These characteristics of Thai foreign policy upheld in this conventional wisdom will be examined in detail in the succeeding sub-sections.
2.1.1 Realist view of security-oriented foreign policy

Security is argued to be a primary goal of any state, according to the realist paradigm. Waltz argues that 'the first concern of states is ... to maintain their position in the system' (1979, p.126). The conventional wisdom on Thai foreign policy analysis implicitly positions its argument about Thailand's reactive behaviour within the broad literature of 'small states' in the field of international relations. Thailand's foreign policy behaviour through this conventional lens then generally shows the characteristics of a 'small power'. As Thanat Khoman puts it, 'Thailand is not a big or even a medium power, but a small power...therefore we have to be realistic and pursue a policy appropriate to timing and commensurate with our capability' (1999, p.186).

The notion of small powers assumes that a small state lacks power in quantitative terms (Neumann and Gstohl 2006, p.4) especially in its military and economic attributes. As elaborated by Keohane (1969) using a psychological dimension, in such a country, the leaders 'consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system' (p.60). A small power thus often 'feel[s] threatened, to some significant and immediate sense, by the play of Great Power politics' (Rothstein 1968, p.4). Therefore, it actually prefers neutrality and nonalignment, and finds the way in which its involvement in the great powers' conflict is minimal (p.30). However, ironically an optimal policy of nonalignment and neutrality is hard to achieve in reality due to the country's smallness. A small state, in Morgenthau's view, therefore can maintain their independence mostly through either the balancing or bandwagoning with great powers to guarantee its survival (1948, cited in Neumann and Gstohl 2006, p.18). If it chooses inappropriate policies it 'may end the possibility of free choice' (Rothstein 1968, p.5).

This suggests that security and state survival are the primary concerns, thus a foreign policy has a significant function to protect this interest. Therefore, the flexibility to select an appropriate foreign policy to practically reflect the surrounding environment at a particular time is deemed necessary by its leaders. Considering its relative weakness in terms of power within the international hierarchy, a small state generally exhibits a reactive and passive posture rather than acting actively as an
agent of change (Hey 2003, p. 6). The maintenance of the status quo in the system is therefore an essential feature of a reactive foreign policy.

The view of Thailand as a small state, according to this conventional school of Thai foreign policy, hence exhibiting a reactive foreign policy to maintain its security and survival constitutes the core theoretical background of this conventional wisdom. The general description of Thai foreign policy under this tenet, thus, reflects the assumption of the nature of small states that struggle for maintaining their autonomy at home by flexibly and pragmatically adjusting their external policy suitable for a particular international environment. Scholars of Thai foreign policy subscribing to this argue that Thailand’s properties, of being small and marginalised in the international hierarchy, do not change, Thailand thus continues its traditional direction of flexibility, pragmatism and accommodation of external powers. This behaviour is analogous to the view of Thai foreign policy as ‘bamboo bending with the wind’, described vividly as ‘always solidly rooted, but flexible enough to bend whichever way the wind blows in order to survive’ (Kislenko 2002, p.3). This also characterises a foreign policy of conflict avoidance and conforming to the mainstream (Prapat 2000, p.4). This policy orientation is historically rooted in both a traditional inter-state system and Thailand’s experience with external interactions especially with great powers.

For Thailand, the national security concept is traditionally defined in relation to the national pillars, namely, ‘nation’, ‘religion’ (Buddhism), and ‘king’ (Neher 1990, p.201; Panitan 1998, p.420). The maintenance of Thai national security thus involves preserving the status quo and continuing the relevance of these three elements in Thai society. Likewise, Thai foreign policy is argued to exhibit this nature and aims to achieve a condition that stabilises its national ‘holy trinity’. In other words, as Panitan asserts, Thai foreign policy needs to ‘defend the nation’s independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and status in the international arena’ (1998, p.433). Flexible and pragmatic foreign policy is thus regarded by Thai policy-makers as the proper way to achieve that goal. It is the way in which Thailand allows the key pillars to sustain and survive in the international system. This has been reflected in Thai foreign relations throughout its history.
According to this conventional wisdom Thai diplomatic history well justifies its claim on flexible foreign policy. Thailand constantly adjusted its foreign policy and strategies to suit domestic and external environments in order to preserve its national security and status-quo. Thai foreign policy-makers have always tried to avoid dependence on any single external power. There seemed to be no difficulty for the Thai elite to suddenly change their foreign policy posture when the situation changed. Several notable examples with regard to Thailand's position during the major wars reflect this tendency.

For example, in the First World War, Siam (the former name of Thailand) officially declared war on the Central Powers, led by Austria-Hungary, Germany, Italy and the Ottoman Empire in 1917 (Prapat 2000, p.4) becoming the only Southeast Asian country in the European theatre. This was surprising to the public because relations between Siam and countries in the Central Powers up to that time had been very cordial and warm. Since the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) German, Austrian and Italian nationals had maintained a good reputation in the country and played an important role in Siam's reformation and modernisation projects such as the construction of the transport system, Western styled palaces and buildings, and in modern military training (Rong 1977, p.153). Moreover, Germans were important to Siam's economy as they controlled most international shipping by which Siamese imports and exports were carried (Terwiel 1983, p.304). Germany, Austria and Italy were also parts of Siam's balancing strategy against other European powers, particularly France and Britain who had extensive great interest in mainland Southeast Asia. During that time, according to a major group of Thai policy-makers and the general public, Germany appeared to have a positive image that posed no threat to Siam's territorial integrity compared to the British and the French to which Siam had ceded many parts of its 'territories' (Neher 1974, p.311; Sanan 1975, p.294). However, partly with his careful observation and calculation of the situation in Europe, including his pro-British background, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) was convinced that the Allied Powers were gaining the upper hand and to side with them would enable Siam to re-negotiate the course of the unequal treaties with the European nations (Wyatt 2003, pp.217-219). Consequently, Siam could resume its full sovereignty without major external interference. Thailand's independence was thus preserved.
The various positions taken by Thailand during the Second World War are commonly cited as a case of Thailand's attempt to secure its stability and the status quo. Thailand adjusted its position at least three times during the Pacific War from neutrality to taking sides with both the Axis and the Allied Powers, respectively. Thailand had remained neutral until December 1941 when Japanese forces landed on Thai soil. It then signed a military alliance treaty with Japan at the end of that month, and a month later declared war on Britain and the United States. However, the victory of the Allied Powers did not result in Thailand being treated as an Axis country. This was due to the fact that the United States acknowledged the role and merit of the 'Seri Thai' movement—the underground grouping both within and outside the country against the Japanese and the co-belligerent Phibun government—and refused to recognise Thailand's declaration of war. Thailand's post-war leaders also swiftly renounced the country's war declaration and claimed that it was illegitimately enacted without unanimity in the Council of Regency. Moreover, they argued that Thailand was forced to join the Axis while the majority of Thai people disagreed with that decision as evidenced by the emergence of 'Seri Thai' (Wiwat 1999, pp.123-128; Wyatt 2003, pp.250-251). Thailand was thereafter treated as an enemy-occupied country. It only had to pay reparation in rice to the British and to relinquish its claim on adjacent territories gained during the War (Neher 1974, pp.314-315; Sanan 1975, pp.302-303; Baker & Pasuk 2005, pp.135-137). Importantly, Thailand was the first nation amongst the former Axis countries to join the United Nations in December 1946. Thai sovereignty and independence were therefore preserved, unlike those of other Axis Powers, such as Germany and Japan, which were occupied by the Allies until the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, respectively.

Thai foreign policy doctrine after the Second World War was also grounded in its experience with the role of major powers in sustaining Thailand's international status and sovereignty (Chulacheeb 1998, 2004). International recognition of Thailand's independence became a top national interest amongst Thai policy-makers. At this juncture, the United States became ‘the principle guarantor of [Thailand]’s independence against hostile regional powers’ after World War II (Muscat 1990, p.18). Embracing external powers in this way to guarantee its sovereignty, as well as regional stability was not unfamiliar to Thailand. This characteristic was quite
different from some other Southeast Asian nations that were colonised by Western colonial powers and gained their independence after World War II. Indonesia, for example, was normally suspicious of external powers' intentions and involvement with regional affairs and tended to resist their roles especially during the Sukarno regime (Chulacheeb 2004, pp.190-193). For Thailand, this accommodating posture was the way to maintain its survival.

However, the 'reactive foreign policy' argument asserts that Thai foreign policy still changed along with global and regional politics, not only adhering to pro-Western bloc as once generally understood. Neher's generalisation of the pattern in Thai foreign policy during this time gives a clear picture of Thailand's flexibility. He states:

Thai foreign policy can be chronologically categorized as follows:
1945 to early 1970s - the era of Pax Americana when Thailand chose an exclusive and all-encompassing relationship with the United States;
from the early 1970s to the present - a period first called 'equidistance' amongst the great world and regional powers, as Thailand sought a way to respond to the Communist victory in Vietnam and the decrease in American interest in the region and later termed 'omnidirectionality', a more independent foreign policy...The patterns are clear (1990, p.189).

Corrine's analysis (1998) also concurs with that of Neher about pattern in Thai foreign policy. She contends that Thailand's post-war foreign policy followed three major directions—siding with the Free World against the communists, tilting towards the socialist bloc, and being neutral. She argues that Thailand tried to do all of them but finally returned to its traditional foreign policy position which was being friends with everybody, or a so-called 'omni-directional policy' (Corrine 1998, pp.9-10).

According to this argument, pragmatism was a suitable strategy for Thailand's survival especially during the Cold War period. During the peak of ideological conflict in the region and within Thailand during the 1950s and 1960s, Thailand saw the need for the American security guarantee to fight against the communist threat
perceived amongst the Thai elite (Neher 1975, p.1102; Chulacheeb 1999, p.94), or what Wiwat (1999) calls the 'security syndrome'.

Reactive foreign policy in which Thailand accommodated the United States' strategic position in Southeast Asia was also important at the peak of the Cold War. The convergence of both the security and the economic interests of the United States and Thailand brought about a close relationship between the two countries. Thailand was thus a key actor in sustaining American hegemony in Asia during the 1950s-1960s by serving as a supplier of natural resources and a market for the reconstruction project of the post-war Japan, 'as well as in the American drive to keep communism at bay' (Kullada 2003, pp.48-49). In return, Thailand received a significant assistance package from the United States after the early 1950s including access to foreign capital through international financial institutions (Fineman 1993, pp.234-313; Chamber 2004, p.461; Kullada 2003, p.49). Embracing the American presence also shielded Thailand from a possible threat from a regional power, namely that of communist China during the first decade after World War II, and against communist Indochina led by Vietnam in the 1960s (Kullada 2003, pp.54-55, 60-62). Thai foreign policy throughout the 1960s continued to support the American military presence in the region with the latter's involvement in the Vietnam War to protect South Vietnam from falling into its Northern rival's hands.

This fear of communism within its own backyard prompted Thailand to deepen the Thai-American security alliance. This resulted in the transformation of the Manila Pact from a multilateral to a de facto bilateral document of the Thanat-Rusk Joint Communiqué in 1962¹. This resulted in another significant increase in American military assistance to Thailand after the first wave of military assistance following

¹ Prior to the 1962 Thanat-Rusk Joint Communiqué, Thailand and the United States were both members of a multilateral security arrangement under the 1954 Manila Pact of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO). However, Thailand viewed this security pact as insufficient to guarantee its security against the communists due to the weak commitment amongst the treaty members, unlike that in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This weakness of SEATO manifested in the Laos Crisis in 1960-1962 when the communist Prathet Lao supported by communist China and North Vietnam was likely to gain victory over the right wing nationalist group backed by Thailand and the United States. Thailand requested SEATO to intervene militarily but many of the organisation members disagreed. Instead, SEATO's decision came out in favour of calling for a cease-fire agreement, 'constructive negotiation' and an international conference on Laos. See also in US Department of State 1961; Chulacheeb 1999, pp.77-78.
the Korean War in the early 1950s. However, the United States military assistance did not involve any actual operations in Thailand but was mainly limited to technical and logistic assistance. The assistance programmes related to military or security affairs included personnel training, the procurement of military supplies, the construction of road networks to remote areas where communist movements were gaining ground, and airport construction in strategic locations for the American military operation in the Vietnam War (Marshall 1969, pp.192-196; Muscat 1990, 341-343; Plotnick 1994, pp.123-127). This included U-Tapao airport that became a front-line facility of the United States Air Force (USAF) during the Vietnam War from 1966 through 1975.

Thailand’s vigorous role in the birth of ASEAN in the late 1960s might be seen as an assertive foreign policy in the middle of the Cold War; however, it was not proactive regarding its intent. Thanat Khoman’s view on the need of a regional entity to supplement the weakening SEATO to secure the regional stability can reflect this security maintenance view.

The factors for regional co-operation at that time were, one, to preserve Thailand’s independence and freedom. So, ASEAN was a necessity for our country’s survival. The other one was the weakness of SEATO gave us a lesson that an effective regional arrangement required the participation amongst countries with common interest (Thanat 1990, p.167)

The security concern about communism amongst the Thai elite was carried through into the 1970s although the nature of the threats and foreign policy response changed. Suchit and Sukhumbhandh state that Thailand’s foreign policy in the 1970s, at least until 1977, turned to seek peaceful co-existence and normalisation with its Indochinese neighbours. This reflected the reality that Thailand had to live with its neighbours regardless of their political differences (1999, p.277). This more accommodating posture reflects the prevailing Kissingerian realist idea prevailing amongst Thai policy-makers during that time that downplayed the internal nature of other regimes, similarly to Nixon’s foreign policy (Roth 2006). This change arose due to several major international and regional political developments at the end of the
Vietnam War—the split in the communist camp between China and the Soviet Union, the rapprochement between China and the United States, and, importantly, the American failure in the Vietnam War and its withdrawal from Southeast Asia.

In this new environment, therefore, Thailand adjusted its foreign policy posture to accept the new reality following the pull-out of the last Thai troops from Vietnam in May 1972. Thailand started to prepare for the resumption of its relations with the People’s Republic of China in the early 1970s despite the major concern about Chinese support of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). However, confidence was gradually built and the plan had been carried out. The Thai Foreign Minister announced in 1971 that Thailand was willing to resume trade relations with China. After that, Thailand relaxed its regulation of official contacts with the Chinese officials leading to sending a ping-pong team to China in 1972. Discussions between Thai and Chinese officials about diplomatic normalisation and exchange of visits continued from 1972-1974 and finally reached an agreement to normalise the diplomatic relations on 1 July 1975 (Anand 1999).

Apart from the more distant communist states of Soviet Union and China, a greater concern amongst Thai policy-makers was actually their immediate neighbours and traditional buffer states—Laos and Cambodia—including its traditional regional rival, Vietnam. This concern gained wider recognition after the fall of Saigon, Phnom Penh and Vientiane in the same year, 1975. The regime change in these countries brought Thailand to the border of communist regimes for the first time. The fall of Thailand as the next communist state was then becoming more likely according to the domino theory. Therefore, to reflect this geopolitical reality Thailand initially attempted to be friends with Vietnam leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1976 under the civilian government of Seni Pramoj. However, the Vietnamese threat still remained in the mind of many Thai policy-makers. The right-wing backlash against the policy of appeasement with the socialist countries including a growing leftist student movement, then forced Seni to resign and replaced him with an extremely right-wing leader, Tanin Kraivixien. This domestic change led to a break in the foreign policy of peaceful co-existence briefly during 1976-1977 (Plotnick 1994, pp.103-146; Chulacheeb 1999, pp.80-84; Wiwat 1999, pp.143-151).
This perception of threat from Vietnam reached its peak when the latter invaded Cambodia in 1978, resulting in the installation of a pro-Vietnam regime in Cambodia (Thongchai 2005, p.121). The Cambodia conflict occupied Thailand's foreign policy throughout the course of the 1980s and the early 1990s (Sarasin 1999, p.314). This event rose to significance due to the combination of both domestic and regional factors. It arose after the return of the right wing government following a short period of democracy during 1973-1976, when Thailand faced a serious internal communist insurgency and economic downturn (Funston 1998c, p.53). Vietnam was viewed as a potential destabilising force against Thailand's national security considering its experience in the war with the United States and being a relatively stronger military power (Sarasin 1999, p.317). Vietnam's political and military influence in both Laos and Cambodia further accentuated this fear. Thailand suspected that the real intention of the Vietnamese hegemonic project did not stop only in these buffer states but was also aimed at inclusion of the north-eastern part of Thailand in its goal to recreate the Federation of Indochina (Sunai 1997, p.3). This belief was reconfirmed when Vietnamese troops, for the first time, intruded into Thai territory in Non Mak Mun village of Prachinburi Province in June 1980 (Sunai 1997, p.9), and 70,000-100,000 personnel were deployed very near to Thailand's eastern border in May 1981 (Khien 1999b, p.307). The repercussions of this threat were felt regionally and arguably crystallised ASEAN's co-operative direction against the Vietnamese invasion thereafter.

During the Cambodia conflict Thailand pursued a multilevel strategy to seek for international support against the abrupt change in regional balance of power. Again, its active role in the entire episode of regional conflict resolution was grounded in its fear of the security threat and power imbalance in Indochina. The primary objective was to maintain security and status quo in mainland Southeast Asia which reflects the reactive nature of its policy.

Thailand made use of the relaxing international environment by diversifying support from various major powers and supporters, but did not limited this to any particular ideological camp, including not only the United States and the free world but also
communist China and even the Soviet Union. While maintaining political support from the United States, Thailand also turned to China for political and military assistance. This resulted in Chinese involvement in the conflict by supplying weapons to both the Thai armed forces (Chulacheeb 1999, p.87) and Cambodian resistance groups through Thailand (Sarasin 1999, p.319; Suchit & Sukhumbandh 1999, p.284; Theera 1999, p.348).

At the regional level, ASEAN and China agreed to address the problem by placing pressure on Hanoi on both economic and political fronts. Politically, Thailand on behalf of ASEAN succeeded in convincing the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to agree with Thailand and ASEAN's direction in conflict resolution. This resulted in the UNGA Resolutions No.34/22 and No.35/6 and subsequent international conferences to solve the conflict throughout the 1980s (Sunai 1997, pp.4-9; Funston 1998c; Surachai 1999). This led to the proposal of a 'comprehensive solution' to the Cambodia question especially the demand for a Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, a call for a free general election in Cambodia and a guarantee of Cambodian neutrality (Soon 1982, pp.549-550). At the same time, Thailand and other supporters such as the United States, Japan, China and some ASEAN member states also levied economic sanctions against Vietnam (Soon 1982, p.559; Surachai 1999, pp.19-20). Although Thailand may be seen as playing an active role in the issue, it was rather a reaction to the change of the status quo in Southeast Asia as well as a defence of its national security and sovereignty. Therefore, according to this thesis' operational definition of reactiveness, Thailand's foreign policy during the Cambodia problem was basically a reaction to Vietnam's growing influence and Thailand's security threat.

In spite of changing international political and economic environments, the conventional school of Thai foreign policy analysis still holds the view that Thai foreign policy continues to, and should, follow the flexible posture it adopted after the Cold War. Neher (1990) suggests that pragmatism is necessary for Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era to deal with more complexities in the interdependent world economy. Kislenko (2002) similarly argues that Thai foreign policy will still

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2 The then Prime Minister of Thailand, General Kriangsak Chomanand, made a state visit to Moscow in 1979 after his visit to the United States and China, becoming the first Thai Prime Minister to visit the Soviet Union.
hold firmly to 'a remarkable history of continuity' (p.561). She posits that 'Thailand will undoubtedly try to accommodate [all major powers]' (p.561) including other actors, such as its neighbouring countries and regional organisations in order to cope with emerging challenges in the post-Cold War environment, such as economic difficulties, lingering problems with neighbouring countries and international terrorism.

However, this thesis contends that the above observation is misleading in its analysis. Certainly, it is irrefutable that any country needs to be pragmatic to tackle the issues thrown up by a complex world. The differences rest on its policy intention or objective. If pragmatism in Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy were aimed at preserving Thailand's traditional security, that is, 'sovereignty' and its 'status quo', then this conventional view may still be valid.

However, traditional threats seem to have disappeared or no longer challenge Thai security, especially since the comprehensive withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1989 (Kusuma 1999, pp.47-48; Prachuab 1999, pp.184-185; Prasong 1999, p.60). Other non-traditional security issues such as illicit drug trafficking, arms smuggling, illegal migration and economic crime have become more relevant to current security concerns especially during the 1990s (Prachuab 1999, 191-192).

Moreover, the international recognition of Thai sovereignty remains relatively stable despite the renewed political upheavals and insurgency in the Muslim-dominated areas of the southernmost provinces bordering Malaysia since 2003. Thailand has managed to exclude external intervention in the issue. The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) still officially supports peaceful conflict resolution between the Thai government and the insurgent groups while still not acknowledging the legitimacy of the separatist group (The Nation, 16 March 2005, p.1A; 9 June 2005, p.2A). At the same time, regardless of criticism about the Thai government's tough handling of the issue, Thailand's Muslim neighbours have been very careful about the question of legitimacy of the Thai authority. They have rather encouraged negotiation and non-violence solutions including providing intelligence support to assist in arresting suspects (Bangkok Post, 19 March 2005, p.3; The Nation 23 March 2005, pp.4A, 6A; 11 June 2005, p.9A). In addition, although border disputes between
Thailand and its neighbouring countries are still unresolved in many parts, they do not act as a direct threat to the country's sovereignty, nor to its survival (Panitan 1998, p.436). Therefore, despite the fact that pragmatism may still constitute an important part of Thai foreign policy since the Cold War as argued by the conventional wisdom, the core element of flexibility as security and the \textit{status quo} maintenance during the post-Cold War period may face serious challenges. So, the question arises: is the flexible foreign policy still needed to protect Thailand's sovereignty?

2.1.2 Conflict avoiding and opportunism

Other prominent characteristics of Thailand's reactive foreign policy according to the conventional wisdom can be seen in its 'conflict avoidance' and 'opportunistic tendency'. These elements are inseparably linked to the primary aspect of security and the \textit{status quo} orientation mentioned in the last previous sub-section. This is because when Thailand sees external actors being more powerful and their policy direction as threatening its security, it will need to manoeuvre its relations with them in order not to succumb to the external environment. Therefore, the optimal choice for Thailand in such a situation is to avoid unnecessary conflicts with major powers but rather mainly accommodate their policies and befriend them.

The existing literature analysing Thai foreign policy prior to the end of the Cold War also largely focuses on this aspect. Astri Suhrke (1971) points to this aspect and suggests that the accommodation of external powers helped Thailand minimise the interference by the great powers in its domestic affairs. Buszynski (1982) argues that accommodating posture has become a norm in Thai foreign policy-making because Thailand realises that external powers normally stay in the region only temporarily. Consequently, the fear of being abandoned has convinced Thai foreign policy-makers that their foreign policy needs to seek engagement with all powers to hedge against any uncertainty (Buszynski 1982, pp. 1037-1039). Kislenko then asserts that Thailand prefers temporary arrangements with foreign counterparts (2002, p.537). Therefore, the ability to change its alignment is regarded as the important strategy to serve the country's national interest in response to the rise and fall of different foreign powers. It has helped Thailand avoid engaging in long-term conflict with external powers.
This line of argument gives a sense of 'normative' policy evaluation in that pragmatism is regarded as a *preferred element* in policy choice for a small country like Thailand. Thailand should avoid direct confrontation and choosing sides with any particular external power. Suhrke argues that Thailand's ability to adjust its policy towards external actors and environments can be attributed to a *successful model* of small nation diplomacy (1971, p.429). Neher also concludes that 'the pragmatic foreign policy of the Thai government has been *remarkably successful* in securing at least one goal, the sovereignty of the Kingdom' (1990, p.201). This norm seems not only to stabilise Thailand's domestic interest but also the regional environment itself. To alter this norm may result in destabilising both domestic and regional fronts.

According to the conventional view, the end of the Cold War seemed to allow Thailand to continue and easily consolidate its traditional posture of maintaining stability. Thailand’s security tie with the United States has been loosened since the latter's military withdrawal from the Vietnam War and Thailand in the 1970s, while dependence on China’s security assurance against Vietnamese expansionary policy declined along the conclusion of Cambodia issue. The erosion of ideological contestation leaves more room for a small nation like Thailand to choose its own course of foreign policy. This pragmatic feature of Thai foreign policy was still argued to be relevant to the country's foreign security policy after the Cold War according to scholars who hold this conventional view. With regard to strategic competition between China and the United States in this period, Vatikiotis (2003) posits that 'Thailand's traditional aversion to domination by any one power also offers a useful [understanding of] how that influence can be harnessed safely to the best advantage' (p.77). It means that Thailand would balance the influence of the great powers by maintaining and cultivating close relations with all of them at the same time (Prapat 2002b; Panitan 2006). Murphy also argues similarly that Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era may generally neither balance nor bandwagon with the United States and China, but Thailand has tried to 'strengthen its relations with [everyone] without setting off a security spiral of threats with the others' (2006, p.44). This policy preference to avoid tensions with regional powers aims to ultimately stabilise the external environment for Thailand to secure its national interest.
Supporters of this conventional wisdom would argue that Thailand's shifting positions during the first few weeks after the September 11 terrorist incident ostensibly reflected conflict avoidance in its foreign policy. Thailand initially announced its neutral position despite its support of the international anti-terrorist campaign. However, the Thai government had to tone down its position after receiving strong criticism from many domestic parties, including the public, academics, the press, and the Senate with regard to the concern of other Muslim countries and its Muslim population which constitutes the second biggest religious group in the country. The Thaksin government declared its position, that Thailand still supported the American actions against terrorism but 'within the United Nations framework'. However, Thailand adjusted it position again after President GW Bush's criticism of some countries' covert and inactive support with the well-known quote: 'you're either with us or against us in the fight against terror' (*CNN*, 6 November 2001). Thailand, then, eagerly pledged its full support of the United States' anti-terrorist policy with the possibility of utilising the Thai-American military alliance, including dispatching Thai troops to Afghanistan upon the US' official request.

Although this vacillation may have confused or even upset the United States in terms of rhetorical support, in practice, it was found that Thailand's co-operation with the United States in general was not seriously affected (Supamit 2002; Chambers 2004). United States' aircraft have constantly stopped over at U-Tapao airport even after the Vietnam War ended. This airport is part of the Pentagon's forward-positioning strategy where American forces stored equipment and from which they come and go as needed. In the war against terrorists, Thailand has also provided constant support to the United States. During the military operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq, American warplanes from the US military base in the Pacific were always allowed to stop at U-Tapao before continuing to military base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean (Supamit 2002, p.167; Chambers 2004, p.466). Furthermore, U-Tapao has been used as a base for the annual joint military exercise between Thailand and the United States—Exercise Cobra Gold—for over a quarter of a century since 1982 to promote interoperability between their military components, not only in war-related

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3 In fact, the Thai-US joint military exercise can be dated back to the early period of the Cold War in 1956. The exercise involved the Royal Thai Navy and the United States' Navy and Marine Corps focusing on amphibious landing training. The exercise expanded to involve more operational activities and all branches of the armed forces in 1982. The new name, 'Exercise Cobra Gold' has been used since then.
activities but also in other purposes such as peace-keeping operations, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, including anti-terrorism (TSCH 2007). This joint military exercise has expanded to include the other main participating countries in the region, that is, Indonesia, Japan, and Singapore, as well as other invited participants differently each year (TSCH 2007; PACOM 2008) making it the largest peacetime exercise in the Pacific.

In addition, bilateral co-operation especially in intelligence sharing and training against terrorist network has been tightened, leading to the arrest of Hambali, a leading figure of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist network in Southeast Asia (Chambers 2004, p.469). There were also reports of Thailand being used as a CIA site for interrogating terrorists connected to the September 11 incident and the al-Qaeda network since 2002, including a controversial secret prison (Bangkok Post n.d.; Priest 2005).

With reference to this security policy, the conventional wisdom argues that Thailand still preferred to see its close ties with the United States continue while balancing its posture with other emerging forces, such as public opinion and criticism from other foreign countries through seeking support and justification based on international arrangements. It points to how Thai decision makers evaluated the cost and benefit of the degree to which its commitment should be presented to the public in that time. On the one hand, to stay very committed to the United States may have brought conflicts with other Muslim countries and certain domestic groups which could be potentially harmful to Thailand’s security and the government’s stability. The less verbal commitment, however, did not change the significance of Thailand’s support of American operations in reality. This policy option, on the other hand, reduced conflict and pressure on the government and could hedge against any negative consequences, hence leaving more room for the government to manage the situation at hand. These changing positions in support of the war on terrorism reflect Thailand’s traditional features of accommodating external powers and conflict avoidance so as to maintain its security interest. Thus, this posture is reactive in nature.
The above observation, in a way, is also relevant to a broader literature on the security and strategic posture of Southeast Asia focusing on enquiry into the region's strategic inclination towards major powers. It has become increasingly accepted by many scholars that Southeast Asia neither totally practises balancing nor bandwagoning in dealing with the regional security order. Rather, the regional states tend to combine several strategies, including 'soft-balancing', 'engagement' and 'omni-enmeshment', to hedge against future instability and to nurture the ongoing co-operative atmosphere in the region (Tow 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Ganesan 2000; Van Ness 2001, Higgit 2004; Goh 2005a, 2005b, 2007/08; Roy 2005; Archaya & Tan 2006; Ba 2006; Frost 2006; Murphy 2006). This evolving regional order is also seen in Thailand's foreign policy goal of avoiding conflicts and maintaining friendship with all powers as advocated by the conventional wisdom.

In line with the conventional belief, Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy in general tends to conform to the above observation. Although a close tie between Bangkok and Beijing is widely recognised by some scholars and government officials in both countries, especially in economic terms (Montesano 2003; Vatikiotis 2003; Murphy 2006), the military alliance between Thailand and the United States still continues. Kusuma (2001), Thitinan (2003) and Busakorn (2006) further argue that Thailand as one of the United States' allies is using its security tie with the US to balance the Chinese influence. The closer tie with the United States after the terrorist attack on 11th September 2001 especially following the designation of Thailand as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) offered economic benefits to Thailand as well as consolidating the government's power (the Thaksin government) over domestic contestation especially with regard to the Southern unrest. Moreover, some scholars suggest that alignment with China may also help Thailand deal strategically with other cross-border problems spilled over from its neighbours, particularly in relation to Myanmar in drug trafficking matter (Busakorn 2006; Murphy 2006, pp. 38-39; Siriluk 2004; Ganesan 2001).

Not only does Thailand strengthen its ties with both contending powers, it also cultivates economic co-operation with other external powers, especially Japan, the European Union, and other new trading partners. Thailand is also at the forefront in support for China's constructive involvement in ASEAN affairs, leading to
institutionalisation under the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) framework (Chulacheeb 1998; Panitan 1998; Tow 1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Goh 2005a, 2005b; Shambaugh 2005). This regional development corresponds to Goh’s suggestion that Southeast Asia in fact exercises soft-balancing not only in the politico-security area but also in the economic arena (2005a, pp. 9-12), while omni-enmeshment and engagement are also at work to cultivate a complex web of interest and co-operation amongst regional stakeholders. As William Tow argues, the role of existing bilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific is an assurance for continuity of the regional order while regional multilateralism is being developed to address emerging security challenges (1999; 2001; 2004a; 2004b).

In sum, scholars supporting the conventional interpretation of Thailand’s foreign policy contend that the characteristic of conflict avoidance by flexibly changing its position whenever it suits the national interest still constitutes a major part of modern Thai foreign policy. To maintain neighbourliness and friendship with foreign countries has been in Thailand’s interest. It is then easy to see this school of thought conclude that this type of foreign policy behaviour comfortably fits with the general practice of other Southeast Asian countries pursuing the combined security strategy as mentioned above. This position encompasses all practical approaches to regional stability that fit both medium and long-term goals towards regional security order. Hedging through soft-balancing and omni-enmeshment serve Thailand’s preference of conflict avoidance and not taking sides. At the same time, engagement strategy will secure economic benefits from rising powers and gradually enhance regional institutionalisation in the longer term. These strategies can be viewed as smaller nations being assertive in managing their relations with bigger powers. However, its main objective is still to accommodate external power so that regional stability is maintained. Thus, it still can be regarded as a reactive behaviour according to the Two-Good Theory’.

The conventional wisdom that sees Thai foreign policy as pragmatic and avoiding conflict with major powers also has another implication that this type of behaviour finally results in a lack of clear guiding principles. Temporary arrangements allow Thailand to change its direction deemed to serve its national interest. It allows the country to choose to align itself with any party that would offer greater benefits and

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opportunities at any time. The examples of Thailand’s positions during the First and Second World Wars including its close co-operation with China in security matters in the 1980s cited in the previous sections clearly support this generalisation.

Prapat (2000) criticises this opportunistic tendency in Thai foreign policy that continues its way to the post-Cold War period, and sees it as a weakness. He states:

A weakness in Thai foreign policy is derived from its strength in adhering to 'bamboo bending with the wind' policy. Sometimes Thailand adjusts or bends so quickly that its foreign policy seems to lack principle. This causes conflicts with countries in the region on many occasions (p.175).

He also posits that although Thailand’s reactive foreign policy with pragmatic characteristic helps Thailand maintain security and smooth relations with its foreign counterparts, on the other hand, it makes Thai foreign policy more receptive to changes. By avoiding direct confrontation and easily adjusting to the changing external environment, Prapat (2000) concludes that Thai foreign policy is very reactive in nature. He characterises it as highly vigilant, reserved, compromising, incremental, hence lacking in long-term vision (Prapat 2000, pp.175-7). These descriptions appropriately encapsulate the main feature of this conventional line of argument.

A search for better opportunities to maintain its security and the status quo can be seen in both foreign security and economic policy. In dealing with power competition amongst great powers, it can be said that in general Thailand prefers not to choose sides, but rather cultivates friendship with all if their powers are perceived as equally distributed. However, in a situation where there is only a predominant power that is likely to preserve Thailand’s sovereignty and national pillars, Thailand will adjust its policy towards alignment with it. This was evidenced during the peak of the Cold War when Thailand agreed to form an alliance with the United States; it was seen as a de facto position with China when Vietnam invaded Cambodia. In the foreign economic policy sphere, critics of Thailand’s position particularly with regard to its neighbouring countries argue that that Thailand’s lack of principle has some negative
consequences (Kusuma 2001; Thitinan 2003, 2004a; Asda 2004; Surapong 2007). Considering the proliferation of democratic norms and principles worldwide, Thailand's relationship with Burma is a good example of how economic benefits in trading with the Burmese junta may be conflicting with international pressure against its violation of human rights and democracy.

2.1.3 Drawbacks

Although this conventional view offers a useful understanding of Thai foreign policy in the history, it cannot clearly explain Thai policy-makers' decisions and their proactive foreign policy, particularly during the Chatichai government between the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, and notably during the Thaksin governments between 2001 and 2006. Thai foreign policy during these two governments in particular was not necessarily accommodating of external major powers, as the 'bamboo bending with the wind' analogy would suggest. These governments' foreign policies did not merely seek to preserve Thai national interests by pragmatically choosing appropriate policy options but opted for exercising the country's leadership, which sometimes came into conflict with major external powers and friends. For instance, Chatichai's initiative suddenly moved Thailand away from its previous position on the Cambodia issue and surprised supporters and stakeholders, especially China, the United States, and ASEAN countries (Murphy 2006, p.21). Thaksin also utilised nationalistic sentiment against the West to buttress his assertive and aggressive foreign policy during his first term in office.

Even during the Democrat Party-led government when most observers would have predicted the most accommodating foreign policy towards external pressures many unexpected decisions can still be observed. For example, the Chuan government refused American requests to pre-position its supply ships in the Gulf of Thailand in 1994 and 1996 despite the existing bilateral security agreements between Thailand and the United States (Chambers 2004, p.462). The Thaksin administration also made the same decision in 2002 (Chambers 2004, p466). This policy direction does not seem to fit the traditional description of Thai foreign policy of accommodating all foreign major powers and conflict avoidance. This may suggest that in the post-Cold War period accommodation with external regional power has not always been the only dominant policy choice for Thailand as it was during the Cold War. As in the case
of Thailand's compromising position in the war against terrorism mentioned earlier, other factors came into play in decision-making. This case shows that independent and active foreign policy regardless of any security alliance has also been pursued widely after the Cold War as well.

To summarise, the rationale behind this flexibility argument is deeply grounded in the traditional international environment especially during the Cold War. This conventional school views Thai foreign policy as a reaction towards 'security' threats and external pressures. However, this thesis argues that the post-Cold War environment has transcended those traditional boundaries not only in the international and regional arenas, but also in the domestic one. Although the traditional elements and conventional thinking about what the threats are and how foreign policy should be implemented to deal with them have not totally disappeared, ideas of how foreign policy should serve the national interest have altered. Examining foreign policy within the post-Cold War environment is more complicated than judging decisively which factors are most influential to foreign policy outcomes. Certainly, the security factor in the post-Cold War environment still carries weight within foreign policy circles, but it is no longer a primary element in every situation. Economic, social and non-traditional challenges within the ongoing globalisation process have also infused foreign policy decision-making and have become even more significant in many cases. The author views that post-Cold War foreign policy analysis without this consideration is partial and may not show powerfully the general picture. This has led to the importance of some globalised norms and principles that have gained wider acceptance in the international community especially democracy and human rights. The next section therefore discusses the opinion posed by a group of scholars who suggest incorporating these international norms in Thai foreign policy analysis. This element, in their view, constitutes evidence of active behaviour in Thai foreign policy instead of a conventional flexible-reactive foreign policy.

2.2 The emergence of proaction in Thai foreign policy

The end of the Cold War offers an opportunity for Thai foreign policy analysis to incorporate factors that may influence its foreign policy-making. There are two
important focuses that are prevailing in the discussion in the literature of Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy. One is the effect of democratisation to Thai foreign policy. The other is related to Thailand’s economic success and its leaders’ ambitions to raise Thailand’s profile for economic benefit, mostly of the politicians and their cronies.

2.2.1 Proactive through adhering to universal principles
Along the line with the liberal approach to the effect of the rise of democracy in the 1980s, a number of scholars viewed that in the post-Cold War period Thailand has embraced universal norms and principles, notably democracy and human rights; thus, its foreign policy has reflected this nature by actively promoting democratic norms both domestically and internationally. This position holds that this phenomenon occurred as a result of democratisation in Thailand since the late 1980s, especially after the May 1992 uprising against the attempt of the military to reconstitute its power in Thai politics. Consequently, the military role declined, while other social groups especially the urban middle class and the businesses gained greater opportunities to participate directly in the politics (Kusuma 1995, 2001; Ganesan 2004, 2006; Lynch 2004; Chanlett-Avery 2006; Kasian 2006; Panitan 1998, 2006).

The spread of ideas associated with democracy and civil liberty across borders became more significant and relevant in the policy-making process after the end of the Cold War. Policy-makers and academics saw that Thailand was by no means able to avoid this global phenomenon. Therefore, not only did Thai foreign policy shift from a security orientation to an economic one, but it also accepted other universal principles particularly human rights and democracy. This foreign policy orientation towards universal norms was clearly and repeatedly pronounced in several governments and most actively during the Chuan administrations. For this reason, most literature that supports this tenet particularly focuses on his governments’ foreign policy, and even set it as a benchmark for a preferred policy for Thailand.

Panitan (1998) and Connor (2003b) contend that Thai security and foreign policy objectives also transformed from being narrowly defined to protect national sovereignty and integrity to a new concept that was more socially oriented.
Especially since the 1997 Financial Crisis, issues such as good governance, accountability, transparency and proper political practices have gained currency not only within private sector and economic reform discussions, but also in foreign and security policy circles as a panacea for the problems (Connor 2003b). This type of foreign policy is, again, argued to be found apparently in the rise of the pro-democracy movement, notably led by the Democrat Party, after the resignation of General Suchinda Kraprayoon as the Prime Minister in 1992. Since economic issues were still the main focus of foreign policy, Thailand then needed to restore public and foreign investors' confidence in its economy following the domestic political turmoil of the time. Therefore, the principles of democracy and human rights were obviously inserted as a policy objective for that purpose and appeared on many occasions.

Chuan Leekpai delivered his inaugural policy statement to Parliament on 21 October 1992, which stated that his government would be committed to international norms and standards with regard to democracy and human rights. In this connection, he particularly referred to the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Chuan 1992b). On another occasion at the Asian Regional Meeting on Human Rights in 1993 he also reflected his government's realisation of the significance of democracy and its relevance to Thailand's political and economic development. He stated:

Thailand has been moving steadily towards greater democracy. Naturally, this process had to overcome whatever obstacles along the irreversible path of democratization...By this, I am referring to the growing awareness in Thailand of an individual's rights and fundamental freedoms as well as of one's duties to society. Ordinary people are aware of how these concepts—abstract as they may be—affect their everyday life. The inherent inter-relationship between human rights, democracy and development has become clearly visible. The need to keep a fair balance between those fundamental components becomes even more urgent. This is particularly so in the time of greater political and economic uncertainties in our world today (1993b, p.4).
Prasong Soonsiri, Chuan's Foreign Minster (1992-1995) also made his turn towards democracy, despite his well-known security hard line in previous governments and background in the National Security Council (NSC). He placed the promotion of democratic values as one of the Ministry's highest priorities. He pledged that not only would this ideological stance be advocated within the country but also throughout the region (Prasong 1993, p.7).

Certainly, this reflected the Chuan government's political environment in which his dominant party operated after the fall of a military regime. Similarly, Corrine (1998) agrees with what Panitan (1998) and Connor (2003b) mention, that one of the immediate tasks of the Chuan government was to 'correct the country's image on the violation of democracy and human rights after the 1991 coup d'état and the bloody military crackdown on the popular demonstration in May 1992' (p.8). Moreover, the international factor during his first term in office was also important. This was a period when the United Nations was active in peacekeeping operations based on the support from the great powers after the Cold War and the principle of human rights which was widely advocated under the 'New World Order' (p.7).

Proponents of this argument contend that the adherence to democracy and human rights in Thai foreign policy achieved in the post-Cold War era had never appeared previously in other governments. Thailand stated to adopt these principles in line with the international community regardless of the negative consequences that may have followed (Corrine 1998; Kusuma 2001, 2000). In this connection, two examples are widely mentioned. One is the issuance of entry visas to a delegation of Nobel Peace Prize laureates in 1993 despite political pressure from China and Myanmar and the likelihood of the impact on Thai businessmen in those countries. The other is Thailand’s proposal of 'Flexible Engagement' in 1998 within ASEAN that underlies the modification of the ASEAN's non-interference in members' internal affairs (this issue is discussed further below) (Kusuma 1995, 2000, 2001; Corrine 1998, pp. 34-35).

However, Chuan and his party may have also found that an attachment to the international principle of democracy and human rights was useful in positioning Thailand in the international system after the Cold War. This policy doctrine
appeared in both Chuan's terms in office and was further elaborated during his second one (1997-2001) notably through his Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuwan. Surin argued that a foreign policy was an extension of domestic policy, therefore, it was not peculiar that democratic values would be in Thailand's interest particularly against the background of the country's democratic consolidation since 1992 (Surin 1999b). A month after he was appointed Foreign Minister, Surin tested the waters in the region during the Informal ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in December 1997. He claimed that he proposed the idea of promoting open societies in ASEAN as a way towards the creation of a caring community envisaged in ASEAN Vision 2020, cherishing the concept of democratic and human values (Surin 1999b, 2003). At least two places in ASEAN Vision 2020 echo this idea; it stated that ASEAN member countries:

see vibrant and open ASEAN societies consistent with their respective national identities, where all people enjoy equitable access to opportunities for total human development regardless of gender, race, religion, language, or social and cultural background, [and]... envision our nations being governed with the consent and greater participation of the people with its focus on the welfare and dignity of the human person and the good of the community (ASEAN Secretariat 1995).

Surin saw this move as reflecting the success of Thailand's foreign policy in promoting universal principles in the region despite some compromises with state-centric reservation. This may have lifted Surin's level of confidence to further elaborate his idea afterwards.

Surin emphasised the significance of adhering to democratic values, and envisaged that in the globalised world Thailand could no longer afford to abandon this value, otherwise it would be unshielded against negative consequences. His stance was clearly pronounced in his speech at Thammasat University on 12 June 1998. He asserted that to survive in the globalised world with emerging trans-border challenges especially through invisible market forces a country needed to 'either reform [itself] to meet international standards, or [it] can resist and be overwhelmed in the end, with no control over the pace or direction of change' (Surin 1998a).
With respect to the realisation of interconnectedness revealed in the course of the 1997 Financial Crisis, Surin was, again, not reluctant to extend his idea to Southeast Asia at large. At the Asia Pacific Roundtable in Kuala Lumpur on 1 June 1998, he started to call for ASEAN’s attention to re-evaluate the group’s weaknesses when it came to the matter of democracy and human rights. He urged that ASEAN countries should seriously amend their outdated policy especially with regard to democracy, human rights and transparency that undermined ASEAN’s diplomatic bargaining power in the international community, including its shield against possible problems (Surin 1998c). Although his main objective was to criticise ASEAN members’ inability to give each other a warning about the potential economic turmoil in 1997, the repercussion of his comments was greater than the economic issue. He criticised ASEAN’s longstanding norm of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, and proposed to adjust it. For instance, on the same occasion in Malaysia he said:

I wish to pose the question to this academic forum whether the time has come for ASEAN to rethink its decades-old policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States...If events in one nation inevitably impact upon the affairs of another nation halfway around the globe...This is to say that ASEAN members perhaps no longer can afford to adopt a non-committal stance and avoid passing judgement on events in a member country, simply on the grounds of ‘non-interference’ (Surin 1998c).

Subsequently, Surin brought this issue up and tabled his new initiative of ‘Flexible Engagement’ at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in the Philippines later in 1998. This proposal, if approved, would have allowed ASEAN Member Countries to publically criticise and jointly seek solutions to members’ domestic issues even when the adverse effects were likely to spill over to other member countries or had a regional implication (Haacke 2003, p.168). However, the Westphalian principle of sovereignty was still strongly upheld by most of ASEAN’s member states, therefore, the proposal was rejected.
Haacke (1999) contends that Thailand's initiative 'should be understood in the context of the ASEAN Vision 2020, to which ASEAN governments had committed themselves in December 1997' (p.586). This proposal mirrored Thailand's view of the value of democracy as an effective tool to help overcome emerging challenges in the interdependent world. On the other hand, it also revealed the country's confidence in its ability to advance this idea based on what the ASEAN Vision 2020. This regional master plan envisages the group achieving a concert of Southeast Asian Nations in which its members espouse the values of 'outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, [and]... a community of caring societies' (ASEAN Secretariat 1995).

However, adherence to universal principles, according to this tenet, seems to be able to explain only some specific foreign policies especially during the Democrat-led government, and cannot establish a solid generalisation of Thai foreign policy. Although advocates of this tenet rightly offer a thought to another element in Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, ironically, they also accept that Thai foreign policy still lacks this element in general. Therefore, the literature in this group tends to focus on criticising reactive foreign policy and suggests Thai foreign policy-makers incorporate this principle into foreign policy as a 'preferred element'. The call for universal principles in Thai foreign policy in the existing literature, in turn, reflects the ephemeral nature of this universal value feature in Thai foreign policy-making.

In addition, the management of some domestic issues also casts doubts on how these democratic and human rights principles are sustained or seriously pursued in foreign policy-making. Thai governments after Chuan do not have a strong record on promoting human rights and democracy. Thaksin's heavy-handed approach to narcotics, the local mafia, and the violence in the South (Ukrits 2006b) was an important point worth considering against his adherence of human rights. Furthermore, the resumption of a military role in Thai politics after the coup d'état in September 2006 certainly points to the failure of military professionalism and its likely implications for foreign and security policy direction. The regime's approach towards some universal principles was criticised, particularly concerning the freedom of speech, which directly challenged the notion of the country's adherence to democratic norms and human rights as advocated by this view.
The military back-up government after September 2006 coup also lacked legitimacy to fully claim to be democratic. For example, General Surayud Chulanont was reported having difficulty in strongly condemning the Burmese junta about the suppression of the civic demonstration in September 2007. He stated, 'my government did not come from a democratic process. If I pressure Burma too harshly and they retort from where my government came into power, how can I answer them? Therefore, we have to consider this point as well. If this government were an elected one, we would have been able to speak clearly with a stronger voice about democratic system' (Matichon Online, 13 October 2007).

The newly elected government in early 2008 under Prime Minister Samak Sudaravej did not look any more impressive in terms of its human rights and democracy record. Samak was criticised for his involvement in the crackdown on student demonstrations in October 1976 resulting in the death of many protesters (Bancha 2008; Chaiwat 2008) and thereafter his support of the right-wing governments and the role of the military throughout the 1980s. Samak's controversial statement was from an exclusive interview on 9 February 2008 with CNN International after the government under his premiership was newly formed. In the interview he denied any his involvement in the event and only accepted that just one 'unlucky' student died during the crackdown of the student riot. He stated, 'Oh, I deny the whole thing. I have no concern on that business. And I have nothing to do, to deal with that at all....For me, no deaths, one unlucky guy being beaten and being burned in Sanam Luang....Only one guy by that day' (CNN, 19 February 2008). Moreover, many of his key ministers were also in the Thaksin administrations, while his party itself, People’s Power Party (PPP), was also criticised as being a proxy of the former Thai Rak Thai Party which was abolished by the order of the Constitutional Tribunal after the September 2006 coup.

Even more recently, the Abhisit government is also widely criticised by the opposition and many human rights organisation on its violation of numbers of issues, including its heavy-handed crackdown of the anti-government demonstration in April-May 2010, its suppression of freedom of speech under the emergency decree, and its uncompromising position towards the public outcry about undemocratic features of the government. These domestic policies and
events certainly affected the country’s foreign policy position, confidence, and firm commitment to democracy and human rights issues.

For this reason, while seeing the value of this development as an important element of Thailand’s proactive foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, this thesis still considers this evolution incomplete for the time being and cannot represent the general feature of Thailand’s proactivity. It has increasingly become an important element indeed but needs to be considered within a broader context.

By looking from different perspectives, it may be possible to offer a more convincing explanation of what constitutes Thai foreign policy as we have seen it throughout the post-Cold War era. Interestingly, both views on Thai foreign policy mentioned earlier seem to say very little, or nothing, about a major force at the international level developing even before the end of the Cold War, that is, the increasing internationalisation of the Thai economy. The next section will therefore discuss another body of literature that takes this element into consideration in Thai foreign policy analysis by focusing on Thailand’s attempt to exercise its leadership in the region within the new regional political economic context of post-Cold War.

2.2.2 Proactive through political leaders’ interests

Even though the idea of Thailand being a leading actor in the region is not totally new in Thai foreign and security policy, there are relatively limited scholarly analyses devoting mainly to this issue. Most of the available materials refer to this point simply as a lingering historical background that helps explain cases after the Cold War in which the leaders’ ambitions were extraordinarily pronounced, notably those of Chatichai Choonhavan, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Thaksin Shinawatra.

Buszynski’s several publications on Thai foreign policy (1989, 1994) may be regarded as the flagship in the exploration of a regional leadership idea in Thai foreign policy after the Cold War. He argues that the Chatichai government wanted to promote and extend Thailand’s economic benefits through creating a web of interdependence throughout mainland Southeast Asia. Chatichai saw Thailand’s strong economic position as a vehicle for expediting this idea and then adopted the strategy of promoting Thailand as a regional gravity that would link countries in the
region into a new phase of interaction (1989, p. 1061; 1994, pp.723-4). Buszynski also implies that this idea of leadership and regionalism is actually ingrained in Thai policy-makers and even in the general public. He states, 'it was Chatichai who with his grandiloquent turn of phrase formulated a regional vision for Thailand's foreign policy, which struck a deep chord amongst the Thais' (1994, p.723). However, he does not elaborate further on why this leadership idea suddenly became an issue in the post-Cold War period, or whether this idea became a genuine element in Thai foreign policy-making after Chatichai.

Similar to Buszynski, Funston (1998d) also demonstrates that there existed regional aspirations amongst Thai leaders. He argues that despite the political and economic turmoil in the mid 1990s Thailand was still attempting to exercise its regional influence. He shows that different regional initiatives were proposed constantly by Thailand throughout the Cold War such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992, Economic Growth Quadrangle in 1992, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC) (1997), and Flexible Engagement (1998). He concludes that Thai foreign policy in the 1990s was an attempt to depart from being reactive and receptive but only failed to do so due to the need for foreign assistance to support its economic recovery after the 1997 Financial Crisis.

Funston's discussion is thus another important writing amongst the limited number representing this line of argument. It confirms that the idea of projecting Thailand's regional leading role exists in Thai foreign policy. However, his analysis covers the subject matter focusing particularly on the Chavalit administration until around the Financial Crisis in 1997-1998. He also gives more weight to domestic factors over external ones, especially the frequent changes of government and foreign ministers that affect the exercise of leadership. He does not situate Thai foreign policy in a broader context in relation to changes in the international and regional political economic development with the exception of the immediate consequences of the Financial Crisis for Thailand's regional leadership.

Amongst recent analyses that focus on Thailand's international leadership, Thaksin's foreign policy is raised as an important issue for debate. Thitinan (2004b) argues
that Thaksin's foreign policy resembled that of Chatichai, and that they shared similar characteristics. Foreign policy under both governments departed from the simple 'reactive and pragmatic' notion that had dominated Thai foreign policymaking. They became assertive, unconventional and seeking to exercise Thailand's preponderance and sphere of influence particularly in Indochina, as well as to extend Thailand's role in regional and international affairs. It was Thaksin's conflicts of interest that brought strong criticism against his policy.

Paul Chambers (2005) argues that Thailand became an economic hegemon especially in mainland Southeast Asia, benefiting from its superior economic and political conditions compared to its neighbours. Thailand's foreign policy especially in the economic domain then aimed to exploit its neighbours' rich resources and cheap labour for the profit of Thai businessmen through the promotion of export processing zones (EPZs) around Thailand and regional economic co-operation at the regional level.

Both Thitinan and Chambers agree on one fact that Thailand during the Thaksin period actively engaged in regional affairs as the country's strategy in the post-Cold War era. They agree there is a connection between Thailand's economic position within the region and the personal interests of political leaders as major driving forces in Thai foreign policy during the Thaksin government. However, both authors do not further touch upon the possible interaction between Thailand's self-perception as a leading nation and its economic interests within foreign policymaking circles. Thitinan's main intention is simply to focus on the connection between Thaksin's foreign policy assertiveness and his personal benefits. Although Chambers touches upon the concept of 'Suvarnabhumi' or 'the Golden Land' as Buszynski does, it is only very briefly and is simply an a posteriori justification to support Thailand's regional interest. In other words, none of the aforementioned scholars views 'self-perception' as having a significant determining effect on current foreign policy-making. It is seen merely as an old-fashioned ideology which is obsolete and, if relevant, is picked up by politicians to raise nationalist rhetoric in support of their policy. In this way, 'economic interests' constitute or reinforce 'self-perception', not the other way round.
Several foreign affairs critics also emerged during the Thaksin government, similarly criticising how Thaksin exploited his political position for the benefits of his crony’s businesses (Surapong 2007, p.30, Asda 2004). For instance, the Thaksin government’s endorsement of the offer of a multimillion-dollar loan to the Burmese government for improving its infrastructure was arguably benefiting his own family’s telecom company, Shin Corp. (Taipei Times, 1 October 2006; Thitinan 2004, p.5). This line of criticism concludes that Thaksin finally demeaned Thailand’s credibility in the international community, hence his failure to exercise effective leadership of the country. They see Thaksin’s foreign policy as the extension of his government’s populist domestic policy. Thaksin merely tried to impress the Thai constituents that their leader was active in the international arena but, in fact, there was no significant substantive value in this policy. Furthermore, it did not serve Thailand’s national interest but that of Thaksin and his circles. Thaksin’s foreign policy therefore compromised Thailand’s commitment to democracy by his pursuit of his personal interests. Thus, the scholars and critics in this group eventually advocate Thailand’s bringing back in a foreign policy with universal principles, many of which are found having a close link to the Democrat Party.\footnote{Prominent vocal critics of the Thaksin regime and his foreign policy include Surin Pitsuwan, Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Ambassador Kasit Bhironya and Ambassador Surapong Jayanama. The first three are members of the Democrat Party, and the last one mentioned during the interview on 12 February 2008 that he was invited to join the Democrat Party. He refused to engage directly in the politics and preferred an advisory role to the party.}

In sum, this regional leadership feature has not been established as a significant element in Thai foreign policy behaviour. It is still regarded as a sporadic phenomenon and mostly dependent on individual political leaders. Therefore, this group of scholars and observers implicitly concludes that regional ambition, though it exists, has not become an important input in foreign policy. Proaction is yet Thailand’s foreign policy behaviour. The overall nature of Thai foreign policy is still flexible and reactive. Thus, this explanation falls into the same situation as the ‘foreign policy with universal principles’ argument, as being partial and specific to certain individuals and political systems. To the best of my knowledge, apart from the number of writings mentioned above there is not a single scholarly study that straightforwardly tries to pursue this regional aspirations notion as a continual driving force in Thai foreign policy throughout the post-Cold War period.
Although this thesis sees the merit of a 'personal ambitions' hypothesis for Thailand's emerging regional ambitions since the Chatichai government, it does not see this tendency as merely bounded specifically within the personal and business interests of politicians. The personal ambition factor, though it exists, is quite inadequate in providing a broad or general picture of Thai foreign policy behaviour and is therefore limited to only a certain number of political leaders. Therefore, it is this thesis's task to propose reconsidering Thai foreign policy from a different angle. It suggests that Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy behaviour is proactive. This proactive nature is examined through the influence of ideational factors in Thai policy-makers—self-perception—within the context of the internationalisation of the Thai economy in the post-Cold War era. The interaction between these elements has become another important part in forming and strengthening the idea of regional leadership in Thai foreign policy circles after the Cold War and its proactive role in shaping regional order especially in mainland Southeast Asia.

This thesis agrees with the approach of 'perceived' position of a state in the international system as contended by Rothstein (1968) and Keohane (1969). That is, a country shall be regarded as small or not, depending on how its people and institutions perceive themselves. If they do not see themselves as small, they shall not be so. For this reason, this thesis will explore Thailand's self-perception in detail to establish the proposition that this has also been a factor in directing Thai foreign policy behaviour especially after the demise of the Cold War. Amongst other things, this is another important feature that has shifted the nature of Thai foreign policy behaviour towards proaction as evidenced by its rigorous support and involvement in regionalist schemes. The succeeding chapters thus discuss the emergence of Thailand's self-perception, its development and adjustment in the changing post-Cold War environment, including its relevance in shaping Thailand's foreign policy direction.
CHAPTER THREE

A HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THAILAND’S SELF-PERCEPTION

As discussed in the previous chapter, this dissertation agrees with the possibility of seeing Thailand’s regional ambition to the extent that it opens up an analytical space for the role of ‘idea of Thailand being a leading actor in Southeast Asia’ in Thai foreign policy-making. However, this thesis disagrees with the main conclusion of this group of scholars, that the intention to utilise this concept is merely rhetorical and as a justification to extend the personal interests of some politicians, or only prevails amongst military. This study, instead, seeks to see how this idea has perpetuated in the Thai policy-makers’ minds as a collective perception in general. This perception is formed, elaborated, maintained, and should be likely to influence the country’s foreign policy choice in certain ways.

Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to trace the origin of this idea so as to reveal its significance and inferences for the formation of Thailand’s self-perception and its regional aspirations. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates the historical development of ideas associated with how the Thais view their country and their neighbours. It will form the foundation on which the succeeding chapters of this dissertation rest in order to empirically demonstrate the significance of self-perception and its regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy-making and implementation in the post-Cold War environment. This chapter, thus, strengthens the relatively new argument for Thailand’s regional aspirations and will ultimately help elucidate its proactive role in regional affairs.

Historical events involving the formation of the Thai state and its nationalism shaped a particular image amongst the Thai policy-making elite and the Thai public about their country within the region. This image or perception about their country has been developed through several phases in Thailand’s modern history tracing it back as far as the period of colonialism. The shaping of self-perception did not take place in a vacuum but in the context of domestic politics and regional political economy. Therefore, this chapter aims to answer a basic inquiry, that is, ‘how does Thailand perceive itself in the
region?'. How this self-perception evolved into regional aspirations after the Cold War is to be examined in the succeeding chapter.

Prior to answering this question, the next section discusses the theoretical frameworks across disciplines deemed to be useful in elucidating the issues relevant to the main focus of this chapter—the construction of self-perception and its significance in policy-making. Due to the fact that foreign policy analysis involves multiple levels of analysis, ranging from the micro level of individual decision making to state and international levels, this dissertation is unbound by particular theoretical schools. It sees the usefulness of an eclectic approach that will help improve our understanding of the complexity of the subject area. Different perspectives are thus viewed as complementary tools or building blocks towards a better understanding of the nature and pattern of foreign policy.

This section is followed by a section on historical understanding of how Thailand's self-perception originated by tracing the introduction of the modern nation-state concept to the Siamese (Thai) elite. This concept gave birth to a 'new Siam' or Thailand as we see it today, within a clear boundary and the idea of nationhood or nationalism sanctioned, sponsored, and promoted by the Thai state. The last section touches upon the consolidation of these ideas especially through mass education in newly democratic Thailand. This will include the impact of Thailand's involvement in the Cold War on strengthening the self-perception.

3.1 Analytical frameworks for understanding the construction and implications of self-perception in foreign policy-making

The analysis of perception is relatively abundant in the psychology discipline from which Political Science including its sub-field of International Relations has borrowed, to build a useful analytical tool to understand human cognition in political behaviour. Therefore, this section draws on the notion of self-perception from various sources and uses concepts as analytical framework for foreign policy analysis, such as the concepts of perception, self-perception, image, role theory/national role conceptions, and identity. It should be noted here that, however, this section will not discuss in detail each pertinent concept but rather maps and points out the basic ideas that are
relevant to the focus of this dissertation as a heuristic tool of analysis to facilitate further discussion of Thai foreign policy. The main objective of this section is to demonstrate how pertinent theoretical approaches view: (1) the connection between historical and socialisation processes and the construction of self-perception, and (2) how certain self-perceptions may transcend individuals to form a collective self-perception of a society, and (3) the implication of self-perception for policy-making focusing on how self-perception may influence policy preference or policy choice. The succeeding sections then investigate how Thailand’s self-perception has been constructed in history and how it is likely to shape the way in which Thailand’s foreign policy focuses.

3.1.1 Perception/ self-perception

Within the International Relations discipline, scholars have for some time thought about the significance of belief and perception in foreign policy decision making. They agree that the way in which state leaders view each other can be a basic factor in international relations as, in fact, their decisions and actions generally emanate from this perception, not as a response to reality *per se* (Brecher et al. 1969, p.86; George 1969, p.190). Therefore, a state’s perception (or misperception) of others as either friends or threats, regardless of their real intention, informs which type of foreign policy response the former should pursue in the first place. The concept of perception was developed more comprehensively by Robert Jervis in his seminal work, ‘*Perception and misperception in international politics*’ (1976).

Jervis’ argues that perception of decision makers is important in the international politics as it dictates the way in which a policy towards other actors in the international system is shaped and implemented. He criticises International Relations theories that normally assume decision makers make decisions rationally in response to external stimuli in policy formulation. Jervis does not deny that rational decision-making model entirely but, instead, posits that perception, which consists of images, beliefs and intentions, intervenes in decision making as the fundamental motivation behind political decision (pp.3-31). By doing so, Jervis suggests that foreign policy decisions can be most comprehensively understood with greatest clarity. Perceptions are then one of the most important factors determining policy choices in foreign policy and can be useful independent variables (Herrmann 1986, p.869). However, it seems
that this model does not elaborate on the extent to which the perception of one's own self or self-perception is a significant determinant in foreign policy-making. This directs this dissertation to consult further with other fields of study related to a decision maker's cognitive aspect especially within the psychology discipline.

In psychology the concept of self-perception seems to be more clearly analysed. A seminal work of Daryl J. Bem (1972) on 'self-perception theory', is widely mentioned, incorporated and extended in foreign policy analysis. 'Self-perception theory' offers a useful starting point here to see a causal link between individuals' historical background, context, the formation of attitude and belief, and their behaviour. Bem posits that:

Individuals come to 'know' their own attitudes, emotions and other internal states partially by inferring them from observations of their own overt behaviour and/or the circumstances in which this behaviour occurs (1972, p.2)

Self-perception theory is concerned with the condition under which individuals' principles, attitudes and beliefs are formed. This theory argues that human social behaviour is strongly influenced by their past history and the 'socialising community itself must necessarily train the individual's self-descriptive skills' upon the social context (Bem 1972, p.55). Therefore, self-perception theory offers several useful points here for the analysis in this dissertation. First, observers can infer individuals' inner attitudes and intentions from their behaviours. Second, in order to understand individuals' behaviour observers also need to take into account their surrounding environment and historical background. For these reasons, with relevance to policy-making it is critical to understand policy-makers' attitudes inferred from their historical and external context in which their socialisation and decision making take place.

Self-perception theory further argues that the attitude formed in the first place is generally stable with little substantive change occurring afterwards (Bem 1972, p.28). External contingencies of reinforcement have only a small effect on the individuals' attitude and behaviours that they believe they want to carry out or which reflect their
true opinion (Bem 1972, p.39). Although a change of perception or belief is possible, normally only peripheral perceptions are easily altered while the core perception is unaffected (Heradstveit 1979, p.21). As asserted in the theory of cognitive dissonance, 'a decision-maker can infer several mechanisms, in order to reduce dissonance and achieve consonance, without changing the images or beliefs' (Deyer 1983, p.266). In other words, contradictory information is either ruled out, ignored, or used to reinforce the existing perception.

This notion has significant implications for this thesis in drawing inference from the historical development of policy-makers' attitudes, at least as individuals or groups, about Thailand within the region that have continued until the post-Cold War period. It argues that the self-perception amongst the Thai elite about Thailand’s glory and position as a leading nation has remained of important relevance to Thai foreign policy decision-making background.

3.1.2 Image theory

Image theory is closely associated with the 'perception model' discussed above as they both agree that ideas of other actors influence foreign policy responses. However, image theory differs from the 'perception model' in its definition of image. Image theory views an image as 'a cognitive structure that represents organised knowledge about a given concept or type of stimulus' (Herrmann 1986, p.843-844). It holds that in general people tend to simplify reality and interpret what they encounter to fit their generalised versions. Therefore, ideas towards other actors are organised in a systematic way into different types of images, also called stereotypes, or group schemas. Each image contains specific cognitions, views, beliefs, and characteristics of the other actors in it (Alexander et al. 2005, p.28).

Originally, image theory mainly dealt with the enemy image between competing states as a result of the Cold War's international environment, but it restricted the theory to explain other behavioural variations especially after the Cold War (Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995; Alexander et al. 2005, pp.28-29). Therefore, Herrmann & Fischerkeller (1995) extended the theory based on three basic compatibilities, that is, goal, relative power, and cultural status. These produce five different general images, which are enemy, ally, barbarian, imperialist, and dependent images (Herrmann &
Fischerkeller 1995, pp. 425-438). These images encompass both perceptions of other actors and one's own self, since decision makers need to evaluate their country's compatibility with their counterpart before reaching a conclusion on what kind of image would represent their relationship.

Only one image, an ally image, is a result of all compatibilities in goal, power and culture and eventually produces co-operative responses. Other images are formed due to asymmetries in these basic three elements. The enemy image prevails when their status and power are relatively similar but they share different goals. The barbarian image dictates a relationship in which one country portrays the other as more powerful and exhibiting an aggressive goal but less civilised than itself. The former would therefore try to resolve this conflict by way of appeasement. When a country views that it is superior to the other in both power and cultural terms and sees an opportunity to exploit the latter's weaknesses to serve its objectives. The former thus takes the dependent (colony) image of the latter resulting in a policy of domination or helping instead of a harmful policy. At the same time, the weaker state also views the stronger state under the imperialist image and may resist domination passively or strongly depending on circumstances (Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995, pp.428-438; Herrmann et al. 1997; Alexander et al. 2005, pp.29-32).

Therefore, image theory is a useful guide in conceptualising self-perception as it also suggests a specific tendency of policy responses with regard to each image type. Image theory offer a meaningful analytical lens through which to see further which image represent Thailand's collective view of itself and of others. By doing so, it permits us to seek for a trend in which Thailand's foreign policy is formulated in certain ways. In other words, a certain image held by policy-makers may allow specific policy preference to influence policy outcomes.

3.1.3 Role theory/ national role conceptions
Role theory, being originally advanced in the disciplines of social psychology and sociology, offers great benefit as another way to understand an individual's psychological factors and how one perceives oneself vis-à-vis others in society. It provides a useful analytical tool for foreign policy analysis under the 'national role conceptions' which many scholars in international relations have successfully

Role theory holds that individuals spend most of their time in groups in which they take different positions or roles, with a set of functions that are formed by the expectation of others in the group. Therefore, it posits that 'social behaviour is in large part a function of the expectations attached to or associated with individuals on the basis of their locations or position (or status) in a social system' (Biddle and Thomas 1966; Biddle 1979 cited in Grossman 2005, p.42). A society, then, can be viewed as the complex relationships and interactions amongst roles in which individuals hold particular positions. In this sense, roles and behaviours are analogous as once individuals 'perform' their roles it means they 'decide' to take certain 'actions', which are called behaviours (Holsti 1970, pp.237, 239).

At the same time, roles are also influenced by both the internal factors and external factors of the individual or in Holsti's words, ego's role conceptions' and alter's role prescriptions. Internal factors include, for example, self-interest, goals, attitudes, values, and personality; whereas external factors involve norms, cultures, social institutions, and organisations of which individuals are members. (Holsti 1970, 239-240).

Holsti proposes the application of the concepts of role theory to introduce 'national role conceptions' in foreign policy analysis as a powerful model in explaining foreign policy behaviours. Based on the assumptions that the foreign policy elite are the primary actors in the policy-making process, and the international system is a type of social system; national role conceptions thus views states interacting in the international system similarly to the way in which individuals in a stratified society perceive which roles they should perform (Grossman 2005, p.42). Therefore, 'role performance results from, or is consistent with, policy-makers' conceptions of their nation's orientations and tasks in the international system or in subordinate regional systems' (Holsti 1970, p.245).

National role conceptions also assert that a national role arises from a complex combination of sources. Other factors rather than merely self-interest (or national interest) are also influential in shaping the behaviour or roles performed by actors,
including decision maker's attitudes, decisions, commitments, rules, and actions in accordance with the role they perceive how their nation should perform in the international society. This includes location, capabilities, socio-economic characteristics (Holsti 1970, pp.239, 245-246; Wish 1980, p.533; Rosenau 1984 in Walker 1987, p.49). Some scholars also find that role prescriptions, such as system structure, are also relevant in shaping the roles in many cases (Walker 1987, p.242-243; Wish 1987).

Not only do national role conceptions suggest which roles a state would perform in the international system but also limit certain policy options that may be otherwise available since certain policies are seen as appropriate to certain roles and vice versa (Holsti 1970, p.247; Rosenau 1984 in Walker 1987, p.54; Grossman 2005, p.42). As Holsti argues:

> The more these national role conceptions become part of the political culture of a nation, the more likely they set limits on perceived, or politically feasible, policy alternatives, and the less likely that idiosyncratic variables would be crucial in decision-making' (1970, p.298)

Thus, national resources, leadership, and other collective actions are mainly mobilised and directed towards policies that support, reinforce, or sustain the national roles (Hollis & Smith 1986, p.277). In other words, national role conceptions help redefine national interests and courses of actions to achieve it including foreign policy.

The national role conceptions model also agrees with other psychological theories that see perception and image as difficult to change but 'likely to remain stable and consistent' (Wish 1980, p.533). Backman argues, changes of political elite 'rarely have the expected effect of changing national policies' (1970; p.311). Therefore, national role conceptions act as a set of guidelines or standards for foreign policymaking on which decision makers rely to conduct their policy on a general basis (Holti 1970, p.246; Wish 1980; Rosenau 1984 in Walker 1987, p.54-55; Aggestam 1999; Grossman 2005). As a result, national role conceptions can provide a useful explanation for general patterns of foreign policy behaviours.
Furthermore, the result of Holsti's study (1970) suggests that instead of several traditional typologies based on the balance of power theory such as bloc leader, balancer, and bloc follower, many different roles based on an active-passive continuum can be conceptualised. He found seventeen role conceptions to which states subscribe depending on different functions, issue areas, geographical regions, or sets of relationships. They can also be categorised into two major groups as active and passive national roles. The active national roles refer to a variety of policies that engage with the external environment—including bastion of revolution-liberator, regional leader, regional protector, active independent, liberation supporter, anti-imperialist agent, defender of the faith, mediator-integrator, regional-subsystem collaborator, developer, and bridge. In contrast, faithful ally, independent, example, internal development, isolate, protectee can be labelled as the passive national roles which focus more on domestic development and less on external involvement (Holsti 1970).

A national role is argued to be useful either as a dependent variable or an independent variable depending on how the research question is posed (Holsti 1970, p.307; Grossman 2005, p.337). It is also valued as an intervening variable that helps bridge levels of analysis (Holsti 1970; Rosenau 1984, Adigbuo 2007) and modifies the prevailing Rational Actor and Bureaucratic Polity models (Hollis & Smith 1986).

Therefore, a national role conceptions framework is relevant to this thesis as another analytical tool to help investigate Thailand's self-perception and the roles that Thailand views it should perform. Certain methodology employed in national role conceptions can be replicated to help reveal Thai foreign policy elite's perception about Thailand's roles in the region and through what type of policy preference they seek to realise those roles.

3.1.4 Identity
Within the field of international relations, the social constructivist school is at the forefront in advocating the analysis of identity and its effects on foreign policy and international politics at large. Constructivists share ontological ground with the post-positivists in questioning an attempt to understanding political reality solely through materialistic and value-free perspectives. Constructivism proposes that 'accounts of the world are shaped by preferences – and often power – so that if truth is possible at
all it lies only in understanding how different versions of events have come to be produced and how they compete' (Hill 2003, p.28). So, social reality is not an object of nature or an entity pre-existing before human society, but is constructed and ‘exists only as inter-subjective awareness among people’ (Jackson & Sørensen 2003, p.253). This includes the international system that is thought to be anarchic but ‘anarchy’ itself is argued by Alexander Wendt (1992) to be ‘what states make of it’. Therefore, a social system consists of values, ideas, norms, thoughts, and knowledge upheld by certain people and prevailing at a particular time and place.

Constructivists contend that actors within a society engage in the social processes of sharing and distributing these ideas and knowledge. Through the process of socialisation, then, a society constitutes collective understanding and expectations of ‘self’ and ‘other’, thus identities are formed with roles attached to them (Wendt 1992, pp.397-398; Katzenstein 1996, p.1). Therefore, similar to role theory, constructivists view that a state as another type of social system attains its identities through the sharing of the same collective norms and values amongst its population in relationship with other states in world state society (Jepperson et al. 1996, p.10). In this way, the state gives notions to itself as an entity different to others in terms of historical background, religion, race, language, culture, ideology, political institutions, and so on; and hence national identities, nationalism, patriotism, and so on. At the same time, the state also defines the nature of its relationships with other states, whether they be friends or enemies, allies or rivals, and thereby constitute international relations.

Furthermore, unlike neo-realists and neo-liberals who view identities and actions are conditional upon interest, constructivists repudiate that claim. They assert that interests and actions are shaped according to identities or how actors see themselves and their relations with others. In other words, identities constitute interest and actions (Wendt 1992, pp.398-399; Reus-Smit 1996, pp.8-9). As Wendt puts it:

> Identities are the basis of interests. Actors do not have a “portfolio” of interests that they carry around independent of social context; instead, they define their interests in the process of defining situations...Sometimes situations are unprecedented in our experience,
and in these cases we have to construct their meaning, and thus our interests, by analogy or invent them de novo (1992, p.398).

Constructivists suggest that foreign policy is an important tool for a state because it reproduces the state's identities that ensure 'self' and 'other' differentiation (Campbell 1998, pp. 68-72), hence 'reinforces national and statist culture' (Hill 2003, p.9). For this reason, identity is worth studying as a significant variable explaining a state's international policies and actions. The primary objective of foreign policy analysis based on the constructivist perspective is therefore to discover how identities are formed and what forces, mainly at the domestic level, may play a part in this identity formation.

Constructivists also view language as another means that constitutes political reality as it is a tool to convey ideas and values in society. Therefore, 'language, whether official or private, rhetorical or observational, has a lot to tell us about both mind-sets and actions, and it is a relatively untapped resource' (Hill 2003, p.9). This thesis can utilise certain constructivist research strategies that might help investigate the perceptions of Thai foreign policy-makers especially through analysing the language used in various policy statements.

To reiterate, the main objective of mapping the above conceptual frameworks is to show that all concepts mentioned above agree on one common ground—that is, how states view themselves has significant implications for foreign policy behaviour. Moreover, it also offers some useful guidelines to elements that may influence the development of collective self-perception. The agreement rests on the fact that perception is shaped within a social and historical process and remains relatively stable through time. To do so this thesis requires a historical method to infer the formation of self-perception from the environment in which Thai people and policy-makers are socialised and share their experiences and worldview.

This chapter places heavy focus on the understanding of self-perception or identity as a discursive practice within Thailand's own history, socialisation and interpretation. It argues that this historical process of socialisation was imposed largely, if not totally, by the Thai state through phases of its nation building. Thus, subsequent sections will
firstly discuss Thailand’s history with relevance to the shaping of the Thai people’s self-perception. Attention will be paid to how the state formation process in Thailand since the late nineteenth century has contributed to creating a certain self-image or perception. Next, it investigates how self-perception was sustained, reinforced, and popularised in Thai society in post-war Thailand. The main objective is to show how the self-perception was formed and how it affected the way of thinking amongst the Thais and, inevitably policy-makers, especially towards Thailand’s neighbouring countries. As Vertzberger (1986, 1990) argues, decision-makers ‘act as a practical-intuitive historian’ whose decisions are often based on beliefs, values and stereotypes (1990, p.113) which is shaped by a mixture of historical experience, selective memory, national mythologies, writing, painting or artefacts (1986, p.224). In short, this chapter wants to show the part of socialisation process that gave birth to Thailand’s self-perception, and the effects of this self-perception on foreign policy-making will be discussed largely in the subsequent chapters.

3.2 The origin of Thailand’s self-perception

This chapter maintains that self-perception amongst member of the Thai elite can be traced back to the process of modern nation-state building since the late nineteenth century. It is directly related to the creation of state’s version of nationalism that brought individuals to share perception towards their country. This section highlights two significant factors that are deemed to be critical of the construction of Thailand’s self-perception. that is, the physical and ideational formation of modern Thailand. This is done especially through the adoption of modern state boundaries particularly in the early development of the nation-state and education as a means to inculcate the very concept of ‘Thai-ness’. Therefore, nationalistic sentiment is an outcome from modern state formation and thereafter shaped the Thai people’s worldview and perception. Moreover, this self-perception also spread vastly when the national education system was implemented nationwide. The perception amongst the elite and the populace became uniform with regard to the view of their own country and the comparisons made with its neighbours.

However, the task of this section and the subsequent one is by no means to discover the origin and development of nationalism in Thai politics. A great number of studies
have already successfully added to the rich literature on this issue. The main concern in this chapter is rather to establish a link between state formation, nationalism, and self-perception in the context of Thai history that was influential in foreign policy-making in the succeeding periods. This linkage has been overlooked or, at least, recognised only superficially in most Thai foreign policy analysis as previously discussed in Chapter Two. Therefore, not every aspect of Thai nationalism will be discussed in detail; only the scope relevant to the shaping of self-perception is included.

3.2.1 The birth of Thai modern state and definition of Thai-ness

The formation of the modern state began for Thailand during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) as a novel political project of the Bangkok elite in response to the expansion of colonialism in Southeast Asia. The centralisation of Bangkok's political power as a sole legitimate political entity involved the imposition of Bangkok's power over other traditional polities arguably by way of adopting a modern geographical concept, hence sovereignty, over its tributary states. Thereafter, the success of the royal court in Bangkok was attributable to its modernisation and reformation in state apparatus such as the fiscal system, modern army, bureaucracy, and, importantly, the education system within a new bounded territory. Through the modern education system nationalism was achieved by instilling the nationalistic idea amongst its citizens. As Baker & Pasuk (2005) well summarise:

The idea of nation, unified nation-state, nationality, national identity, and centralised nation-governing bureaucracy were imposed from above. They were adapted from European models, and adopted in part to parry the threat of colonial takeover. But they were taken up also to replace old systems of rule and social control ... (2005, p.47)

The political actors are selective in manoeuvring historical narratives that mobilise their nation-building; hence constructing shared memories and knowledge of society amongst peoples. Nationalism has been utilised as a tool by the Thai political elite in Bangkok throughout contemporary Thai history to consolidate their power and, significantly, to form the new modern state's shared identity or 'imagined community' in Benedict Anderson's term (1983).
As mentioned briefly in the preceding chapter, mainland Southeast Asia's interstate system was traditionally marked by constellations of power or *mandalas*. Within each constellation there existed a hierarchy of power and recognition. Direct controls from a centre were exercised only within its military and administrative capabilities. Beyond these areas were tributary states that recognised the superiority of and bestowed their loyalty and symbolic tribute to the stronger entities. Apart from the recognition of this hierarchy, unlike colonies, tributary states still maintained their autonomy in managing their manpower, resources, and even external relations with other states. Moreover, this loyalty was not exclusive to any particular power but could be granted concomitantly to several ones. As a result, multiple recognition of the influence of powerful kingdoms as the overlords was a general practice by these tributaries as a means to hedge against any threat to their survival. (Thongchai 1996; Stuart-Fox 2003, pp.26-36; Baker & Pasuk 2005, p.58; Thanet 2006, pp.13-33). At the same time, the influential kingdoms also needed recognition from their smaller tributaries for maintaining their superior hierarchy within the system. The loss of recognition also meant the shrinking of their sphere of political influence and profile. This recognition of power also played an important part later in modern border demarcation between Siam and Western colonial powers. Siam could not control parts of Cambodia and Laos partly owing to the fact the latter also had recognised Vietnam as their suzerainty concomitantly, hence creating a legal claim by France after its occupation of Vietnam.

Thongchai's seminal work on an early stage of mapping Siam in modern history as another way of explaining the construction of the modern Thai state is a useful starting point for this analysis. As argued by Thongchai (1994, 1996), boundaries in pre-modern mainland Southeast Asia were obscure, imprecise, and flexible. Territories were normally limited to an area where towns or cities could oversee with their manpower. Therefore, borders between towns and cities were not necessarily interfaced leaving some areas ungoverned by any authority (1996, p.73). These overlapping and ambiguous boundaries created confusion, misunderstandings and conflict between the Europeans and local people when territories were important to the former's colonial expansion. The demarcation of state boundaries in a modern political geographical sense was first introduced when the British requested Siam to indicate its border with the colonised Burma in 1826. The Siamese court, instead, saw it as an unimportant and irritating issue in the first place but gradually agreed to settle
the issue just to prevent any conflict and mainly because they had to play the new game to ensure their survival (1994, pp.62-72). However, from the time of King Chulalongkorn the new generation of Siamese elite who mostly received Western-style education also wanted to modernise the country in the Western way and started to share the same rationale for demarcation. They also saw the embrace of modern cartographical concepts as a device to buttress their new modern nation-state building project (1996, p.80).

The adoption of modern mapping techniques helped the Siamese rulers to form their idea of how their nation should look. The increasing pressure from the Europeans around Siam alarmed the Siamese court enough to define its border as a defensive mechanism. Siam, for the first time, in 1880 hired a British surveyor James McCarthy to map the territories, a work which was completed in 1887 (Baker & Phasuk 2005, p.58-59). The McCarthy map demonstrates the Siamese elite’s aspirations to claim sovereignty over all Siamese traditional tributaries by automatically transferring the old concept of tributary relationship into a new Westphalian idea of state (Thongchai 1996, p.80). At this time, Siam viewed its tributaries using the Western concept of colonies, thus, they should have been incorporated into a new Siamese map as part of a modern Siamese state. The new map was, in Thongchai’s word, ‘the encoding of desire’ (1994, p.125) covering southern China’s Sipsongpanna (now officially called Xishuangbanna), Sipsongchuthai (the northwestern part of Vietnam), Laos, northern Cambodia, and the northern Malay states (Thongchai 1994, p.125; Wyatt 2003, p.189-190; Baker & Phasuk 2005, p.59-60). Thus the perception amongst the Thai elite as revealed in this mapping of a new Siam indicates that they saw Siam as an empire influencing and controlling a vast area of mainland Southeast Asia.

These aspirations became internalised in the Thai elite’s perception that it created ‘self’ and the sense of belonging within these boundaries. This can be seen from the historical narrative of Thai history that King Chulalongkorn felt so humiliated and so sad after Siam lost the territory east of the Mekong River to the French in 1893. The area nowadays covers most of present-day Laos. As Terwiel (1983) describes:

[King Chulalongkorn] collapsed and left the country’s daily affairs in the hand of his cabinet. He took the matters so to heart that he refused to eat
and to meet people, and it was widely expected that he would die, his spirit broken (p.260)

It is very interesting to see how this sense of belonging of a new bounded state was built in quite a short period of time. It can be argued to a certain degree that, at this stage, the Siamese elite had already attached themselves to the new concept of state sovereignty. Thongchai (1996) does not really explain this in detail. He states that 'two decades later [around the mid 1820-the early 1840], the British were still urging that the boundary be demarcated. Siam finally agreed, for unknown reasons' (p.78). However, he implies that the new generation of Siamese elite may have been strongly influenced by their modern education (1996, p.80).

Prior to the accession to the throne of King Chulalongkorn in 1868 many young princes and noblemen were either educated abroad or by foreign teachers. Young Prince Chulalongkorn had also been trained by a group of English teachers including Anna Leonowens (Wyatt 2003, p.175), a famous character in the Broadway musical 'The King and I'. This group of elite, the so-called Young Siam, later become a driving force in modernising the country (Kullada 2004). Leaving aside those educated abroad, it can be easily imagined that part of the curriculum taught by these English teachers would have been Western history and geography in which modern maps of the world and the British Empire were illustrated. As a result, by the time Prince Chulalongkorn become the king, the concept of modern nation-state with clear boundaries was at least understood amongst the potential ruling class.

Therefore, Thongchai's treatment of the demarcation of Siamese territory as an independent variable in explaining the emergence of nationhood, thence nationalism, might be somewhat problematical in inferring the formation of elite's self-image and perception. Perhaps, the western elements of education prior to the mapping processes in Siam had actually formed such a perception. Maps, though influential, were merely an outcome of cognitive structuring that was crystallised and revealed at a particular time when political environment was allowed. That is, although the concept of nation-state was recognised by a certain modernised elite during King Mongut's reign (father of King Chulalongkorn), this group had still been unable to push
forward the change until they could consolidate their political power vis-à-vis other groups later during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

Kullada's seminal work (2004) discusses in detail how King Chulalongkorn successfully consolidated his political power and achieved the ultimate goal of creating a modern absolutist state during his reign. She argues that King Chulalongkorn's idea of building the nation-state owed much to Napoleonic France in which the French emperor maintained his absolute power above all. This absolutist state idea was reflected, and in some sections paraphrased, in an unpublished constitution that King Chulalongkorn ordered to be drafted (pp.193-194). It was a response to the traditional political power held in the hands of both the noble class and the great families, so that he could gradually mobilise political support and power from new resources to create an absolutist state.

King Chulalongkorn's state formation project was more than an introduction of a modern system that comprised the institutions of taxation, military, and bureaucracy. More importantly, the ultimate objective behind these initiatives was his attempt to enforce the modern concept of citizenship within a territory. The creation of this notion is arguably attributable to the strengthening of self-perception, not only amongst the Thai elite but also the common people.

The abolition of slavery, later on including corvée, was King Chulalongkorn's important tool to redirect loyalty from his new 'subjects', which brought several impacts to Siam. Firstly, it increased an independent workforce within the Siamese economy and allowed Siam to enjoy benefits from the expansion of production and trade with the Europeans. Secondly, it allowed Siam to expand its taxation base on which a new modern bureaucracy relied. Thirdly, this initiative also coincided with the interest of the Bunnags—a great noble family that controlled trade and tax collection. This convergence of interest between King Chulalongkorn and the Bunnags, in turn, had a positive effect on the former's political position vis-à-vis other hard-line groups (Kullada 2004, pp.45-51). Most importantly, the release of labour forces from the traditional system and the conversion of them into a modern conscription helped the new modern state to acquire its own army with less reliance on other traditional lords who would usually supply manpower. This helped Bangkok to deal effectively by force
with revolts and internal resistance within its new boundary, and finally brought all people under the Siamese King. In Baker & Pasuk's word, 'all men were now the king's men. Almost everyone now stood in the same relationship to the state tax and military service. In parallel, they were also reinvented as members of the same race' (2005, p.62).

Challenged by the European definition of 'nation' as a political expression of race, King Chulalongkorn stepped forward to identify 'Thai-ness' based on language and new boundaries. Therefore, the Thai, the Lao, and the Shan were regarded as the same race, as their languages are in the Tai family. Other groups such as Malay, Mon, Khmer, though speaking different languages, were also Siamese as long as they resided in Siam. King Chulalongkorn adopted a term similar to that of the British Queen and her empire, representing himself as 'King of Siam and Sovereign of Laos and Malay'. Siam was many times instead referred to as 'Ratcha anachak Thai' which is literally translated as 'the Kingdom of the Thais' (Baker & Pasuk 2004, p.62-67).

3.2.2 Instilling Thai-ness
Apart from King Chulalongkorn's attempt to re-mobilise loyalty in favour of his position under the new concept of who was Thai as described above, education was another significant tool for him to inculcate this new concept and strengthen nationalistic idea. King Chulalongkorn did this on both fronts, amongst the bureaucrats and the general public. His primary purpose was to create a loyalty centred on the monarch (Kullada 2004, p.66; Wyatt 2004, p.181). Modern education training was meant to become the new entry to career advancement. Promotion was now based on merit in contrast to paternalism, which prevailed in the in traditional system. Although King Chulalongkorn's primary targets were princes and noblemen, commoners also infiltrated the new system, treating it as a social ladder, hence the expansion of education outside the ruling class. Once the new bureaucracy grew, new recruits were needed hence mass education was expanded to provide modern knowledge to a wider population. Later, professional schools such as law and public administration were created to fulfil the need for specialised skills. The new bureaucratic class was formed and enlarged through time. However, the new class started to develop their own distinct interests and values attached to the new bureaucratic institutions and later
'the nation', whose definition started to gradually depart from the throne as initially intended by King Chulalongkorn (Kullada 2004, p.85).

Popular education may be the key to understanding how the concept of 'nation' successfully entered into people's lexicon and later into their views on other nations. The concept of nation was taught through a standard textbook called 'Thammachariya' which conveyed the idea of moral education and new values for a civilised person (Kullada 2004, pp.85-87). This textbook rationalised an individual's love, responsibility, pride and loyalty to the nation. It emphasised a nation as a cultural community in which individuals share similar history, culture and other characteristics including language, Buddhist ethics, and family and interpersonal values based on seniority (Kullada 2004, pp.88-92).

Thai history, at the same time, also started to be narrated in a linear line of continuity that explained how the Thai state had been formed, expanded and became Siam. King Chulalongkorn's half-brother and son—Prince Damrong and Prince Vajiravudh, respectively—were amongst the leading, and most rigorous sponsors, of the study of Thai history as a subject in the curriculum similar to that in other 'civilised Western nations'. They put forward that Sukhothai (1238-1438 AD) was the first capital of an established Thai kingdom and 'the beginning of an unbroken sequence down...to Bangkok' (Baker & Pasuk 2004, p.72). Prince Damrong also dedicated his time and efforts to writing Thai historical texts in which heroic Thai kings were portrayed as courageous and dedicated to protecting the country. In this context, Burma was depicted as Thailand's perpetual enemy which had twice destroyed the old Thai capital, Ayutthaya, forcing the Thai people to move southward to resurrect their kingdom in Bangkok. He put forward that Thai people basically loved peace and freedom. In one of his works, *Laksana kan pokkhrong Sayam tae boran* (Governments in Siam since the ancient time), he concludes:

> It is common to think that because of their [past kings'] might the Thai people have become a dominant group in Siam. However, more importantly, the ability to rule Siam for over 700 years also needs other morale that is integrated in Thai people's character. As far as I have noticed in my historical studies, Thai people have three important
characteristics, that is, their "love of national independence", "tolerance", and "power of assimilation" (Prince Damrong cited in Chatchai 1991, p.354).

This historical narrative came to the conclusion that it was King Mongkut and especially King Chulalongkorn who modernised Siam and protected their people and territories from colonial threats. This is similar to the way by which previous kings throughout history had protected Siam from its enemies. Therefore, according to the new morale, Siamese citizens owed gratitude to their king and should repay this debt in form of loyalty to the throne and, similarly, the nation.

This nationalistic version of Thai (royal) history or 'Rachaphongsawadan' and the moral education of 'Thammachariya' were incorporated into national curriculum for commoners in 1884 and 1902, respectively. Attachak (1995) finds that a *viva voce* examination on knowledge of Thai history and the kings' contributions to the country was a general requirement for passing school levels until after 1932 when the absolute monarchy was officially abolished (p.184). However, this conventional version of Thai history has also been reproduced, and repeated, and still dominates the mainstream belief until the present day.

During the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) the concept of nationalism was contested, redefined and elaborated. Similar to his father, King Vajiravudh saw nationalism as an important tool to defend himself against political instability upon his accession to the throne. However, King Vajiravudh did not possess great charisma on the same level as his father. Thus, he found himself not respected especially by the powerful and experienced princes and bureaucrats. At the same time, the new educated social class concentrated in the modern bureaucracy that his father had built, in turn, became a stumbling block for the monarchy. The monarchy was increasingly losing its relevance as bureaucracy could perform state's modern functions and developed its own ideology of the nation which became gradually detached from the throne. As a result, many scholars argue, King Vajiravudh's nationalism was an attempt to strengthen the king's centrality and analogous to royalism (Wyatt 2003, pp.210-2218; Kullada 2004, pp.126-153; Baker & Phasuk 2005, pp.106-107).
King Vajiravudh’s official nationalism rested on the creation of the national holy trinity—nation, religion and king. His emphasis was to rationalise loyalty directed to the throne. He created the metaphor of the king as captain who gained authority and respect from his subordinates so that he could control the vessel effectively and bring everyone to shore safely. Likewise, a nation needed a leader who acted for the national interest, and the people should obey the leader’s authority if they wanted to see the nation survive and progress. Therefore, in King Vajiravudh’s view the nation and the king were inseparable, while religion was needed to sustain people’s moral principles to behave for the collective welfare, not for individualistic interest (Wyatt 2003, pp.216-217; Kullada 2004, pp. 126-153).

King Vajiravudh’s various nationalist campaigns aimed at promoting the core concept of unity, sacrifice, and duty as a guideline for his people to achieve collective action. The Wild Tiger Corps—a paramilitary unit—was an outstanding example of this attempt to institutionalise nationalism. It is arguable that the Wild Tiger Corps was established as his balance-of-power tool against the old establishment in the bureaucracy (Achara 1980; Yupha 1984 cited in Attachak 1995). However, its training and ideology suggest that, at least, it was an instrument for him to instil his nationalist ideas in government officials and population. It was an effort to melt down the individualistic mentality and to implant social utilitarian ideas in his subjects (Attachak 1995, p.195). His speeches and writings to the Wild Tiger Corps emphasised the theme of the good citizen embracing the concepts of nation-loving and self-restraint for the public interest as their guiding principles. As the group expanded to the provinces his idea was popularised. As Terwiel (1983) notes, ‘[King Vajiravudh] established a truly nationalist organisation which made people feel that they were part of the Siamese nation and bonded to the monarch himself’ (p.294).

Apart from the Wild Tiger Corps, other regular audiences of his nationalist addresses on various occasions included the younger generation of low to middle-ranked officials, military officers, court officials and students of schools under royal patronage, such as the Royal Pages College, the Chiangmai Royal Pages College, the King’s College, and the Pran Luang School (Ratana 2004, p.91). These young generations of the Thai elite, therefore, had absorbed these nationalist principles which still influenced them when
they became political leaders in a new democratic Siam, as we shall see later in the succeeding section.

However, the new modern state’s mechanism—bureaucracy—that helped King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh consolidated their absolute power started to change. Ironically, it also became destructive to the monarchy itself. Instead of consolidating the centrality of the monarch, the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie started to develop its own version of nationalism in which ‘the nation’ was departing from ‘the monarch’ (However, the issue of the fall of the absolute monarchy in Thailand is less relevant to the focus of this thesis, so this will not be pursued here).

The new socio-economic reality that took hold in Siam after the country had experienced close contacts with Europeans in political, economic and social arenas, especially since King Mongkut, opened up new space and time. The previous section demonstrated how a new space was created once a modern nation-state was formed within new boundaries. This new spatial dimension influenced how people residing in Siam thought about themselves as a nation. This view arose first within the elite and was transmitted to other social classes. Simultaneously, the notion of time was redefined in association with a new space. Cosmological timing based on Buddhist theology that emphasised human reincarnation within samsara was gradually replaced by a more scientific reasoning. Humans have one life but the nation continues. Thus, the modern concept of citizenship evolved to rationalise humans’ responsibility for safeguarding the nation, its continuity, historical pride, progress and glory, hence reinforcing nationalism. At the same time, the individualistic mentality developed so that it became another working rationale for other classes to see themselves as part of the country’s progress, not only that of the king.

The transmission of these concepts from the elite class to commoners was more conducive when the boundaries were defined. Education became an important instrument to proliferate these ideas into the wider population especially with the help of printing technology and modern communication. These new technologies gave a clearer picture in comparison to what one was and what others were. A self-evaluation of Siam within a new international community created a threshold for what its elite and people would aim for and avoid. The European model was then preferred to that
of the more backward neighbouring countries that had succumbed to colonial rule. The ability of Siam to avoid the fate of its neighbours also helped raise the morale and confidence amongst its elite and people. The early process of modern state formation and nationalism were therefore crucial to the further development of self-perception or the view of Thailand with reference to other countries, especially its neighbouring countries.

3.3 The consolidation of self-perception

The transformation of political governance from the absolute monarchy to democracy in 1932 did not lessen the importance of nationalistic sentiment in the political arena. Instead, as suggested in its name, the democratic regime needed popular support especially when the political change was driven from above by the military clique, and was not a social revolution. Nationalism was therefore an important means to direct the citizen's loyalty away from traditional palace to a new civilian government, and to consolidate its democratic nation-state building.

3.3.1 Nationalism enforced and disseminated

Thai nationalism in the new era reached its peak during the Phibun governments (16 December 1938–1 August 1944; 8 April 1948–16 September 1957). According to Marshal Phibun, his state building policy meant to aggrandise and civilise Thailand through state mandates. His state policy was based on three broad aspects. First, it was fascist authoritarian as he encouraged and even forced people to only listen, believe, and follow him. He also positioned himself as the centre of national unity to push forward progress. Second, Phibun emphasised chauvinistic propaganda to raise public morale about Thailand especially in relation to its pride and prestige. He convinced the Thai people that they had been great since ancient times and this greatness should continue to be so. One of his famous mottoes that shows this idea is 'If we don't want to be enslaved, we must be a great power' (Manit 1997, p.96) Therefore, his nationalism was preoccupied with a sense of revolution in which certain aspects of Thai culture should be redefined, adjusted, and created, while other aspects should be annulled, according to the state's view (Piyanat 2007, p.174). All of this propaganda was intended to make Thailand civilised on a par with the West and to 'create in Thai citizens a sense that their country had entered a new epoch' (Reynolds 2002a, p.6).
Phil's nation-building policy was indoctrinated through the enforcement of twelve issuances of state's mandate or 'Rattaniyom'. These mandates were edicts that prescribed 'civilised culture' guidelines for Thai citizens to practise. They ranged from all personal and inter-personal levels such as how and what to eat, dress, speak, and act, to the social level including the reform of the Thai alphabet, the promotion of the role of women, the adoption of a universal New Year's Day, directives regarding Thai national characteristics, and the change of the country's name from Siam to Thailand. Affirmative actions were implemented, including economic nationalism in which an import substitution industrialisation policy was pursued. Foreign enterprises were nationalised while native Thai were encouraged to participate in economic activities and were privileged in accessing financial resources (Piyanat 2007, pp.174-183).

In the political arena, the Phibun government stimulated nationalistic sentiment amongst the citizenry, most importantly through education. Education, once again, became imperative to instilling nationalism in the same way the leaders in the absolute monarchy had done. Thus, this thesis posits that nationalism in this period was a turning point at which Thailand's self-perception was crystallised and consolidated. This nationalism has had a great impact on how Thai people see themselves and their neighbouring countries, and is also seen in Thai foreign policy.

Phil's nationalist pedagogy was to raise awareness that everybody in Thailand was Thai. The supremacy of the Thai race and Thai-ness were emphasised over other races. This project was manufactured by Phil's intellectual right-hand man and prominent Thai historian in the post-absolutist era, Luang Wichit Wathakan. Having overseas experience and modern education during his early life and a career in the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs, Luang Wichit was able to make sense of the different sources of materials to construct a new way of explaining Thai civilisation and history, including other literary writings. He departed from the previous focus of Thai history on individual chronology (mainly focused on the past kings) to involving a more interdisciplinary approach including geography, economics, archaeology, literature, sociology, linguistics, amongst others. By so doing, he was able to '[present] the history of Siam in relation to that of other countries...[and] indicate the importance of the country in global terms and thereby instil a sense of pride in his readers' (Barme 1993, p.49). This new technique of history telling has been adopted and prevailed in Thai
textbooks. Srisak Walliphodom, a prominent Thai historian, asserts that the most influential narrative is 'Prawattisat ton trakun thai' (History of the Thai origin) authored by Luang Wichit Wathakan. It was adapted into nationalistic songs and plays during the Phibun regime and became part of textbook that Thai students needed to memorise (Thai Post 19 August 2001, p.1).

Textbooks on Thai history and Social Studies which set out the knowledge of Thailand and its neighbouring countries for Thai students reflect how the Thai state inculcated the nationalistic ideology amongst its people. Although there were contending versions of Thai history in the beginning of the Phibun government including a liberal one which was more compromising and accepting the reality of ethnic diversity in Thailand, the nationalist version in line with Phil's policy of the great Thai-ness prevailed and was sponsored by the state. This historical discourse has dominated Thai education with insignificant changes until today.

Warunee's study of the nationalist agenda in textbooks (2001) elucidates our understanding of the impacts of teaching Thai history and presenting information about neighbouring countries on the shaping of the idea of its relations with neighbours. She argues that Phil's nationalist version that emphasised the superiority of the Thai in mainland Southeast Asia due to the country's longstanding independence had a great influence on Thai education, especially at the peak of the Cold War. This nationalistic approach also reinforced an expansionary idea amongst Thai military circles that seeks to exercise Thailand's dominant position in mainland Southeast Asia, or the concept of 'Suvarnabhumi'.

During 1960-1973 Phil's successor, Marshal Sarit Thanarat, continued the nationalist ideology, emphasising security as another justification. Thak (2007) argues that Sarit was influenced greatly by Luang Wichit's idea of promoting nationalism and received Luang Wichit's support in many occasions (pp. 115-119). Sarit saw that Thailand was in danger due to the communist threat encircling Thailand; therefore, the Thai state needed to raise the security mindset of its people. One way to achieve this was through following the central authority's directives as a guide to strengthen, develop, and modernise the nation. Any ideology that seemed to undermine the sacred pillars of
nation, religion and monarchy needed to be suppressed, including socialism and communism (Warunee 2001, pp. 21-32).

Within the context of regional politico-ideological contestation, other neighbouring countries especially in Indochina were viewed with suspicion as threats to national security and portrayed as having inferior characters. Thailand’s neighbours started to appear negatively in Thai people’s eyes. Similar to King Vajiravudh and Phibun, Sarit’s nationalism repeated the story of how the Thai people had struggled against brutal regimes since their migration from China to the Golden Peninsula of mainland Southeast Asia, frequently referred to as ‘Suvarnabhumi’.

School textbooks used in history and social studies illustrated that the Khmer Empire, which is associated with modern Cambodia, as being repressive towards the Thai. The victory over the Khmer and the successful establishment of the Thai kingdoms were interpreted as a reward for the Thais’ love of freedom and independence, the characteristic special to the Thai. Burma was also portrayed an aggressive nation who had always invaded Siam. The stories of the Burmese sacking the old capital twice, forcing the Thai people to move to Bangkok, were reproduced in both textbooks and in fiction. The Vietnamese were also shown as an aggressive and perfidious neighbour who betrayed Thailand’s trust and always tried to take control over Thailand’s sphere of political influence—Laos and Cambodia. Although the Laos and the Malay were not pictured as aggressive, they were portrayed as inferior because they were under Siamese suzerainty before. At the same time, Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia were also not trustworthy as Thai history interprets their rulers as being disloyal to Siam when they secretly agreed to be under the protection of the British and the French Empires (Warunee 2001, pp. 38-67).

Furthermore, the loss of control over Laos, Cambodia and northern Malay states since King Chulalongkorn were understood as Thai territory being attenuated based on the modern concept of state sovereignty. This became a political and diplomatic issue several times in the contemporary period. During the Phibun government, Japan helped return some parts of the ‘lost territories’ back to Thailand as a result of Thailand’s co-operation in World War II and, partly, the popular support for the campaign of regaining Thailand’s ‘lost territories’. These included the northern
Cambodian provinces in 1941 (Battamban and Siem Reap), Lao territories on the west bank of the Mekong River in 1941, four northern Malay states in 1943 (Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis, and Kedah), and the Shan States in 1943 (Wyatt 2003, pp.247-248; Baker & Pasuk 2005, pp.135-137; Piyanat 2007, pp.184-187). Moreover, the handover of ancient Khmer ruin of Preah Vihear on Thai-Cambodian border in 1962 to Cambodia according to a decision of the International Court of Justice also reinforced the perception of an untrustworthy neighbour. This dispute reared up again during 2007-2008 when the Cambodian government proposed to register the ruin and its adjacent area as a UNESCO World Heritage site to which the Thai strongly objected and provoked a public outcry as the initial proposal included a wider area that may have encroached on Thai territory (Pathan 2008; Matichon, 18 June 2008, p.11). These incidents indicate that the sense of belonging and imperialistic perception amongst the Thai over mainland Southeast Asia is tangible.

Images of other countries especially those within the communist camp deteriorated again after the backlash of the rightwing and conservative elite against the student movement in 1976. The perception against the leftwing also needs to be considered within the context of the collapse of Indochina in 1975 and the flood of refugees into Thailand. Textbooks during this time also show contents relating to threats against national security in a chapter on 'foreigners in Thailand'. This writing implies that the Thai state was aware of security threats that may have been disguised in these Indochinese refugees and advised Thai people to be cautious of their intentions (Warunee 2001, pp.81-82).

A survey conducted in 1985 amongst local leaders about the nationalist attitudes, which catches the essence of the perception formed throughout history. The result of the survey is cited in Thongchai (1994), it shows that, unsurprisingly, the strong view that Thailand is a wonderful nation in which respondents would love to be reborn. As for the nations they hate most, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos scored the highest. People of these nations...were the most untrustworthy...If one asks why these peoples are classified as enemies there will be no clear rationale (p.168).
This also is reflected in the general public's mind. A survey by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (1987) reveals that Thai perception towards Indochinese countries was very negative. Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were ranked at four bottommost amongst 16 selected countries with which Thailand should strengthen cooperation in both security and economic areas. 'Self' and 'other' have been repeated in the minds of the Thais in such a way that the former is seen as better quality than the latter, corresponding to good and bad, civilised and uncivilised, peaceful and aggressive, friendly and hostile dichotomies.

The formation of this perception amongst Thai public through education can also be inferred to political leaders who were also socialised and educated within the same context. Warunee finds that textbooks on Thai history after 1975 including 1977, 1978, 1981, 1988, 1990, and 1998 showed no significant change in the core concept of nationalism, national security and its threats (2001, p.85). Knowledge of neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia was still limited and some parts were anachronistic. An anti-communism sentiment still exists in a textbook in 'Southeast Asia in a modern world' that has been used since 1993 by downplaying Thailand's neighbours' successes but focusing on their poverty, lesser development, and illiteracy (p.96). A part on Vietnam still reveals a sense of competition in both political and economic terms over Laos and Cambodia (p.98).

This relationship between education and the creation of self-perception can be well reflected in the opinion of Srisak Walliphodom about the study of Thai history. He asserts:

[Thai education] is selective in studying. Therefore, Thai people are narrow in knowledge...living in a wider world but with a narrow mind...This is because of our education...Simply, we do not understand our neighbours and always create problems [with them]. This is also because we study history to fantasise to ourselves that Thailand is greater than anybody else (Thai Post 9 August 2001, p.1).
In short, this section has shown the effects of Thailand's socialisation process through the enforcement of nationalism as part of nation-state building on the formation of Thailand's self-perception. This self-perception was formed within an idea of Thailand being a great nation first. The Cold War context helped add elements of comparison vis-à-vis its neighbours due to their different political development from Thailand. The fear of security threat augmented the negative view and image of its neighbours as seen in school textbooks, which also helped reflect and construct Thailand's self-image in return.

3.3.2 External reinforcement of self-perception

However, Thailand's self-perception as a great country in both physical and moral terms is also reinforced by the regional context of the Cold War. It also put in and brought back the sense of its significance. This can be seen in relation to the notion of the Security Complex in Southeast Asia that conceptualises political competition in Indochina in which Thailand and Vietnam played a key role during the Cold War (Buzan 1998, 2003, pp. 133-136; Ganesan 2001; Emmer 2004).

The co-operation with the Free World in the Cold War, at the same time, may have helped shape and deepen Thailand's self-perception as an important actor in the region as well. Besides the Indochina Security Complex view, briefly mentioned above, which shows that political dynamics in mainland Southeast Asia during that time were driven to a great extent by Thailand's security concerns, an ally status with great powers also became an indispensable element. Apart from its function as a security assurance against the communist threat, being an ally with the United States also symbolised being at the centre of attention and activities. Thai policy-makers seemed to be accustomed to the presence of the United States. Sukhumbandh Paribatra, a former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned that, 'Thai elite from the past including myself is used to having the Americans around', so 'it is a psychological factor' that helped lessen security concerns (interview, 29 February 2008). This perception was reflected in a survey of 1,352 Thai respondents conducted in 1987 with regard to their attitude towards Thai-US relations. Around 75.5 per cent had a positive view on the US and more than 77 per cent thought the relationship was also good (Roper Center 1987).
The perception of Thailand being a centre of Southeast Asia was not only held by the Thais but also reflected by Thailand’s major security patron, the United States. Edwin Stanton, a former US Ambassador expressed the United States’ concern on Thailand’s security threat in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference of 1954. He stated that ‘Because of her geographical and strategic location, Thailand is the heart and citadel of the region’ (1954, p.72), thus should be kept free from being overtaken by the communist countries. He further proposed the US government should provide assistance in order to maintain Thailand in the free world and base its defensive system for Southeast Asia in Thailand (pp.83-84). He says, ‘If Thailand’s freedom and independence can be preserved, the heart and much of the body of Southeast Asia will have been saved’ (p.85). Therefore, it can be seen that US military assistance during the Cold War and its political support were partly due to its perception that Thailand was an important fortress for the free world in this region.

The creation of ASEAN can also be seen in the light of US involvement and Thailand’s role in the region. Kullada (2007) questions the original idea of ASEAN as to whether it was proposed locally or influenced by the US foreign policy at that time. Her research on US archives reveals some possibility that ASEAN might have been a US idea but the US did not want to be seen being involved in it. Therefore, the US assigned this leading role to Thailand. Kullada quotes a memoir of Dean Rusk to President Johnson on 13 May 1967 stating ‘US Objectives: ...Growth of Asian Regional cooperation, with Thailand playing a leading role’ (Kullada 2007, 151). If so, we can see how external power perceived Thailand’s potential role in the regional order. Importantly, it also reiterates the passive and accommodating posture of Thai foreign policy.

However, despite the continuity of Thai-US security alliance in the post-Cold War period, its value in Thai policy-makers’ perception is mixed and still debatable. On the one hand, it has entered a new phase in which a strategic partnership between the two countries has replaced the old patron-client relationship of the Cold War resulting in the expansion of bilateral security co-operation to other related areas especially non-traditional security (Pranee & Nongnuth 2007, pp.17-18). On the other hand, some policy-makers viewed this relationship as something having started to be irrelevant in the modern time. When asked for his opinion on the issue of the relevance
of the ally status with the United States, Kachadpai Burusapatan, a former Secretary-General of Thailand’s National Security Council (NSC), stated:

the conventional military alliance with the American is not significant anymore, its relevance is vague. Even with the Major Non-NATO Ally status, Thailand has not benefited that much from it. It is merely symbolic of friendship and historical co-operation (interview, 27 February 2008).

If, in fact, these security ties are now not as important as before, their persistence can be seen as a reminder of Thailand’s significant status in the region. This may be relevant today as a psychological support on which Thailand’s active role can be further rationalised.

Thailand’s assertive role in Southeast Asian regional co-operation from the beginning has also accentuated a sense of its centrality in regional affairs into generations of Thai elite. Thanat Khoman (1999), the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and a founding father of ASEAN, recalled Thailand’s role in regional reconciliation at the beginning of post-war Southeast Asia. He stated that Thailand helped ameliorate the situation by being a mediator for over a year to prevent the escalation of conflict amongst Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, which was finally settled in a meeting in Bangkok (1999, pp.170-171). Then, he claimed that the ASEAN initiative was informally tabled by him during that time. He noted:

After the meeting they [Malaysian, Indonesian and the Philippines delegates] held a banquet and invited Thailand in order to show their appreciation for the host country that helped facilitate the meeting. On this occasion, I told Adam Malik who was Indonesia’s Vice President and Foreign Minister that I wanted to restore regional co-operation and would like Indonesia to join. He agreed but asked for some time until the Malaysian-Indonesia diplomatic relations were normalised (1999, p.171).

The fact that eventually ASEAN was officially conceived in Bangkok signifies the importance of Bangkok’s role in this endeavour. Surin Pitsuwan, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and the current ASEAN Secretary-General, addressed Thailand’s
National Defence College on 25 December 2007 with a similar sense of significance. He stated that ‘this organisation is important to Thailand; it was born here and is a pride of our nation’.

Towards the end of the Cold War, although the alliance with the United States was reduced in significance after its withdrawal from Vietnam, Thailand was still able to maintain its central position of regional politics because of the Cambodian issue. The special relationship between Bangkok and Beijing cultivated during this regional episode also anchored another regional power’s perception of Thailand’s important role in pressuring Vietnam’s withdrawal (Likhit 1999, p.367). The regional momentum towards Bangkok’s leadership was evident as discussions and efforts to resolve the issue occupied ASEAN for over a decade until the early 1990s.

In perceiving that Thailand has been an important driving force of ASEAN since the beginning of its establishment, Thai policy-makers seemed to refute the notion of Indonesia as ASEAN’s natural leader. They felt that Thailand was equally eligible to be a leader as well. Thanat Khoman’s view illustrates this perception. He asserts (1999),

> Recently, there was a country that thought it should be the regional leader due to its size. That really irritated my ears when I heard but didn’t want to say anything much...Of course, a country with a sheer size of territory and population including economic potential may gain more weights to attract audiences than a smaller country. Yet, a true leadership is rather dependent upon ability and wisdom. Although Thailand is not a very big country in term of size, many of our initiatives, in fact, have been reasonable and, thus, gained enormous support from all parties (1999, p.172).

Therefore, it can be said that the experience of Thailand during the Cold War also help raise its policy-makers’ confidence in the country’s policy direction. Its co-operation with the free world led by the United States and its allies until the collapse of the communist bloc created a self-image of Thailand as a leading actor in Southeast Asia, especially compared to its socialist neighbours. Strategic relations with China in the
latter half of the Cold War also demonstrated Thailand's relatively important position in regional politics.

However, this thesis does not conclude at this point that Thailand's self-perception as being a leading actor in Southeast Asia primarily drove its foreign policy to a great extent. It is this thesis's assumption that the Cold War politics and security concern of communist threats around Thailand overshadowed a deliberate exercise of this perception. Thai foreign policy during this period was still reactive as it sought to maintain security, stability and status quo. Within these concerns Thai policy-makers allowed its policy to flexibly adjust to carry out those objectives. In most part, it searched for alignment with regional powers that could protect its sovereignty, and for collective action with regional states and friends to supplement it. In short, the effect of Thailand's self-perception during this time was subordinated to security consideration and played a minimal role in shaping policy direction.

In turn, it is the Cold War and great powers' policy that helped consolidate the ongoing formation of Thailand's self-perception through highlighting Thailand's role in different episodes. Thanat Khoman's view also indicates that as a policy-making elite he did not see Thailand a regional leader. Thailand's leading role was only as a small power attempting to seek security protection. He states,

Thailand as a small country in the middle of two big states like China and India and in Southeast Asia where great powers struggled for political interest,...such as China, US, and Soviet Union...Our main interest is to survive (Thanat 1990 cited in 1999, p.174)

However, this self-confidence and perception would start to reveal its greater effect towards the end of the Cold War.

3.4 Conclusion

The main objective in this chapter has been to show how self-perception originated, developed, and consolidated amongst the Thais and their elite throughout the modern state-building history. Situated within the framework of cognitive approaches to
perception mentioned early in this chapter, the historical development of ideas and socialisation in Thailand and its interaction with outsiders has helped shape self-perception, self-image, or identity amongst members of the society.

In short, this chapter has introduced the advent of the Thai nation-state formation since King Chulalongkorn and its impact on instilling self-perception amongst the Thais. Although initially as an attempt to consolidate the King's power against other contending groups and to counter the external colonial threats from the West, the King's policies greatly affected the people's perception about themselves and their nation. The identification of the Thai people within a new nation-state created and strengthened loyalty to their community at large. Nationalism was developed and utilised by the Thai political elite to cultivate their subjects' allegiance, hence strengthening their power throughout contemporary Thailand from King Chulalongkorn to the governments of post-monarchical Thailand.

In ways similar to the use of force, education was monopolised by the Thai state. It was even more effective in its controlling effect especially when a national historical writing, uniform school curriculum, and textbooks were determined by the central authority. Although private authors and publishing companies could later on write and produce their own textbooks, they all had to be inspected and amended thoroughly by officials in the Ministry of Education before the latter granted approval for them to be used in schools. However, the official textbooks produced by the Ministry of Education in general still gained more trust amongst schools and teachers, and were selected as the main teaching materials (Supannee 2001, pp.140-150). Therefore, a state nationalist ideology being passed on through education can persist in people's mind through time. It has produced the perception amongst the Thais that their country is great and able to sustain difficulties through history. This success is inevitably compared with its neighbours that fell into foreign hands and remain 'less developed'. The Cold War context also raised suspicion against these neighbours due to the differences in regime type.

At the same time, the involvement of Thailand during the Cold War also reinforced the sense of its significance not only within a small circle in mainland Southeast Asia but also in external power's eyes. Close ties with the United States and Thailand's active
role in regional co-operation helped elevate a greater confidence in Thailand's policy actions. Therefore, it can be seen that Thailand's self-perception or identity is grounded deeply in its history. The consolidation of the Thai nation-state took place both at the domestic level and through the interaction with external actors. These processes certainly shaped the knowledge of Thailand's self and of 'other', which affected not only popular belief but was also within Thai policy-making circle.

The next chapter will demonstrate how the self-perception formed throughout history started to crystallise at the end the Cold War; and how this self-perception eventually played some role in Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy. It will introduce how self-perception has interacted with material changes within the context of economic internationalisation. This will demonstrate the fact that self-perception is not static. Some part is reinforced by, and some adjusts to a new environment. The self-perception of Thailand as a better nation has been reinforced by its economic success since the late 1980s. With its renewed economic interest in mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand re-created the sense of a sphere of influence on which it leading role rests, especially in mainland Southeast Asia development. Its regionalist policy throughout the post-Cold War period reveals this self-perception. Ultimately, Thailand’s attempt to exercise its role in the region by rearranging regional order signifies its true embracing of proactive foreign policy behaviour.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE EMERGENCE OF THAILAND'S REGIONAL ASPIRATIONS
IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA:
SELF-PERCEPTION READJUSTED IN A GLOBALISED ECONOMY

This chapter explores the juxtaposition between material and ideational factors which converge to generate Thailand’s regional aspirations in the post Cold War period. It intends to demonstrate how the self-perception that was formed over time as discussed in Chapter Three, relates to and interacts with Thailand’s economic interest since the end of the Cold War. It contends that the internationalisation of the Thai economy since the late 1980s has had a significant impact on the nature the Thai state. It has gradually transformed the state’s main priority from maintaining security—the basis of policy reactiveness—towards improving economic competitiveness. However, this change was not insulated from the pre-existing mindset but has been reconciled with it so that the core self-perception was sustained.

This chapter asserts that self-perception and changing material interest converged and reinforced one another so that self-perception has become a working idea for Thailand to support regional development initiatives apart from its political and economic interest. The existing self-perception operating in the changing context was therefore adjusted to not only fulfil a material objective of reaping benefits from economic globalisation but also to reinforce Thailand’s self-perception in a new fashion. That is, Thailand’s self-perception in the post-Cold War era has been expressed in relation to its regional economic co-operative policy. Thailand has also attempted to propose its own version of co-operation on many occasions. These regional aspirations allow Thailand to play a leading and proactive role in regional politico-economic transformation. Foreign policy analysis in this policy tendency is therefore a good means to see how a state’s ideologies and interests are intertwined.

To describe this interaction, therefore, this chapter is guided by two key sub-questions: ‘how did the existing self-perception interact with the new international environment of the post-Cold War, and what was the outcome?’; and ‘how did the outcome of this interaction
influence Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy? These questions coupled with the one posted in Chapter Three—addressing the construction of Thailand’s identity and its possible implications for the cognitive aspects of Thai policy-makers—will ultimately address the main research enquiry of this thesis that seeks another supplementary explanation of the ongoing development of proactive behaviour of Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.

To reiterate, this thesis advances the argument that Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy is not always as reactive as conventional wisdom maintains. In contrast, it has gradually departed from its reactive nature and become more proactive in the post-Cold War era. One way to observe this proactive nature is through Thailand’s attempt to exercise a leading role in its own version of regional economic development especially in mainland Southeast Asia. Throughout this thesis this idea and policy preferences to achieve this role are collectively called ‘regional aspirations’. They give rise to a discernable pattern in Thai foreign policy behaviour that has a strong attachment to a regional focus especially in mainland Southeast Asia. The previous chapter showed that the formation of this self-perception played a part in the cognitive mindset of the Thais as well as the policy-makers. This chapter subsequently demonstrates further how this self-perception persisted, evolved, and was expressed in a post-Cold War environment through its foreign policy and, particularly, through its efforts to innovate policy within an increasing globalised economy.

This chapter first develops an understanding of the impacts from participating in the process of internationalisation of production on the Thai state. It revisits briefly how the Thai economy transformed in the current globalisation process. Then, it discusses the effects of this economic transformation on the nature of the Thai state in terms of its incentives, preferences and capabilities. Next, it examines how this changing nature of the Thai state interwove the existing self-perception and material interests. It suggests that this interaction helped generate Thailand’s aspirations to play a leading role with certain characteristics. Finally, the chapter conceptualises these core characteristics of these aspirations that can arguably be found in Thai foreign policy throughout the post-Cold War period. This nature and the pattern generalised in this chapter will be examined empirically through case studies in the succeeding chapters.
4.1 The economic globalisation and the Thai economy

In addressing the first question posed earlier in this chapter on the outcome of the interaction between self-perception and material interest in the globalised world, it is necessary to discuss how the global political economic environment in the post-Cold War affected the nature of the Thai state. This chapter argues that the globalisation of production—especially since the 1980s—not only affected the economic activities of private firms but also increasingly shaped the state's political structure in many ways, hence is reflected in its foreign policy.

It is therefore necessary to revisit the significance of globalisation briefly in this section to see how changes at the global level precipitated changes in Thai economy. In its essence, the recent globalisation has been highlighted by the flexibility in global production and its geographical dispersion as a way for private firms to reduce production costs and increase their efficiency. This change has pressured states to adjust their behaviour and policy to be more open to foreign firms and their investment. This impacted on not only its economic but also political affairs. The raison d'être operating in this new structure re-oriented most states towards a similar direction, that is, states became more concerned about and even overwhelmed with its competitiveness and their position in the world economy.

4.1.1 Global and regional changes

The current process of globalisation owes much to the internationalisation of production especially since the Plaza Accord in 1985. This agreement reflected the ongoing crisis of the Fordist mode of production and regulation extended to the post-war order under the Bretton Woods system. Under the previous system, liberalisation, stability and domestic welfare were compromised. This period saw the promotion of trade liberalisation that well served the mass production of the American industries for economic reconstruction in the free world, while the exchange rate remained stable (Cox 2006, p.40). At the same time, the role of the state as an interventionist to maintain domestic stability and economic growth was deemed important. The welfare state system and Keynesian policies were implemented to achieve this goal including the nationalisation and subsidisation of key public goods, financial markets, and strategic industries in industrialised countries (Palan et al. 1996, p.4). The rising inflation and the oil crisis in
the 1970s finally affected the profits of firms located in the industrialised economies (Bernard & Ravenhill 1992, p.1). This economic crisis subsequently generated a global structural change in production.

This change resulted in firms gradually specialising in high value-added production in which they have comparative advantages and moving other low-profit and labour-intensive chains to low-wage locations. International subcontracting of parts and components to foreign firms emerged as an important strategy. With the aid of advances in technology and transportation, geographical barriers were broken down, resulting in the achievement of firms to create a network of production across different locations (Brooks 2005, pp.21-24).

With specific reference to East Asia, this change in the economies of production also creates tension between the United States and Japan, as well as other newly industrialising economies (NIEs—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore). However, this change also needs to be put in the context of the changing world and the regional security environment. The political détente between China and the United States in the 1970s and the economic reform in China after Deng Xiaoping came into power in 1978 essentially transformed the Cold War logic. The maintenance of the post-war regional order in which the United States allowed East Asian democracies to 'free ride' until they had accelerated their industrialisation was no longer applicable (Mack & Ravenhill 1994, pp.3-4). Therefore, the relative decline of the economic power of the United States and relaxing political environment reinforced the tension amongst industrialised economies, resulting in the United States forcing currency realignment in the mid 1980s. In effect, this move devalued the American dollar leading to the appreciation of the Japanese yen, thus increasing the cost of production at home for Japanese firms.

The 1985 currency realignment marked a significant turning point in which the globalisation of production was deepened in the region mainly through foreign direct investment starting from Japan. Coupled with increasing demands from Washington to further reduce the Japanese trade surplus through various measures including voluntary export restraints, non-tariff barriers, and pressures for opening the Japanese market to American imports, one of Japan's prominent strategies was to increase its investments
abroad (Bernard & Ravenhill 1992, pp.2-3). The same adjustment also occurred in South Korea and Taiwan in the later 1980s which motivated their firms to relocate their manufacturing abroad to maintain their international competiveness. Since the Plaza Agreement foreign direct investments from the three countries rose significantly, particularly in Southeast Asia and mainland China (Bernard & Ravenhill 1992, pp.2-3; Ravenhill 1994, p.4; Lee 1995, p.70-71; Dent 2002, pp.215). Apart from economic motives of low wages, abundant labour, and geographical proximity, cultural affinity, historical contacts, and the large number of overseas Chinese also determined the geographical focus of Northeast Asian investment in Southeast Asia (Bernard & Ravenhill 1995, p.179). Although foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia was not unprecedented, the new wave of investment in the 1980s led by Japan shifted its focuses from natural resources, raw materials, and import substitution industries, to mainly export-oriented industries of low-end and low value-added electronic industries, textile industries and other consumer products (Pasuk 1990; pp.29-33; Naya & Imada 1990, p.37; Bernard & Ravenhill 1992, pp.8-9; Fukushima & Kwan 1995, p.17).

The picture of economic regionalisation during this period is not complete without mentioning the pull factor of economic policy in many Southeast Asian countries. A plan for transforming an economy from import substitution industrialisation to export orientation took place amongst Southeast Asian countries in the 1970s with the exception of Singapore that had abandoned its import substitution policy during the early 1960s (Narula 2002, p.12). Although Malaysia's 1968 Investment Incentives Act and the 1970 New Economic Policy (NEP) marked its gradual turn away from the import substitution industrialisation strategy (Athukorala & Menon 1996), its export-led strategy was not seriously put into action until the mid 1970s (Kuruvilla 1996, p.643). Similarly, Indonesia's import substitution policy was implemented until the devaluation of the rupiah in 1986 when deregulation towards a more open market helped Indonesia to reap the benefit of its abundant natural resources and low-cost labour for the export sector (Lecraw 1993). The Philippines had a long-standing import substitution policy strongly influenced by American business interests and the local capitalist elite. The IMF alleviation package for correcting balance of payment crisis forced the country to deregulate and adopt the export-oriented strategy in the mid-1970s (Kuruvilla 1996, pp.646-647). However, due to strong resistance from traditional socio-economic pressure, serious implementation was not achieved until the early 1990s (Chan & Clark
1995, pp. 171-172; Clark & Chan 1995, pp. 89-90). It can be said that since the mid-1970s countries in Southeast Asia had started to embrace a more open market orientation. The shift of economic development strategy coupled with the push factor from Japan and NIEs enabled the process of East Asian regionalisation and its integration into the world economy. Thailand was no exception to this transformation.

4.1.2 Changes in the Thai economy
In the case of Thailand, technocrats had started to outline strategies for promoting manufactured products during the mid 1970s but the plan was not well received as the protected domestic industries and agricultural export sector were still shown to be able to generate growth. Not until the second oil crisis in early 1980s when exports of agricultural products slumped and traditional domestic manufacturers faced increasing costs of production did full export-oriented industrialisation became possible (Pasuk 2005, pp.202-203). After that, the Thai economy gradually departed from relying on the agricultural sector and import substitution industries based on natural resources to a focus on manufacturing industries.

The change in production structure is illustrated by Table 4.1, seen in the decline of agricultural product share in Thailand's domestic product (GDP) compared to the considerable rise of GDP due to the manufacturing sector. During this period GDP in the apparel industry alone for the first time in 1990 overtook that in paddy rice production—the country's traditional major agricultural export (Figure 4.1). In addition, within the manufacturing sector itself GDP in machinery and electrical supplies increased sharply since the late 1980s. In 1996, it surpassed traditional manufacturing products in both textiles and apparels that constituted the country's industrialisation in the early stage (Figure 4.1). This signifies that the Thai economy had fully graduated to another stage that required more skilled labour and technology. As a result, Thailand experienced a rapid economic growth similar to that experienced by other Southeast Asian countries during this time. The growth of the manufacturing sector can be attributed to foreign investment since 1988 especially from Japan and East Asian NIEs who escaped their rising local currencies (Baker & Pasuk 2006, p.204).
Table 4.1: Comparison of Thailand's production in agricultural and industrial sectors in selected years; at 1988 price, unit: million baht (Source: NESDB 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>GDP from agriculture</th>
<th>GDP from Manufacturing</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>184,576</td>
<td>211,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>227,324</td>
<td>268,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>263,607</td>
<td>540,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>315,572</td>
<td>909,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>309,948</td>
<td>1,096,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>347,830</td>
<td>1,500,657</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1: GDP in selected sectors, 1980-2001 (Source: NESDB 2006)

To sum up, the results of political and economic changes—at both the regional and domestic levels—led to Thailand jumping into competition for foreign investment. In this context, the role of the state became an essential factor to ensure economic prosperity. In contrast to the hyper-globalisation thesis that predicts the decline and increasing irrelevancy of the state, the new phase of a globalised world economy...
requires the state to be even more active. As Cerny puts it, 'states play a crucial role as stabilisers and enforcers of the rules and practices of global society, ... [and] are probably the most important single category of agent in the globalisation process (Cerny 1997, pp.257-258).

The next section, therefore, discusses the evolving nature of the state in this changing economic structure in general, and directly relates to the Thai state in particular. It maintains that states became preoccupied by the competition for economic advancement within neo-liberal economic guidelines. This suggests that Thailand has inevitably transformed towards a neo-liberal 'competition state' as well. This transformation is represented by the structural changes which have taken place in the nature of actors, incentives, and capabilities of the Thai state. The changing nature of the state will be elaborated and connected to the notion of self-perception in the final part of this chapter.

4.2 The Thai state as 'the competition state'

As discussed above, the importance of the changes in the world economy in the 1970s and especially since the 1980s in East Asia gave rise to a flexible and fragmented production system and the geographical dispersion of capital. The previous economic and production crises also brought to the end of welfare state and started the era of 'the competition state'. This section begins with a discussion of how the improvement of competitiveness became the state's priority. This conceptual guideline is then used to examine the nature of the Thai state. It shows how the Thai state transformed into 'the competition state' indicated by changes in three aspects—the nature of actors, incentives, and capabilities. This thesis contends that this changing nature of the Thai state towards 'the competition state' was a critical juncture in which the existing self-perception was modified and expressed in a new fashion in the globalised world.

4.2.1 The competition state

'The competition state' is a concept that tries to explain a type of state that has an embedded idea of promoting its international competitiveness by way of attracting economic transactions and activities within its territory which ultimately advances its
national wealth (Cerny 1997, p.259; Fougner 2006, 165). The reduction of the political and strategic tensions of the Cold War since the 1970s also facilitated the emergence of this type of state as states' priority shifted to market orientation.

Palan et al. (1996) argues that 'the competition state' operates within four common denominators. First, the major concern of a government is economic growth, hence the standard of living of people. Second, traditional protectionist policies are increasingly inefficient and unproductive; thus, a hybrid of economic policies of free market and state intervention is implemented. As a consequence of modern telecommunication technologies that help private firms to become more mobile, states are also pressured to be more active in securing firms' investment decisions within their territories. Therefore, states exercise their authority in economic management policy, in order for their economies to become more competitively advantageous than others (pp.37-38). Third, states therefore shift their modus operandi within these new rationales. States' objectives and functions move away from maximising welfare and redistribution towards creating a 'competitive advantage' in the international market. Therefore, in terms of policy, states tend to engage more at the microeconomic level to furnish themselves with suitable environments for competition, through policies such as deregulation, industrial policy, and the control of inflation. At the same time, they also engage in 'the promotion of enterprise, innovation, and profitability in both private and public sectors' (Cerny 1997, p.260). In this sense, states are acting more like market players whose policies and strategies are aimed to 'promote, control, and maximise returns from market forces in an international setting' (Fougner 2006, p.167).

This competitive nature in a globalisation context forces states worldwide to increasingly adopt and institutionalise a neo-liberal economic agenda into states' policies (1997, p.265). As Ravenhill (1994) puts it, 'the ideas of neo-classical economics have achieved an unprecedented hegemony' (p.9). This tendency has resulted in the advocacy of economic liberalisation by international economic institutions around the world which has infiltrated states' agendas (1994, pp.9-10). This prevailing free-market orientation can be attributed to the influence of the United States in these institutions. As mentioned earlier, although the liberal economic agenda had appeared within a post-war economic order, it had to compromise with Keynesian welfare states partly for security purposes. After the decline of Cold War political tension, Washington was less
willing to bear the cost of maintaining such an economic order and shifted its economic
policy back to an original ideology of free trade and economic liberalisation (Ravenhill
1994, p.8; Rupert 2000, pp.42-54). In East Asia, the push for opening the markets of
Japan and other East Asian NIEs by the United States since the 1980s reflects this
situation.

In the Asia-Pacific region, another factor that deepened and sustained a neo-liberal
economic agenda was the increasing international co-ordination amongst officials of
different countries and intergovernmental organisations, especially since the Plaza
Accord of September 1985 (Furlong 1989). Ravenhill (1994) found that policy co­
ordination through several international organisations in the Asia-Pacific, particularly
the Pacific Trade and Development Conference (PAFTAD), the Pacific Basin Economic
Council (PBEC), and the Pacific Economic Co-operation Council (PECC), had long been
linking academics, business people, and government officials, also including providing
ideas and networking even before the 1980s. These organisations and networks
provided what Oran Young (1991) refers to as an ‘intellectual leadership’. It created an
epistemic community—as neo-Gramscians would say, an emergence of a ‘constellation
of dominant social forces’ (Rupert 2000, p.50)—‘to which the idea [of economic
liberalisation] propounded by these organisations has been wholeheartedly adopted by
the governments of the region’ both as states’ ideology and policy approach (Ravenhill
1994, pp.9-10).

As shown above, competitiveness can no longer be taken for granted as a natural
behaviour of the state. For neo-realists, competition is a natural way for states to obtain
relative power (Hobson 2000, pp.17-63), but this chapter offers a different approach.
Competitiveness is rather seen here as an outcome of the changing nature of the
international economic order. This is because of states integrating into the world
economy and transforming within this context; the issue of competitiveness thus
becomes a governmental problem which public policy objectives aim to resolve.

As Fougner reviews in his article (2006), the concept of international competitiveness
was popularised and spread from the United States around the end of the 1960s initially
in the business management field. Parallel with the decline of the welfare state and the
Fordist mode of production, governments were conceived of being inefficient and their
roles should be limited only to delivering the proper conditions for improving the competitive environment for national enterprises. The pressure on states to be able to react to a changing economic and business nature modified governmental mentality to embrace this concept. That is, states are more concerned with not only how to make their national firms competitive, but also how to make foreign firms competitive if they invest in their territories. In this environment, the ‘competition state’ theory suggests that states have fewer alternatives but need to compete amongst each other. They are increasingly commodified as competitive entities in a global market. States develop, promote, and market themselves including learning best practices while creating distinctive characters at the same time. The main objective is to become an attractive site for foreign investment (Fougner 2006, pp.179-183). In short, the change in the global economy has been instrumental in bringing about homogeneity in the competition state.

However, as neo-liberal strategies were increasingly prevailing other policy options are less plausible. Therefore, it can be seen that economic liberalisation, deregulation, and the ‘political and legal institutional framework in and through which a market is constituted (property rights, contract rights, and so on) and policed on a continuous basis (competition policy)’ (Fougner 2006, p.176) emerged as a dominant prescription for governments.

Thailand has also been incorporated into this process of embedding the notion of competition in the logic of the state. Its promotion of inward foreign direct investment and the implementation of its export-oriented strategy during the 1980s can be seen as an important step towards consolidating the nature of ‘the competition state’. The effects of this transformation can be observed in three aspects—actors, incentives, and capabilities—as shown in the following sub-sections. These changing characteristics of the Thai state point to the fact that the Thai state is primarily concerned with its position and competitiveness in the world economy.

4.2.2 Changes in the nature of actors in the Thai state
As framed by the declining Cold War tensions and the emerging trend in the globalisation of production, economic issues previously described as 'low politics' increasingly became a priority of the state over traditional security (Hobson 2000, p.2). At the same time, as pressured by the changing nature of international
production and the state's failure of promoting its own national enterprises, as described earlier, the Thai state started to give way and allow private firms to participate in this decision-making process more directly during the 1980s, not only in its economic policy, but also in its foreign policy.

Anek (1988, 1991) and MacIntyre (1990) concur that this transition stemmed mainly from the growth of the private sector itself, the decrease in the ethnic bias against Chinese Thai businessmen by the traditional elite, and the political openness that emerged following the right-wing government of Thanin Kraivixian. Anek's analysis of the influence of business associations in Thailand on the formation of public-private sector dialogue in 1981—the Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee (JPPCC)—points to the departure of the Thai state from the bureaucratic polity towards the liberal corporatist model in which both sectors were now on an equal footing. Therefore, in the 1980s businessmen were able to enter politics and assert their power 'to encroach on bureaucratic prerogative' (Connor 2003, p.96). This transition reached its zenith when General Prem unsuccessfully tried to return to power and a retired general-turned-businessman Chatichai Choonhavan formed the first civilian government after twelve years of military rule in which a major faction in his cabinet had a business background. Although a coup d'état against Chatichai took place three years afterwards, the military was unable to sustain its power for long after the blood-shedding suppression of the civic demonstrations in May 1992. Since then, as Connor puts it, 'the military and bureaucracy were facing a steady decline in political influence and a threat to [the] corporate position and illegitimate commercial interests' (2003, p97).

Although existing studies do not elaborate specifically on the power of international factors that may have contributed to the growth of the business sector in Thailand, earlier discussion in this chapter about the internationalisation of production in the advanced capitalist countries may offer an important connection. The external pressure from foreign capital coupled with the growing interest amongst domestic capitals keen to tap into this opportunity was likely to affect the dynamics of the business sector in Thailand, and thus the nature of the Thai state. With regard to the interest of foreign capital from the mid-1980s
onward, Anek (1998) notes the role of several American agencies, notably the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the US Chamber of Commerce, and the Asia Foundation. These organisations made this public-private dialogue in the JPPCC possible through funding projects related to how to facilitate the business sector in both legal and policy areas, and training programmes for business and managerial upgrading (pp.460-461). These activities suggest that American capital also sought to penetrate the Thai market in close collaboration with the American state during that time. Therefore, the United States’ influence on the business legal framework and policies towards deregulation and liberal economic practices is undeniable.

It was during the Chatichai government when the convergence of Thai and international capital interest started to clearly constitute the core policy of the government. In his policy address to the Parliament on 25 August 1988, Chatichai stated that the main objective of his economic policy was to strengthen the Thai economy in which ‘the private sector will become competitive in the world market...[by] support[ing] [them] to play a major role in economic development under the liberal economic system’ (1998, p.5). He repeated this economic policy orientation in his policy statement to the Parliament in 1991. He stated:

The government aims to expand the country’s production sector and trade through opening the economy to [the] global economy, so that Thailand will become an economic front line of the region, whether it be the regional centres for international production, processing, exports, financial business, and transport...to achieve these goals Thailand needs to relax its economic policy...[and] increase the role of the private sector (Chatichai 1991, p.25)

Chatichai’s foreign policy statements also reflected the emphasis on the expansion of economic activities and the role of the private sector. He noted his government would ‘use foreign affairs to support Thailand’s economic growth by encouraging close co-ordination between public and private sectors, so as to improve efficiency and unity in foreign policy implementation’ (Chatichai 1988). It can be said that
during this time the Thai state apparently echoed the rationale of the neo-liberal ‘competition state’ emphasising ‘competitiveness’ and the role of private business.

Another crucial juncture at which the international and domestic capital interests converged was during the interim governments of Anand Panyarachun between 1991 and 1992. Anand was a former diplomat, who went into business in 1979 and became a Vice-Chairman of Saha Union Group and a Chairman of the Board of Directors in 1991. He was also elected Vice-Chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries between 1982 and 1990 and became the Chairman in 1990. At the same time, he also held several positions in other companies (Tasker 1991, p.15; UNICEF n.d.; UN News Centre n.d.). He also actively engaged in ASEAN business groups, serving as President of the ASEAN Chamber of Commerce and Industry (1982-1984), President of the ASEAN Task Force responsible for ASEAN co-operation in its Track II (1988-1989), as well as President of the ASEAN Committee in the ASEAN-US Council (1986-1990). Despite the Anand government being appointed by the military, business interests were not severely dampened considering Anand’s background in the private sector. Instead, they continued and even extended by the Thai state as suggested by Anek (1991, p.178) and Connor (2003, p.97). Anand ensured a free market economy continued (Anand 1992, p.260) and later passed many laws in line with the liberal economic prescription which further liberalised the Thai economy (Connor 2003, p.97).

As leader of the interim government in 1992 Anand did not elaborate his economic and foreign policy in detail for his second term but directly referred to his intention to follow the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (1992-1996). According to the Seventh Plan, Thailand would develop a sophisticated financial market and liberalise it, so that it could achieve its goal of becoming a regional financial centre. Actually, this goal had been in place since the Chatichai government and was included in the previous Plan as well. Therefore, the Bangkok International Banking Facility (BIBF) which laid out the deregulation of Thailand’s financial transactions was approved during the second Anand administration though fully implemented later in early 1993 with support from the IMF (MOF 1992; Warr 1999, p.634). Not only financial liberalisation but similar liberalisation schemes can also be seen in other sectors during this time, for example, the abandonment of import bans and a reduction in the tax on cars (Sakkarin 2008),
the liberalisation of hypermarket outlets (Veerayooth 2008) and beer brewing industry (Nualnoi 2008). Moreover, despite his short tenure of the second term in office, Anand’s most acclaimed achievement in foreign policy was ASEAN’s adoption of his proposal to establish the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) at the Fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore in January 1992. The scheme aimed for reduction and elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers within ASEAN, which thereby encouraging intra-ASEAN trade as a building block for global trade liberalisation. This included other economic co-operation such as investment in both the industrial and financial sectors (ASEAN Secretariat 1992). Once achieved, it was hoped that AFTA would make the region more competitive and attractive to foreign investment with a market size of nearly 600 million people.

In sum, it can be said that the major actors in the Thai state had already transformed following its further engagement with the world economy. The private sector not only replaced the state as the driver of both economic and foreign policy decisions but had also played an increasingly important role in Thai politics since the 1980s. More importantly, parallel with this development the Thai state also embraced the neo-liberal competition state model in which economic liberalisation and competitiveness were embedded into its raison d’etat.

4.2.2 Changing incentives/preferences of the Thai state

If the changing nature of the key actors in the Thai state moved the centre of gravity towards industrialists/internationalists as an influential coalition, the incentive of the Thai state also shifted towards furthering this coalition’s interests. Co-operation rather than conflict was therefore a preferred policy direction. This changing incentive also corresponded with liberal theory that saw economic transaction as a less costly means of accumulating wealth than coercive means. Moravcsik argues that ‘economic development tends to increase the material stake of social actors in existing investments, thereby reducing their willingness to assume the cost and risk of coercion through war or sanction’ (1997, p.530)

Strengthening economic gains became a priority of the Thai state since the 1980s. The transition of the decision making structure of the Thai state from purely bureaucratic polity to liberal corporatism as discussed in the previous sub-section
was another critical juncture at which the concept of competitiveness was implanted into the Thai state. Competition in the world market, on the one hand, prompted the Thai state to mobilise its support to increase its attractiveness as a good location for investment and exporting. On the other hand, co-operation was also possible as a means to reduce structural costs of building up market infrastructure, to maximise the economies of scale, and to obtain raw materials for expanding domestic industries. Therefore, the strengthening of competitiveness and promotion of co-operation in the economic arena co-existed.

To develop competitiveness, foreign direct investment became very significant to the Thai state. FDI gradually contributed to a major proportion of the country’s productivity (GDP), from nearly 10 per cent in 1990 to more than 30 per cent in 2005, measured by FDI stock as a percentage of GDP (UNCTAD 2007a). The Thai state started to implement policies that were generally aimed at improving its competitiveness to attract foreign capital and boosting exports as a core objective. For example, according to an UNCTAD report (1999) Thailand set up different types of special economic zones including three investment zones, five economic processing zones and several other specialised zones. It also offered a three-year tax holiday, duty-free imports and export privileges to investors. The main target industry was electrical appliances as a source of industrial upgrading from basic labour-intensive industries. The majority of firms interested in investing in this sector were Japanese, European, and American (p.454).

Figure 4.2 shows the trend of net FDI flows to selected major industries of Thailand of which electrical appliances and machinery sectors are two major recipient sectors. The concentration of foreign investment in these two sectors also corresponded to the overall increase in the domestic products in the same industries as depicted in Figure 4.1 (section 4.1). In addition, when considering Thailand’s major exports it is seen that the export structure also shifted towards manufacturing products with over 70 per cent of total exports since 1993 (Ministry of Commerce 2008). It also suggests that the production in these two sectors are more internationalised than others, corresponding to the overall nature of the production network especially in East Asia as previously discussed.
In addition, it was not only FDI that was so significant to Thailand's modern industrial sector and its real economy; foreign investment in equity form also became more attractive. Thailand at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s further deregulated its financial market through the establishment of BIBF. This made it much easier for foreign capital with lower interest to invest in the Thai stock market to finance domestic investment and consumption when domestic interest was relatively high with a fixed foreign exchange rate. The result was a rise in the amount of short-term foreign capital, even surpassing long-term foreign investment after BIBF was fully implemented in 1993 until the Financial Crisis interceded in 1997.

This situation suggests that the Thai state was preoccupied with strengthening its competitive position in the world economy with a focus on attracting foreign capital, firstly with direct investment in the production sector and later extended to financial market. As Warr (1999) notes, one of the incentives to liberalise the Thai the financial market was the hope that Bangkok would 'replace Hong Kong as a
regional financial centre following the restoration of Chinese sovereignty in Hong Kong in 1997' (p.634). The competition for foreign capital can therefore be attributed to the Thai competition state in the post-Cold War period.

The changing incentive of the state also began to blur the boundary between domestic and foreign affairs. Thai foreign policy, traditionally concerned with core political and security issues, also altered its focus to improving the country's economic position in the world economy. Thailand's priority had shifted since the end of the Cold War to attach more importance to economic development, while conflicts were either put aside or brought to an end. Peace, co-operation, interdependence, and mutual economic prosperity became buzzwords for Thai policy-makers even before the Chatichai government. Although in the 1980s Thailand was still preoccupied with the Cambodian issue in the area of security, it is undeniable that the Thai state was more active in promoting economic co-operation and calling for an end to the conflicts, especially with its neighbours, for possible mutual economic prosperity.

For example, Siddhi Savetsila, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, speaking about Thailand's foreign policy in 1985, stated that in the 1980s economic interdependence was unquestionable, but this encompassed both benefits and risks. He noted that foreign policy had a role in harvesting this opportunity so that national economic well-being was improved. He asserted that 'now it is the time to concentrate on economic areas' and suggested that ASEAN should be geared towards removing its obstacles to create an economic community for mutual prosperity. He also called for the end of conflict in Cambodia and mentioned that to achieve regional progress and prosperity, 'Vietnam can and, certainly, should play a role' (Siddhi 1999). This can be seen as a seed for realising Thailand's eagerness to end the Cold War in mainland Southeast Asia in the Chatichai administration.

As Thailand at the end of the 1980s enjoyed its high growth, Chatichai's policies in both economic and foreign affairs reflected the Thai state's preference for international and intra-regional co-operation. Chatichai argued that the most important force in the international political system was economic dynamics, not political or military contestation. As every country wanted to improve its citizens'
well-being, mutual economic prosperity would be the best way to secure peace (Phairot 1994, p.91). It can be said that in Chatichai’s mind political competition no longer served the national interest. Only through economic relations would peace be sustained and benefit all nations. This was a new rationale for his foreign policy towards Indochina aimed at ending the political stalemate and opening up opportunities for trade and investment in these countries. This Indochina policy reflects the changing nature of incentive in which traditional security rationales no longer gained domestic consensus to maintain conventional foreign policy practices. Foreign policy needed to serve the interest of a new domestic coalition that saw economic opportunities abroad. This policy logic can be observed in Chatichai’s words:

External security is an important condition for improving domestic security. We cannot achieve our goal domestically without considering the external environment. Therefore, if possible, we must try to make what happens outside the country consistent and facilitate what we are doing in our country as well (Chatichai 1989 in Phairot 1994, p.49).

This statement constituted an important message for Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy. First, it indicated a shift in Thai foreign policy behaviour from reactive to proactive as it aimed to change the surrounding environment to serve the nation’s best interest. Second, it signified Thailand’s sphere of interest for its active foreign policy. It signified that Thailand wanted to improve its economic competitiveness through consolidating its economic and political position in mainland Southeast Asia, so that Thailand would become more attractive and prominent in the international community. This was a point from which later proactive foreign policy was sustained by successive Thai governments throughout the post-Cold War era.

The changing nature of the Thai state towards ‘the competition state’ is not only seen in the changes of its key actors and preferences but also in terms of its capacities. A change in capacities can be seen through how the Thai state allocated its national resources, which reflected the shift of the Thai state’s focus from security towards the economic arena. Many resources were mobilised to enhance
the country's economic position in the competitive world economy. The state's capabilities traditionally expressed in its military might changed and were replaced by the notion of economic strength and its ability to improve its wealth. The allocation of resources between these two objectives reflects this changing nature.

4.2.3 Changing capabilities of the Thai state

As economic competition gained currency over traditional security issues, it in turn affected the national resources allocated for state expenditure. State capacities in this new environment were defined more broadly, not exclusively as military strength, to show how the state could maintain and improve the economic well-being of the nation.

With reference to the previous discussion on the 'Two Good Theory' of foreign policy in Chapter Two, a country is considered to be endowed with limited resources. It needs to allocate these resources to either maintaining status quo or generating changes (Palmer & Morgan 2006). We can apply this model to the issue of changes in capabilities. Assuming a country has to distribute its resources to two broad national interests, that is, maintaining security and improving the country's economic position, when a country's preference or incentive changes towards the latter it is assumed that more resources will be allocated away from military to economic activities. Figure 4.3 illustrates the hypothetical change in national resource allocation in Thailand after the late 1980s. This figure assumes that when a country experiences economic growth its resources for both security and economy will increase, represented by a shift of production frontier from $P_1$ to $P_2$. However, due to changes in incentive and preference of actors favouring economic activities, depicted by the change of indifference curve $i_1$ or $i_2$ to be steeper towards X-axis, resources for military are unchanged (M) or reduced (M2) as a result.
This trend can be observed in the change in the Thai state's military capability in terms of defence expenditure. Government expenditure on defence-related issues in general had declined since the Chatichai government. The drop in military expenditure occurs both as a percentage of total expenditure in each fiscal year (from around 30 per cent in 1988 to 10 per cent in 2006) and as a percentage of GDP (from 2.8 per cent in 1988 to 1.1 per cent in 2006). This is illustrated in Figures 4.4 and 4.5.

Figure 4.4: Thailand's defence spending as a percentage of GDP, 1988-2006 (Source: SIPRI 2008a)
This trend does not directly indicate that the effectiveness of the Thai armed forces had declined since effectiveness is affected not only by budget allocation but also by other factors such as quality of weaponry, techniques of military training, and technological improvement. However, it is likely that without careful planning to improve its personnel and equipment the shrink in budget would also affect a country's overall military capabilities. Moreover, it may be reasonable to assume that the 1997 Financial Crisis had a negative impact on military expenditure. The record suggests this, as defence spending dropped from 2.1 to 1.9 per cent of GDP in 1997 and 1998, respectively (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5). Yet, this trend was not unprecedented as Thailand's military expenditure had gradually declined since the late 1980s with insignificant sporadic rises in only a few years within two decades. This thesis contends that a decline in military capabilities was substituted by other state strategies to improve the country's national security. In the context of declining traditional politico-military confrontation in the post-Cold War period, a co-operative strategy was thus likely to be a preferable option.

In sum, this sub-section has attempted to demonstrate that the current the internationalisation of Thai economy changed the nature of the Thai state. The changes in its key actors, preferences, and capabilities reflected the general trend
towards 'the competition state' in which the priority of the state was to improve its competitiveness in the world economy. The problem at this point is how this changing nature of the Thai state and its existing self-perception interplayed. In other words, how was self-perception in this globalised world expressed especially in Thai foreign policy?

The next section addresses this question and points to the fact that Thailand's self-perception has become an operative idea in which material interest is pursued. In this connection, self-perception was adjusted to incorporate features of 'the competition state'. Although its modification embraced a co-operative element, the existing self-perception still maintained its core feature of viewing Thailand as a leading actor in its essence. This created Thailand’s regional aspirations in which a co-operative policy became an important strategy to enhance Thailand's leading position in the international and regional systems.

4.3 Translating self-perception into regional aspirations in foreign policy

Although Thailand's self-perception or identity has recently received attention in academia, the literature on this issue pays greater attention to how national identity is formed with relation to the consolidation of political institutions, such as the monarchy, the nation, or specific regimes. The emphasis on national identity is regarded as a political tool of the powerful elite to mobilise political support against their opposition in different contexts. Nationalism created the 'otherness' which is defined as a threat to the nation. These threats are thought to have been working against the Thai-ness such as the colonial powers and progressive political groups during the absolute monarchy or the communists during the Cold War. To the best of my knowledge, there is no specific study on the relationship between Thailand's self-perception and its foreign policy especially in the post-Cold War era. The farthest most scholars of Thai foreign policy have gone is the address of 'Suvarnabhumi' concept (discussed in Chapters Two and Three). However, this feature is not further elaborated in detail. This thesis takes this issue seriously and assesses more extensively how self-perception or identity influences Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.
After having discussed the external pressures on the Thai state from a current internationalisation of the Thai economy, and its effects on the political economic structure of Thailand, the problem addressed now is how self-perception of the Thai state, mentioned in Chapter Three, interacted with this changing nature of the Thai state. To put it slightly differently, what is the connection between these structural and cognitive factors that influenced Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy?

The answer to this question rests on the interaction between the nature of the ‘competition state’ and the existing self-perception. Therefore, this section argues that the transformation of the Thai state into the competition state model helped facilitate or reframe the existing cognition amongst Thai decision makers. That is, it offers a new working space in which a co-operative strategy has become very relevant in promoting competitiveness. However, only changes in the economic system and domestic coalition did not automatically produce a specific type of foreign policy that aimed to promote Thailand’s own version of economic cooperation. Considering the fact that the decline of the Cold War context also offered more independence for Thailand to pursue its own foreign policy with less pressure from regional politics and great powers, other co-operative strategies could have been emphasised. Therefore, in such a case an ideational dimension is germane to the analysis.

In its essence, Thailand saw, at least, mainland Southeast Asia as a foundation of the country’s leverage to project its leadership further in the regional system. The next sub-section, then, shows how this self-perception was expressed in major Thai foreign policy initiatives from the end of the Cold War roughly until the Thaksin administration. The main intention is to show a broad picture of Thailand’s major foreign policy initiatives that exhibit regional aspirations. However, comprehensive evaluation of policy effectiveness is thus well beyond this study’s analytical scope.

4.3.1 A new expression of Thai’s self-perception: emerging regional aspirations
As intimated in section 4.2, the issue of competitiveness was relevant in the policy-making of the Thai state. The competitive mentality was embedded within the decision makers’ idea and behaviour in post-Cold War Thailand. A senior official in
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated this point to his audience from the Thai Navy on a special lecture. He stated:

We cannot ignore the economic aspect of foreign policy. This is because a prosperous country cannot only have political security but also needs economic well-being of its people. So, economic aspect is another effective threshold to prove a country's prosperity. Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has focused on trade diplomacy by strengthening good relations with other partners (MFA 1989a, p.5).

The significance of economic aspect has been especially elaborated in every government since the Chatichai administration. Since competition involves comparing and contrasting oneself to others, self-perception thus intervened in the cognitive mechanism of comparison. It was the self-perception of the Thai state to be understood as a capable country that achieved political stability and economic prosperity, particularly when compared to less-developed Indochinese neighbours. This cognitive notion helped policy-makers position Thailand within the region and shaped its foreign policy behaviour, resulting in its eagerness in exercising a leading role to help bring development into this area. As General Chatichai put it with regard to the situation in Indochina and his policy, 'Vietnam seems to be sincere to accept the reality and reach out its old foes for assistance so that it can get out of the quagmire in Cambodia and to improve its own economic condition' (1988 cited in 1999b, p.9). He further elaborated on another occasion that '[Thailand] needs to offer opportunities to Indochina and Burma to join the world's economic development process' (1989 cited in 1999a, p.4).

A survey conducted in 1989 amongst 501 Bangkokians on their attitude towards neighbouring countries still reveals a somewhat negative view towards neighbouring countries but at the same time indicates the development of a cooperative mentality. A percentage of 75.25 and 78.44 viewed Cambodia and Vietnam, respectively, with a negative attitude. An interesting trend emerged in this survey which suggests that despite their negative attitudes, the majority of the respondents thought, however, that maintaining good relations with them was important (71 and 63 per cent towards Cambodia and Vietnam, respectively). In
this connection, when specifically asked about Vietnam 57.4 per cent thought it would become an important trading partner with Thailand in the next 5 years. (Roper Center 1989).

Given the tendency of the Thais to perceive their immediate neighbours as somewhat subordinate, the question arises: what, precisely, do the Thais think of their neighbours in the post-Cold War period? Perhaps the justification for this perception can be gauged through Thongchai’s argument (2005). He asserts that Thailand’s perception of Southeast Asia is based on its ‘imperial knowledge’ that assumes the centrality of the court in Bangkok and later the nationalist governments. It is therefore generally an inward-looking and nationalistic perception. Meanwhile, the end of the Cold War and the integration of Thailand into the globalised world economy also shaped the context in which antagonism may be outmoded and co-operation preferred. The outcome shaped by this context was the transformation of the existing perception into a new variety that included a sympathetic view towards its neighbouring countries. While this perception was operationalised on the basis of co-operation and assistance rather than antagonism and defence, the core perception remained attached to the centrality and superiority of Thailand.

The perception in the post-Cold War period was therefore still seen as being shaped within a hierarchical concept of power. Great powers and more advanced economies had a higher status, while Thailand was on par with newly industrialising economies characterised by co-operative and competitive natures. However, this self-perception viewed Thailand being of higher status in both political and economic terms vis-à-vis neighbouring countries on the mainland. The role attached to this perception was likely to be Thailand’s responsibility for helping these countries out of backwardness and underdevelopment. Thailand therefore nominated itself as a leader, helper, or saviour. This notion was prevailing from the Chatichai government onward as shown earlier by the language of General Chatichai in his speeches. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also set a budget of THB 200 million a year for technical assistance to Indochinese countries, and put forwards that Thailand ‘will be proactive in helping them as much as possible in any area to nurture long-term relations as an ultimate goal’ (MFA 1991b, p.1). The
Foreign Ministry also set a foreign policy objective towards Indochina and Burma by ‘supporting, advising and assisting economic development in these countries’ (MFA 1989b, p.15), and also planned to ‘push Thailand to be the co-ordinating centre of international assistance to rehabilitate Thailand’s neighbours such as Laos and Cambodia’ (MFA 1989c, p.2).

Confident over its economic progress since the 1980s, Thailand’s self-perception became associated more with successful economies, especially those in NIEs and other ASEAN neighbours. Indochinese countries were likely to be placed outside the same league, according to the Thais. An interesting study by Chulanee & Thompson (2007) revealed this possibility even on younger Thai generation. Their survey was conducted amongst Thai university students, and asked for their view of their country’s position and its association with neighbouring countries. It was predicted to represent the fact that Thai people thought their country was very distinctive from other neighbouring nations. It finds that students positioned Thailand in the mid of Southeast Asia. However, they grouped Thailand in a category different from its mainland neighbours but in the same group as Malaysia and Singapore (Chulanee & Thompson 2007, p.47-49). Despite the geographical proximity and cultural affinity between Thailand and its immediate neighbours its ability to maintain independence and the level of economic development were major sources of pride to the Thais.

By thinking and acting in the way that Thailand is superior and responsible for help, the emerging regional aspirations served both the ideational and material logics of the Thai state in the globalised world. This idea was well expressed not only by Chatichai in his ‘turning the battlefields into marketplaces’ policy but also within the military circle. Chavalit clearly envisioned Thailand’s leading role in mainland Southeast Asia since he was the Supreme Commander of the Thai Armed Forces in 1989. On the Thai Armed Forces Day, 25 January 1989, he stated,

The Thai armed forces will strive to create a durable peace in order to make it possible for the development of economic co-operation, solidarity and prosperity in this Suwannaphume—with Thailand at its centre (Paisal 1989, p.11).
Ideationally, this perception still positioned Thailand as a centre of regional affairs, hence maintaining its pride and centrality. At the same time, it provided economic and political justifications for Thailand to assert its prowess in exploiting Indochina’s abundant natural and cheap labour resources. The outcome of this structure was still hierarchical as it aimed to improve Thailand’s economic competitiveness in the world market by upgrading its industries into a higher production whilst transferring labour and resource-intensive industries to its less developed neighbours. For these reasons, mainland Southeast Asia became vital to Thailand’s international political and economic position in which Thai foreign policy needed to be carried out.

This logic can be seen from the idea behind Thailand’s interest in sub-regional economic co-operation expressed by a former Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Noranit Singhaseni, that

The justification behind Thailand’s foreign policy with regard to sub-regional co-operation is not only a way to expand Thailand’s market and trade opportunity... but also aims at narrowing the economic gap in the region. This is because Thailand is successful in economic development especially in mainland Southeast Asia. In addition this policy also follows what HM the King mentioned. He said we cannot develop alone or be rich alone. We need to give help to our neighbours by bringing development to them and help them develop. This is not merely a charitable act but also a prevention of any problem that may affect us (Paisit & Uraiwan 2007, pp.10-11).

As the boundary between domestic and external affairs was eroded in the post-Cold War period, it was less likely to express Thai foreign policy in an exclusive manner from other areas. Foreign policy was one of the tools used to help strengthen Thailand’s competitiveness and facilitate its penetration into its areas of interest, both in mainland Southeast Asia and beyond.
(a) Pre-Asian Financial Crisis

It is evident that in the post-Cold War era Thai foreign policy was more likely to be occupied with this regional agenda since the Chatichai administration. This subsection outlines major foreign policy initiatives under different government and their regional implications.

Under the Chatichai government (1988-1991), Thailand initiated the transformation of Indochina from 'battlefields into marketplaces'. This foreign policy was partly intended to stimulate economic activities by bridging economic opportunities of both parties initially through border trade. This strategy was later supported by the expansion of transport infrastructure that linked inner regions to seaports on the East Coast of Thailand (Chuan 1992a). This significantly impacted not only on economic development but also on security and politics in Southeast Asia. Thailand was playing a leading role in paving the way towards peace and development in the region with historical foes becoming friends. The swift rapprochement with Hanoi may have been an impossible achievement under by previous governments because Vietnam was regarded as a foremost threat to Thailand's security.

This can be seen from a conflict between Chatichai and his Foreign Minister, Sithi Savetsila. Sithi Savetsila was the Foreign Minister throughout the Prem government (1980-1988) and the first Chatichai’s Foreign Minister (1988-1990). Although Sithi agreed with adjusting Thai-Vietnamese relations, he still strongly insisted Vietnam follow ASEAN’s comprehensive withdrawal from Cambodia and was reluctant to turn around Thai foreign policy according to Chatichai's vision. This policy change was controversial because it was initially against the will of Thailand's supporting allies especially China and other ASEAN countries. As Sithi argued, 'Thai foreign policy towards the Cambodian issue has been consistent for more than 8 years and has had positive results. These benefits may be affected by a swift change' (MFA 1988, p.4). He further asserted that these negative consequences can be Thailand losing its credibility amongst allies and increasing Vietnam's potential before the right time (MFA 1988, p.4). Thus, if Sithi's position had won support in the government, the change in Indochina may have been delayed further. This policy also left its legacy in ASEAN's widely-accepted practice of 'constructive engagement' with non-democratic neighbouring countries, particularly Burma.
Moreover, the focus on advocating regional co-operation in Thai foreign policy was consistent regardless of political changes or regime type. Thailand's case seems to be inconsistent to the prediction of the democratic peace theory that sees less co-operative external behaviour from non-democratic regimes. It suggests that non-democratic governments are constructed around nationalist and traditional elite coalitions, therefore, their grand strategy is generally opposing liberalisation. In other words, foreign policy under non-democratic regimes is likely to be inward-looking and not constructive to international co-operation (Solingen 1996, 1998). In contrary, more internationalist and outward-looking features in economic and foreign policy can also be found in Thailand's post-Cold War period under the undemocratic governments.

For instance, the interim government under Anand (1991-1992) appointed under the successful coup d'état against Chatichai in 1991 continued further liberalisation and promoted regional integration, notably through AFTA. Surayud Chulanont, appointed under the 2006 military junta, also pursued a liberalisation agenda such as further elimination of agricultural subsidies imposed during the Thaksin government (The Nation, 10 November 2006), and relying heavily on exports while abandoning stimulating domestic consumption (Bangkok Post, 30 April 2007). In addition, he was reported to be more co-operative with Malaysia in addressing the Southern unrest as opposed to the suspicious approach during the Thaksin government (The Nation, 1 July 2007, p.3A).

During the Anand interim government (1991-1992), the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) initiative in 1992 also reflected Thailand's regional ambition to push forward a free trade regime in the region as a whole. Anand was keen to table this proposal among ASEAN member countries despite his government's ad hoc nature as an interim government after the overthrow of Chatichai by the 1991 coup d'état. AFTA aimed to lay out a comprehensive programme of regional tariff reduction and ultimately hoped to establish a common market in Southeast Asia (Chuan 1993a, p.9) as the European Community had done. It cannot be denied that AFTA was a significant turning point in ASEAN development and regionalism. Moreover, while Chatichai in practice laid the foundation of the general rationale for constructive engagement, it was Anand who formalised and advocated this principle as a major
guideline for Thailand’s policy towards its neighbours, with a particular focus on Burma (Pavin 2005, p.128). This policy also had regional repercussions as it became a common regional practice with a broad reference to a general principle of non-interference in ASEAN members’ internal affairs.

During the Chuan government (1992-1995), the promotion of sub-regional economic co-operation was one of its major foreign policies. The ‘Quadrangle Economic Co-operation’ was proposed to co-ordinate development projects—mainly with respect to transport links—among Thailand, China, Myanmar, and Laos. The transport links for the new East-West corridor not only stimulated economic development in this sub-region by strengthening the connection to the growing Chinese economy, but also placed Thailand at the centre of the project (Chapman and Hinton 1993; Kusuma 2001, pp. 194-195). The success of this project required effective international co-ordination. Thailand played an indispensable role in aligning interests amongst these countries. Thailand was committed to research and development in transport projects that would link the four countries together into a network. It also acted as a facilitator in brainstorming and mobilising support from within the member countries and external donors such as ADB, Australia, and Japan (MFA 1994c). Moreover, it also offered technical assistance to Indochinese countries to survey and design many road construction projects including partially financing their construction (OC 1994). This project was incorporated into the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) project supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) which further expanded to incorporate Cambodia and Vietnam.

The Chavalit government (1996-1997) attempted to shape Thailand’s regional aspirations to become an epicentre of mainland Southeast Asia through its ‘Indochina Policy’. This policy was put in place when Thai policy-makers felt that their country was becoming less active in regional affairs especially during the preceding Chuan government. Chavalit declared that his government was going ‘to restore Thailand’s former international influence which rested mainly on improving relations with neighbouring countries’ (ISEAS 1998a). With his special relationship with the military regimes in Indochina established during his service in the Thai military, Chavalit relied heavily on his personal contacts. Importantly, his highlighting of foreign policy revolved around the exercise of Thailand’s influence
over ASEAN's admission of Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, including ASEAN's economic programmes aimed at creating transport links between countries in Indochina and the other ASEAN countries for which Thailand was a major hub (Funston 1998b).

Moreover, Chavalit also wanted to link South and Southeast Asia under his 'Look West' policy. Chavalit initiated a regional co-operation institution in which both sub-regions could be formally linked, namely the Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Co-operation (BIST-EC). The forum later included Burma, Nepal and Bhutan and the name of the forum changed to the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC) (BIMSTEC 2008). Through this forum linking two sub-regions, it was apparent that Chavalit positioned Thailand as an important piece in the jigsaw to fill the whole picture of potential economic prosperity with a market size of 1.3 billion people. Thailand envisioned itself as acting as a bridging actor, hence it deemed its leadership to be necessary.

It can be concluded that Thai foreign policy during the years from Chatichai and before the 1997 Financial Crisis has attempted to nominate Thailand as a centre of regional dynamics. Thailand envisioned its leadership to be recognised, therefore, invested extensively in its regional policy throughout this time. Kasit Piromya, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, also reflected this vision amongst Thai leaders. He said 'Thai leaders from Prem, Chatichai, and Anand on shared a similar vision which constituted continuity in Thailand's attempt to exercise its regional leading role in the early post-Cold War period' (interview on 19 December 2007). The attempt to project its leadership was curtailed by the Financial Crisis mainly due to its economic difficulties. However, the crisis did not cause Thailand's regional aspirations to vanish.

(b) Asian Financial Crisis and its aftermath

The Asian Financial Crisis that hit Thailand in mid 1997 and later spread throughout the region was a sign of Thailand losing its competitiveness, hence seriously affecting its confidence to continue its leading role. Although the exercise of leadership was temporarily dampened, its regional aspirations did not disappear.
Foreign policy was not totally overshadowed but re-adjusted to serve as an important state apparatus to overcome the crisis and bring back economic stability, thus restoring confidence amongst foreign investors over the Thai economy. During the course of the crisis and in its aftermath, the Thai leadership was gradually revived.

It can be noticed that during the second Chuan government (1997-2001) Thai foreign policy turned back to its conventional focus on accommodating external powers. This was due to the fact that the United States, the European Union, and Japan were the important sources of assistance for economic recovery, and had their voices in international institutions such as IMF, World Bank, and ADB (Prapat 1999; Somchai 2007). Therefore, Thai foreign policy during this time was mainly framed within its relations with external powers. However, the endeavour for regional leadership or regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy did not totally end. Thailand’s proposal of ‘Flexible Engagement’ reflects this lingering idea amongst Thai foreign policy-makers.

The ‘Flexible Engagement’ initiative was proposed amidst the crisis and put the spotlight back on Thailand’s leadership in regional affairs. This policy was proposed to radically adjust ASEAN’s traditional non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs. Thai foreign policy-makers understood clearly that ASEAN countries’ inability to warn each other of foreseeable dangers that might spill over boundaries was partly responsible for the contagion of the 1997 economic crisis. This weakened and reduced ASEAN’s credibility within the international community. Despite the fact that ‘flexible engagement’ was a timely, creative, and effective improvement in the conduct of ASEAN diplomacy, an important focus was also to address problems from Burma rooted in its authoritarian regime. It was therefore a break-away from Thailand’s longstanding policy towards Burma that emphasises tolerance and expectation of gradual change in the regime.

Also, this foreign policy initiative was arguably an effort to restore Thailand’s credibility through emphasising its available soft power. The principle of democracy and human rights, thus, became an ideological guideline in Thailand’s foreign policy. The proposal of Flexible Engagement did not only demonstrate that
Thailand was committed to democratic norms similar to its Western counterparts but also distinguished Thailand from other ASEAN countries that opposed the proposal. As a senior official in the MFA put it in his facsimile to the Ministry assessing the position within ASEAN regarding the Flexible Engagement:

The rejection of Thailand's Flexible Engagement by seven ASEAN countries, in fact, was positive to Thailand's image, reputation, and credibility. It undoubtedly made Thailand more outstanding, respected, and accepted in the international community in which civilised nations are governed by democratic rules (MFA 1998b)

This strategy can be interpreted as Thailand manoeuvring its foreign policy in a proactive way that would preserve its material interest as well as self-perception. This proposal was explained by Surin (interview, 9 January 2008) and his supporters such as the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Kasit Bhiromya (interview, 19 December 2007) and the former ambassador Surapong Jayanama (interview, 12 January 2008) as a way by which to re-boost foreign investors' confidence and reassure donor countries of the country's accountability and transparency in exchange for access to economic assistance during the crisis. At the same time, this proposal obviously illuminated Thailand's leading role in the Association despite the likelihood that Thai foreign policy-makers may have already anticipated a strong rejection beforehand. This can be captured by Surapong's words,

Thailand proposed Flexible Engagement because we wanted to play a leading role in Southeast Asia. We had the potential to do so. It was a politics of identity and we needed to show clearly that we could lead in democracy and human rights issues (interview on 12 January 2008).

Therefore, it can be said that although foreign policy under the Chuan government was largely concerned with attracting the attention of the major powers, it still sought to project its regional leadership within this context. Thailand's regional aspirations or its self-perception as a leading actor and its leadership once again loomed large in the succeeding government under Thaksin.
The foreign policy of the succeeding Thaksin government (2001-2006) likewise clearly demonstrated that he was attempting to illuminate Thailand’s role in the region and the world. Thaksin’s Forward Engagement initiative was bold, assertive, unconventional, controversial, and departing from business-as-usual. He clearly intended to pursue an active foreign policy especially through fostering ‘a variety of regional institutions in recent years’ (Goh 2005a, p.4). According to Thaksin and his Foreign Affairs Minister, this foreign policy sought to utilise Thailand’s geopolitical leverage to strengthen existing international co-operation while further engaging new partners on an equal basis (Thaksin 2003a; Surakiart 2004b). This foreign policy platform revolved around new multilateral initiatives complemented by bilateral economic co-operation (Thitinan 2004a, 2004b).

The major evidence of the leadership in multilateral platforms was Thaksin’s enthusiastic campaign for his newly-created regional fora on the one hand—the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation Strategy (ACMECS), and Asia Co-operation Dialogue (ACD), and the promotion of complex bilateral free trade agreements with many countries, on the other. Thaksin also renewed his interest in BIMSTEC and pushed forward several other sub-regional co-operations specialising in certain areas. For example, the Emerald Triangle Co-operation Framework was mainly intended to boost socio-economic development through promoting the tourism industry amongst the culturally and historically rich resources of Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand (MFA 2008b). Thus, the regional repercussions of his policy were widely recognised, albeit credited with varying degrees of success. This proactive foreign policy expanded the scope of co-operation, affording Thailand an enhanced ability to play a leading role.

At this point, it can be seen clearly that throughout the post-Cold War period up to the Thaksin administration, Thailand’s regional aspirations were sustained despite the changes of government. Thailand’s self-perception and its integration in the internationalisation of production created a precondition in which new regional aspirations were crystallised as an important element in Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy. The next section, therefore, conceptualises the key features in Thailand’s regional aspirations in detail.
4.4 Key features of Thailand's regional aspirations

The interplay between self-perception and the material aspects of globalised economy exhibited in the 'competition state' has created quite distinctive elements in Thai foreign policy orientation and behaviour. The previous sections discussed the sources of the transformation of Thailand's self-perception into its foreign policy in the post-Cold War context. Thailand's self-perception was used as the cognitive basis on which the logic of 'the competition state' operated. The result was clearly shown in Thai foreign policy behaviour that sought to exercise its regional leading role or influence. This section then takes a further step to conceptualise in detail the essential features of Thailand's regional aspirations. This conceptualisation is further examined through the case studies in the subsequent chapters.

From the general observations presented in the previous section about the trend in Thai foreign policy, it can be conceptualised that Thai regional aspirations exhibit three important characteristics: (1) it aims for improving Thailand's competitiveness; (2) it attempts to push for Thailand's leading role especially in mainland Southeast Asia; (3) it seeks multilateral approaches to regional co-operation.

4.4.1 Emphasising economic competitiveness

Thai policy-makers envisioned Thailand as being able to be competitive in the world economy if proper measures were put in place. Therefore, its strategy was to enhance this opportunity. Since the Chatichai government Thai policy-makers viewed the liberal economic system as essential to the country's prosperity; therefore, it was the government's role to provide the necessary support to the market mechanism, and 'facilitate the adaption of the Thai economy into the changing world economy, so that it is strong and sound' (Chatichai 1988). Competitiveness was therefore important to continue a high level of economic growth, which would enhance Thailand's economic strength in the region (Suchinda 1992).

Therefore, it is also imperative to secure confidence amongst both domestic and foreign investors in the Thai economy by repeating its attachment to free market
system, deregulation, and transparency. Chatichai’s foreign policy master plan clearly stated an objective to ‘increase Thailand’s role in the world economy by supporting free trade and lift up the country’s international economic competitiveness (MFA 1991). The same line was reiterated in subsequent governments that they would ‘continue a free market policy’ (Anand 1992), or ‘to implement liberal economic policy... to strengthen the country’s competitiveness’ (Chuan 1992a). In addition, international economic institutions were seen as important fora from which Thailand would benefit (Banharn 1995). The Banharn government not only paid attention to the material aspects of competitiveness, but also to the promotion of the Thai image as complementary to the country’s competitiveness. He mentioned in his policy address to the Parliament that his government was to ‘promote the real and proper Thai image as a country in which its people are skillful, diligent, and responsible’ (Banharn 1995).

However, as the Thai economy stepped into a higher level of development the government realised the limit of the country’s capability. The structural problem was identified as Thailand could not upgrade its industries quickly enough to escape entrapment in a low-value chain of production (NESDB 2002b, p.10). This problem alarmed the government enough to adjust its competitive position especially after the 1997 Financial Crisis. There was a series of attempts to do so, especially setting up the Committee for Restructuring and Improving Competitiveness (CRIC) in 1998, and the National Competitiveness Committee (NCC) in 2002.

The issue of economic development appeared to be significant, not only in domestic and economic policy but also in the traditional areas of security and foreign policy. The scope of security issues was redefined in connection to the economic development theme. Security was now involved in socio-economic stability and people’s well-being instead of the ability of the state to maintain defence capabilities against traditional security and political threats. For example, Chavalit’s security policy states that the government would mobilise military strength to ‘facilitate other public and private sectors’ activities in development, [including] training labour forces, [and] lifting national athletic competence’ (Chavalit 1996).

Moreover, foreign policy orientation towards economic focus can also be seen in
the government’s attempt to include the Foreign Ministry under an ‘economic agency’ cluster (NESDB 2002b).

Foreign policy in this context therefore becomes a tool to ‘to actively project Thailand’s leadership in the regional fora and promote Thailand as a link between advanced and less developed countries’ (NESDB 2002b, p.13). Although the most recent strategy was formulated in 2002, similar expressions can be traced back to as early as the Chatichai government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ operation plan stated that the government ‘attempts to search for the way in which Thailand can play a role in bridging economic co-operation between Indochina and Burma and the rest of Southeast Asian countries’ (MFA 1991b). Viewed from the competition state’s perspective, Thai foreign policy had now become a part of an overall national ‘grand strategy’ for improving the country’s competitiveness. Not only was foreign policy expected to maintain a co-operative environment abroad but also to actively enhance Thailand’s ability to step up on the international development ladder.

The rapid economic growth of Thailand especially between the late 1980s and early 1990s manifested this economic success and raised confidence amongst the Thais over their performance. This confidence certainly contributed to Thailand’s attempt to project its leadership. As stated by the MFA’s Permanent Secretary in a Ministry’s senior official seminar in 1994, the MFA viewed that ‘Thailand [was] much stronger both in international political and economic positions, therefore, it need[ed] to take this advantage to boost its own role internationally’ (PPD 1994, p.3). In order to do so, this thesis asserts that Thailand’s foreign policy in the post-Cold War period favoured performing the role of a central link in various regional political and economic developments.

4.4.2 Advancing Thailand’s leading role
According to the Thai policy-makers, in order for Thailand to hold and improve its competitiveness it needs to be able to exercise leadership beyond its boundaries. To perform a leading role, Thai policy-makers leaned towards the idea of placing their country as a centre of regional geo-politics and economic development in mainland Southeast Asia.
In Thai policy-makers’ perception, and from a geographical point of view, Thailand was situated in a significant geo-strategic location. Historically, Bangkok and the central plain of Thailand had enjoyed the status of important *entrepôt* on a trade route between Asia and Europe. Ayutthaya, the former capital of Siam, was reported by foreign traders as one of the flourishing metropolises in Asia (Baker 2003, p.48; Kullada 2004, p.11) with population over one million people, greater than that of London in the seventeen century (Beek et al. 1999, p.140). Although Singapore and Hong Kong increasingly became trading centres in Asia due to the British influence in the nineteenth century, Bangkok still enjoyed its commercial significance due to the overseas Chinese network in the region (Dick 2005, p.264). In the modern day, Bangkok has also been an important international aviation hub and a gateway to the region competing with Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Chin & Tongzon 1998, p.95; Duenden 2001, pp.14, 18).

Politically, as also discussed in the previous chapter, Bangkok has played a central role in regional affairs. Its continuity of maintaining independence from foreign rule, whether it be British, French, Japanese, or Communists, was viewed as Thailand’s ability to manoeuvre the balance of power between contending forces (PPD 1994, p.3). As cited by many Thai foreign policy-makers, Thailand has an important role in regional fora and institutions (e.g. ASEAN, ASEM, ARF, AFTA) and also houses regional and international headquarters (e.g. SEATO, UN regional headquarters-ESCAP). These elements also significantly indicate the centrality of Bangkok as a regional political centre (PPD 1989).

These politico-economic elements undeniably influenced the cognition of Thai policy-makers that the promotion of Thailand as a regional leading centre was not an option but an essential strategy in Thai foreign affairs. The significance of this idea can be seen in foreign and economic policy of every government. Every government since Chatichai has elaborated on how to maintain, improve, and elevate Thailand’s leadership and centrality in the international affairs. The focus on Bangkok’s centrality and leadership was in both economic and political arenas, and generally expressed in the language of being ‘a centre of’ (or base, hub, gateway) such as a regional centre of the financial market, transportation, aviation, etc. In
addition, other associated roles—as a bridge, a link, a door, a facilitator, or a broker—were also emphasised in a more consistent manner.

In addition, Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era exhibited a preference for a facilitating role. Emphasis was placed on the role of co-ordinating economic development and co-operation in the region from which Thailand also benefited. However, Thai policy-makers realised that external powers still had strategic and economic interests in the region, and that their contribution to the region could improve economic development and stabilise regional peace. Thailand therefore used its strategic location, in the centre of mainland Southeast Asia, to extract this advantage in terms of inviting more foreign direct investment to Thailand and using Thailand as a gateway to other countries.

Thailand therefore mobilised its possible resources to play a leading role in co-ordinating regional development. It can be argued that no other foreign policy was more sophisticated and complex than the policy towards mainland Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War period. The Indochina policy was related to Thailand’s domestic policy, and involved all possible aspects and levels of Thailand’s diplomacy, whether it be political, security, economic, and socio-cultural. In addition, all ranges of actors in Thailand also took part in it—from the royal family, the government, the military, the private sector at both the national and local levels, to the general public.

Thus, it can be said that since the beginning of Chatichai’s Indochina policy Thai foreign policy objectives in this sub-region have remained unchanged. The main objectives include: (1) reviving and expanding economic relations, (2) enhancing Thailand’s export and investment opportunities in this area, and (3) gaining access to necessary natural resources (PPD 1989). This idea was crystallised and explicitly expressed as Thailand’s main goal. As a then Deputy Foreign Minister put it, this was to ‘promote Thailand as a leader in mainland Southeast Asia...which is attainable’ (PPD 1994). A senior official expressed his support of this goal and suggested possible ways in which Thailand could materialise this idea including becoming a democratic role model, promoting its economic capability, and supporting regional co-operation (PPD 1994).
For Thailand to effectively exercise its leadership and influence in mainland Southeast Asia, political rivalry emanating from the Cold War had to be put to an end. As a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prachuab Chaiyasan, reiterates:

The end of the Cold War had a liberating effect on foreign policy making...we should be writing the rules for the borderless future now practically upon us...foreign policy must be firmly rooted in the national agenda...focus[ing] on our country's economic interest and the role of the people...In practical terms, the primary focus of our foreign policy remains our immediate neighbours...the task of building shared prosperity in the region (Prachuab 1997).

The main target was Vietnam. This was because compared to Vietnam's weaker economic and international status Thailand was emerging in the late 1980s as a newly industrialising country. It was believed that by opening up to Vietnam and allowing its economic reform policy, Doi Moi, to benefit from the world economy, Thailand would be able to remain significant as an economic role model, and, perhaps, also in political aspects if Vietnamese leaders were willing to democratise their country. This perception was undeniably playing a role in Chatichai's 'turning the battlefields into marketplaces' policy. Chatichai swiftly seized this opportunity to promote peaceful reconciliation so that Thailand's political centrality in the region was secured.

Thailand, therefore, not only moved unilaterally to end the political stalemate, it also supported and facilitated any possible move to that end. Apart from its own role in ASEAN to push for Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, Thailand was also supportive of any possible move by other countries. Surakiat Satirathai, as a member of Chatichai's advisory team and later the Foreign Ministry, explained Thailand's facilitating role in support of Japan's action this issue in an interview on 13 February 2008. He recalled that the Japanese actually wanted to end the Cambodia conflict and played a role but was not comfortable to explicitly express this will due to political sensitivity about Japan's political role in East Asia. Therefore, it once covertly requested Thailand to support Japanese involvement in a peace negotiation. Thailand accepted and proposed during an ASEAN meeting the
idea of holding a peace negotiation in Tokyo. Once ASEAN seconded Thailand’s proposal, Thailand officially tabled this idea at a joint meeting of ASEAN and Japan. In response to this proposal Japanese officials acted as if they had not been informed beforehand, and seemed to be surprised. Therefore, a peace negotiation could be held in Tokyo in June 1990. Takeda (1998) explains why this event was so important to Tokyo. He asserts, ‘the Cambodian conflict was the first testing ground where Japan could try to play a positive role in the international arena’ (p.554). Thailand’s role as a facilitator in this negotiation was therefore indispensable.

Furthermore, as the biggest investor in Thailand, Japan also played an important part in Thailand’s strategy to promote its active facilitating role in mainland Southeast Asia’s trade and development. Korn Dabarangsi, a Minister attached to the Office of Prime Minister in the Chatichai government, reported on his Japan road-show trip to promote Thailand’s investment potential that by investing in Thailand, Japanese firms also ‘have an opportunity to sell their products in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma as Thailand has the advantage over other ASEAN countries of being so close to these countries’ (SC 1988).


In a discussion of Second White Paper in 1992, both countries started to harmonise their policy towards Indochina. As a country that pioneered the end of the conflict, Thailand aimed at being a centre for international aid and technical assistance in Indochina after the political settlement process was complete. The MFA reported that co-operation between Thailand and Japan was significant in promoting development in Indochina. In this connection, Japan played an important role as a main aid provider while Thailand facilitated the arrangement of technical co-
operation with its neighbouring countries (MFA 1992, pp.3-4, MFA 1993f). This Second White Paper for the first time designated a facilitating role for Thailand in restructuring mainland Southeast Asia (SORTJER 1996, pp.3-9).

The Third White Paper (1997-2002) further institutionalised this role through a tripartite approach to co-operation that encouraged the involvement of recipient countries in the project planning and implementation. The tripartite approach to foreign development assistance became a principle feature of Thailand’s aid strategy. This is also an interesting point to note, that while foreign aid from external donor countries could be easily and directly granted to recipient countries, Thailand still attempted to justify its involvement. The Deputy Director of Thailand International Development Co-operation Agency (TICA) explained:

Thailand was equipped with skill, experience, and necessary know-how to train human resources in areas of development. Therefore, it was beneficial to every party to have technical training conducted in Thailand. It was cheaper to do it in Thailand than sending regional participants to train in donor countries, while the participants were more comfortable adjusting themselves and gaining more relevant experience from Thailand. At the same time, Thailand also benefited from the money spent in Thailand as well (Interview, 5 February 2008).

Therefore, it is likely that apart from small economic benefit of this assistance approach, the maintenance of Thailand’s role and relevancy in regional affairs and development was likely to be of primary interest.

It is clear that apart from sustaining self-perception of being a leading actor in mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand also related this role to a clear economic foundation. Indochina is abundant in natural resources that Thailand could exploit for its economic development. Thailand also saw an investment opportunity in utilising Indochina’s cheap labour for its labour-intensive industries so that Thai firms remained competitive. In the early 1990s Thailand engaged in negotiations with these countries to reduce trade and investment barriers especially along its
borders. Agreements on the promotion and protection of investment were proposed by Thailand to Vietnam, Laos, and Burma in 1990 (MFA 1990, 1991; OC 1990), and to Cambodia in 1994 (OC 1995).

Moreover, transport linkage has been an important element in Thailand's Indochina policy. Bangkok tried to mobilise international support for numerous construction projects including roads, river ports, bridges, railways, including airports. The main contributor to this strategy has been the Asia Development Bank (ADB) especially for the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) project since 1992. Thailand has greatly benefited from these projects as they stimulated economic growth in its North-eastern hinterland and in poor areas by providing transport links and outlets to Indochina. (Next chapter will discuss in further detail about transport link in case of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative).

Moreover, another important strategy of Thailand's Indochina Policy was to make use of existing socio-cultural affinity as the leverage. Although positive factors were well grounded as a basis of friendship and close co-operation, it appeared that Indochinese countries were still suspicious of Thailand's motives as to only exploit their resources, due to a long history of Thailand's political hegemony. Therefore, a socio-cultural aspect of foreign policy became an important tool to ease this difficulty. Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand share similar tradition and cultural practices through Theravada Buddhism. Laos and Thailand, in particular, even share ethnic and linguistic roots. The promotion of cultural diplomacy was therefore proposed to soften unintended consequences from political and economic diplomacy (PPD 1994). The promotion of socio-cultural co-operation, academic contact, tourism, and sports was believed would build a strong foundation and help facilitate other relations in the long term (NSC 1993). Coupled with aid and technical assistance, Thailand seemed to hope that the acceptance of its regional leading status could be secured.

Thailand's attempt to exercise its leading role can also be seen expanding beyond mainland Southeast Asia at a later stage such as co-operation with South Asia and Asia as a hole in the Thaksin government. However, Thailand still tried to make them relevant to mainland Southeast Asia. Its leading role is clearly expressed as a
function of bridging and co-ordinating so it can remain central to these co-operative schemes.

4.4.3 Multilateral orientation

In connection to the aforementioned features of Thailand's regional aspirations, this thesis asserts further that Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War era was reliant on a multilateral approach. This by no means suggests that bilateralism was unimportant or totally abandoned. Bilateral relationship still took immediate foreign policy attention and was equally important, especially with regard to relations with major powers. However, multilateralism and regional policy in particular have increasingly become an indispensable platform for Thailand to enhance its competitiveness, maintain its centrality, and exercise its leading role. This multilateral and regionalist orientation was well captured in a comment by Asa Sarasin, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Anand government, that 'Thailand should pay special attention to multilateral co-operation in which the Thai image as a leading regional actor would be promoted and gained acceptance from the international community' (PPD 1994).

Since the first half of the 1990s, multilateral strategy has been an integral strategy to Thai foreign policy. With reference to its 'Indochina Policy' Thailand did not see any alternative better than acting through a multilateral approach. In this connection, the National Security Council (NSC) in 1993 issued a policy and strategic guidelines for building regional co-operation. It aimed to promote a regional network including transport, communication, and shipping as a tool to link and support economic potential in the region by which Thailand played an important role in initiating and bridging these economic networks. The NSC assessed that Thailand was economically sustainable and geographically advantageous; therefore, it should retain a leading position to directly benefit from the regional co-operation. A significant strategy that the NSC also stipulated was to develop regional economic zones by pulling support, resources, and know-how from within ASEAN and other countries (NSC 1993). At the same time, the MFA also followed suit and agreed that Thailand should act as a bridge between Indochina and ASEAN, and Thailand should be promoted as a centre of political and economic activities related to this area. The MFA then concluded that sub-regional growth
areas and AFTA were therefore vital to achieve this goal on the economic front, while Thailand's support of the Indochinese countries' admission into ASEAN was its political strategy (PPD 1994). This adjustment in foreign policy also signifies a re-orientation of policy focus from security oriented to economic and co-operative approach taking place even within security agencies.

The multilateral orientation was also pursued in response to emerging new challenges in globalisation. Apart from multilateral trade negotiation, this approach was sketched out to assert Thailand's role in other issue areas such as human rights, environmental protection, peace keeping, narcotic prevention, and so on. Democratisation in Thailand in the early 1990s, especially after the May 1992 demonstrations, also facilitated the use of democracy as another front in foreign policy. Starting from Chuan these issues were incorporated as guidelines in foreign policy. Chuan said that the government was pledged to comply with the international treaties to which Thailand was a party including the UN Charter and the International Convention on Human Rights (Chuan 1992a). Banharn went further, saying that his government aimed to strengthen Thailand's leadership in foreign relations especially in Southeast Asia by focusing on its constructive role in promoting democracy, righteousness, human rights, and ecological balance and protection' (Banharn 1995). A similar tone of promoting these principles also appeared in Chavalit's policy.

In practice, it can be seen that in the policy-makers' minds the multilateral orientation was a good strategy that sustains Thailand's economic benefits and leading role. Several examples demonstrate this belief. With regard to Thailand's becoming a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in October 1993 during the Chuan administration, Prasong Soonsiri, the then Foreign Minister, justified this application as an alternative multilateral forum in which Thailand can increase its political and economic roles. It is also a 'new platform for Thailand to expand its South-South co-operation including expanding its bilateral relations with other developing countries' (PPD 1993). Moreover, the official approval afforded by the Dalai Lama's visit to join the peace mission to press for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in Thailand was also justified by referring to the global principle of democracy. Prasong argues, 'it is the right decision because Thailand is an open society. The
laureates are here for democracy and human rights' (The Nation, 20 February 1993, p.A2). Moreover, with regard to the peace process and reconstruction of Cambodia, Thailand pledged its total support to the UN process and refused to intervene in the issue before the election, a proposal proposed by the United States, France, and Japan to have Thailand arrange an informal quadripartite meeting. Prasong stated that Thailand should not intervene in the Paris peace agreement process and contact with any of the Khmer faction should be done through the Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC), a body composed of representatives of all groups (Corrine 1999, p.86). It is clear that in these cases Thailand chose to justify its policy position with reference to multilateral forums and ideas.

In fact, Thailand's multilateral strategy started to develop in the Cold War period especially with regard to world trading system. It, perhaps, developed from Thailand's disappointment in South-South co-operation in multilateral trade negotiations especially in GATT in the 1980s. Policy documents during this period emphasised the difficulties in multilateral negotiations in which developing countries did not fully benefit from the world trading system due to the lack of good co-ordination. Therefore, Thai foreign economic policy was aiming to increase policy co-ordination amongst them, such as through G-77 and UNCTAD, to advocate for special treatment for the developing world (PPD 1989). Promoting regional cooperation was one of Thailand's proactive strategies to increase its bargaining power vis-à-vis bigger economic actors by lifting Thailand's leading role.

However, with the unsuccessful Uruguay Round and increasing importance of the Asia-Pacific region since 1990s, Thailand had concluded that its leadership and interest should focus on Asia. Chatichai's Indochina policy may have had a narrow-down effect on Thailand's policy on foreign co-operation. Geographical proximity became a criterion in which regional grouping was constructed, in which Thailand was as a leading actor. Sometimes, this element even overshadowed other regional co-operations in which many active actors existed, such as ASEAN and APEC (especially during the Thaksin government).

Thailand's preference for its multilateral strategy focused on Southeast Asia as its primary concern. Different regional arrangements were an expression of such an
orientation. In the post-Cold War period, it can be said that Thailand was preoccupied with promoting sub-regional co-operations as previously exemplified, from Chatichai to Thaksin (See Table 4.2). Throughout this time Thai policy-makers had no reservations in promoting its role in this area. Pitsanu Suwannachot, Deputy Director-General of the East Asian Affairs, MFA, also expressed this rationale during an interview on 20 December 2007. In his words,

Thailand has been always proactive since the end of the Cold War. Our attempt to assert a regional leading role has never changed. The only change is how to approach this goal.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Governments</th>
<th>Regional policy initiative(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chatichai (1998-91)</td>
<td>Indochina policy</td>
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<td>Anand/ Suchinda (1991-92)</td>
<td>Constructive Engagement, AFTA</td>
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<td>Chuan (1992-95)</td>
<td>Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative</td>
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<td>Banharn (1995-96)</td>
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<td>Chavalit (1996-97)</td>
<td>Indochina, BIMSTEC</td>
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<td>Chuan (1997-01)</td>
<td>Flexible Engagement</td>
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<td>Thaksin (2001-06)</td>
<td>ACMECS, Emerald Triangle, ACD</td>
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Certainly, ASEAN still constituted an important area in Thai foreign policy due to its experience during the Cold War. Thailand’s MFA viewed that Thailand’s role and involvement in ASEAN remained high after the Financial Crisis in 1997, despite the economic difficulties. It summarised that Thailand’s various initiatives in ASEAN not only strengthened ASEAN itself but also lifted Thailand’s leadership in the international community. These initiatives included ASEAN Troika, enhanced interaction, social safety net development, co-operation on science and technology, Mekong development co-operation, and human resource development, including Obuchi’s Plan (MFA 1998b).

Apart from ASEAN, the promotion of other regional co-operation beyond Southeast Asia also gained momentum mainly in response to the rise of trading blocs and the 1997 Financial Crisis. The significance of regions can be seen in the restructuring of the Foreign Ministry in the early 1990s. The MFA document suggests that
previously, the MFA's internal structure was organised based on a functional approach. However, with the increasing significance of regions in the post-Cold War international environment as evidenced by the rise of regional trade blocs such as EU, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, AFTA, a proposal to restructure its organisation on a regional basis in 1994 was welcomed. MFA senior officials rationalised that the 'setting up of four initial regional departments within the Ministry reflected its adaptability to the significance of economic development at the regional level' (PPD 1994).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the interplay between the internationalisation of the Thai economy and its own self-perception. It concludes that the economic transformation impacted on the nature of the Thai state in which competitiveness issues became the state's core priority. It probed how this changing nature of the Thai state facilitates the continuity of its self-perception. At the same time, it also demonstrated how the material interest influenced change in self-perception. The critical point this chapter has emphasised is that 'the competition state' also requires a co-operative strategy to improve economic competitiveness. At the same time, this material objective was sustained by readjusting certain cognitive aspects in how Thailand interacted with outsiders. Thailand still saw itself in a better position than its neighbours. However, this better position was not to be antagonistic but moved towards compromising and co-operative approaches. The result of the combination of these two cognitive elements influenced certain aspects of its foreign policy on co-operation. That is, Thailand's foreign policy during the post-Cold War era attempted to promote regional arrangement by seeking to play a leading role or so-called 'regional aspirations' in this thesis.

In other words, the change in the international environment that led to domestic adjustment towards openness and the free-market system harmonised a general 'goal' of the Thai state, allowing co-operation to be possible with its former enemies. However, Thailand's self-perception, that it was superior to neighbouring countries, continued and was re-emphasised as Thailand's relative power especially in economic terms grew stronger. Therefore, the role that Thailand assumed in this environment was no longer that of a frontline state to contain the spread of
communism, but a forefront advocate for regional economic development. Thus, Thailand's eagerness to exercise its role in various regional schemes could be observed throughout the post-Cold War period. In this circumstance, Thailand's foreign policy has become more proactive in re-arranging regional settings in which Thailand could gain benefit from co-operation more independently from the dictate of the great powers.

This chapter has further shown that the regional aspirations were relevant to the making and conduct of Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy at a broad level. By tracing the origins of Thailand's regional aspirations in the previous chapter and their evolution in a new global context in this chapter, this thesis shows 'how' preference was formed rather than assuming its existence a priori. It has been shown that regional aspirations were not merely a justification used by Thai policymakers for their proactive regional policy, especially in mainland Southeast Asia. They acted as a cognitive filter through which material interest was operationalised.

This chapter has concluded with an attempt to conceptualise the essential characteristics of Thailand's emerging regional aspiration. It has proposed that they consist of three core elements. That is, Thailand's foreign policy aims to promote its own economic well-being and improve its competitiveness reflecting the nature of 'the competition state'. Second, this economic strength is the basis on which Thailand seeks to exercise its central influence and role in mainland Southeast Asia. Third, in most cases, Thailand views multilateral approaches as suitable to promote its leading position in regional co-operation. Its proactive role in mainland Southeast Asia is generally pursued. This role can be expressed in many terms as facilitator, strategic hub or prime mover.

The succeeding two chapters will therefore examine these features in Thailand's regional aspirations by focusing on major regional initiatives before and after the 1997 Financial Crisis. The main objective is not only to examine whether or not the generalisation of regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy is justified by the empirical evidence. It is also to understand the differences in the way in which regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy are translated into action between the two periods separated by a structural shock—the 1997 Financial Crisis.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE QUADRANGLE ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION:
THE CASE OF THAILAND'S REGIONAL ASPIRATIONS
IN THE EARLY POST-COLD WAR PERIOD

Sub-regional co-operation entered into Thailand's interests since the beginning of the 1990s resulting in its support and engagement in various initiatives, notably the Greater Mekong Sub-region project (GMS) in 1992, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation (QEC) in 1993, and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) in 1993. With regard to this tendency in the early post-Cold War period, this chapter thus aims to examine Thailand's attempt to exercise its leading role in mainland Southeast Asia through the promotion of sub-regional economic co-operation.

The chapter focuses on the case of Thailand’s initiative, that is, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation. It considers specifically how Thailand’s regional aspirations were expressed in the implementation of this particular sub-regional initiative. The analysis here tests the validity of the previous chapter’s conceptualisation of the characteristics of Thailand’s regional aspirations—exhibiting preferences to improve Thailand’s competitiveness, enhance its leading role especially in mainland Southeast Asia, and pursue a multilateral approach to co-operation.

The Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative is particularly interesting and significant in its own right for several reasons. Firstly, this initiative can be seen as Thailand's earliest endeavour after the Cold War to re-arrange regional setting in mainland Southeast Asia based on a multilateral approach. Prior to this initiative, Thailand’s move to befriend former Indochinese foes was primarily based on normalising bilateral relations with each of them inherited from Chatichai’s Indochina policy of ‘turning the battlefields into market places’. If Chatichai’s foreign policy is seen as significant in re-arranging regional politics and security in the post-Cold War era, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative can be equally seen as having a great impact on regional politico-economic development. It was Thailand’s attempt to enfold the socialist countries in the region into a market-led system as well as a preparatory
forum for some Indochinese countries to engage in other regional institutions at a later stage. Secondly and important to this thesis's main argument, this initiative did not offer a self-evident picture of costs and benefits for Thailand in material terms relative to the potential costs in the economic, political or security sectors. The fact that Thailand initiated this initiative and persistently pushed for policies to sustain it regardless of the ambiguous success, relates to the central theme of this thesis: the role of ideational elements in Thai foreign policy-making. Thirdly, this initiative was also one of the earliest multilateral forums with mainland Southeast Asia that China participated after the Cold War. It can offer another lens to understand Beijing's policy intention in Southeast Asia in a new political and economic environment. Fourthly, the initiative somewhat overlapped, complemented, and, to a certain extent, competed with the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) GMS project in many ways. As a result, studying this initiative may allow observers to see the dynamics of the interplay between a key regional institution, the Thai state, and other external foreign stakeholders in this particular episode of regional politics.

The above rationales of this case study therefore frame the key issues of concern to this chapter. That is, why did Thailand unrelentingly support the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation? Apart from economic benefits potentially accruing from promoting this initiative, how did the regional aspirations play a role in this policy-making?

The chapter is presented in three main parts. First, the background of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative is explained to offer a general overview of the co-operation including its initial establishment, implementation, and progress. It also shows factors affecting the progress of this initiative, mainly in terms of the participating countries' commitment and capacity. This is followed by a discussion of how this initiative was rationalised so that Thailand was actively engaged in promoting the project. The overall discussion suggests that the negative potentials and consequences from this initiative may have affected Thailand in many ways, and in the long run, may not be offset by mere short-term benefits. Regardless of the negative impacts of opening up its borders to neighbouring countries, this chapter shows that an ideational factor may have played a role in Thailand's decision to continue supporting this initiative. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the actual dynamics of the initiative. It examines the ideas and roles of key stakeholders involved in this initiative including decision-making
elites, government officials and local businessmen. Towards the end of the chapter it also demonstrates the constraints of Thailand's regional aspirations or attempts to play a leading role. The continuity of political support and differences of ideas amongst major policy-making agencies on how the initiative should be managed were amongst key explanations. Based on archival research (mainly speeches and policy documents from the Thai government) and interviews with a number of Thai policy-makers, this chapter reveals how ideational and material interests intermingle, resulting in a 'push-pull' process driving the implementation of the initiative.

Most importantly, this chapter underlines the general proposition of the thesis that we can observe the emerging role of ideational factor in Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy. The attempt of Thailand to play a leading role resulted in its proactive foreign policy behaviour to be developed. The Quadrangle Economic Co-operation can then be seen as another step for Thailand to exercise this regional role which is part of an unbroken vision since Chatichai.

5.1 Background of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation

The idea of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation can be traced back to the Chatichai government's policy of 'transforming the battlefields into market places' in the late 1980s. This policy had significant repercussions for many actors in Thailand not only for the central government but also for local administrations and Thai business to reconstitute their approach towards Thailand's neighbouring countries.

With particular reference to the birth of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, it was initially associated closely with the proposal for expanding its trade to adjacent areas by local businessmen in Thailand's northern region, especially in the northernmost Chiang Rai Province (Siriphet 1997, p.18). This proposal was vigorously supported by the provincial administration since it was viewed as comprising part of Thailand's newly proactive foreign policy. In 1991 the Governor of Chiang Rai made a series of visits to local governments in Yunnan Province, Myanmar, and Laos in support of his campaign for intensifying trade and economic relations with the Northern Thai region. This project was later called the 'Five "Chiang" Strategy' encompassing Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Chiang Tung (a former Tai language name for Kengtung in Shan State), Chiang Rung (a former
Tai language name of Jinghong, the capital of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan province, and Chiang Thong (the former name of Luang Prabang in Laos) (Arun 2001).

There was a simultaneous move by the central government to promote a similar agenda. A series of bilateral discussions was conducted between the Thai government and its neighbouring countries especially Laos and Myanmar for connecting their road network. In December 1992, Thailand's deputy Foreign Minister and the Ambassador of Laos to Thailand agreed to link several roads between Thailand and Laos, especially between Chiang Rai Province and Luang Prabang, and Ubon Rachthani Province (in Thailand's north-eastern region) and Pakxé (Laos South). At the same time, the Myanmar government also requested assistance from Thailand to improve Road No.4 from Tachileik Town (opposite Thailand's Chiang Rai Province) to Kengtung in Shan State. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) also supported Myanmar's request for Thai assistance in improving road conditions to facilitate the shipment of agricultural products under the UNDCP's substitutional crops projects in Myanmar to the world market through Thailand (DERC 1993a). These decisions mainly reflected a determination to open up opportunities for trade and tourism expansion between Thailand and adjacent locales in the aftermath of the Cold War.

The push to link transport routes also came from China as part of the 'Go West' strategy for the economic development of its western inland regions. Southeast Asia became significant in China's domestic development strategy as an alternative route to the sea for its exports. This policy was expected to boost the economy of China's land-locked regions of Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Tibet by shortening transport routes from these regions to sea ports in Southeast Asia, thereby stimulating trade, investment and tourism in the areas (DERC 1993b, p.5; Dosch 2008, p.171). The two important gateways under this strategy were through Myanmar's sea port in the Indian Ocean (Shee 2002, p.36), and through Thailand's eastern seaboard which also links to Singapore in the far south (Tian 2004, p.623). An early initiative of the Go West programme was to offer assistance to Myanmar to improve its road connecting Yunnan Province to Kengtung (DERC 1993a).
At the same time, there were also emerging sub-regional projects around Southeast Asia at the end of the 1980s. The growth triangle amongst Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (IMS-GT, or the Southern Growth Triangle) as a duty-free and investment zone benefiting from the economic complementarities of the three countries was established in 1989. The IMS-GT's success in inducing private sector-led economic development (Tambipillai 1998, p.256) was so attractive that it was replicated in other areas. In 1992, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) thus sponsored sub-regional economic co-operation under the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) project covering six countries, namely Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. The main objective of GMS project was 'to enhance economic relations amongst the countries...[mainly through] the development of infrastructure to enable the economic development and sharing of the resource base, and promote the freer flow of goods and people in the sub-region' (ADB 2008a). The first ADB study conducted for the GMS was published in 1993 and identified potential areas of co-operation including transportation, energy, telecommunications, tourism, trade and investment, human resource development, environment, agriculture and multi-sector industries (NESDB 1996; ADB 2008). Roughly around the same time Malaysia also started to express the idea of a growth triangle similar to the IMS-GT with Indonesia and Thailand. This resulted in the three countries agreeing in mid-1993 to set up IMT-GT or the Northern Growth Triangle.

Against this backdrop, sub-regional co-operation was becoming popular and inevitably entered into Thailand's policy-making circle. Although Thailand participated in the ADB project, the primary focus of the GMS was initially on the lower Mekong Basin, and paid relatively little attention to the upper stream. Thailand's initiative to foster co-operation amongst the Upper Mekong countries, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to fill the gap in Mekong development and Southeast Asia's overall economic development. Close coordination and overlapping areas of co-operation between the GMS project and the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative resulted in the latter sometimes being viewed as merely a sub-component under the GMS. Despite the final merging of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative into the GMS, Thailand's attempt to maintain the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative's separate identity is interesting and worthy of attention in the context of this study's overall concerns.
5.1.1 Realising the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation

Against the above background, Thailand's Foreign Ministry subsequently convened an inter-agency meeting to discuss the impacts of opening Thailand's borders in this fashion. The meeting agreed to set up a working group to identify potential transport connections with Thailand's neighbours. The working group generated a proposal for creating eleven routes, including two that would link Thailand-Myanmar-Laos and Southern China. However, after a field survey of the two routes connecting Thailand's North to Myanmar and Laos the Director-General of the Department of International Economic Affairs raised the concern that Thailand was unlikely to be able to finance these projects unilaterally (DERC 1993d). During the Thai Foreign Minister's official visit to China (27 February-4 March 1993), Thailand invited China to support its proposal for a meeting amongst the countries concerned to discuss transport links more extensively, particularly in regard to seeking financial support from donor countries and institutions.

Consequently, the Quadripartite Meeting on Sub-regional Transportation Linkages was held in Bangkok between 27 and 28 May 1993. ADB, UNDP, and ESCAP observers were also present. The meeting discussed three main issues, namely land transportation, water transportation, and tourism. The meeting concurred that the transport linkages amongst the participating countries as a means to promote contacts at all levels were the key to socio-economic development in the sub-region. As the Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri put it, transport links were believed to 'facilitate the flow of commodities and services,...[and] accommodate the movement of peoples across borders, thus contributing to greater economic activity in the sub-region' (MFA 1993a).

The outcomes of the first meeting can be seen in two core areas of co-operation, transport and tourism. The meeting reached a common position concerning transport issues, in support of the construction of the two roads linking the four countries, including the potential extension of rail links. Thailand proposed to approach international institutions for funding both a detailed feasibility study and the actual projects. The meeting also supported the Chinese proposal of developing water transport along the Lancang-Mekong River and agreed to convene a technical-level meeting for further discussion. However, strong concerns of environmental and security impacts from developing the Mekong River as a transport alternative also existed especially between Laos and Thailand (this issue will be discussed later in the
succeeding section). Importantly, the participating countries agreed to co-ordinate their common position in the ADB meeting in the end of August 1993 to lobby for the two roads and water transport to be included in ADB priority projects.

After that meeting, there was some progress towards realising this sub-regional initiative. Significantly, the four countries convinced other participating countries and the ADB to include the two road projects in ADB's priorities for developing transport networks in the Mekong sub-region during the second ADB meeting on the GMS project in Manila, the Philippines, 30-31 August 1993. ADB accepted responsibility for conducting a feasibility study of the projects including mobilising support for the projects. The two routes together were called R3 Route project as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

5.1.2 Implementation, progress, and limitation of the co-operation

As the project had started, the participating countries in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation including the ADB, felt that the major obstacle to expanding economic cooperation in this sub-region was an inadequate regional infrastructure, especially in Laos and Myanmar. Therefore, the project attached considerable importance to infrastructure development linking the four countries. However, the road projects only moved forward slowly mainly due to the differences in the levels of economic development amongst four countries involved in project funding. Although road conditions and networks in Thailand were already of an international standard, many improvements especially in Laos and Myanmar, and to a certain extent in Yunnan Province, were needed in order to realise success in this regional endeavour. Moreover, the priorities of domestic development and the commitment to implement the plans by individual countries vied for attention.

The discrepancy in financial capacity of each participating country made tangible progress dependent on the intensity of each country's policy commitment. First of all, there were stark differences in domestic systems amongst the participating countries particularly political structure, economic orientation, and level of development. Therefore, a significant effort to harmonise and to work through different expectations was necessary. This can be seen through a comment on the president of Thailand's northern region business association. He observed that the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation progressed slowly compared to its southern IMT-GT counterpart due mainly
to differences in the political systems. The similarities in the political systems of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand helped facilitate more effective co-ordination whereas these backgrounds did not exist in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation (Prachachat Thurakit, 27 May 1996).

As China was another key actor in the co-operation, its commitment to fulfil the initiative's goal was also critical to the progress. However, the initiative was mainly in the interest of the Yunnan Province, not that of Beijing. A Thai official reported that Beijing seemed to focus more on expanding trade with major trading partners especially the United States, the European Union, and Japan (The Manager, 21 September 1998, p.8). Moreover, the route through Thailand was not the only option for China to reach the sea but routes through Myanmar and Vietnam would serve the same purpose. Therefore, the projects in the initiative sometimes lacked the strong support of the Chinese central government. Other alternative policy options were given more urgent attention instead.

For instance, China's determination to develop a Western road to Myanmar resulted in the R3 Route under the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, becoming its second priority. It was reported that by 2002 China had improved and constructed most of its roads stretching from Kunming to the Western part of Yunnan Province, to Bhamo in Kachin State in the north-western part of Myanmar. However, a road improvement project as part of R3a route from Jinghong to Mohan bordering Laos' Boten did not commence until 2005 (MFA 2002g; ADB 2008). It was finally completed in late 2007 and opened in 2008 (Shilu 2007, p.15; MOFCOM 2008; UNESCAP n.d.). (See Figure 5.1 for comparison)

The slow progress of these projects could also be attributed to factors in Laos and Myanmar. Laos and Myanmar felt that the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative mainly benefited China and Thailand leaving them only as relatively minor conduits between the bigger counterparts without any significant contributions or gains from the projects for themselves (Manager 21 September 1998, p.8; MFA 1998d). At the same time, they were not in a position to finance the proposed projects unilaterally; therefore, most of the funding and progress were driven by other actors. For instance, it was reported that the completion of 247km of R3 Route in Laos (R3a) could not be completed without the financial assistance of the ADB, China, and Thailand. China and
Thailand offered to connect their roads into Laos by building 80 km each, while ADB gave a soft loan to the Laos government to construct the remaining 70 km (MFA 2002g).

Human rights problems in Myanmar also prevented that country from receiving funding directly from other possible donors. China and Thailand were thus required to help finance some of the projects directly. Thailand approved a loan of THB300 million to Myanmar in 1996 to improve a 164km road from Tachilek to Kengtung. However, Rangoon was reported to initially intend to divert this loan to finance other roads outside the initiative especially in the central region around Taunggyi city instead. This resulted in Thailand temporarily suspending the withdrawal of the money for some time, as late as 1998, when the Myanmar representative resolved this issue with the Thai authority (The Manager, 21 September 1998). Later the project could be continued by the Myanmar government extending concessions to private companies to carry out the road construction. Tachilek’s Governor recalled that a concession was given to a private company to repair a road from Tachilek to Kengtung (R3b) in 2001 which was expected to be completed within a few years (Chiang Rai Province 2001).
Myanmar was also viewed by observers as being reluctant to see progress moving quickly. Academics and some officials in China and Thailand observed that Myanmar also feared opening its border and that development projects would increase the influence of external powers, especially China and Thailand, as well as the United States in the area. At the same time, more development also meant increasing revenue and leverage of its ethnic minorities vis-à-vis the central regime, particular the Wa Army in the eastern Shan State (Krungthep Thurakit, 16 May 1997, p.5; 20 May 1997, p.4).

Moreover, Chinese-sponsored water transport had also been proposed to develop navigability along the Mekong River from Yunnan Province to Thailand during the first meeting in 1993. For that reason, progress on water transport was mainly attributable to the Chinese eagerness to use the Lancang-Mekong River as its shipping route to the South. China hosted the first water transport meeting during 18-21 January 1994 in Kunming, Yunnan. The meeting reached a general agreement to develop the upper Mekong River as a transport route. A quadripartite committee was proposed to consider related legal and regulatory issues (MFA 1994c, p.5). However, this proposal was not met with significant enthusiasm by the ‘lower-stream countries’ but rather with security and environmental concerns— especially by Laos and Thailand (DERC 1993f; MFA 1993d). Vientiane expressed its concern about environmental and other impacts, and proposed a detailed technical study before any further implementation could proceed. Thailand’s position was similar to that of Laos. It had also suggested earlier that because it was an international river, any proposal that changed the status quo in utilising the Mekong River should be discussed and agreed upon amongst the riparian states. In that case, Thailand proposed China consider discussing the issue in detail with the existing Mekong Committee (MC) (later on re-formed as the Mekong River Commission–MRC) of which Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam were members (NESDB 1993b, p.1). However, as China was not a party to the 1995 Agreement on the Co-operation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin it mostly continued pursuing its plans for the Lancang-Mekong River in its territory, unilaterally building dams and removing rapids and shoals in river areas.

However, China still tried to push for a series of negotiations amongst the four countries regarding this issue. The co-operation over water transport was then successfully concluded in the Lancang-Upper Mekong River Commercial Navigation Agreement.
signed in April 2001. The agreement aimed to facilitate trade and tourism by improving the navigability of the upper Mekong River (Apichai 2005, p.4). The first phase of removing shoals under this agreement was completed in 2003 (MFA 2002h) allowing convenient passage of 100-150 ton ships all year round (Goh 2006, p.29). Subsequent discussions on further development for heavier vessels were conducted within the GMS, ASEAN, and the MRC frameworks (Buntaine 2007, p.12) as many parties were concerned about environmental impacts and changes of boundaries (Bangkok Post, 9 June 2003, p.4).

Tourism was viewed as having much potential for co-operation and as being more convenient to implement. The meeting in 1993 therefore agreed to facilitate this activity by exploring ways to simplify travel formalities such as visa and customs procedures, promotion of investment in service sectors and facilities, and expansion and improvement of air transport services (MFA 1993a; 1994a, p.4). In this connection, Thailand hosted a meeting on 9-10 August 1993 in Chiang Rai on tourism co-operation amongst the four countries. Later in that year, a friendship caravan trip travelling from Thailand to Myanmar and Yunnan during 3-10 December 1993 was sponsored by the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Chiang Mai Tourism Business Association. The tour involved representatives of leading Thai travel agencies and aimed to promote potential tourist sites and routes between Thailand and Myanmar and Yunnan Province (DERC 1994).

Air transport links also constituted an important part of the tourism venture. There were discussions about improving potential airports in the sub-region to facilitate an increase of flights and tourists. In August 1993, Myanmar allowed Bangkok Airways to fly from Chiang Mai to Mandalay. In addition, Thailand also requested China to allow more flights between Bangkok and Kunming, an increase from five times a week to one every day (DERC 1993c). Thailand also proposed to help Laos improve its regional airport in Luang Prabang. The first phase of this project was completed in January 1997 but the second phase was postponed due to Thailand's economic slowdown during the 1997 Financial Crisis (MFA 1998c).

Discussions were also held on other areas of co-operation. Expanding trade and investment opportunities within the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation countries were
aimed to be achieved by proper adjustments in trade and investment regulations. Thailand addressed the need for better currency-clearing arrangements and a reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers. Moreover, other issues related to strengthening legal frameworks to facilitate the movement of people were also raised especially in customs, immigration, and travel procedures. Notwithstanding the initiatives in other areas of co-operation, the primary concern of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative still focused on developing transport networks. Discussions about road improvement and construction dominated the agenda of the co-operation especially from the Thai side, while China paid close attention to water transport.

It is noteworthy here that the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was not an initiative of the ADB per se but of the Thai government. The ADB was viewed by the Thai government as an external supporter, though very important as a project funding campaigner. Thailand, in fact, criticised the ADB for not giving much attention and priority to the initiative. The Director of Thailand's Export-Import Bank stated that four years after the first ADB meeting in 1992, there was no single donor country or financial institution that expressed interest in support of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation projects. External assistance with relevance to the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was limited to the bridge construction projects over the Mekong River, mainly from Japan and Australia. Even within the GMS framework itself, there was only one pilot road project between Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City to which the ADB rendered technical support from 1991 to 1996 (valued at US$ 3 million). Even at the turn of the new century, it was also reported that ADB still had difficulty in funding and seeking private sector's support for the whole Mekong projects (Bangkok Post, 4 June 2003, p.4; 9 June 2003, p.5). The limited participation of the external parties concerned therefore also greatly affected progress under this sub-regional co-operative framework.

In short, the projects under the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative were viewed overall as offering potential economic benefits to all participating countries associated with the expanding network of transport. For Myanmar and Laos, the roads linking their countries to China and Thailand would benefit the development of their economies as it could bring about trade and tourism. Employment was expected to increase particularly due to potential investment in primary production and agriculture. Moreover, the Myanmar and Laos governments could also benefit from extending
concessions to road construction and collecting passage fees. These roads were also hoped to facilitate the movement of people and goods within Southeast Asia and between ASEAN and China. At the same time, China would benefit from having alternative routes to sea ports for its land-locked regions. These transport developments would ultimately enhance China's economic growth by facilitating the export of its products to Southeast Asia. For Thailand, the dominant belief was that the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative would be a channel for Thailand to acquire raw materials from China, Myanmar and Laos where natural resources and cheap labour were still abundant. Moreover, the tourism industry in Thailand would also benefit from linking northern Thailand to many natural and culturally pristine locations in the other three countries. Despite slow progress, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was sustained for almost a decade from 1993 before slowly and fully merging into the GMS framework during the end of the second Chuan government in the early 2000s.

The conventional belief thus seemed to put more weight on the economic gains stemming from this initiative. However, it is unclear whether Thailand perceived any negative effects that may have emerged from promoting this type of sub-regional co-operation. Considering Thailand's active role in this episode, the question arises whether economic and other benefits were so great as to attract Thailand to play a leading and active role in sustaining the co-operation. The next section briefly develops a dichotomous view of the benefits and costs from the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. It suggests that the rationale of economic gains may have been weaker than was generally believed, while the negative impacts may have been greater. At the end of this section, it is now important to show to how ideational factors played such an important role in Thailand's active participation in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation.

5.2 Thailand's justifications for the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative

The justification promoted by the Thai state for sub-regional co-operation mainly stemmed from the economic assumption that 'growth areas are designed to exploit the existing natural cross-border economies and socio-political links, with the intention of extending the range and scope of activities' (Thambipillai 1998, p.251). The strategic thinking of the Thai policy-makers in proposing the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was therefore to utilise Thailand's comparative advantages and complementarities vis-à-
vis its neighbours as stated in an MFA policy document (MFA 1993b). Thailand believed that its attributes such as skilled labour, entrepreneurs, infrastructure, regulatory settings and its strategic location in the heart of mainland Southeast Asia could help Thailand reap substantial economic gains. Thailand’s disadvantages were mostly thought of in terms of its shortage of natural resources and more expensive labour base which could be overcome by reaching out to its rich well-resourced neighbours via the initiative’s evolving pathways.

5.2.1 Rationalising the benefits of Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative

Analyses produced by Thailand’s Office of National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and by its Foreign Ministry (MFA) seemed to support the above rationales. They reported that Thailand was considered most developed economy in the Upper Mekong Basin due to its rapid economic growth and per capita income. Therefore, Bangkok viewed the economic potential of the sub-regional co-operation as a complement to Thailand’s economic development as well as contributing to those of its neighbours (MFA 1995a).

In terms of its human resources, the Thai labour force was thought by most Thai stakeholders to be more competitive, qualified, adjustable, and educated. This was predicted on the basis of a literacy rate of 94 per cent and a longer duration of formal education received by average Thais relative to other countries in the initiative. Moreover, the NESDB also commented that Thailand was the only country in mainland Southeast Asia that had experience navigating through the market economy. Its labour force was thus expected to be more flexible to new skill training and production technology. At the same time, the Thai business sector was also familiar with market mechanisms and more experienced in management and diversifying their businesses. This could be seen in the country’s expansion of its export sector since the 1980s and the increasing volume of Thai foreign investment abroad. Moreover, Thailand’s well developed infrastructure was also seen as having an advantage over other countries in the sub-region. Its network of roads, railways, airports, deep-water seaports, and the telecommunications system was considered to be more efficient and penetrating. Such connections made Thailand one of the regional hubs for transport and shipping (MFA 1995a; NESDB 1995, pp.4-2–4-8).
Not only were the physical aspects of the Thai economy thought to be conducive to Thailand’s advancing its co-operation in the sub-region, but regulatory regime governing various national economic activities was also relatively more advanced and internationally compatible. Thailand had embarked on national economic planning during the 1960s and gradually promoted the role of the country’s private sector in this process. Thailand’s industrial policy, investment promotion policy, and tax system were more favourable to investment and commercial activities with limited restrictions against foreigners. The development of related legal frameworks in economic activities was also based on the free market which was seen as positive for foreign investors who wanted to use Thailand as a gateway to the sub-region. Furthermore, Thai policy-makers also viewed their country as being reasonably politically stable, operating under a democratic system compared to its socialist neighbours. The economy recorded steady growth since the 1980s and was not significantly affected by the occasional political disturbances, which were eventually resolved and resulted in further democratic consolidation (NESDB 1995, pp.4-9-4-12).

Thai policy-makers also considered Thailand’s disadvantages primarily in terms of its shortages in primary resources, that is, cheap natural resources, unskilled labour, and environmental degradation. The NESDB report (1995) reflected these concerns by stating that Thailand’s thirty years of economic development had depleted its natural resources to the point that it increasingly faced resource shortages and environmental problems. Deforestation had reduced the forest area to around 20 per cent of the total land area which, in turn, affected rainfall and the fertility of the land. The economic consequences were apparent: Thailand could no longer produce timber, paper, and wood products to satisfy its domestic demand. A similar picture appeared in other sectors such as minerals for industrial production, sea products, and energy. Thus, related production costs especially in wages and land prices, rose (NESDB 1995, pp.4-13-4-17). To secure necessary supplies, intensifying co-operation with its neighbours was seen as essential as the latter were still viewed as being underdeveloped. Increased co-operation with them was therefore logical as compensation for Thailand’s shortages of resources, and as a means to stimulate economic growth and demand for Thai products.
For these reasons, Thai policy-makers expected to enhance Thailand’s economic competitiveness in the international market by acting as a link between resource-rich Indochina, populous China, and the rest of the world. The result was expected to be a ‘win-win’ situation which would, as Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, the Deputy Secretary-General of the NESDB put it, ‘eventually [help] narrow economic gaps between Thailand and its neighbouring countries, and generate jobs and incomes for people around the border areas and major cities of Thailand’s neighbours’ (Interview, 28 December 2007).

5.2.2 Manageable or insurmountable negative factors?
Although the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation promised to benefit the Thai economy substantially, it did not proceed without concerns from both government officials and independent observers. A study by Somkiat Osotsapa in 1993, for example, revealed that although the economic gains were feasible from expanding trade and transport links with the sub-region as generally believed, there were still significant limitations. Negative effects could largely neutralise expected benefits.

Road network expansion within the sub-region was expected to increase trade opportunities for Thai exporters especially in the Chinese market. However, Somkiat argued that the Chinese market was fragmented and infrastructure in Yunnan Province was not fully developed, resulting in the likelihood of increasing price per unit in shipping. Moreover, Yunnan province was one of the poorest regions in China with GDP per capita less than $US 1,000 in 2004 (Kwan 2005); thus, its purchasing power may not be able to absorb exported goods as expected in the short run (Somkiat 1993, p.9). Although this problem was expected to be resolved when the Chinese economy become more developed and income distribution policy took effect in the future, it was the long term forecast and full of uncertainties.

Even so, developing more convenient transport routes linking China, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand may have offset the concerns about the lack of infrastructure for business to fully gain from accessing the bigger market in China. However, the removal of natural trade barriers conversely allowed cheaper Chinese products to penetrate markets for consumer goods, not only in Thailand but also in Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia which had been dominated by Thai products (MFA 1993e). This trend was evident in the mid 1990s in the trade statistics for Myanmar and its counterparts. In this instance, Thailand
was replaced by China as the most significant trading partner especially in the consumer goods area (Shee 2002, p.47). At the same time, cheap agricultural products from China, Myanmar and Laos such as onions, garlic, soybean, corn, rice, vegetables, and livestock also competed with the Thai farming sector in the country’s north which earned income through producing similar products. This situation was further exacerbated if Vietnam was brought into the picture within a broader GMS project (NESDB 1995, pp.5-8-5-11; Somkiat 1993, pp.10-11).

More convenient water transport along the Mekong River was expected to benefit trade and movement of people along the river, hence stimulating economic growth in border areas. Chiang Rai Province could gain most in this as a centre of border trade in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation area (Somkiat 1993, p.25). However, a similar negative result in terms of the influx of cheap Chinese products to southern neighbours through shipment along the river was feasible. Moreover, since the costs of river transport were quite expensive, Chinese tourists could not easily afford to travel south to Southeast Asia. Tourism was thus likely to be a one-way movement mostly bringing tourists from Thailand to China, not the other way round. At the same time, the Chinese were able to control navigation on the Mekong River as they had been active in surveying and developing river navigation knowledge for quite some time. It was reported recently that most of the vessels and crews in the river are dominated by Chinese (Goh 2006, p.30). Moreover, overall Sino-Thai trade trends revealed that Thailand suffered an overall trade deficit with China. This remained unchanged even after the implementation of the Sino-Thai free trade agreement in 2001 (Bencha et al. 2004).

Other social and security problems were also of concern to some Thai authorities. Adisak Tanyakul, Deputy Secretary-General of the National Security Council also expressed Thailand’s concerns on the transport link in the sub-region. He said:

The transport linkages bring a lot of security challenges including transnational issues, power expansion of China and its competition with other regional powers, changes in life style of people in the Mekong Basin, the opening connection between possible terrorist groups in China and in Southeast Asia (interview on 20 January 2008).
Apparently, convenient transport not only meant increasing flows of goods but also those of people. It was projected that there would be a huge flow of labour—both legal and illegal—from the sub-region to Thailand. Although, in general, cheap labour benefited certain production sectors in Thailand, it also brought other socio-security problems, such as increased drug smuggling, prostitution, and trans-border diseases. Costs accrued from the labour movement to Thailand were thus incurred in areas of law enforcement and health services (Somkiat 1993, p.12). It was reported that the estimated number of foreign workers emigrating mostly from Indochinese countries in Thailand in 1993 was approximately 1,000,000 people (Somkiat 1993, p.12). By 2005, that total number rose to over 2,000,000, of which around 1,200,000 people either overstayed or entered the country illegally (Banyat 2005; Sawai 2005).

The expansion of trade and economic development in the region was likely to affect environmental and human security especially in the lower Mekong countries as well. This concern was mainly aroused due to China’s hydropower plan for the river as well as other projects in the downstream states. These projects would not only require large areas of rainforest to be cut for the construction of dams but would also affect the food chain of 85 per cent of inhabitants living on the lower basin. This population was poor and made its living through small trade, subsistence farming, and fishing. The expected lower level of water flowing downstream could therefore affect fish supplies, biodiversity, soil fertility, and generate toxic waste in the lower basin. This would result in a weakened irrigation system and lowered agricultural production as well as exacerbated poverty and nutrition quality of over 60 million people (Somkiat 1993, p.26; Jacobs 2002, p.356; Goh 2006, pp.42-50; Grinter 2006, p.461-462). In the longer term, this resource management problem may even lead to a regional security conflict. In contrast, the Chinese authority continuously claimed that the impact of its dams was often exaggerated. An engineer at the Chinese Academy of Engineering was reported to comment that ‘we concluded that the project will have limited impacts...instead, the dam projects will help with irrigation and navigation in the lower reaches [of the river]’ (Liang 2003).

Furthermore, the building of dams and removing rapids in the Mekong River by China could lead to changing patterns of river flow and to water diversion. This, in fact, could affect natural border demarcation especially between Laos and Thailand, a concern
expressed by the Thai military (Goh 2006, p.29). The Mekong River forms the Thai-Laos border for roughly 1,000 kilometres (of total 1,810 km border line) and most of the demarcation has been unsettled and still under bilateral negotiation (Lerdsak 2008). Therefore, future border disputes could erupt between the two neighbours should the river change its course, endure bank erosion, or incur blurring thalweg\(^5\).

The development of transport and increasing economic activities could also result in increasing political competition amongst the great powers, especially between China and the United States. Chinese influence in the sub-region had already raised security concerns in smaller countries. The road linkage between Thailand and China through Myanmar, though providing the benefits of the economic development in Myanmar, could also strengthen the economic position of the ethnic minority resistant. This issue was also mentioned by U Aye, Director-General of Political Affairs of Myanmar’s Foreign Ministry, that his country needed to be careful of the development of transport networks due to its sensitivity about ethnic minority conflict (MFA 1994c, p.18). However, development patterns in the 1990s suggested that the Myanmar government was able to reach a number of cease-fire agreements with ethnic minority insurgents, partly due to the Chinese pressure over some of the insurgents, especially in Kachin and Shan States bordering China. Beijing’s extension of military assistance to Rangoon also strengthened the latter’s military capability vis-à-vis these insurgents (IISS 2000; Shee 2002, p.44; The Irrawaddy 22 August 2003; Keyuan 2003, p.65; Yawnghwe 2007). At the same time, it was also reported that the Myanmar government also worried about an increasing American political interference in its vulnerable region due to opened borders and foreign investment. Therefore, it did not want to see rapid progress of the initiative (Krungthep Thurakit, 16 May 1997, p.5).

Consequently, these situations inevitably intensified some security concerns amongst Thai policy-makers. Thailand, for the first time, had to directly confront Myanmar’s central authority on its border as well as indirectly face the Chinese influence in adjacent areas without obvious buffer zones. This alarming perception of Chinese influence appeared in a highly confidential policy document (declassified for public access in

\(^5\)The line in the bottom of a valley in which the slopes of the two sides meet, and which forms a natural watercourse; also the line following the deepest part of the bed or channel of a river or lake
December 2007) circulating in 1992 within the Thai Foreign Ministry—a year before the initiation of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation.

The paper (DPA 1992) viewed China in a more pessimistic context than was publicly known. It argued that China's intention in Southeast Asia was to secure its own economic interests and to build a Chinese sphere of influence in Southeast Asia so as to prevent other major powers' intervention in the region. For this reason, China's strategy was to expand its economic relations with Indochina and Southeast Asian countries which may have, in turn, decreased the significance of Thailand's role in mainland Southeast Asia. It concluded that although Sino-Thai relations were at the time in an 'extraordinary amicable condition', in the long run this positive relationship was likely to change. Competition, especially in economic areas, may undermine the relationship and evolve into conflict.

The paper also further expressed concerns that China was likely to be a security threat to Thailand as it could manipulate Thai policy-makers and business in favour of its interests. This was especially due to the fact that Chinese diplomats and officials had established close and unbroken contacts with high-ranking Thai officials and overseas Chinese associations, resulting in a sympathetic attitude toward China amongst the Thais. Increasing local government contacts between Thai provinces and Chinese counterparts were also viewed as a means by which China could expand its political and economic influence including in relation to the socio-economic problems in Thailand's regions. This document therefore recommended that though Thailand should inevitably maintain close ties with Beijing, it should use this relationship to also limit the negative ramifications (DPA 1992).

For the above reasons, although the economic benefits expected from the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative were clear, enhancing co-operation in the sub-region under this initiative also gave rise to a number of concerns. Some of these were seen as not being easily resolved in the short or medium terms. Against the background of Thailand's active role in promoting and encouraging co-operation under the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, ensuing developments in sub-regional co-operation raise an interesting analytical challenge whether purely material interest was a sole justification for Thailand's role. The next section thus discusses some drawbacks of using
the conventional perspectives to understand the dynamics of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. The section presents empirical evidence to show that ideational factors—Thailand's regional aspirations—may have played a certain part in sustaining Bangkok's support for this project than has generally been understood.

5.3 The role of regional aspirations in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative

The conventional way of assessing regional economic co-operation examines how material factors drive inter-state co-operation, in terms of whether they relate to economic or politico-security interests. Although increasing numbers of theoretical studies go beyond these material elements of inter-state co-operation, empirical research in this area is still limited in examining possible ideational factors that may play a role in which actors rationalise co-operation, particularly in the case of Thai foreign policy. This thesis does not refute the material significance of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation. It only wants to focus on how an ideational factor may play its role in policy planning. That is, it investigates how and to what extent Thailand's regional aspirations influenced Bangkok's foreign policy in sub-regional economic development, employing the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative as a 'case study'.

5.3.1 Domestic and regional environments
Prior to discussing the empirical evidence of the role of regional aspirations in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, this sub-section will evaluate domestic and regional environments during the course of this initiative. This is to highlight the fact that this rationalist-materialist approach to understanding this regional scheme may leave an unexplained gap for the ideational factor to fit in.

(a) Routinisation of foreign policy
In contrast to the Chatichai government in which the Prime Minister and his advisory team played an active role in policy formulation (Khien 1999a, p.38), Chuan Leekpai himself is well known for his reliance on the bureaucracy in foreign affairs. He did not have a specific foreign policy advisory team and his character is not outspoken. Therefore, his role in foreign policy was less highlighted or apparent.
Foreign policy formulation during the Chuan government was thus handed over to relevant ministries and agencies. During the initiation and implementation especially under the Chuan government, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was primarily implemented by technocrats in the government agencies, mainly involved the National Security Council (NSC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Office of National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). Due to this tendency to rely on technocrats, Thai foreign policy was routinised as a business as usual.

This can be seen from the negative image of the Chuan governments from a survey in 2001. Around 70 per cent of respondents thought the Chuan government did not have any clear policy and implemented its policy slowly (Suan Dusit Poll 2001). This nature of foreign policy implementation therefore suggests some obstacles to the pursuit of regional aspirations, if existed. The implementation of this sub-regional scheme revealed a conflict amongst implementing agencies. At the same time, Thai private sectors were not fully ready to project such a leading role in this regional co-operation. The last section in this thesis section will show in further detail for constraints in realising Thailand's regional aspirations.

Moreover, scholars and observers in Thai foreign policy also hold the view that Thailand's regional aspirations are specially expressed by the military and very old elite, a civilian government like the Chuan administration did not have such a tendency. In the interviews with Surin Pitsuwan (on 9 January 2008) and Sukhumbhand Paribatra (on 14 February 2008) concurs noted that this regional aspirations were never be a conscious justification in Chuan's foreign policy.

Regarding the above mentioned nature of foreign policy setting, one would expect foreign policy during the Chuan government to be totally unimportant and not so much active. However, Thailand's position in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation suggests a different picture. Thailand was attempting to assert its leading role in setting up a sub-regional co-operation and in many circumstances as equally as a regional power like China. Therefore, regardless of a mundane style of foreign policy formulation, an aspiration to play a leading role in Thai foreign policy can still be observed.
Regional consideration

Thailand’s initial support of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative can also be seen from the regional political environment. Thai concern about China was also a major reason behind Thailand’s cultivation of sub-regional co-operation. Strong security concerns about China’s expansion to the South were reflected in the MFA policy document mentioned in the previous section (DPA 1992). Therefore, the regional balance of power behaviour played an important role in Thai policy formulation and would have generated several policy options.

Furthermore, co-operation in a regional agreement was a viable option for Thailand to pursue with regard to the ongoing economic globalisation. Sub-regional co-operation is a way in which participating countries jointly shape their arrangements and will compromise in order to achieve economic progress. A peaceful international environment can be achieved by increasing contacts not only amongst states but also amongst the individuals and groups managing them. This multi-level interaction would bring about a complex web of interdependence in which armed conflicts become more costly (Rosenau 1990). Co-operative relations will ultimately result in an increasing sense of community that will resolute conflicts without resorting to large-scale physical force—a situation termed ‘a security community’ by Karl Deutch (1968). Therefore, building an institution or a set of rules, or a regime, will increase the sustainability for co-operation as it increases levels of certainty and trust (Jackson & Sørensen 2003, p.119-120).

According to this reason, it is likely that the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative acted as a loose form of institution or regime building that brought about norms and rules guiding how participants would expect to interact and compromise their interests as well as resolve obstacles so that they would enjoy mutual benefits from such co-operation. In fact, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative successfully co-ordinated countries in the sub-region to achieve its plan of expanding the transport networks and increasing contacts at various levels.

However, there are several questions that these explanations may not fully give satisfying answers. First, Thailand may have chosen to limit co-operate with China by which the latter would gain relative economic and political advantages. The increasingly
direct influence of China in mainland Southeast Asia definitely challenged the sub-region's traditional power structure which was dominated by Thailand and Vietnam. This security awareness would result in a less co-operative environment. However, the opposite policy option was chosen. Instead, Thailand tried to engage China into this co-operation.

Second, if co-operation with China could be a possible option (and in fact was) as a means to maximise economic benefits from a big market, the co-operation would have lasted until Thailand thought that Chinese gain had exceeded an acceptable level. Such a break-off situation could result from China's construction of dams while ignoring the concerns of the lower Mekong countries about water supply, environmental impacts, and boundaries. Such an action would directly threaten Thailand's economic and border security, hence impeding further co-operation. However, the slow progress of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was not derived from political tension between China and Thailand but from other technical problems as mentioned in the first section of this chapter.

Moreover, the Chinese position in its dam construction projects was the opposite of that held by the small riparian states from which Thailand needed to gain support for strengthening its sphere of influence in the sub-region. Thailand would have supported the downstream nations against China's actions. In fact, Thailand's differing position from the Chinese did not aggravate tensions between the two countries. In contrast, Thailand tried to persuade China to further co-operate within the Mekong River Commission. Failure to exercise soft-power effectively or to bring China into compliance with the Mekong Agreement would have brought about conflict between China and downstream countries. However, such a serious conflict did not arise.

Thailand was finally able to convince China to reach a multilateral agreement amongst four countries over river navigation. The agreement started to be negotiated in 1997. China was initially reluctant to accept Thailand's proposal to include a provision regarding co-operation in maintaining water flow in the river. China claimed that this provision would affect its ability to manage water in the dams, especially in dry seasons. During this time of unsuccessful negotiation, China instigated a bilateral approach to conclude a tripartite agreement with Myanmar and Laos, so that its vessels could
navigate the Mekong into Thailand. However, Thailand insisted on its inclusion in the quadripartite agreement and refused Beijing’s proposal to sign similar bilateral agreements on this issue. Finally in a meeting in November 1997 China agreed to include co-operation in sustaining the water level but the difference remained (Weekly Manager, 29 March 1999, p.12). Thailand wanted to ensure that there was ‘adequate flow’ especially for navigation (normally not less than 1-1.20 metres), whereas China only wanted it to use a more flexible term such as a ‘possible extent’ (The Manager, 25 March 1999, p.8). In March 2000 Thailand’s Foreign Ministry reported that it should not have any problem accepting China’s preference in this regard and the agreement should be signed in Myanmar in April that year (SC 2000). Thus it can be seen that although Thailand and China were taking different positions on this issue, Thailand could persuade China to agree to the great extent. The divergence was instead mediated resulting in the ‘Agreement on Commercial Navigation on Lancang-Mekong River’ being signed in April 2000.

Third, on realising the Chinese threat, Thailand could have pursued a balancing strategy by seeking closer co-operation with external powers at the same time. However, it is not clear that any other players were playing an active role enough in the project to balance China’s influence. The ADB and, perhaps, Japan (including other regional institutions such as MRC, ASEAN, or other individual Southeast Asian players) may be seen as constraining forces to China’s ultimate objectives. Yet, they never really challenged China to the point where China needed to reconsider its position on its Lancang-Mekong development projects. In contrast, the fact that China was finally able to secure approval from ADB without the Japanese blocking such support may diminish the dominant explanatory power of the geopolitical logics.

Regarding the creation of regional institution to possibly promote economic interdependence, there is an uncertainty if the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation could develop to play such role. This sub-regional scheme was comprised of a series of meetings and had no real guidelines for participating countries, it is difficult to conclude that institutionalisation of this co-operation was a primary objective of the member countries. Therefore, this case may not fully explain that ‘institutions have an independent impact on strategies and outcomes’ (Koehane 2002, p.157) as the main
actors and actions in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative were still state-centric in context, and an institutional effect was not so evident.

Moreover, the issue of cost-sharing to sustain the co-operation was also uncertain. The question arises to why Thailand was actively and persistently playing a key role in this co-operation. Institutionalists only explain that a state turns to collective action only 'to compensate for imperfection' or when it cannot pursue policy objectives unilaterally or bilaterally. Yet, collective action should not eventually impose greater cost on states, otherwise; the arrangement should cease (Ruggie 1998, p.55-56).

Considering this point, despite Thailand's higher level of economic development compared to the rest of the initiative's participants, it would still incur a financial burden by fulfilling the requests from neighbouring countries for assistance. Parallel with the liberal institutionalists' prediction, this was the clearest rationale for Thailand to initially seek sub-regional co-ordination that included of China. As a regional power China would have been expected to play an active role and be willing to bear the cost of the co-operation considering its foreign policy of maintaining good neighbourliness with the surrounding states in Southeast Asia. However, Thailand did not financially contribute less than China in this case.

Even though this can be seen as an attempt by Thailand in trying to play a role in bringing about a coalition of like-minded countries (including external donors and financial institutions) to promote a co-operation, it is still not clear why Thailand would also extend its economic assistance to a great extent. China would have presumably played a greater role in this case. Yet, Thailand and China offered roughly equal financial assistance to Laos for building roads and bridges to complete the R3 route. Thailand also extended unilateral assistance to Myanmar to complete the project considering the latter's difficulty in acquiring financial support from the international community regarding its human rights problem.

With regard to security considerations, sub-regional co-operation in the Mekong Basin in general has facilitated the modification of Cold War antagonisms and familiarised sub-regional states with co-operation in a substantive manner. Yet, particular concerns about a possible Chinese threat have not waned in Southeast Asia. The Quadrangle Economic
Co-operation may be a means Thailand and other small states employed constraints and engaged with China, cultivating economic interconnectedness, regional norms, and institutionalisation (Goh 2006, p.13). However, the basic question: 'why only Thailand?' is still not clearly understood. Thailand should have realised its weaker power position vis-à-vis China. A more rational option would have seen Thailand seek to recruit more members into this co-operation, especially from ASEAN and external donors, or give way to the ADB's GMS project. On the contrary, the attempt by Thailand to promote the co-operation within only limited membership in mainland Southeast Asia, instead of within the GMS project, still leaves some room for questions.

For the above reasons, considering merely political setting and regional environments during the Chuan government may not fully explain why Thailand assumed a certain role in this sub-regional scheme. Moreover, it might not be able to predict why this role was also persistent when material and strategic interests may have been waned or lessened. As cognitive approaches discussed in Chapter Three contend, self-image, self-perception, or identity of an actor may also influence on how it sees its role in international arena, hence policy options and preferences. Therefore, this chapter therefore brings Thailand's self-perception as being a leading actor in Southeast Asia into its analysis to fill this gap.

This chapter incorporates an ideational factor into the analysis and looks at the black box of decision-making process. Thus, it is important to examine especially how relevant actors in Thailand involved in the scheme think and view themselves and their role in this sub-regional co-operation. Examining Thailand's regional aspirations amongst Thai policy-makers with regard to its role in mainland Southeast Asia may add further understanding in this case.

5.3.2 Empirical evidence of regional aspirations at play
In order to understand Thailand's regional aspirations in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, Thailand's overall national economic development strategy framed within the five-year Economic and Social Development Plan needs to be reviewed. This blueprint started in the early 1960s not only had domestic dimensions but also international implications which were largely relevant to the course of Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War period.
The successful economic restructuring resulting from the so-called ‘Fifth Plan’ (1982-1986) paved the way for successive phases of development to occur based on an export-oriented industrialisation strategy. This yielded successful results evidenced by economic growth and stability and increasing level of income per capita. The international effect of the Plan can be seen in its increasing focus on enhancing Thailand’s competitiveness in the world market which was constructed on the idea of Bangkok’s increasing role in the regional political economy. Thailand’s foreign policy direction in the post-Cold War can therefore be viewed as another facet of Thailand’s ambition to fulfil this grand vision.

The opening up of Indochina since the Chatichai government presented a significant opportunity for Thailand to lead and to make changes, especially in mainland Southeast Asia. The Seventh Plan (1992-1996) during which the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative commenced, projected the goal of not only maintaining Thailand’s economic growth and dynamics but also internationalising the Thai economy through becoming a centre of economic activities in the region (NESDB 1992). It even projected the Thai economy to expand to become the world’s eighth largest by 2020 (The Manager, 21 September 1998, p.8). As the Plan puts it:

Trade and investment opportunities in our neighbouring countries are positive due to the constructive development in Indochina including our foreign policy to expand trade and investment relations with Indochinese countries and Myanmar. This will definitely enhance Thailand’s opportunity to remain in the forefront of this region...[and] to become a regional financial centre (NESDB 1992, p.7).

To achieve this goal the Plan endorsed the idea of developing ‘regional centres’ in different areas of Thailand. These ‘regional centres’ were the means of diversifying and distributing various economic activities throughout different areas of the country so as to increase employment and income in rural areas, hence discouraging urban migration into the over-crowded Bangkok area. Importantly, these ‘regional centres’ were also assigned to be gateways for engaging directly with neighbouring countries. These local centres were expected to promote overall economic dynamics in Thailand’s regions, and ultimately enhance Thailand’s political and economic centrality (NESDB 1992). Against
this background, Thailand's policy towards mainland Southeast Asia, including the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, can be seen as the way in which Thailand continuously promoted its economic prowess by linking nodes in the periphery.

This development strategy and foreign policy behaviour can be said to reflect a symbiotic relationship between ideational and material interests. Thailand's aspiring to assert its influence in mainland Southeast Asia thus coincided with Thailand's actual economic achievement. As role theory and constructivism both claim, a state's self-perception or national identity determines how it develops its international role and translates this into policy (Adigbuo 2007, p.89). While the idea of being a significant regional state was always part of Thai policy-makers' image for the future of the country, its recent economic growth revived and consolidated this self-perception amongst them and intensified their aspirations for regional leading role. Such aspirations influenced the way in which Thai policy-makers thought of how to sustain their country's economic competitiveness which, in turn, would strengthen its economic and political influence in the region. A glance at Thailand's foreign policy rhetoric that promoted Thailand's version of regional co-operation compared to that held by other Southeast Asian nations demonstrates this point. A statement made by Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (1996-1997) reconfirmed these regional aspirations:

"Thailand must lead and be a centre of this region. Although we do not want to do so, our geographic location in the heartland of the region is an inevitable reality...We are like a regional gateway to the prosperity. Our duty is to build a peaceful environment especially in neighbouring Indochina (MFA 1996c)."

With regard to the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, these regional aspirations can be seen through the same idea expressed by different actors involved in the project, from the political elite and government officials to local provincial businessmen.

(a) Political elite

Although the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was initiated by the Chuan government, it cannot be analysed separately from the initiative of his predecessors and
successors. Thai politics was not conventionally polarised by policy position divergence but rather by the balance of power amongst groups. Thai politics especially in the 1990s were controlled by a few groups of politicians who had established close connections amongst themselves. The main political cliques were around the Democrat Party based in Bangkok and comprising urban middle class voters, and the other parties were based on the rural majority. Therefore, it can be seen that politicians moving around these political parties or rival parties joining the same coalitions was common practice. In this context, certain ideas, visions, and policies were inevitably transferred, spread and shared amongst the Thai political elite through the loose, amorphous nature of domestic politics.

To illustrate this complexity and interrelation between politicians, some examples of key politicians taking important positions in different governments since Chatichai are given. In the Chatichai government, Chuan was appointed Public Health Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Agriculture Minister. Banharn served as Industry Minister. Chavalit once replaced Chatichai as Defence Minister and also served as Deputy Prime Minister. Chavalit was also in Chuan's cabinet as Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and in the Banharn government as Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister. Thaksin also replaced Prasong Soonsiri as Chuan's Foreign Minister, and became Deputy Prime Minister in the Banharn and Chavalit governments. Amnuay Wirawan also served as Deputy Prime Minister in the Chuan, Banharn, and Chavalit administrations. Moreover, Chatichai himself also became Chavalit's foreign and economic advisers during the latter's premiership.

It is also interesting to trace the movement of some of Chatichai's foreign and economic affairs advisers. Pansak Winyarat, a chief policy adviser also served as the chief adviser to Thaksin. Sukhumbhandh Paribatra, a foreign affairs adviser, later won a parliamentary seat in Bangkok under the Democrat Party in 1996, and became Deputy Foreign Minister in 1997. Chatichai's economic adviser, Surakiart Sathirathai, served as Finance Minister in the Banharn government in 1995, Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Council on Economic and Foreign Affairs under Chavalit in 1997, and became Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in the Thaksin government. Therefore, certain continuity amongst Thai political elite especially in their vision and idea is highly possible.
Moreover, Thai foreign policy especially towards mainland Southeast Asia has long been dominated by security agencies such as the military and the National Security Council rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thai politics was also under the influence of the military for decades. In the post-Cold War period, although Thailand has been ruled mainly by civilian government, many political leaders are retired military, notably Chatichai Choonhavan and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh or even Thaksin Shinawatra as a former police. It is understandable that some vision or idea as the concept of Suvarnabhumi may have passed through generation of political leader as well.

From the Thai decision-making elite's point of view, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was therefore part of the unfulfilled vision of 'Suvarnabhumi' (the Golden Peninsula) reintroduced during the Chatichai government. The idea envisions that 'continental Southeast Asia should be under Thai leadership' (Nischalke 2002, p.94) resulting in the creation of the Thai sphere of influence in the region in the 1940s (Buszynski 1994, pp.727-8; Nischalke 2002, p.94). Indochina has thus continuously been a priority in Thai foreign policy as an important part of this vision.

The first Chuan government (1993-1996) held fast to this conventional perspective. Chuan's foreign policy statement to the Parliament well captured this idea. In order for Thailand to enhance its role and opportunities to be a regional economic, financial and transport centre, Chuan strongly advocated Thailand's increasing role in assisting and supporting economic development in neighbouring countries (Chuan 1992a, pp.24-25, 28, 33-35). On another occasion, he intimated that that he 'strongly [felt] that [Thailand was] in a natural position to extend and channel greater co-operation with Indochinese countries and Myanmar' (Chuan 1993c). Chuan's Foreign Minster, Prasong Soonsiri then echoed this view by stipulate that Indochina was important to Thailand's interest and said that '[he] placed Indochina high on [his] agenda' (1993a). Prasong therefore pledged to take serious steps to strengthen Thailand's co-operation with countries in the Mekong Basin. Prasong's deputy Surin Pitsuwan then put forward that the Quadrangle area should be promoted strongly as it was within Thailand's capability to pursue it based on closer cultural affinities in the sub-region and existing contacts at local and informal levels (Surin 1993).
To deepen political and economic relations throughout this sub-region, developing the transport system across borders was a very tangible objective which successive Thai leaders emphasised. This importance of the transport linkage arguably dates back to the Cold War era. Within Thailand the expanding road network was seen as an important tool for the central government to stretch its power and authority to control Thailand’s peripheral areas. This was crucial when the threat of communism was at its peak during the 1950s-1960s, during which time the plan for completing 1,000km regional highways was extensively outlined in the first Economic Development Plan (1961-1966). This project accounted for the highest amount of government spending compared to other sectors, or roughly THB1.6 million at the end of the first phase (NESDB 1961, 1964). The northeast region’s highway plan revealed this strategic thinking as it contained to build a loop that linked the American military bases in Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, Khon Khaen, Udon Thani, and Nongkhai (Thak 2007, pp.239-240).

Likewise, the transport network was also viewed by Thailand as an important factor in the post-Cold War era, not only on its own soil but also in the wider areas outside Thailand. Economically, the network would facilitate trade and investment in the region and further enhance Thailand's economic development. Politically, it helped Bangkok to continue its leading role in integrating Indochinese countries into mainstream Southeast Asia after the Cold War, hence increasing Thailand's political influence in the region.

The Thai intention to lead mainland Southeast Asia is captured in a statement by Amnuay Veerawan, Thailand’s Deputy Prime Minister in the Chuan and Chavalit governments. Amnuay insisted that ‘Thailand must be the leader of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation as it was more qualified in every aspect than the other members’ (Manager, 15-21 November 1993). In a discussion with a Chinese head of delegation at a GMS meeting in 1996 in Kunming, Amnuay expressed to the Chinese counterpart that both China and Thailand were important to the Mekong's development because while China led the upper basin Thailand was a key player in the lower one (MFA 1996a). Amnuay’s statement can be seen as an expression of the Thai elite's belief in Thailand's eligibility to exercise its leadership in its traditional zone of influence. This perception complied with the Thai elite's cognitive predisposition to reaffirm Thailand's centrality by weaving peripheries further beyond Thai borders into Bangkok's sphere of economic and political influence.
The Quadrangle Growth project can also be seen as a way in which Thailand's regional aspirations in mainland Southeast Asia were rearranged in a more organised manner. The initiative can be seen as an early attempt of Thailand to build a sub-regional order on a multilateral approach. This strategy enabled Thailand not only to co-ordinate its own policy towards neighbouring countries in a more harmonious manner but also to identify its niche in actualising its ambition. Clearly, the transport issue was a logical choice for this as it was also a major interest of its neighbours. Thai policy-makers realised that the absence of proper infrastructure among its neighbours was a major obstacle for Thailand in consolidating its influence in the region. The first attempt by the Chatichai government to expand Thailand's economic strength into these neighbours based on the private sector failed to secure business interest in the area and resulted in its retreat (Thansettakij, 2 April 1997, p.24). The Thai state's active role in promoting infrastructure development in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was thus to fill this gap. Importantly, the focus on the transport issue by the Thai government through the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was also a tangible link to complete its ideational vision of 'all roads lead to Bangkok'.

(b) Policy-making agencies
Clear written evidence of regional aspirations amongst the Thai policy-making elite may be relatively scarce because policy statements are normally written with a concern for political sensitivity. This sensitivity at the political level is very significant in Thailand's formal relations with its neighbouring governments as oppose to general view of historical animosities and cultural ignorance amongst the Thai public. However, this lack can be offset by examining ideas amongst government officials as they normally either initiate the idea with their ministers in the first place or adopt political views from them and translate these ideas into policy and action. At the same time, delving into how the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was translated into policy action by government officials can verify that statements made by the policy-making elite were not merely rhetorical.

Several central government agencies were involved in the implementation of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, but three important national agencies can be singled out: the National Security Council (NSC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). The role of
the NSC was to give, approve, and monitor overall policy strategy. The MFA mainly pursued a negotiating role with foreign counterparts while NESDB's main responsibility was to study how the initiative should be directed and to propose policy recommendations to materialise the scheme. The inter-workings of these key agencies reflected the fact that, firstly, economic issues were incorporated into the state's security concerns, and secondly, foreign and domestic affairs were intertwined in Thailand's post-Cold War decision making.

**The National Security Council (NSC)**

Although the role of the NSC in sub-regional co-operation and the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative in particular is not normally enunciated, its role as the national top policy-making body headed by the Prime Minister and having important ministers as members cannot be disregarded. The NSC's concern about sub-regional co-operation was parallel to the changing nature of the politico-economic environment. Economic issues as embedded in the 'competition state', at this time, previously discussed in Chapter Four became associated closely with security policy.

With regard to the view of economic competitiveness in the post-Cold War era as an integral part of security concern, the adjustment in organisational structure within the NSC took place. Prakit Prachonpachanuk, the former NSC Secretary-General, mentioned that during the mid 1990s, it revamped its structure and set up the Economic Division to be the NSC's policy formulating and co-ordinating unit with other concerned agencies. Its direct concerns were related to economic security issues with Thailand's neighbouring countries, such as maritime borders, border trade, and most importantly sub-regional economic development (interview on 20 February 2008).

Relevant to this initiative, by March 1993 the NSC followed and evaluated regional political development closely, and making policy recommendations on sub-regional co-operation. This re-orientation in the NSC's work could be traced back to the swift adjustment in Thailand's foreign policy towards Indochina since Chatichai. The March 1993 recommendation therefore was not totally unprecedented but continued Thailand's general posture since the end of the Cold War and particularly in response to the ADB's GMS project that commenced in 1992. However, the policy recommendation was applied broadly.
During the time of the first meeting of Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative in May 1993, the National Security Council (NSC) presided over by the Prime Minister agreed on a master plan in which Thailand would streamline its strategy to actualise sub-regional economic development objectives. Reflected in a confidential report (NSC 1993), the NSC rationalised that:

Thailand would promote regional co-operation in which Thailand plays an initiating and leading role as a bridge that links or offers prosperity to its neighbours and countries in the region....considering Thailand's outstanding potential and its geographical advantage Thailand is naturally a leader (NSC 1993, p.2).

This NSC's policy states that the main strategy adopted to realise this advantage was 'to promote regional co-operation focusing on linking transport, shipping, communication, and telecommunication networks that will connect and bind economic, social, and human resources potentiality in the region together' (NSC 1993, p.2). The NSC outlined the administration of this strategy by which it would oversee policy implementation. The NESDB was assigned to co-ordinate co-operation among the economic, infrastructure, and energy sectors within the country and with foreign counterparts. The MFA was responsible for promoting co-operation in political affairs, social issues, human resource development and regional security (NSC 1993, p.2).

With this recommendation, Thailand's centrality in promoting regional development was clearly justified and embedded as a significant element in the top policy-making body. Again and in line with the policy-making elite, the transport linkage was strongly advocated as a crucial factor to realise the regional co-operation.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)**

The active promotion of sub-regional co-operation by the MFA as a key policy-making agency was actually another example of Thailand's attempt to re-position itself as a sub-regional leader in the post-Cold War period. The decline of the political and military confrontation of China and Thailand vis-à-vis Vietnam, especially after the Cambodian issue was resolved through the UN processes, actually threatened Thailand's previously favourable position as a pivot in regional politics. In other words, Thailand's centrality

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6 Declassified in December 2007 upon the author's request

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needed to be reinstituted within the new regional and international settings where the co-existing nature of economic competition and co-operation had prevailed.

Referring to the aforementioned MFA policy document with regard to Thailand's policy towards China (DPA 1992), it was apparent that Thailand was alarmed about the possibility that the changing regional environment would reduce Thailand's 'special position' based on its practical alliance with Beijing during the Cambodian conflict. Not only did this regional transformation remove a condition by which Thailand could continue its diplomatic role, but it also altered bilateral relations with Beijing along more competitive lines. The document noted that:

The positive development in Cambodia and normalisation of relations between China and Indochinese countries including China's successful economic and political transformation resulted in Beijing's increasing active policy towards its neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia...This transformation in the long term would possibly develop into competition and conflict between Thailand and China. Sino-Thai relations would be more distant than they were during the containment of Soviet influence and in the Cambodian conflict... (DPA 1992, pp.2-3)

However, Thailand did not totally accept this changing environment but tried to adjust it to suit its interest. The MFA therefore recommended that 'Thailand should consider other ways to maintain close ties with Beijing in this changing environment' (DPA 1992, p.4). This included deepening economic co-operation with China in Indochina. The MFA viewed that this strategy would enable Thailand to become a significant link between China and Southeast Asian countries once again. Since China was successfully expanding its relations southward with Indochina this sub-region was therefore a playing field in which Thailand needed to engage to shape its development for Thailand's economic interests and influence, as well as to protect it from any negative impact through the penetration of Chinese power into the region (DPA 1992, p.4). For this reason, it can be seen that Thailand's proactive role in building the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was a way in which the country wanted to transform regional environment to buttress its leading position in the region. This can be seen in both reactive and proactive foreign policy behaviour. It was reactive if considering Thailand attempting to maintain its relevance in this changing regional environment especially with Beijing. However, it
was proactive if we look at Thailand's primary objective as not letting this environment continue but putting forward a sub-regional scheme as a policy innovation to shape or divert the outcome to benefit Thailand's interest.

To effectively realise greater sub-regional co-operation, the MFA proposed several measures: (1) setting up a fact-finding commission to study and collect relevant information for further policy formulation; (2) convening an inter-agency meeting to seek possible directions, or at least setting up a coordinating committee to oversee this issue in particular, in which the MFA would play a major role; (3) promoting people-to-people contacts based on culture, education, sport, and Buddhism; and (4) expanding and improving Thailand's transport network to prepare for future linkages with neighbouring countries (DPA 1992, p.2). Of these four policy recommendations, the transport issue was again seen to be the most important solution by the policy-makers.

Therefore, the MFA's position on the transport issue in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was consistent with these of the political elite and the NSC. The MFA planned to engineer the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation by proposing to set up the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation Joint Working Committee (QEC-JWC) to co-ordinate cooperative projects amongst the four participating countries. Domestically, the MFA proposed to form a team in which major government agencies related to the Quadrangle Growth project would work together closely. This mechanism consisted of the MFA, the NESDB, and the National Committee for Co-ordinating Sub-regional Economic Co-operation (NCCSEC). In addition, the MFA also encouraged Thailand's private sector to set up a similar co-ordinating body or a business council in the Quadrangle area consisting of provincial chambers of commerce in Thailand's northern region (MFA 1994c).

The Foreign Ministry, especially under the Chuan administration, seemed to pay greater attention to the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative compared to the other similar ongoing development programmes in Thailand's north-eastern region which were implemented under ADB's auspices (Supalak 2007, p.8). This position was different from that of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) that seemed to prefer Thailand to co-operate closely with ADB (this divergence is discussed in the succeeding sectors). The MFA wanted to develop Thailand's northern
region as another centre in the sub-region (MFA 1994d) that would link the sub-region from the northern direction with Thailand's overall transport network. It would ultimately connect to Thailand's eastern seaboard as part of its grand development strategy.

The MFA was concerned more with Thailand's regional influence that might have been overshadowed. The Vietnamese factor was also a part of this regional power calculation that stimulated the MFA's enthusiasm in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. Ongoing GMS projects focusing on developing land-locked Laos and the lower Mekong Basin had already attracted active the participation of the Thai private sector in the northeast. From the MFA's point of view, the project to link Thailand, Laos, and the port cities in Vietnam (Vihn, Hon La, and Da Nang) would greatly reduce Thailand's economic and political influence over Laos. Allowing Laos to have another alternative to Thailand's ports for shipping exports would clearly decrease Thailand's bargaining power vis-à-vis Vietnam. This can be seen from a comment made by an MFA senior official on a report regarding the development of a road from Thailand to Vietnam that:

> From my discussion with some Lao officials and businessmen on many occasions, I have realised that Laos is not happy with shipping its goods through Thailand, thus, wants to support the construction of road to Vietnam's coast. This will greatly reduce its dependence on Thailand (MFA 1995b, p.4).

This was a viable reason regarding the ongoing promotion of Thailand's eastern seaboard as a regional shipping hub (MFA 1993c, 1993d). A NCCSEC document captured this sensitivity:

> With regard to a transport linkage between Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, although it is somewhat feasible, [Thailand] needs to consider its negative effects on Thailand’s Laem Chabang port as well. We need to consider how much impact would occur on our broader policy if any co-operative project brings Laos and Vietnam especially closer (NCCSEC 1993, p.3).
This idea was also reflected in a cabinet meeting in 1996, the Cabinet agreed that 'Thailand should reassess with caution before deciding to speed up the link of land transport from Laos to Vietnam's coast' (The Cabinet 1996, p.31).

One event in Thai-Vietnamese relations can cast light on the sub-regional dynamics in the early 1990s. Around the initiation of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, Thailand and Vietnam were also engaging in a political dispute over the re-establishment of the lower Mekong River management regime. The negotiations between 1991 and 1995 saw different positions from Bangkok and Hanoi over documents and rules governing the new entity, and the question of when to re-include Cambodia in the co-operation. In this political tension, Vietnam was able to form an informal Indochinese coalition against the Thai position. This situation forced Bangkok to threaten to abandon the whole negotiation process. This resulted in a political stalemate over moving the co-operation that lasted several years. This deadlock was lifted when the Indochinese bloc was broken up after Thailand successfully lobbied Phnom Penh to support its position, and Vietnam was admitted into ASEAN (Makim 2002, pp.26-31). Finally, the Agreement on the Co-operation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin was signed in April 1995 as the legal basis of the establishment of the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

Therefore, promoting the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative to the country's north that did not include Vietnam was not merely due to the simple fact that Vietnam was not geographically in the upper Mekong Basin. It was a political intention to increase Thailand's bargaining power while keeping Vietnam away from this sphere of influence. Moreover, the inclusion of China in the initiative can be interpreted as Thailand not fully overcoming its mistrust towards Hanoi. Having China on its side could also ward off this suspicion on Vietnam's hegemonic intention in Indochina.

The MFA therefore strongly argued for the Thai government to extend foreign assistance to the poorer countries, Laos and Myanmar, to implement the road construction projects under the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. The MFA suggested the Thai government should offer aid in the form of technical assistance, low-interest loans, and mobilising financial support from external donors to participate in the project (MFA 1993c). The government followed suit. In mid June 1993 it approved THB300 million
loans initially with three per cent interest to Myanmar for the R3 Route. Attached to this loan were certain conditionalities for Myanmar to: (1) hire and use Thai companies and materials; (2) to lower the toll fee for shipment of goods from Thailand to China; (3) to eliminate trade and investment barriers to Thai businesses; and (4) to improve its immigration procedures. The MFA perceived that Myanmar's increasingly co-operative attitude was a positive sign for the development of the project. It assessed, 'Myanmar is trying to open itself to sub-regional co-operation which is a good sign towards increasing commitment in this regional development' (MFA 1994b, p.12). It thus proposed to Thailand's Ministry of Finance that the interest rate charged to Myanmar for the R3 Route be lowered to 1.5 per cent, with now only the first condition included (NESDB 1996, p.20).

Regarding Laos, the Thai government also backed the Economic Quadrangle Joint Development Company, a joint venture of Thai businesses (60 per cent) and the Laos government (40 per cent) in return for extracting a concession from Vientiane to build R3 Route in Laos. Thailand also increased its assistance to Laos considerably, mainly for education and technical training. A technical co-operation programme between the two countries started in 1993. The project was directed towards strengthening the market economy, technology relevant to social and economic development, and upgrading the living standard of the Laotians (TICA 2004, p.19). In November 1996 the Thai government also set up an economic assistance and development fund to offer low-interest loans for governments, public enterprises and financial institutions of neighbouring countries to invest in their development projects (MFA 1997a).

Thailand's financial decision to support the projects in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation reflected how it viewed this venture as highly important to Thai foreign policy. When such co-operation began in 1993, Thailand exercised leadership by persuading the ADB to fund the feasibility study for the R3 Route project valued US$650,000 (ADB 1999, p.15). It also successfully urged the ADB to support most of the projects in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative as part of GMS strategy. The ADB dispatched a team to survey the route in Laos in January 1994. After this feasibility study was completed Thailand offered THB35 million assistance to Laos to appoint an engineering company to design the road. Coupled with ADB's financial assistance for the
road's construction, Thailand also proposed to finance 20 per cent of the total cost (DERC1993e).

Although the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative may be seen as a part of the GMS project regarding the ADB's role, in practice, Thailand was the main actor that tried to push for the scheme's progress and to build its own identity separately. This included the proposal to set up a Quadrangle Economic Co-operation Joint Working Committee (QEC-JWC), and other separate activities to promote cultural exchange and tourism. The MFA also played an important role in seeking support from external donors especially Japan, Australia, Canada, and France. An early report on the progress of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative suggested that Thailand had approached Australia and Japan to co-finance some of the projects. Australia expressed its interest in seeking any possible channel through ADB, while Japan was initially interested in helping in the construction of a bridge between Chiang Khong district in Chiang Rai Province and Houay Xay in Laos on R3 Route (MFA 1994a).

The role of the MFA was important to the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative by serving as a co-ordinating body between the policy level and technical agencies. Without the MFA the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative may not have evolved a more systematic and specific manner. Although the pursuit of a separate sub-regional co-operation from a broader GMS may reflect Thailand's desire to focus on its economic interest in its northern region, cognitive factors cannot be discounted. Thailand's vision of playing a leading and central role in mainland Southeast Asia clearly drove MFA policy-makers' motivation in their efforts to operationalise the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation within concerned agencies, at both domestic and regional levels.

**The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)**

As mentioned in section 5.3.2 when discussing the National Economic and Social Development Plan, the NESDB was the core agency responsible for drafting and monitoring the overall implementation of that Plan. The earlier Plans generally focused on Thailand's industrialising strategy, economic restructuring, and increasing economic growth while solving the economic crisis (NESDB 1977, 1982, 1987). The Sixth Plan (1987-1991) started to clearly mention about increasing the country's competitiveness in the world economy. It states that 'the Sixth Plan focuses particularly on increasing
efficiency and quality of development so as to elevate the country's economic competitiveness as the ultimate goal' (NESDB 1987, p.2).

However, since the Seventh Plan (1992-1996), the NESDB had conspicuously promoted positioning Thailand as the catalyst for the transition of the neighbouring countries into a market economy complex. The Seventh Plan started to ground a strategy for Thailand to benefit from the opening up of Indochina. The development of Thailand 'to be a regional economic and regional centre' was thus an important strategy (NESDB 1992, p.7). The same line of strategy in the Eighth Plan (1997-2001) was also expressed as 'to develop Thailand as an important regional centre in production, transport, finance, tourism, and services' (NESDB 1997, p. khor). All of the strategies recommended by the NESDB, both in the Plan itself and in its sub-regional co-operative strategy, indicated that NESDB policy-makers viewed Thailand as a centre of regional development. Certainly, this outcome would eventually be in Thailand's economic interest. Yet, the preferred strategy behind this goal was partly ideational in nature.

This ideational background is also illustrated by a comment on Thailand's leading role in the sub-region made by Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, the Deputy Secretary-General of the NESDB, in an interview on 28 December 2007. His remark captured the cognitive mindset of the sub-regional planning of NESDB. He observed that 'Thailand implemented a development policy similar to that of Japan in the past. It was a development strategy that aimed to pull all sub-regional economies up by using Thailand as a locomotive'. He elaborated further that the idea of Thailand exercising its leadership in sub-regional co-operation firstly stemmed from Thailand being the centre of Indochina that linked China and India. Secondly, the economies of Thailand and those of its neighbours were complementary; co-operation therefore helped lift both Thailand's competitiveness in the world economy and its neighbours' level of development. Thailand thus believed it was in a position and had a responsibility to assist them to develop. Finally, Thailand believed that by cultivating good relations with neighbours through development projects and foreign aid it would build interconnectedness in the region and 'gradually persuade them to accept Thailand's economic, social and cultural influences' (interview, 28 December 2007).
A NESDB document issued in 1993 confirmed the above aspirations. It indicated that 'Thailand should play a role as a “gateway” into its neighbouring economies' (NESDB 1993a, p.2). This "gateway" concept was elaborated by notions that Thailand functioned as (1) a provider of convenient transport routes, (2) a catalyst for facilitating foreign investment in the sub-region, and (3) a link between international institutions and Thailand's neighbours (NESDB 1993, pp.2-3). Again, such an analysis confirmed Thailand's self-perception and role as a potential centre of the region; what kind of 'grand strategy' it should follow to pursue regional leadership; and which areas it saw as important to achieve this strategy.

Against this background, the NESDB produced a final report on 'Thailand's strategic plan for the Mekong sub-regional economic co-operation' in 1995. Thailand viewed its need to employ proactive strategies to promote itself as an epicentre of the region. It laid out strategies for Thailand to become a hub of regional activities regarding its readiness in terms of domestic infrastructure. These facilities can be developed into a regional hub especially in transport, tourism and finance (NESDB 1995, p.1-6). The transport issue was deemed by the NESDB to be a particularly important area of activity. Therefore, the NESDB was active in planning and implementing transport linkages in sub-regional co-operations, both within the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative and the GMS project. According to this strategic plan, the 'strategy for promoting Thailand as a centre in the sub-region' drew much of the attention in project proposals. In outlining two main strategic approaches, the NESDB stipulated that its 'Proaction Plan' consisted of 209 projects (of which 82 projects were under 'Promotion of Thailand's Centrality' title)
compared with 139 projects under the 'Economic Restructuring Plan' for improving competitiveness (NESDB 1995, pp.1-13-1-16).

Specifically concerning the transport sector, the NESDB argued that the Thai government should play a leading role to speed up the development of the land transport network in the sub-region. Such an effort was to demonstrate that Thailand was politically committed to 'leading other countries in the sub-region...by completing its projects in Thailand shortly' (NESDB 1995, p.6-3). The NESDB urged that the new Bangkok International Airport be completed as soon as possible to accelerate the plan for Thailand to become a regional aviation and air freight hub. Thailand’s Laem Chabang seaport was also aimed to become a principal port for shipping accessing the Indochinese countries and Southern China. In addition, an international gateway for telecommunications in Thailand’s northern and north-eastern regions was planned to link the sub-region and the world through fibre optics (NESDB 1995, pp.6-3-6-4).

In terms of enhancing Thailand’s financial potential, the NESDB report outlined a strategy to encourage Thailand’s financial institutions to expand their role in the sub-region. A significant dimension of this was to allow international transactions with clients in Indochina to be made in Thai Baht so that it would become the currency benchmark in the region (NESDB 1995, p.6-3). In the tourism sector, the NESDB urged Thailand to promote the sub-regional tourism industry by linking that country with culturally rich and pristine neighbours (NESDB 1995, pp.6-3-6-4). Moreover, by exploiting its superior human resource capacity the NESDB also suggested that Thailand could increase its foreign assistance to the sub-region through a variety of technical assistance, skill training, and technology transfer programmes (NESDB 1995, pp.6-5). These recommendations were all designed to strengthen Bangkok’s centrality and the economic significance of the sub-region.

The NESDB’s planning vision therefore specifically assigned certain functions to the major regional cities as sub-centres of Bangkok to carry out the grand strategy outlined above. The Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was part of what was labelled the Northern Region Development Strategy. Chiang Mai was assigned to be the centre of the northern region emphasising the role of technical training and human resource development and the business centre of the Upper Mekong region including a regional
aviation hub (NESDB 1995, pp.6-13–6-14). At the same time, Chiang Rai performed the function as a gateway to the upper Mekong Basin, focusing on border trade and cross-border transport. The R3 Route and rail links were therefore critical to this development strategy as they linked Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai more closely to the sub-region (NESDB 1995, pp.6-16). The initial estimation of the budget allocated for this project was approximately $US6 million for the R3 Route project. Thailand also planned to contribute US$200-400 million for the rail link projects between Thailand and Burma (out of total US$350-550 million for the whole project) and US$0.38 billion out of US$1.2-1.8 billion for Thailand and Yunnan link (NESDB 1995, Table kho-1, sub-section: railway network). To further enhance this strategy, the NESDB recommended that Thailand should negotiate to eliminate trade and cross-border barriers such as visa arrangements, restrictions on the number of vehicles passing through the border, customs procedures, etc.

Although the idea of the NESDB was quite ‘Bangkok-centric’ in the sense that the country’s other regional centres’ functions were designed to serve Bangkok’s growth and stability, the planning mechanisms were not totally centralised. In contrast, the central government allowed local administrations and Thailand’s private sectors to play roles in developing trade, investment, and tourism opportunities with local administrations in neighbouring countries. Therefore, the alliance between provincial administrations and the private sector in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was also strengthened and the sustainability of the overall co-operation under the initiative’s general framework was made more secure.

(c) The local actors: a local public–private alliance
Although Thailand’s private sector had no direct decision-making authority in the decisions of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, it still influenced the direction and implementation of the initiative to a great extent. As mentioned in the background section 5.1, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative had partly sprung from the active role of local businessmen in the northern region in expanding and establishing formal trade relations across borders. Exploiting a close alliance with the local governments, they expected special attention from Thailand’s central government to move the initiative forward as a national agenda.
It may be difficult to clearly differentiate the business logic based on material interest and the ideational factor in this context because the former was easily noticeable and more clearly pronounced in the business world. The general impression was that by promoting sub-regional economic co-operation Thailand’s private sector would certainly benefit from cheap labour and natural resources including enormous consumer demand in the sub-region. As neighbouring economies were just starting their transformation towards viable market economies, infrastructure, regulatory regimes, and standard legal practices were still underdeveloped and were potentially major obstacles to proper reform (DERC 1995b; Manager 15-21 November 1993). Therefore, the private sector believed that a government role was necessary to harmonise various sectoral policies and to regulate legal matters especially in issues of transport, customs procedures, taxation, and investment policy. Therefore, there appeared to be collaboration between local government and the private sector both in provincial and regional levels.

The perception of Thai local governments combining with private business to support sub-regional initiative can also be examined by looking at this alliance’s preference for promoting its locales regional centres in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. It can be argued that this tendency was a product of an overall hegemonic perception that Thailand was entitled to and capable of being a regional centre at the macro level. Hence Thailand’s local public-private interaction also adopted or replicated the centre-periphery model at the local level. To be a centre was not only to serve the economic interests of the localities but also to complement the perception of the Thai nation of its neighbouring countries. The eagerness of the local actors to build sub-regional ties and to promote their own locations also confirmed this cognitive mindset.

In fact, the role of the private sector was prominent from the beginning of this initiative. As mentioned earlier in the background section, this sub-regional scheme partly sprang from local business hoping to expand its commercial ties with adjacent localities of Thailand’s neighbouring countries (Siriphet 1997, p.18). The government later asserted more roles and streamlined this scheme into its foreign and economic policy. In this connection, a public-private co-ordinating committee was set up at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to monitor and push for the progress of the sub-regional co-operation (MFA 1996, p.4). There was also a committee of private sector in the northern region comprising nine representatives of the chamber of commerce in each province under the
support of the central government. It was later developed into the ‘Committee for the Economic Quadrangle 10 Chambers of Commerce’ (CEQC) in 2000 (CEQC 2010). This committee was expected to push and co-ordinate needs amongst the business community in the northern region and to liaise with the government (MFA 1996, p.5). This move was strongly supported by the Chuan government as it also wanted to revive the private participation in sub-regional initiative.

There was also competition amongst potential provinces in the region, supported by local business associations especially in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, to become the centre of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation activities. Chiang Rai Province seemed to be particularly enthusiastic, perhaps due to its disadvantage of smaller size, so that it could offer to the project and compete with Chiang Mai. This is evidenced by frequent visits of the Governor of Chiang Rai to local administrations in the Quadrangle area from 1994-2000 (Chiang Rai Province 1997). The Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai provinces supported by their provincial chambers of commerce, also nominated themselves to house a regional office to co-ordinate activities in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiatives. Chiang Mai argued to the Cabinet that it was already a regional centre for economic activities and transport in the north, and it should be viewed as the best location to perform this function. Chiang Rai claimed that its proximity to and cordial relations with all local administrations in the neighbouring countries should make it a natural gateway to this area (Chiang Rai Province 1997). The Cabinet decision finally favoured Chiang Mai due to the support of the NESDB as Chiang Mai was already in NESDB’s strategic plan for the northern region. Chiang Rai was compensated by its other proposals being approved, including the construction projects of a railway to Chiang Rai, piers in Chiang Khong and Chiang Saen districts, an industrial zone, including the establishment of higher educational institutions in the province (Prachachat Thurakit, 3 July 1997, pp.35-36). Moreover, it was also selected as a special economic zone acting as a gateway to southern China and a centre of border trade in the Upper North Strategic Plan, instead (Luechai et al. 2000, p.166).

Therefore, although observing an ideational aspect of the role of private sector is difficult as economic and business interest seems to be prevailing. However, to the least extent, it might be also to say that the local provinces and private sector in the northern region also carried a similar vision of the central government. That is, they sought to position...
themselves as a centre of regional economic activities and compete for this bid. They saw their economic potential and interest in the area offered by loosening borders as their economic position compared to the surrounding neighbouring countries was higher. Therefore, they sought to act as a centre of regional activities and mediator between local and central authority.

5.3.3 Thailand's internal constraints on sustaining its regional aspirations

Although Thailand's regional aspirations can be observed behind the logic of planning and implementation of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, there were several constraints that affected the way in which they were fully translated into action. These constraints can also be seen in terms of commitments amongst Thai policy-makers and capacity of other stakeholders to sustain their aspirations relative to this initiative. As a result, the unity of the initiative's stakeholders in pursuing the regional vision was eroded, leaving it to be incorporated into a bigger Mekong development framework by the early 2000s.

(a) The limit of political commitment and continuity

During its implementation under the Chuan government, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative progressed quite slowly. This can be attributed to the working style of Chuan himself who relied heavily on the bureaucracy. As an observer on the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative describes: 'Chuan has a reputation of working slow. It took him nearly two years to make a systematic approach to deal with neighbouring countries' (Supalak 2007, p.8). Coupled with frequent changes in the top positions in the cabinet responsible for the initiative, complaints were made, mostly by the local business and provincial authorities, that the government had no clear and substantive framework to push the project fast enough (DERC 1995a).

Moreover, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation suffered from a lack of strong political support from the succeeding governments led by Banharn and Chavalit. The Chuan government lasted only three years and was dissolved in July 1995. Although the initiative still continued, the pace of co-operation was sluggish and increasingly integrated into a bigger framework of GMS. The MFA assessed the progress of the Quadrangle Growth project in 1996 and commented that it was overshadowed by the ADB's projects and needed to be revitalised (MFA 1996b).
However, this policy lethargy can not be considered to show inconsistency in Thailand’s regional aspirations. Thailand continued to pursue its regional aspirations long after Chuan departed but under different fashions. The foreign policy of the Banharn and Chavalit administrations also focused on exercising Thailand’s regional leading role as discussed in the previous chapter but with their own different policy initiatives. As John Funston (1998b) observes, Chavalit’s foreign policy was characterised by his strong regionalist tendencies. Chavalit also positioned Indochina as a foreign policy priority and declared that his plan was to restore Thailand’s influence based on developing cordial relationships with its neighbours. He played a leading role in ASEAN’s admission of the Indochinese countries into that organisation, and in setting up an ASEAN task force addressing Cambodia’s political problem after the July 1997 coup staged by Hun Sen (Funston 1998b, p.5).

Banharn’s and Chavalit’s short-lived governments (July 1995-November 1996, November 1996-November 1997, respectively) and their foreign policy agendas did not yield a fine balance in maintaining the pace of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. Even Chatichai sitting as Chavalit’s foreign and economic affairs advisor also commented that ‘the progress in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was considerably slow due to political ineffectiveness, and now it is time to revive the plan’ (Prachachat Thurakit, 3 July 1997, pp.35-36). Chavalit’s Deputy Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra also tried to reorganise the domestic co-ordinating structure by reinstating the role of the government as a central body after the failure of the co-ordinating committee centred on business sector in the northern provinces (Weekly Manager, 16 February 1998, p.6). However, in an action to atone for driving Thailand into the Financial Crisis Chavalit later resigned at the end of 1997.

The Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative was thus handed back to and re-invigorated by the second Chuan government that had started it initially. Its policy to urge the private sector to be the locomotive at the operational level in the initiative was also brought back. However, the second Chuan government fell into major financial difficulties within both the public and private sectors. The 1997 Financial Crisis led Thailand to seek an IMF bailout package with certain conditionalities especially through tightening government expenditure. The Thai private sector also suffered from higher interest rates imposed by commercial banks, up to 18-20 per cent.
In short, the 'wax and wane' in the continuity of political support for the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, initiative of both the incumbent government and succeeding ones, created a policy discontinuity. Therefore, Thailand's regional leadership in this case was subjected to oscillations in policy intensity and direction. Most of the project implementations were therefore carried on through bureaucratic channels. The lack of clear political support and consistent guidelines in this initiative then affected the pace of the project and failed to harmonise the differences between key bureaucracies. Although the initiative continued, some variations among the key agencies in this initiative prevented Thailand from achieving its vision to consolidate its influence in an effective manner.

(b) The divergence between major policy-making agencies

The positions of key policy-making agencies involved in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative were similar in that they all wanted to see Thailand take its place as the leading actor in the regional scheme. However, the main difference—especially between the MFA and NESDB—was basically in how the initiative was managed. That is, whether or not the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative and the GMS should be separated to any degree at all. The aforementioned strategic plan for the initiative points to the fact that the NESDB saw these two frameworks as inseparable. From the NESDB's perspective, the Quadrangle Growth project was more likely an extension of the GMS project, thus, its plans for the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative needed to be incorporated into the GMS blueprint. This can be seen in NESDB's 'Strategic Report for the Mekong Sub-region' in 1995 that included projects under the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation scheme in the broad GMS picture (NESDB 1995).

Conversely, while the NESDB wanted to see Thailand play a leading role in a wider forum as in the GMS project, the MFA seemed to aim at a smaller circle, at least, in the beginning. The MFA saw the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation as a nearly exclusively Thai initiative and wanted to see its development as largely independent from the GMS, at least in its identity and core management. This divergence in ideas can be captured in a MFA document in 1996; it observed that:

In some respects, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative has been seen as a smaller part of the GMS framework. However, considering
the leverage Thailand would gain in this co-operation, Thailand needs to build special characteristics for the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, and utilise our leading position in this sub-region (MFA 1996b).

The same document suggested several measures to develop special mechanisms for the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation. These included measures to: (1) elevate meetings specifically concerned with this initiative to the ministerial level and build a clearer co-ordinating body; (2) organise regular seminars between public and private sectors in the Quadrangle area to consolidate national strategy for this co-operation; and (3) establish a public-private co-ordinating committee especially for the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation presided over by the Foreign Minister. However, this co-ordinating committee was very similar to the one that already existed, namely the Co-ordinating Committee for Developing Economic Co-operation with Neighbouring Countries. This committee was presided over by the Deputy Prime Minister and the NESDB was acting as the secretariat. The latter had already co-ordinated several sub-regional co-operations such as IMG-TG, GMS, and BIMSTEC. The MFA realised its proposal overlapped with this Committee but still rationalised that without a special mechanism, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation would be overshadowed by the bigger Mekong framework (MFA 1996b). This idea was not fully implemented and was toned down during the Financial Crisis in 1997. Most of the Quadrangle Growth projects were quietly integrated into the NESDB’s GMS strategy of that time (SC 1997).

However, the idea of reviving the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative emerged during the second Chuan government. In 2000, the MFA proposed to re-adjust the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation framework to be more efficient and separate from the GMS. The MFA believed that integrating the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation into the GMS framework would result in the former being unable to capture sufficient attention. The MFA document indicated:

Projects under the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative should have been pushed for progress faster than it is at the present stage. The main obstacle is that most of the projects are dictated by ADB and donor countries...Therefore, Thailand should be able to have a separate and clearer strategy to promote this framework by itself (MFA 2000).
Yet another divergence of strategy can be seen in the issue of whether to establish a regional co-ordinating office in Chiang Rai or Chiang Mai. The MFA document of 1997 suggested Chiang Rai was favoured by MFA (MFA 1997b), while Chiang Mai was backed by the NESDB appeared in a Cabinet Meeting report (SC 1997). NESDB winning the Cabinet approval reflected the fact that it was regarded as a major economic planning agency. Therefore, its suggestions were justified with reference to overall national planning. This intra-agency policy tension certainly underscored the problem of unity of the implementation of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, hence affecting the exercise of Thailand’s overall regional leadership.

Therefore, it can be seen that the conflict between these two implementing agencies also reveals disunity in policy-making and implementation. Therefore, as reflected by local business and local authority’s complaint about lacking clear framework (DERC 1995a) mentioned in the previous sub-section, this factor also contributed to the failure of materialising Thailand’s regional aspirations.

(c) Limited capacity of local actors

As mentioned in section 5.3.2(c), the Chuan government expected the private sector in Thailand’s northern region to be part of the driving force in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. It set up a private sector co-ordinating committee to perform this function. However, it was reported that this committee did not perform well and was not included in the plan to revamp the local mechanism in the Chavalit government in 1997. The president of the co-ordinating committee reasoned that the poor performance of the committee was due to the frequent changes in persons responsible for liaising the projects, amongst which were provincial industrial councils, provincial chambers of commerce, provincial bankers association. He further asserted that without the government’s clear guidelines, business interests in different sectors could not be easily harmonised resulting in the lack of unity (Weekly Manager, 16 February 1998, p.6).

Moreover, the most important projects within the initiative were large-scale and required enormous financial support such as for infrastructure and hydroelectricity. Most of these types of projects were therefore joint ventures between governments whereas private subcontractors were limited to the actual physical construction. No real local policy initiation was started in relation to the country’s overall picture. The Thai
government understood this problem and mandated that ‘transport infrastructure projects should be implemented mainly by the government. If these projects were left in the hand of private actors there would be problems and negative impacts to the progress’ (DERC1993f).

With regard to investment promotion, the Thai government also realised that the Thai private sector tended to conduct business based on short-term profits, especially in Myanmar and Laos compared to other foreign investors. Thai investors were usually engaged in the extraction of natural resources and service industries related to tourism. Therefore, they were viewed by its neighbours as merely seeking advantage from cheap labour and resources without contributing much to their economies in return (DERC 1993f). A Thai scholar, Ukrist Patamadd, assessed this problem noting that the Thai private sector was more interested in low-return, low-technology business especially subcontracting infrastructure projects while its Singaporean and Malaysian counterparts paid more attention to investment in big long-term projects (interview, 13 February 2008). Coupled with inconsistent support from the government, especially after the 1997 Financial Crisis, the Thai private sector was not strong enough to drive or sustain the economic dynamics of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative.

Therefore, the notoriety of some Thai businesses increased suspicion of this motive amongst Indochinese countries. This affected Thailand’s regional ambition in that Thai businesses became less favourable in their neighbours’ eyes and was susceptible to being outcompeted by businesses from other countries. The wane of Thailand’s economic clout was felt in the fact that Thailand could no longer maintain its position as the top investor in these countries. In Laos, although Thailand was the biggest investor, it has recently fallen to the third rank behind China and Vietnam (Laos Information Centre 2008). Thailand remained between the third and fifth largest investor in Myanmar throughout the 1990s, while Singapore climbed from tenth position in 1990 up to the first rank in 1999 (The Irrawaddy, 1 January 2003). Therefore, the capacities and bad reputation of Thai business can also be partly attributed to Thailand’s difficulty in realising its regional vision in the sub-region. Evidence of the fragility of Thailand’s relations with its neighbours, though not particularly related to the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative per se, can be seen in the civic riot against Thailand in Phnom Penh in 2003. The riot was believed to have been triggered by a Thai movie star’s
comment about Angkor Wat, claiming it belonged to Thailand. The Thai Embassy and some Thai business properties were burnt down in this civil disturbance.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation Economic Co-operation as a case to explain Thailand’s attempt to express and translate its regional aspirations into action. This case is interesting and important due to the fact that it was the first original initiative proposed by Thailand in the early post-Cold War period in the form of a multilateral approach to regional co-operation particularly in mainland Southeast Asia. This case encapsulates how actors involved in the policy formulation and implementation of this initiative were driven by the idea of regional aspirations. It has shown that actors from the political elite, policy-making agencies, and local administrations all shared the aspirations of Thailand to be a leading actor in the region. This view was not only expressed in political rhetoric but had deep roots in the way Thai foreign policy with regard to mainland Southeast Asia was formulated and implemented in the post-Cold War era. Empirical examination of this perception held by policy-making agencies clearly differentiates a real action from political rhetoric. In this case, Thailand’s regional aspirations were not merely grandiloquent speeches generated by Thai political leaders but were substantial motivations in policy-making. They were translated into a grand strategy to facilitate Thailand’s leadership in re-arranging mainland Southeast Asia’s development. Co-operation in transport issues was a particularly tangible symbol of how Thailand saw itself dominating the geography of the regional web of linkages. It is therefore not surprising to see Thailand as the main advocate in this matter. Although sub-regional co-operation was meant to strengthen Thailand’s economic position, its close involvement in the sub-region was also inevitably expected to extend Thailand’s political influence.

This chapter has shown that Thailand’s intention to maintain its centre of gravity in the sub-regional development largely explains the many atypical policy preferences. Possible economic benefits may also explain Thailand’s active role in maintaining the viability of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation but many long-term negative impacts cast doubt on this economic and rational choice. The explanation of this policy behaviour is more complete with consideration of the influence of this ideational force.
This case also helps elucidate why Thailand in many circumstances chose to lead the sub-region and bypass other regional actors such as ASEAN and ADB. Also, the way in which Thailand wanted the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation to be relevant and not to be subsumed by the bigger GMS projects until the end of the second Chuan government has an ambiguous economic rationale. Thailand needed to show its political commitment to the development and progress of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative by offering foreign assistance to smaller and weaker countries in order to facilitate their participation even during the economic difficulty time of the Financial Crisis in 1997. Although, eventually, the Quadrangle Growth was incorporated into the GMS, the idea of a separate sub-regional co-operation in which Thailand played a central role re-emerged in the Thaksin government. A very similar sub-regional initiative was established namely the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation Strategy (ACMECS) covering mainland Southeast Asian countries, exclusive of China.

This chapter has illustrated that Thai foreign policy behaviour was likely to seek a leading position in Southeast Asia as guided by its self-perception of being the epicentre of regional dynamics. However, a coercive hegemonic style of leadership—one that critics have argued Thailand has adopted—is not possible due to several factors. First, the nature of the Thai state shifted towards becoming a ‘competition state’ in which the issue of maintaining and improving economic competitiveness overtook the policy of exercising military might (discussed in Chapter Four). Second, mainland Southeast Asia became an area in which several regional powers such as the United States, China, Japan and recently India were also competing to assert their influence. Some of these, such as China and the United States, were in a stronger position in political, military, and economic terms than was Thailand. In this initiative, although Thailand continuously attempted to push the initiative forward, China’s position was also critical to the overall progress of the co-operation. In addition, the mistrust of the smaller Indochinese nations towards Thailand’s intention to dominate their countries economically and culturally resulted in Thailand’s drawing up a careful strategy to cultivate friendly and co-operative relations with these neighbours. Against this background, Thai foreign policy behaviour, especially in the case of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, can rather be described as having a degree of a ‘benevolent hegemony’ in mainland Southeast Asia. This is specifically characterised by the tendency to exercise leadership in organising ‘reciprocal, consensual, and institutionalised relations’ (Ikenberry 2001, p.196).
The next chapter draws on another case in Thai foreign policy during the Thaksin administration, namely the 'Forward Engagement' strategy to. It examines to what extent regional aspirations played a role in Thaksin's foreign policy in a diplomatic context. Besides Chuan, Thaksin was the other recent Thai post-Cold War leader who stayed in power for a substantial period of time. Studying Thaksin's foreign policy can demonstrate how regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy and its strategy, was developed and changed from the early post-Cold War period as expressed during the Chuan government. Importantly, this chapter ultimately shows the continuity of the relevance of Thailand's regional aspirations in foreign policy making in the post-Cold War context.
CHAPTER SIX

THE FORWARD ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY:
THAILAND'S REGIONAL ASPIRATIONS ON RISE

The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 seriously affected Thailand's economic competitiveness in the international market. Thailand's focus at this time was therefore to restore its economy especially through bringing back investors' confidence. Contrary to the prevailing rationalist approaches that anticipated Thailand adopting an inward-looking foreign policy, however, the Crisis resulted in ambiguity in Thailand's foreign policy behaviour. On the one hand, Thai foreign policy shortly returned to its conventional posture of relying on external powers to a certain degree as a way to regain its economic stability. The aftermath of the Financial Crisis saw Thailand’s cordial relations with its traditional allies being reconfirmed. Close ties with Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Brussels were renewed mainly to ensure Thailand’s access to foreign assistance and to secure its economic recovery during this period. On the other hand, there was a series of attempts to resurrect Thailand's regional leading role both within mainland Southeast Asia and beyond. An effort to re-establish the separate identity of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation from the GMS project briefly during the second Chuan government (1997-2001) as discussed in the previous Chapter is an example of this trend. The effort to restore Thailand's leading position was more obviously pronounced during the Thaksin administration (2001-2006) with his 'Forward Engagement Strategy' signifying Thailand's proactive posture towards external affairs.

Arguing for an alternative explanation to the common wisdom characterising Thai foreign relations, this chapter aims to explore how the proactive orientation in Thai foreign policy during the Thaksin government was elaborated through the 'Forward Engagement Strategy'—particularly, in regional co-operation. Based on the cognitive approach outlined in Chapter Three, this chapter focuses on the adoption of self-perception as a guideline to shape Thailand's policy direction. Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter's main focus is on explaining how a key ideational factor—regional aspirations— influenced the direction of this foreign policy strategy. In other words, the chapter
attempts to show how Thailand’s regional aspirations during the Thaksin era were expressed and translated into foreign policy within the context of Thailand’s economic recovery after the 1997 Financial Crisis. Its main aim is to trace and identify the influence of Thailand’s regional aspirations in the general evolution of the Forward Engagement Strategy rather than examining in detail at the implementation of each initiative.

Thaksin’s foreign policy was interesting in many respects. First, the economic and political circumstances at the time put Thaksin in a special position. As a result of the Financial Crisis, the second Chuan government had to manage the economy within the IMF panacea package which was accused by many Thais of ‘selling out’ the country to foreigners (Matichon 10 December 1998, p.2). This electoral disillusionment towards the end of the Chuan government gave rise to inward-looking nationalist sentiment amongst the Thais (Thai Post 22 November 1998, p.3). Meanwhile, Thaksin emerged within a rapidly changing political setting framed by the new 1997 constitution whose the main purpose was to engineer strong administrative power. Therefore, his general policy was certainly influenced by domestic influences. It is therefore important to understand this domestic and foreign policy nexus.

Second, regardless of the ongoing tendency of backlash attitude amongst the Thai public, and unlike other countries for which the Financial Crisis created an inward-looking foreign policy posture, Thailand during the Thaksin government did not adopt a low-key position in its international affairs. Instead, Thaksin’s foreign policy style showed the opposite direction—attempting to boost Thailand’s roles both within Southeast Asia and beyond. This was pursued notably through creating and renewing Thailand’s bilateral and regional initiatives. These include various free trade agreements, the Asian Co-operation Dialogue (ACD), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC), and the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation Strategy (ACMECS).

Moreover, Thaksin’s foreign policy also demonstrated Thailand’s confidence in its attempt to project its role beyond Thailand’s traditional sphere of influence. On the one hand, mainland Southeast Asia was still a core regional focus of Thai foreign policy. On the other hand, Thaksin also aimed at positioning Thailand as a leading actor in bridging emerging regional powers in Asia, namely China and India. Similar to the case of the
Quadrangle Economic Co-operation discussed in Chapter Five, Thaksin’s Forward Engagement strategy was also to place Thailand in a position that promoted regional co-operation. During the Thaksin period, this strategy was pursued at different levels, from those underscoring Thailand’s bilateral relations to linking to the levels of regional groupings especially in Asia.

This observation leads this chapter to explore several key questions. Why did Thaksin pursue an outward-looking foreign policy despite the inward-looking attitude emerging amongst the Thai elite and public after the 1997 Financial Crisis? To what extent and how did regional aspirations play a role in this Forward Engagement Strategy?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this chapter is structured in three main parts. Firstly, it describes Thailand’s foreign policy strategy of ‘Forward Engagement’ during the Thaksin government as a background for discussion. This strategy aimed to position Thailand as a bridge between its strategic partners mainly through promoting several initiatives for regional co-operation. This is followed by a discussion about the conditions in which this foreign policy strategy—regional approaches to co-operation—was situated. It examines the domestic-foreign policy nexus, and shows how foreign policy was used to form compromises between domestic and external forces. It suggests that foreign policy was utilised as an important tool to satisfy domestic expectations. In this political setting, Thailand’s regional aspirations are argued to be guide to identify national interest and how to achieve it. At the same time, regional contexts also helped support Thaksin’s foreign policy ambition by allowing him to assert his regional leading role amidst economic difficulties.

The third section examines the empirical evidence for the regional aspirations that existed in the minds of major Thai decision makers with regard to this Forward Engagement Strategy. Similar to the case of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, by tracing this idea mainly through available archival documents and the author’s interviews with a number of policy-making elites and government officials, this chapter identifies the relevance of this ideational factor in connection with Thai foreign policy-making.
6.1. Thaksin's foreign policy strategy: Forward Engagement in brief

After 1997, the Thai government assigned a primary emphasis to its economic recovery in an uncertain atmosphere. Thai foreign policy during the Thaksin administration was then aiming to support this ultimate goal. Instead of focusing on relations with the West as had the preceding Chuan government, Thaksin's foreign policy strategy emphasised more the creation of a web of co-operation with Thailand's strategic Asian partners under the 'Forward Engagement' strategy.

The 'Forward Engagement' strategy was part of the Thaksin government's foreign policy to promote Thailand's proactive role in international affairs. The essence of the Forward Engagement strategy was pronounced in the Parliament on 26 February 2001 as part of the government's overall foreign policy statement. The government pledged to:

- increase Thailand's proactive role in the international society by initiating the expansion of closer international ties and co-operation between ASEAN and East Asia, South Asia, and other regions. This also includes upholding the responsibility to be a central link to co-ordinate various co-operations in the region...[and] to urgently strengthen relations and co-operation for development between Thailand and neighbouring countries and Asia (SHP 2001).

Thaksin's Foreign Minister, Surakiart Sathirathai elaborated later that the focus of the Forward Engagement strategy was meant to link different sub-regions in Asia by way of creating bridging inter-regional fora. He pointed out that although there was increasing interaction between ASEAN and East Asia, as well as between ASEAN and South Asia, the precise link amongst three of these groups was less clear. He further asserted that many transnational issues required co-operation at least amongst three parties. To link different sub-regions together was then an efficient way to achieve this purpose (SHP 2001, pp.151-152). Thaksin and his foreign policy officials therefore believed that Thailand could take the lead in bringing the three different groups together.

To achieve this policy objective, the Thaksin administration emphasised Thailand's role in promoting regional co-operation. Thaksin constantly promoted his idea of pan-Asia co-
operation with China, India, and other Asian countries, called in his scheme the ‘Asia Co-operation Dialogue’ (ACD). He also renewed his government’s interest in BIMSTEC initiated during the Chavalit government as Thailand’s ‘Look West’ policy. At the same time, in order to remain an active participant in Southeast Asia he also created ACMECS as another sub-regional co-operation aimed at mainland Southeast Asian countries. Unlike the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, ACMECS encompassed all mainland Southeast Asian countries, except China. At the same time, Thailand strengthened ties with selected strategic partners in each region, such as Bahrain in the Middle East, India in South Asia, and China in East Asia (Thaksin 2002d). The Thaksin government enthusiastically promoted bilateral relations with them, particularly in the economic sector. These three regional initiatives and bilateral economic diplomacy became Thailand’s main strategic initiatives to build its international leadership during the Thaksin government.

6.1.1 The Asia Co-operation Dialogue (ACD)

The ACD was Thaksin’s primary regional initiative to cultivate co-operation across the Asian continent. It was formally launched on 18-19 June 2002 with eighteen founding members, which later expanded to thirty-one by 2008. The main objective of the ACD according to Thaksin’s initial intention was to be an open dialogue forum for Asian countries to build mutual confidence, to search for solutions to poverty, and to further co-operation for regional development based on skills, knowledge, and resources in Asia. Thaksin viewed the ACD as a complement to existing dialogues and ventures in Asia, and predicted it would ‘create synergy among bilateral, multilateral, sub-regional and regional strategic partnerships in the areas of common interests’ (Thaksin 2002e). Through this perspective, increasing interdependence in Asia would be a proper counterbalance against regional uncertainty in the economic and strategic realms. Thaksin expanded on the ACD rationale by stated that:

we have in mind a stronger Asia that can compete and contribute more effectively to the world economy...an Asian region that can maintain a self-supporting system to cushion ourselves from external shocks, be they political or economic (Thaksin 2002e).

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7 Founding members included ten ASEAN countries, Bahrain, Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Pakistan, Qatar, and South Korea. New admission was extended to Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Oman, Sri Lanka in 2003; Bhutan, Iran, Mongolia, United Arab Emirates in 2004; Russia, and Saudi Arabia in 2005; and Kyrgyzstan in 2008.
To make the ACD distinct from other forms of regional co-operation, Thaksin demarcated two dimensions in its composition. The first dimension focused on building a 'comfort zone' amongst top decision makers by way of informal consultations. ACD's annual ministerial meeting was not framed strictly by any formal agenda, but rather a free flow of discussion of common concerns and ideas for conflict resolution and strengthening co-operation. Thaksin believed that this top-down approach was conducive to moving the dialogue forward on a regular basis.

A second dimension of the ACD was the co-operation based on specifically designated projects. Each area was voluntarily run by 'prime movers' reflecting their expertise and interest. To evaluate these projects' effectiveness and progress would require a deeper assessment than space here allows. However, considering the main concern of this thesis is to examine Thailand's regional leadership, suffice it to say that the country's role in ACD during Thaksin was prominent in maintaining Thailand's politico-economic influence in the region. Apart from volunteering to host two ACD Summits in June 2002 and 2003, Thailand actively performed a co-ordinating role. It organised an ACD Breakfast Meeting and an ACD High Tea Meeting—informal meetings amongst ACD foreign ministers in New York during the 57th and 58th UN General Assemblies in September 2002 and 2003, respectively. Moreover, the Thai Foreign Ministry convened ACD ambassadorial meetings twice in Thailand, in July and December 2002, to discuss the future implementation of ACD projects and to assess the expansion of membership. Thailand’s Foreign Minister also engaged in series of separate meetings with ACD members, including with the Pakistani Finance Minister and Chinese Foreign Minister in August 2002. The MFA also dispatched its senior diplomats to discuss ACD with such other states as Japan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, India, South Korea, China, Indonesia and Brunei (MFA 2003a).

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8 At present, there are 19 areas of co-operation with prime mover(s) responsible for co-ordinating and leading activities in each area, namely: energy (Bahrain, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Qatar, China and the Philippines), poverty alleviation (Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam), agriculture (China, Pakistan and Kazakhstan), transport linkages (India, Kazakhstan and Myanmar), biotechnology (India), e-commerce (Malaysia), infrastructure fund (Malaysia), e-education (Malaysia), Asia Institute of Standards (Pakistan), SMEs co-operation (Singapore and Sri Lanka), IT development (South Korea), science and technology (the Philippines), tourism (Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Pakistan), financial co-operation (Thailand), human resource development (Vietnam and Thailand), environmental education (Japan and Qatar), strengthening legal infrastructure (Japan), road safety (Oman), natural disaster (Russia) (ACD n.d).
Thailand's role in promoting a project on financial co-operation as a prime ACD concern was significant. In parallel to the development of the Asian Bond and Currency Swap of the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), Thailand also proposed developing a similar mechanism in ACD and co-ordinated key financial discussions held by the Executives' Meeting of East Asia Pacific Central Banks (EMEAP), Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), and ASEAN+3. This proposal aimed to 'help with the larger issue of diversifying debt-financing, by encouraging Asian countries to shift from short-term bank loans to long-term bonds' (Ahmad 2003). Thailand set up a Working Group on Financial Co-operation to work out guidelines for developing sound Asian bond markets. Thailand also organised a High-level Seminar on 'Enhancing Financial Co-operation through Asian Bond Market Development' on 24–25 March 2006 in Bangkok, to discuss ways to further promote the Asian Bond market. The first ACD Finance Ministers Meeting was also held in Thailand in July 2006.

Although the Asian Bond in the ACD was still in its initial stage, it succeeded in one important aspect. It became a crucial complement to the existing financial regulation at the broader regional level (Lamberte & Yap 2003, pp.10-11). While similar activities in EMEAP, ASEAN+3, and APEC collectively worked to implement technical aspects of bond regulation, for example, Thailand made use of the ACD to raise awareness of the need for Asia to develop such financial arrangements. The ACD thus acted as a political framework within wider Asia for constructing a sound regional financial architecture. This was to achieve its goal to 'transform the Asian continent into an Asian Community, capable of interacting with the rest of the world on a more equal footing and contributing more positively towards mutual peace and prosperity' (ACD n.d.).

6.1.2 The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC)

BIMSTEC was originally initiated by Thailand during the Chavalit government in June 1997 as part of its 'Look West' policy. It originally encompassed Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and later included Myanmar and Nepal in 1997, and Bhutan in 2003, respectively. BIMSTEC's main objective was to expand co-operation between Southeast Asia and South Asia by way of closer economic interactions, mutual assistance in common concerns and provision of training and research. Priority areas of co-operation increased from six to thirteen in 2005, and included trade and investment, transportation and
communication, energy, tourism, technology, fisheries, agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, protection of biodiversity/environment and natural disaster management, culture, and people-to-people contact. Similar to ACD, each sector was led by a ‘lead country’ to co-ordinate, monitor, and facilitate activities in that area.

BIMSTEC was operated by four main mechanisms—policy-making, operational, co-ordination, and expert levels. The policy-making component involved an annual summit meeting and intermittent ministerial meetings attended by foreign ministers and trade/economic ministers. The operational body included senior official meetings (SOM) of foreign ministry and trade/economic ministries which adopted and implemented specific policies. Co-ordination was carried out by the BIMSTEC Working Group (BWG) consisting of director-general level officials, ambassadors, and other representatives in Bangkok. It convened a monthly meeting to follow up and push forward progress in each co-operative sector, as well as to study prospects and policies of co-operation before reporting to the SOM. A BIMSTEC Centre was also set up to support the work of the BWG in 2004 before a more permanent secretariat office for the organisation was finalised. Each ‘lead country’ was tasked to host the expert group discussion to identify activities and ways to strengthen co-operation. The results of dialogues were reported to BWG and SOM (BIMSTEC, n.d; MFA 2002a).

BIMSTEC’s progress was relatively slow until the Thaksin government came into power. As part of the Thaksin’s strategy to link Southeast Asia and South Asia, interest in BIMSTEC was renewed. This can be seen especially from the fact that Thailand enthusiastically proposed a free trade agreement resulting in the signing of the Framework Agreement for the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area at the Sixth Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok in February 2004. In this context, Thailand was designated as the permanent chair of the trade negotiation committee (TNC) to facilitate and frame discussion and negotiation towards the conclusion of BIMSTEC’s FTA. The progress of the FTA since then has been reflected in the agreement to reduce and eliminate tariff to the agreed rates, starting from 2006 and to be completed by 2011, for products listed in the ‘Fast Track’ scheme; and from 2007 to 2015 for the ‘Normal Track’ products (BIMSTEC n.d.).
Apart from its economic achievements, BIMSTEC was also significant in the politico-strategic aspect. BIMSTEC became a major forum for India to assert its role in East Asian affairs, and acted as a gateway for India to cultivate economic benefits with a more dynamic Southeast Asia through Thailand under the FTA scheme. At the same time, by involving itself in Southeast Asian affairs through BIMSTEC, India hoped to balance Chinese influence in the region to a degree, especially with regard to its security and economic ties with Myanmar. With a significantly large Indian population, Thailand also hoped to expand its export markets and to acquire technological knowledge from India. With an eye on Chinese influence in Myanmar, Thailand could implement a more viable hedging strategy vis-à-vis Beijing by connecting India and Southeast Asia through developing transport via Myanmar as well.

6.1.3 Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation Strategy (ACMECS)

Thailand proposed upgrading economic co-operation with the countries in mainland Southeast Asia at the ASEAN Summit on SARS held in Bangkok in April 2003. The leaders of Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand then agreed to meet at Bagan, Myanmar to push forward this initiative in November of the same year. This resulted in the adoption of the Bagan Declaration to lay out the co-operative framework aiming to foster close economic ties amongst the members for regional development. Vietnam later joined what became known as ACMECS in mid 2004 (ACMECS n.d.).

The objective of ACMECS was to strengthen the competitiveness of its members by stimulating economic development along the borders. Based on the comparative advantage of each country, ACMECS was intended to promote the movement of production to more economically competitive locations. By doing so, its member-states hoped it would stimulate employment, generate income, narrow development gaps and alleviate poverty amongst member countries. Ultimately, this would support regional development and prosperity (ACMECS 2003).

ACMECS mechanisms rested on a biennial summit meeting, annual ministerial meetings, biannual senior official meetings, bimonthly co-ordination working group meetings amongst embassies of member-countries in Bangkok, and sectoral working group meetings. The areas of co-operation were grouped into six issues including trade and investment facilitation, agricultural co-operation, industrial and energy co-operation,
transport linkages, tourism co-operation, human resource development, and public health (MFA 2007a).

As was the case with the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative, Thailand hoped ACMECS would help it to benefit from abundant natural resources and cheap labour for its sunset industries and agricultural production. At the same time, by using Thailand as a 'locomotive' for this initiative, it was anticipated that ACMECS would help bridge the gap between new and old ASEAN members. The focus on supporting projects especially in poverty alleviation, capacity building, and technical assistance also became part of Thailand's overall development assistance strategy. ACMECS was designated as a channel to provide aid and technical assistance to neighbouring countries (MFA 2007b).

Recent progress in ACMECS's objectives can be seen in Thailand agreeing to reduce tariffs on many agricultural items from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, such as soybean, corn, potatoes, and eucalyptus wood. A contract farming project was also proposed by the Thai government. This encouraged Thai investment in the agricultural sector in its neighbouring countries by guaranteeing commodity prices and granting some import privileges (Kasikorn Research Centre 2005). Thailand also pushed for an ACMECS Single Visa to facilitate tourism in the region. A pilot project on implementing a Single Visa between Thailand and Cambodia was initiated in 2005 (MFA 2005a).

In conclusion, Thailand after the 1997 Financial Crisis actively tried to utilise its foreign policy to support its economic recovery. Searching for new markets for Thailand's exports and strategic partners for economic co-operation was clearly a rationale for that country's foreign policy formulation. As Thaksin stressed in his aforementioned foreign policy statement, the Thai government would 'emphasise proactive economic diplomacy as a major thrust in its foreign policy' (Thaksin 2001f). Similar to Singapore's foreign economic policy focus, Thaksin's other key strategy in parallel with his 'regional approach' was the promotion of bilateral free trade deals with many countries including Australia, Bahrain, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Peru, and the United States.

At this point one important question emerges. Why did Thaksin and his foreign policy team pursue the multilateral strategy this way? In order words, why did the Thaksin
government create new regional fora when it could have utilised the existing regional mechanisms such as ASEAN, ASEAN+3, ASEAN+1 or APEC?

Indeed, Thaksin himself on many occasions expressed his disappointment at the ineffectiveness of multilateral negotiation and seemed to attach more importance to bilateral strategy. He observed that:

Regarding international political strategy, in the past, we became a member of many fora, such as APEC, ASEM, and ASEAN. The fact is that the bigger the forum the less we benefit in tangible terms...this is because consensus is hardly attained due to stark differences amongst members. Thus, the consensus is reached in superficial issues only. We joined these fora mainly because we were just afraid we could not catch the same train as our friends did (Thaksin 2002d).

Considering the difficulties of creating multilateral co-operation and its slow progress, even at the regional level, Thaksin's regional multilateral approach may be seen to be anomalous in his general overall foreign policy strategy. It is the author's point of view that only when considering the context in which this foreign policy strategy was formulated can this problem be understood.

The next section thus discusses this context in further detail. It suggests that the factors surrounding Thailand at both the domestic and regional levels influenced Thaksin's foreign policy strategy in several ways. That is, they reiterated the existing idea of relations between Thailand and outsiders, shaped the public sentiment for policy direction, and raised the government's confidence in asserting selected strategies at the international level.

6.2 Contextualising Thaksin's foreign policy

This section discusses the context in which the Thaksin administration operated both internally and externally. The main concern is to point to an unusual development of Thaksin's foreign policy posture towards outward orientation and proaction regardless of its backlash domestic platform. At the same time, this section also considers regional and
international environment that benefited and restrained Thailand's leading role in the region.

The 1997 Financial Crisis produced several consequences in the context of which Thaksin's foreign policy strategy was subsequently formed. These consequences had both domestic and regional aspects. They included the emergence of a backlash domestic coalition in Thailand, generating more anti-American attitudes amongst the Thais, and politically consolidating Thaksin to take advantage of an ASEAN leadership vacuum. This section contends that despite the development of contending domestic forces that may have driven Thailand to pursue a reactive and passive foreign policy Thaksin's foreign policy did not totally fall into that expectation. In contrast, Thaksin expressed his clear message that he wanted to bring Thailand into a leading position in the region in the time of economic difficulty.

6.2.1 The emergence of a backlash coalition after the 1997 Financial Crisis

The Financial Crisis in 1997 had serious affects on Thailand in both economic and socio-political terms. The crisis was viewed as a negative consequence of Thailand engaging with the globalised world. At the same time, Bangkok's subsequent bitter experience with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and with the West's unenthusiastic responses to the crisis upset many Thais. Consequently, a new phase of nationalism emerged that advocated the minimalist view of international engagement and promoted the value of 'Thai-ness'.

In regard to economics, Thailand encountered the depletion of foreign reserves, capital flight and increasing foreign debt as a result of the devaluation of the Baht, while its competitiveness in the world market plummeted commensurately (Chalongphob 1998, pp.2-3). A plethora of research elsewhere has detailed the causes and economic effects of the Crisis on the Thai economy. What matters in this study is the Thai government's responses to the crisis through its foreign policy.

As the crisis deeply affected the economy, the government's main objective was to restore national prosperity and to regain the confidence of foreign investors. A major decision under the Chavalit and Chuan governments was thus to seek financial assistance from foreign countries and international financial institutions, mainly the International
Monetary Fund (IMF). In exchange for a $US17.2 billion rescue package the Chuan government agreed to bring Thailand under the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programme. Consequently, the Thai government adopted a series of reforms in macroeconomic policy, domestic market, legal and regulatory issues. For instance, the government's budget aimed at surplus. Value added tax was raised from seven to ten per cent. Full ownership of business and property was also granted to foreigners (Matichon, 24 November 1998, p.2; Bello et al. 1998, p.1). In other words, the IMF's emphasis was to force Thailand to adopt a conventional monetarist policy and further liberalise the Thai economy following the neo-liberal 'Washington Consensus' guidelines. Adopting this policy response not only had economic effects but also rendered broad socio-political consequences.

Essentially, the economic crisis gave rise to the formation of backlash domestic coalition and another phase of Thai nationalism. Thailand's entry into the IMF's economic programme and subsequent policy reform as part of IMF conditionality were regarded as a humiliation to Thailand's national identity and self-confidence. IMF and Western foreign lenders were likened to the Western colonial aggressors who had ripped Siam apart from its original physical constitution during the mid nineteenth century. Politicians, business and civil society groups started to discuss with nationalistic sentiment against IMF's imposed privatisation schemes (FEER 14 May 1998, p.62).

Another good example of emerging nationalistic emotion during the crisis can be observed in popular media. A theme of 'defending national sovereignty' became fashionable in Thai motion picture production (Baker & Pasuk 2005, p.257). The stories of Thai historic heroes and heroines, such as Queen Suriyothai, King Naresuan, Princess Suphankalaya, Bang Rajan villagers who all fought against the Burmese enemy have been reproduced since 1998. Bang Rajan was an example of how much films based on historical narratives are popular amongst the Thais. This film aims to boost nationalistic sentiment by retelling a story of the villagers of Bang Rachan who set up their own paramilitary to fight the Burmese invaders for 5 months. This film also hit number one in Thailand's box-office in 2000 (Matichon 19 March 2001, p.5). A newspaper commentator observed this popularity,

It is like propaganda that worryingly attracts Thai audiences nowadays. But if we look at the current situation in our country which is so bad that
everyone feels like the country is sinking, a flush of nationalism that has been inculcated from the old time is quite understandable (Matichon 27 January 2001, p.6).

Interestingly, some of these films are directed by Mom Chao Chatrichalerm Yukol who is a well-known film producer and a member of the royal family. One of his films, for example, is the Legend of Suriyothai—a story of a queen during the Ayutthaya period who disguised as a man to fight against the Burmese in a battle. It was the most expensive film ever produced in Thailand at that time and remains number one in terms of revenue (ThaiPR.net 9 August 2001). It was also reported that this film received financial support from the palace (MFA 2001b) including royal patronage in production and promotion. The Queen herself ordered a drawing a painting of Queen Suriyothai out of her dream and allowed it to be a cover of a guidebook for viewing 'The Legend of Suriyothai'. The leading actress cast as Queen Suriyothai is also a member of the royal family and mentioned in public that she was selected by the Queen (Thai Post 9 August 2001, p.2).

The observation of Thai motion pictures is a good source of seeing public sentiment during the financial crisis. A Thai commentator compares this to the time after the US withdrawal from Vietnam with the sense of defeat when 'Rambo' became popular (Weekly Manager 22 January 2001, p.22). Likewise, these historical based films were also nationalistic responses to the penetration of foreigners into the Thai economy. It reflects the dichotomous feeling of, what Craig Reynolds asserts, 'thai' (free) and 'that' (slave) (2002b, p.327). These terms were then re-introduced to illustrate the relationship between Thailand and foreign financiers during the time of financial hardship.

This nationalistic view also emerged within a faction of prominent Thai elites, intellectuals, and the general public. This group argued that globalisation no longer served the interest of the Thai people. They called for the exercise of caution and suspicion over Thailand's further engagement in the globalisation process. This camp was led powerfully and influentially by the King of Thailand who has long advocated self-reliance, community-based co-operation, and 'local-knowledge solutions' (Reynolds 2002b, p.319). The King has emphasised this rationale on many occasions since the Financial Crisis erupted in July 1997. His annual birthday speech on 4 December 1997 typifies his
position and can be seen as a royal endorsement of an inward-looking and self-reliance strategy. He stated:

It is not important that we become a tiger. What matters is we have enough to live and eat, and our economy is self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency means we can support ourselves on the basis of moderation...An economy relying on trade is called ‘Trade Economy’ which is not self-sufficient. ‘Sufficient Economy’ is an economy that can fulfil itself; we can survive without struggles (Matichon, 4 December 1997, p.12).

The King’s ‘sufficiency economy’ concept connotes a notion similar to import-substitution strategy. That is, a country should rely on its domestic demands and capacity of production to reduce its expenses. Trade is viable as a mean to release surpluses or to acquire necessary goods that cannot be produced at home. It also conveys a moral directive mainly based on Buddhist philosophy focusing on the exercise of self-moderation based on necessity, self-fulfilment, and individual financial capability (Chaichoke 2001). This underlines the suggestion that a country can choose how to participate in the international economy instead of being forced to adopt a particular stance (Hewison 2005, p.285). The King’s suggestion in the wake of the financial crisis was ‘we have to go backwards, have to be careful and have to return to unsophisticated business’ (Chanda 1998, p.62). This ‘self-sufficiency’ concept was therefore repentant of improper economic strategy and consumer behaviour that had prevailed during Thailand’s economic boom. Withdrawing from deeply engaging in the capitalist economy was a solution under this idea.

At the same time, prominent Thai intellectuals and grass-root social movements embraced this concept and advocated de-linking rural development from the capitalist economy (Hewison 2000, p.286). For instance, a well-known enthusiast is Prawase Wasi, a former royal physician and a prominent intellect who gained respect within both government and NGOs (McCargo 2005, p.511). His ideas were widely welcomed by the public as his image carried an affiliation with the palace and a reputation as a moral Buddhist devotee. His view was to promote local development based on the strength of community including family and religious values (Connor 2003a, pp.156-157). He argued that Thailand competed in the world economy in areas where it does not possess any
strength, hence becoming merely a cheap labour production site. He suggests that Thailand should look back at its roots and cultural heritage. Its strength and future are actually predicated on local knowledge, wisdom, and culture. The local community should be strengthened and collectively organise their own economic activities based on its needs (Prawase 1997). By adopting this view, Prawase believes Thailand can grow stronger and avoid future crises. A survey across Thailand in September 1998 also showed that 50 per cent of 1,029 respondents favoured restrictions on foreign imports (compared to 45 per cent of favour) which showed an inward-looking tendency amongst the public (Roper Center 1998b).

Supported by the King and well-respected intellectuals, this nationalist-localist view gained support from a broad spectrum of societal groups—ranging from government agencies, academics, NGOs, to Buddhist leaders and farmers—as the solution to Thailand’s economic woes. The concept inevitably entered into the policy-making realm as ‘many government departments launched community-based schemes to combat the crisis’ (Baker & Pasuk 2005, p.256).

The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) embraced the concept and incorporated it into the Ninth Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006). In its introduction, NESDB clearly refers to the King’s sufficiency economy concept and the way in which local communities are treasured under its auspices:

The Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) is guided by the King’s sufficiency economy concept as a core element in the country’s development and administration. By attaching to the principle of ‘middle path’ Thailand will survive the financial crisis and become more stable. It will bring about balanced, sustainable, and quality development under the globalisation and changing environment...Thai culture and character are the country’s strength. Our local knowledge and wisdom will be a social immunity from the risks emanated from globalisation (NESDB 2002a).

The NESDB also set up Sufficiency Economy Working Group to facilitate and monitor the translation of this concept into policy implementation (NESDB 1999, p.30). In fact, this
concept had been integrated into the government’s budget consideration since 1999. The budget reports has clearly specified ‘sufficiency economy’ (and in several instances, ‘new theory’ concept) as a main principle to conduct many policy areas, including poverty alleviation, self-reliant rural communities (BB 2007, 2001, 2000, 1999), and economic policy (BB 2008, 2007, 2004, 2002). Therefore, this can show that the contending force that tried to push Thailand towards inward-looking orientation was powerful and well-recognised.

6.2.2 Anti-American sentiment

Moreover, the nationalistic sentiment was also intensified by the United States’ slow and seemingly callous responses to the financial crisis in Thailand. Within the $US17.2 billion bailout package under the IMF programme, the funding was mainly derived from the IMF, ADB, and Asian countries led by Japan (Chalongphob 1998, p.3). The United States was criticised not only for not offering any additional help to Thailand, but also for backing the IMF’s austerity policies (Matichon, 3 October 1998, p.8). In contrast to its slow and minimalist responses to Thailand, the United States seemed to be concerned and swift in action on the economic situation in South Korea where substantial American troops and banks are situated (Pempel 1999, p.9). As Kishore Mahbubani mentions, ‘all the Western institutions that had made loans to South Korea received phone calls from the US Treasury “advising” them not to pull out. These phone calls saved South Korea’ (2008, p.120). That had not happened earlier to Thailand.

In contrast to the United States’ position towards Thailand, other Asian countries seemed to be more rigorous and generous in offering assistance, notably Japan and China. Although initially Japan refused to offer bilateral financial assistance, it later on contributed $US4 billion to the IMF bailout package, equal to the contribution of the IMF. The Japanese government also proposed to establish an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) aiming at building Asian currency reserves to help the affected Asian economies, in which Japan would contribute US$30 billion. This initiative was overwhelmingly supported by the Thai authorities (Lipsey 2003, p.95); however, it was strongly rejected by United States in the G-7 meeting. The Japanese government therefore amended its scheme, which became the ‘Miyazawa Plan’ instead, designed to be a rescue fund for five affected Asian countries. Under this scheme Thailand received US$2.35 billion to restore its economy and to stabilise its financial market (Prachachat Thurakit, 21 December 1998,
The perception of the Thai decision makers towards Japan therefore became more favourable. This was reflected in a comment Thanong Bidaya, Thailand’s Finance Minister, who noted that ‘although I was disappointed by the Japanese government’s reaction on July 18 now I am deeply grateful. This day will be firmly engraved in Thai history’ (Lipsey 2003, p.94).

China was also seen as another ‘true friend’ that did not abandon Thailand during the financial crisis. China’s decision to contribute US$1 billion to the IMF rescue fund and not to devalue its Renminbi was applauded with appreciation by Thailand (Chuan 1999). The latter measure, particularly, gained public admirations for the Chinese leadership for helping affected economies maintain their trade competitiveness. In addition, China joined ASEAN member countries and the other ‘Plus Three’ counterparts to establish the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) in 2000 for a currency swap mechanism. Because of China’s role in this situation, the Sino-Thai relationship became closer especially during the Thaksin government.

Another source of anti-American sentiment in Thailand materialised at this time during the election of the new Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Thailand expected that the United States would support the Thai candidate, Supachai Panitchapakdi. Bangkok thought this was a foregone conclusion, given that Thailand had long been a major American politico-security anchor in Asia as well as a spearhead of liberal democracy and the free market in Southeast Asia (The Nation, 3 January 1999, p.A4). Despite this history, Washington nevertheless favoured the New Zealand candidate, Mike Moore. The conflict over selecting the WTO’s director stretched out for almost one year due to the United States lobbying for Moore. With the majority of developing countries supporting Supachai, the election outcome was not decisive, resulting in the compromise of having the two candidates sharing a position, each for a period of three years (Matichon 31 December 1999, p.9). Thailand was therefore understandably inclined to question the value of its past strategic loyalty to the United States under these circumstances.

In short, the Asian Financial Crisis resulted in a changing perception of many Thais towards its external environment. The main concern focused on how the economic crisis had derogated the pride of the nation due to Thailand losing management freedom within
its own boundaries. The conditions imposed by international financial institutions were seen as a neo-imperialist tool backed by the United States. The picture of companies selling their assets at bargain prices, many of which were bought by American companies, was interpreted as the country being bought and sold out by the hands of foreigners. This created a belief amongst many Thais that the United States actually triggered the Financial Crisis in the first place (Murphy 2008, p.268). Considering Thailand as a security ally and the first Asian nation to have entered a formal diplomatic relationship with the United States, the lack of enthusiasm and support in the crisis not only upset the Thais but also cast doubts as to the United States' real policy intentions. A rough idea of how the perception towards the US declined can be observed from the change of public opinion in favour of the US. In 1993 the Roper Center's survey indicates that 87 per cent of 1,341 respondents had a favourable attitude towards the US (Roper Center 1993). This figure dropped to 69 per cent in 1998 (Roper Center 1993). The revival of nationalism based on anti-American sentiment therefore became an important element in Thailand's post-Crisis politics. It had an impact not only on Thai politics but also on the foreign policy of the succeeding government of Thaksin Shinawatra.

6.2.3 Thaksin's consolidation of domestic platform

To understand how this domestic sentiment was incorporated into Thaksin's foreign policy position, the new context of the political system engineered by the 1997 constitution must be understood. This new political system was argued to help Thaksin consolidate his domestic platform by enabling him to widely co-opt many traditional elites and broad societal groups.

The 1997 constitution was labelled as the most democratic constitution Thailand has ever had, and was referred to as the 'People's Constitution'. It aimed at a number of reforms. Apart from creating mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability, to advance people's rights and freedom and to promote, most importantly, the new constitution was intended to create a more stable government and political institutions. For example, it required 2/5 of the existing members of the House of Representatives to initiate a no-confidence vote debate against the Prime Minister, in contrast to 1/5 in the previous constitution. It introduced the separation of executive and legislative functions by not allowing Members of Parliament to retain their seats when accepting cabinet positions (Borwornsak & Burn 1998). It also discouraged the small-party politics that had plagued
Thai politics for decades. For example, the *Political Party Act 1998* stipulated that any political party incapable of finding at least 5,000 members within 180 days after its registration must be dissolved. Moreover, it also 'replaced multiseat constituencies with 400 single-seat constituencies' (Hicken 2006, p.392). This system forced many small political parties and factions to merge with the bigger ones and reduced the number of parties.

Thaksin would probably not have been able to build his political power without utilising the domestic sentiment at the time. He understood the socio-economic context in which the Thais sought a strong leader to bring the country out from the crisis, and tried to tap into that attitude. His *Thai Rak That* (TRT) Party (the name translated in English as 'Thais love Thais') established in July 1998 obviously conveyed that intention to attract public support. With his business background, Thaksin presented himself as a new generation politician whose working style was decisive, quick, result-oriented, and guided by clear policy and strategy (Pasuk & Baker 2009, p.68). This image was opposite to that of Chuan, the Democrat Party, and the Thai bureaucracy which were blamed for bringing Thailand into deep recession and humiliation under the IMF programme (Pasuk & Baker 2009, p.69).

To attract broad political constituencies, the TRT promised to ‘bring about reform in the fundamental structure of the country in all respects, so that Thailand became strong, modern, and ready to face the challenges of the world in the new era’ (Baker & Pasuk 2005, p.258). The TRT’s populist policy paid unprecedented attention to the rural areas where Thaksin promised various grass-root schemes claimed to strengthen local communities and to alleviate poverty. The major schemes included a three-year debt moratorium for farmers, a THB30 (roughly under US$1) universal access to health care, the one tambon (district) one product (OTOP) project, and a THB1 million village fund (Crampton 2001; Somchai 2005, p.543). These schemes were seen as ‘practical steps to achieve a measure of internal self-sufficiency’ (Ganesan 2004, p.29). With these self-help and grass-root initiatives TRT was well received by many former Thai politicians, academics and NGOs.

At the same time, Thaksin was able to co-opt the Thai traditional elite. His domestic focus on rural areas seemed to correspond with the King’s idea of ‘sufficiency economy’
(Ganesan 2004, p.29), at least in the beginning of his premiership. Thus, Thaksin's nationalist and populist policy was endorsed by many elites affiliated with the palace such as Prawase and Chai-anan who also worked for Thaksin in the beginning. While the rural Thais felt direct benefits from Thaksin's populist policy, at this time the urban population and elite could also relate to it. The landslide victory in the first general election under the new 1997 constitution in January 2001 supported this general sentiment in Thailand. TRT gained 248 out of 500 seats in parliament while the rival Democrat Party received only 128 seats. With TRT's political allies added, Thaksin managed to secure 350 seats for his new coalition government. With such a result, the 1997 constitution succeeded in achieving its premier objective of creating a strong and stable executive power.

Thaksin's confidence was also boosted when he was found 'not guilty' by the Constitutional Court of allegations of asset concealment. Achieving political stability was commensurate with realising policy effectiveness, Thaksin believed, in addressing his legal issues:

Under the new constitution the government will be certainly in power for four years. No matter what will happen in the Constitutional Court, there will be no change in our policy. TRT is a leading coalition party with more than a majority. Without me as a PM, others in TRT members can also perform this role (Thaksin 2001a).

Another step in Thaksin's power consolidation was the reform of Thailand's civil service during his tenure of office. Thaksin felt that the Thai bureaucracy needed to restructure itself if it was to keep pace with the changing global environment and carry out his policy in a more effective manner (Thaksin 2001b). As a successful and experienced businessman, he applied a business management style to reforming the Thai bureaucracy. His strategy's core was actually to re-centralise decision making at all levels. What he claimed as 'decentralised' referred to the way in which senior government officials were given greater freedom in decision making and authority to expedite the implementation of policies already decided at the centre. He dubbed this approach the 'CEO style'. It was applied at the provincial level in which 'CEO Governors' had decisive authority, not only in their direct subordinate departments mainly within the Ministry of Interior, but also in any provincial government agencies within their provinces. This management style
resembled a 'top-down' approach in which CEO officials were responsible for the success of policy implementation in their areas. Simultaneously, they were directly responsible to the Prime Minister and his team (Thaksin 2001b; Hicken 2006, pp.400-401).

This management style was also adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—ambassadors were also called 'CEO Ambassadors'. They would direct and monitor the work of Thailand's other representative agencies within the realm of their own embassies' jurisdiction. Thaksin called this scheme 'Team Thailand', in which he argued ambassadors would need to share a holistic vision, be flexible, and be able to exercise leadership across different agencies. Thaksin hoped that by adopting this approach Thailand's embassies could be more assertive in protecting, pursuing, and extending Thailand's interests abroad (MFA 2002d, 2002c).

The Thaksin government pursued this strategy not only to implement its domestic policy with confidence but also to restore Thailand's position in the international community. Thaksin's confidence in his domestic platforms allowed him to steer Thailand through the financial crisis within a relatively short timeframe. He resisted the East Asia Economic Model that, in his understanding, depended mainly on foreign investment, exports and cheap labour and resources. Instead, he proposed to strengthen Thailand's domestic economy by eradicating poverty and empowering local entrepreneurship (Thaksin 2001b). His government adopted a strategy of building up productivity in Thailand's rural regions and re-energising domestic demand as an alternative to a sole reliance on export revenue and foreign investment.

Coupled with his criticism of the IMF's and of foreign lenders since his election, his economic policies worried many observers who believed that he might adopt an overly inward-looking stance for Thailand (Pasuk & Baker 2005, p.66). However, he resisted that tendency and instead asserted that he was only shaping a 'parallel path' to prosperity to those traditionally relying on foreign investment. This dual-track policy approach was expected to help the Thai economy not only to recover and strengthen but also to become a new economic model for other developing countries. He claimed, 'I am confident that within two years many developing countries will emulate our strategy' (Daily World Today, 29 June 2001, p.6).
In general, Thaksin wanted Thailand to be an exemplar of success. Exploiting anti-Western sentiments in his country, Thaksin tried to create a similar atmosphere at the regional level. Throughout his time in office, one of Thaksin's major foreign policy preoccupations was to build and link the different layers of co-operation in Asia. With his outspoken personality, supreme self-confidence, and robust working style, Thaksin was seen by many observers as a new type of leader who was right for the times and circumstances in Southeast Asia. Thaksin's attempt to elevate Thailand's international role may have been more difficult if there had been many similar contending leaders within ASEAN countries. However, many prominent Southeast Asian leaders were passing from the scene, opening up opportunities for him to assert regional leadership.

6.2.4 Leadership vacuum in Southeast Asia

In the aftermath of the financial crisis, Southeast Asia was severely disadvantaged for several reasons. These were related to problems in major ASEAN countries' economies and politics including rising tensions between some of them. These situations prevented them from performing a prominent role in international arena, and allowed Thailand to play a leading role in the crisis time.

The first disadvantage lays in the economic crisis which weakened the capacity of some countries to actively engage in regional affairs. Although the impact of the Crisis in 1997 varied in different major ASEAN countries, a common after-effect was similar in terms of the exacerbation of inward-looking sentiments similar to that prompted in Thailand. The Financial Crisis not only forced these countries to step back and heal their wounds, but also triggered many domestic changes especially in Indonesia.

Regarded by many as the natural leader of ASEAN, Indonesia did not necessarily perform as such during this time. Indonesia suffered tremendously during the financial crisis. Apart from the slump in its economy, the crisis generated several important changes in the country. After three decades in power, Suharto faced a fierce public protest against his continuing leadership. He finally resigned in 1998 leaving the transition of leadership in Indonesian politics in disarray. Suharto himself faced legal action for his alleged involvement in corruption. Violence erupted in many parts of the country, based on both separatist agendas (such as in East Timor, Aceh, and Irian Jaya) and ethno-religious segregation (such as riots in the Maluku Islands, Sulawesi and Kalimantan). The latter
included anti-Chinese minority tensions throughout much of Indonesia (Brown & Wilson 2007, p.2). At the same time, the United States pushed for further democratisation in return for supporting Indonesia's economic recovery. Coupled with international pressure on Indonesia's heavy-handed approach in East Timor, these external factors strongly influenced the Indonesian government to accept a referendum towards the independence of East Timor in 1999. Moreover, Aceh was also severely hit by the tsunami on Boxing Day 2004 causing approximately 220,000 people to be killed or missing (BBC, 25 January 2005). Although this natural disaster helped bring about a peace agreement between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (MoU 2005), it certainly cost Indonesia time and financial resources to restore damaged areas.

At the same time, the situation in the Philippines did not permit its leader to play a regional role. Although its economy was not as seriously affected by the financial crisis as other countries, it did not actually perform better than its neighbours. The country had been under the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programme from 1983 to 1998 but the economy was still volatile and inefficient (Sida 2005, pp. 55, 69). Domestic political strife also impeded the capacity of the Philippines to project greater regional leadership. President Joseph Estrada was accused of corruption and nepotism resulting in public pressure and protests against him. He was finally impeached by the parliament and replaced by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Protests against Arroyo by pro-Estrada forces muddled the country's political stability while economic stagnation continued (ISEAS 2000, 2002b). This situation seriously affected the country's image and its economy as many foreign investors felt uncertain about its political future. Moreover, the Philippines also faced Muslim separatist problems in its southern provinces led by several groups, most notably the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf. These groups have carried out bombings, kidnapping, assassination, rapes and extortion not only in the conflict areas but also in Manila itself, with Westerners also targeted. The separatist problem has seriously affected the stability of the government and become a reason for the Philippines to seek assistance from the United States especially after September 11 (Morada 2003).

Second, the foreign policy assertiveness of some ASEAN countries was also affected by the change of political leaders. As Pavin (2008) also concurs, Thaksin was once tipped to become Asia's next leader at the time when other charismatic leaders in the region...
had left the scene. From Mahathir to Badawi in Malaysia, Suharto to Habibie and Wahid in Indonesia, Lee Kuan Yew to Goh Chok Tong in Singapore, it can be seen that different personalities do matter in the shaping of national foreign policy postures and international image.

In Indonesia, the absence of Suharto and the ongoing process of democratisation in Indonesia had an impact on its foreign policy in that it was no longer guided directly by a powerful leader and a small group of political elites (Smith 2000, p.504; Dosch 2006, pp.51, 53-54). Scholars opine that Indonesian foreign policy after Suharto witnessed the declining influence of Indonesia in world affairs. Jakarta suffered from an unusually low profile, accommodating policy to the West and financial institutions, projecting a weak leadership (especially during the Habibie and Megawati periods), lacking focus, and wasting resources during the Wahid government (Smith 2000; ISEAS 2002b; Anwar 2003, pp.5-6, He 2008, p.48). At the same time, ASEAN, normally the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy, became less central to it. ASEAN's hallowed non-interference principle was threatened by Thailand's proposal of 'flexible engagement'. Though not officially endorsed, this new approach has gradually been practised by the members, even by Indonesia itself (Smith 1999, pp.257-258).

In Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad continued his nationalist policy in addressing the financial crisis via capital controls and his outspoken character in criticising the West which he believed was behind the whole thing. Internally, his leadership style created a conflict between himself and a potential political rival, Anwar Ibrahim. Mahathir persisted in promoting his nationalist policy and lavish government spending while Anwar, as Mahathir's Deputy Prime Minister, advocated IMF-style measures to underwrite tight budgets. However, in 2002 Mahathir decided to step down and handed over the premiership to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in late 2003. Against this backdrop, Malaysia's foreign policy continued to attach importance to Islamic identity, promoting a developing country posture, and assuming a critical position towards Western countries and globalisation (Saravanamuttu 2008, p.337). However, as Chaichoke (2005) argues, the personality of the Malaysian leader perhaps affected the image of Malaysia in the international forums more than most. In contrast with Mahathir, Badawi's character was softer, calmer, less aggressive and diplomatic resulting in more appeasement with foreign counterparts (p.255).
Singapore also experienced a similar trend to that of other countries in Southeast Asian countries though not as severely affected by the Financial Crisis. Singapore's foreign policy was designed to compensate for its disadvantages in geo-strategic location and ethnic dimensions. Its policy resulted in a high degree of vigilance and flexibility in balancing major powers while maintaining economic relations with most countries (Leifer 2000, pp.8-9; Thompson 2006, p.201). With its economic success, Singapore also increasingly aimed at exercising its international role. The former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was very critical of the West, notably by way of promoting 'Asian Values'. However, his successor, Goh Chok Tong, was more reserved and cautious in his foreign policy, especially towards the end of his premiership (Ciorciari 2004).

Moreover, from 1997 onward there was a series of criticisms made by ASEAN leaders directed towards each other. The rising tensions amongst ASEAN leaders also revealed their disunity, leaving ASEAN in disarray. This tension was mainly between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Despite its economic achievement, Singapore has had an image problem amongst other ASEAN countries. As the late Leifer argued, its posture often received a cold response from its neighbours (2000, p.23). It was looked upon with suspicion, especially in Malaysia and Indonesia regarding its leaders' blunt criticism of their internal affairs. From 1997, Malaysia and Singapore engaged in a series of disputes, initiated by Lee's comment on Malaysia's Johor State as 'notorious for shootings, muggings and carjackings' (Richardson 1997). Bilateral relations between Singapore and Malaysia experienced another downturn following Lee's book entitled *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* published in 1998. In his book, Lee harshly criticised post-independence Malay leaders for obstructing the creation of multicultural Malaysia in which other races especially the Chinese minority would be treated equally. This policy eventually forced Singapore, choose its independence rather than merging with Malaysia to which Lee regretted (Lee 1998). Malaysia responded by suspending the Singaporean Air Force's over-flight rights to Malaysian airspace, and withdrawing from that year's STARDEX exercise of the Five Power Defence Arrangements. Malaysia also summoned Singapore's ambassador to explain Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's comment that ethnic Malays in Singapore do better than those in Malaysia (*AFP*, 26 January 2001). The bilateral relationship resumed greater normalcy when Badawi became Prime Minister.
Singapore’s relations with Indonesia were also strained by Lee’s comment on Habibie’s qualifications for presidency in 1998. The latter retorted by downgrading economic ties with Singapore and by disparaging the island state as just a ‘little red dot’ on the map (Srilal 1999). These negative images and its small size, in general, prevented Singapore from exercising the degree of regional leadership to the extent that it perhaps believes it deserves.

Therefore, domestic environments within and regional tensions amongst major ASEAN countries revealed ASEAN’s lack of unity and strength as a whole and within each member-state. These factors, in a way, aggravated the historical divisions between archipelago and mainland Southeast Asia states. While ASEAN became mired in internecine disputes, the parallel situation in Thailand was working more favourably for the government. Thailand’s greater political stability after the 2001 election and the TRT’s growing confidence paved the way for Thaksin to step into the regional and international scene more forcefully.

This regional reference is important to Thailand’s attempt to play a leading role. While most of the major ASEAN countries were still cleaning up their house in the aftermath of the financial crisis, other smaller countries could not afford resources to take a regional role either. Quieter leaders of major ASEAN countries, in a turn, placed a full spotlight on Thailand’s readiness for regional leadership. Thaksin’s policy success at home also inspired some countries in the region to study and adopt his strategy—Thaksinomics—to recover their economies including Indonesia, the Philippines or even China (Perrin 2003). At the same time one of the healthiest economy, Singapore, which may have been able to assume the leading role, saw its limits as mentioned earlier, hence supporting Thailand’s role. As the president of US-ASEAN Business Council opined on Thailand’s leading role in ASEAN economic integration, ‘the city state was a reluctant leader of the regional grouping so it had passed on its ambition to Thailand’ (Bangkok Post 2004, p.1).

Many regional leaders also explicitly and implicitly expected Thaksin to lead ASEAN. It was also reported in the media that during the Ninth ASEAN Summit in October 2003 in Bali, Indonesia, the Cambodian leader commended Thailand for its leading role in containing the spread of SARS, assisting Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, including Thailand’s measures in counter-terrorism and the arrest of Hambali (Khao Sod 8 October
It also reported that President Megawati after finishing her farewell remarks in tears to Mahathir on his planning to step down from a political career, came to shake hands with Thaksin. She expressed her support for Thaksin to continue strengthening ASEAN before both held hands and walked out from the meeting room (Thai News Agency 8 October 2003, p.4). On the following occasion in the same month of APEC Summit in Bangkok, Goh Chok Tong and many leaders also honoured Thaksin as the next ASEAN leader (Thai Post 12 November 2003, p.4).

At the same time, Thailand’s leading position in the region was also acknowledged by external powers. For example, during the same ASEAN Summit, Japan and Thailand also signed an MOU on Japan-Thailand Partnership Program (JTPP) to strengthen their close co-operation and partnership in organising technical training for developing countries. This signified Japanese perception of Thailand’s ability to lead development programme in the developing world especially in Indochina (Manager 13 December 2003, p. 2). Moreover, the US soon after the APEC Summit in Bangkok 2003 granted Thailand Major Non-NATO Ally status following Thailand’s support in Afghanistan and the arrest of Southeast Asia’s prominent terrorist leader, Hambali. This status helped reaffirm Bangkok’s special relationship with the US as reflected by a senior military in the Thai Army, Lieutenant General Khemarat Kanchanawat, Director of Operation Group in the Thai Armed Forced Headquarters. He states:

the MNNA is merely a diplomatic term to emphasise a special degree of close relationship. This is because militarily we have already had a military alliance with the US under SEATO treaty. Even though the organisation was abolished, in practice the treaty is still binding until now as we can see from our joint military operation (Daily News 23 October 2003, p.3).

Thaksin’s personality also contributed to this regional ambition. With his strong personality and ability to speak English effectively, Thaksin had no problem presenting himself in the international media. He ‘travelled abroad more often than any Thai leader in recent history...[and] enjoyed contact with [the] international business community...[with] no lack of initiative’ (Ciorciari 2004). He was not also reluctant to criticise and comment on the West or international institutions making his approach akin to that of the old generation of outspoken ASEAN leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew and
Mahathir. In fact, he expressed his admiration for both those leaders' leadership styles (Pasuk 2004, p.2). Therefore, many observers concluded that Thaksin was 'in a position to allow Thailand to assume a regional leadership role' (Ganesan 2004, p.39), or 'poised to become Southeast Asia's senior statesman' (Montesano 2003, p.82).

It can be said that Thaksin's confidence was directly associated with the political support he was enjoying in the domestic domain. Although the regional situation was supportive of his projection of Thailand's leading role at the regional level, the concern was how his external relations would be managed. Similar to what the 'two-level game' suggests, his victory in the election signified that his government needed to satisfy his constituencies by restoring not only the economy but also Thailand's national pride. An inward-looking foreign policy would be a possible option but may not have been compatible with the reality that Thailand was now closely knit into the global economy. Being in the middle position to negotiate both domestic and international pressures, Thaksin selected a regional approach as a significant mover in his foreign policy. The next section therefore examines this policy preference in the Forward Engagement Strategy.

6.3 Examining Thailand's regional aspirations in the Forward Engagement Strategy

This section assesses the connection between Thaksin's foreign policy strategy of Forward Engagement and the ideational factor—self-perception—extracted from domestic and regional environments discussed in this chapter's previous sections. It traces the influence of the idea of self-perception mainly amongst Thailand's top policy-making elite and that on Thailand's foreign policy preferences. Moreover, this foreign policy strategy not only shows how Thailand's self-perception and aspirations were influential in decision-making, but also reflects the characteristics of Thailand's regional aspirations discussed in Chapter Four. To reiterate, they include the policy preferences to improve Thailand's economic competitiveness, to position Thailand's centrality in international affairs, and to seek multilateral approaches.

It is important to note here that this chapter focuses more on Thaksin and his Foreign Minister's expression of their regional aspirations rather than that of governmental agencies as previously discussed in Chapter Five. As Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1961) assert, state's decision-making and action is carried out by those who have an authority to
‘act in the name of the state’ (p.189). Therefore, the focuses between this chapter and the previous one are different due to the nature of decision-making in a particular time.

Thai foreign policy during the Thaksin government was somewhat different in nature from that during the Chuan government mentioned in the previous chapter. Thaksin and his Foreign Minister, Surakiart Sathirathai played a prominent role in foreign policy initiative. Decision-making was more centralised as reflected in his bureaucratic reform in ‘CEO management’ style. As critics say, ‘from 2001-2006, Prime Minister Thaksin implemented a myriad grandiose foreign policy idea...He colonised the Foreign Ministry’ (Pavin 2010). Unlike Chuan and most of previous Thai governments that relied on technocrats to elaborate and implement foreign policy (Thitinan 2004a), Thaksin closely monitored and sometimes intervened in policy implementation so that it also served his domestic populist agenda. As Thitinan, a prominent Thai scholar observes,

Thaksin became more attentive to designing a coherent and forward-looking foreign policy platform. Amidst a crowded international landscape full of international and regional organisations tasked with all matters of cooperation among states, the Thaksin foreign policy team tried to carve out its own space in international affairs with very limited input from the MFA (Thitinan 2004a).

Not only was MFA’s role reduced, but ‘NESDB was relieved of its old role as a planning agency’ (Pasuk & Baker 2004, p.114). On the interview of Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, he also criticised this changing role of planning agencies and stated that ‘MFA and NESDB merely received orders from above to implement’ (19 December 2007). This is also in agreement with the Director-General of East Asian Affairs, Anuson Chinwanno that ‘during Thaksin the role of government officials changed from policy-making to policy implementation’ (interview on 7 June 2008). Therefore, the role of government officials was subordinated to Thaksin’s direct command and his foreign policy team.

At the same time Thaksin’s foreign policy style and policy agenda interestingly resembled those of Chatichai. Thitinan explains this similarity as due to the fact that both ‘shared the same coterie of policy advisors, and they both favored elected politicians and ministers over unelected bureaucrats and generals’ (Thitinan 2009).
This can also imply that the idea of positioning Thailand as a leading actor in Southeast Asia was sustained and passed on to Thaksin’s foreign policy. It is not thus unusual to observe the continuity in proactive foreign policy behaviour.

Thaksin’s view on Thailand’s situation is broadly captured by his 2001 policy address to the Parliament. He attempted to link public sentiment of the crisis and his policy stance. That is, the financial crisis brought about the loss of Thailand’s pride in the international community. He stated:

The government realises that Thailand is the country abundant with biodiversity and unique culture. Thai people possess a great skill, craftsmanship, perseverance, and diligence. If they are supported and given opportunity to fully utilise these qualities to make use of what their motherland offers them, it will bring back Thailand’s strength. Thai people can stand on their own feet once again with honour, prestige, and pride of being Thai (Thaksin 2001f).

He also conveyed his frustration at Thailand’s declining competitiveness in the world economy as ranked by the International Management for Development (IMD). He said he was ‘not proud at all to mention about it’ (Thaksin 2001g). By employing such rhetoric, he was able to pressure ensconced policy elites and effectively warn them about the growing public frustration with their traditional ways of doing business.

Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai was particularly forceful in asserting that Thai foreign policy needed to be part of the country’s strategic priority to bring back viability to the Thai economy. He asserted that an important element of this strategy was to build up recognition of Thailand’s role in the international community. He argued that, as a small country, Thailand needed to make itself known, interesting and meaningful. By focusing on deepening ties with its neighbouring countries and Asian friends comprised of regional powers and important commodity producers, Thailand’s initiatives for Asian cooperation would catch the world’s attention (Thansettakij, 16 August 2001, pp.8-9).

To demonstrate the regional aspirations in the Forward Engagement Strategy, it is useful to delineate the topic into several aspects. These aspects were considered to be areas
where regional aspirations were intended to raise Thailand's leadership profile at the international level. Thitinan asserts, 'Its key initiatives exhibited the ambitions of an aspiring middle power' (Thitinan 2009). They include policy preferences towards repositioning Thailand as a centre of co-operation, promoting Asian regionalism, and the management of regional order.

6.3.1 Positioning Thailand as a central link in regional co-operation

The core essence of the Forward Engagement Strategy was designed primarily to place Thailand as a more influential actor in the international community. It reflects the underlying vision amongst the top policy-making elite of an appropriate role Thailand should play and how to materialise it. In other words, it shows that Thai policy-makers perceive that becoming a link or bridge between various fora and partners would best serve Thailand's policy interests. The adoption of this foreign policy preference was explained by Surakiart as 'building Thailand's high profile and put itself on the “radar screen” of international community' (interview on 13 February 2008).

Pasuk and Baker (2004) explain this strategy as one major part of Thaksin's foreign economic policies primarily due to the surrounding environment at that time. China's growth and its role in the region after the 1997 Financial Crisis was prominent (2004, p.123). The Director-General of ASEAN Affairs, Anuson Chinwanno, also agrees with the China factor. He further asserts 'Thaksin saw Thailand's special position both in terms of its geographical proximity and smooth relations with less historical conflict or negative memories compared to other Southeast Asian countries' (interview on 4 January 2008). Surakiart also expressed the same view that 'Thailand does not have any enemy while regional powers like China and Japan do not trust each other, so we were in an appropriate position to push forwards regional co-operation' (interview on 13 February 2008). Therefore, Thaksin and his foreign policy team hoped that playing a role as an important bridge between China and other Asian countries in support for closer integration would benefit Thailand's efforts to increase its competitiveness.

Thaksin's foreign strategy had both bilateral and multilateral dimensions. Thaksin's foreign policy on bilateral relations can be understood within this framework. Bilateral relations would constitute the foundation upon which Thailand's regional initiatives would rest. Not only did Thailand benefit from expanding its market relations with
selected partners but would also gain wider access to other markets previously unexploited or underdeveloped.

Therefore, by creating a 'hub-and-spokes' web of bilateralism (as illustrated in Figure 6.1) Thailand could better pursue its regional approach to co-operation. In Thaksin's rationale, the net benefit of this approach would be Thailand's successful culmination of FTAs with bigger economies. Thaksin thought a smaller economy such as Thailand has a limited capacity to absorb imports, while it gains from larger markets for its exports. His country could gain from greater market access to both individual countries and sub-regional complexes. At the same time, Thailand also expected to increase its attractiveness as an investment location by becoming the gateway to broader economic groupings (Thaksin 2002d). As Thaksin characterised this assumption:

Instead of [foreign investors] relocating all of their productions to China, if they produce in Thailand they can sell their products not only in China, but also in India, Japan, Australia, the United States, and the Persian Gulf countries. If they produce in China, they can only sell to the Chinese, not to the Indians (Thaksin 2002f)

![Diagram of Thailand's major strategic partners during the Thaksin government](image)

**Figure 6.1: Thailand's major strategic partners during the Thaksin government**

Furthermore, bilateral and regional approaches to co-operation in Thaksin's foreign policy also complimented one another in ways to achieve Thailand's economic recovery from the financial crisis. In Thaksin's mind, this strategy of positioning Thailand as a
bridge through bilateralism would result in supporting his ambitions for a Thai role in regional multilateralism.

For instance, regarding ties with Singapore, Thailand and Singapore strengthened their strategic partnership based on the 1997 Singapore-Thailand Enhanced Partnership (STEP) and the 2003 Singapore-Thailand Enhanced Economic Relationship (STEER). Under these arrangements, both countries agreed to promote economic co-operation based on the 'minimalist' and 'readiness' postures. They proposed to negotiate FTAs with many individual countries. They claimed that this approach was approved by APEC which allows 'small group of APEC economies [to] start work on a new initiative while others decide if they should follow' (MFA 2002b). Along with Singapore, Thaksin believed that Thailand could not afford to wait for all ASEAN countries to reach a group consensus to speed up AFTA. Bilateral FTAs would encourage competitive negotiations towards greater free trade. The logic of this bilateral approach was to stimulate multilateralism in ASEAN as a building block towards ASEAN Economic Community. This view can be seen from Thaksin's conversation with Lee Kwan Yew on this issue:

> We [Thailand and Singapore] must tango together to open the dance floor. If nobody is willing to open the floor there will be no dancers. We welcome anybody who is ready to join...Therefore, we must re-invigorate this environment in ASEAN (Thaksin 2001c).

Another example of this strategy is the Thailand-India relationship. Thailand was the first country in Southeast Asia to strengthen relations with India in both security and economic spheres since the end of the Cold War (Singh 2007, p.20). Thaksin and Surakiart also placed India as high priority, key country to foster closer co-operation between South Asia and ASEAN (Surakiart 2003). This can be seen from the frequency of bilateral Thai-Indian discussions at the top level. Thaksin made two official visits to India within four months, the first in late November 2001 and again in early February 2002. He paid another working visit to India in mid-2005. Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee also stopped over in Bangkok after the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia in November 2002, and made an official visit to Thailand in early October 2003. His successor, Manmohan Singh, also visited in July 2004. In the period of 2001-2005, the Thaksin government...
signed more than ten bilateral agreements with India including one for the establishment of a free trade area in 2003 (Chulacheeb 2007; MFA 2008a).

Thaksin sought any opportunity to strengthen Thai-Indian ties. He understood that India’s primary security concerns were related to counter-terrorism and maritime security (SC 2002, p.24). He agreed to India's request for strengthening bilateral security co-operation before other issues were negotiated. Therefore, the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Security Issues was established in November 2002, headed by the NSC for the Thai side and the Ministry of External Affairs for the Indian counterpart. It acts as a co-ordinating body for a broad range of bilateral security concerns including anti-terrorism and transnational crime, defence issues, and legal issues related to security including co-operation in legal mutual assistance in criminal matters (signed in 2004) and an extradition treaty (interview with Prakit Prachonpachanuek, former NSC Secretary-General on 5 January 2008). After the JWG was set up, less than a year passed before the FTA negotiations were initiated and a negotiation framework was formed in 2003.

Through closer Thai-Indian economic ties as a result of the FTA, Bangkok expected that it could be a central link for India to Southeast Asia, vice versa. In Surakiart’s words:

> Thailand is the natural gateway for economic activities in Southeast Asia. Economic integration is being intensified within the region [under AFTA]...Thailand recognizes India as a hub for forging business activities in the sub-continent of South Asia. Likewise, India can look at Thailand as a gateway to countries in the Greater Mekong region and ASEAN as a whole (Surakiart 2003, p.58).

This strategy of linking various sub-regions through Thailand as a key bridging actor is illustrated in Figure 6.2. BIMSTEC can thus be seen as a bridging forum between the two regions—Southeast Asia and South Asia—supported by close ties and the active roles of Thailand and India as the cornerstone. At the same time, BIMSTEC not only provides a way in which economic co-operation between the two regions is cultivated but also offers another possibility for Thailand to seek a partner for development in its own backyard—the Greater Mekong sub-region. Surakiart remarked that India was an important counterpart in the Mekong Basin’s development and encouraged Indian investors to seek
economic opportunities in this locale through supporting co-operative projects in BIMSTEC (2003, pp.58-60). Moreover, Thailand also hoped that BIMSTEC would ultimately serve as a crucial piece of the jigsaw of the greater Asian co-operation in ACD. As Surakiart said, ‘strengthening linkages is what BIMSTEC is all about’ (2004b, p.206).

Figure 6.2: Thailand’s major regional co-operation web in Asia under Thaksin

These examples show that at the micro-level Thaksin actively deepened the bilateral relations with selected strategic partners. Certainly, these ties served to secure Thailand’s economic interest but, at the same time, they were important policy tools for cultivating a broader regional co-operation. Thaksin’s ultimate regional ambition was to construct a pan-Asian co-operation by way of ACD. In fact, the idea of positioning Thailand as a regional link was not totally new but has been included in Thailand’s policy preference since the end of the Cold War. The Quadrangle Economic Co-operation and other sub-regional initiatives in the first half of the 1990s confirm that tendency. The Thaksin government also shared this view and elaborated on it in a more active manner. His hope was ‘to see Thailand as an Asian Geneva where most international summits, negotiations, and conflict resolutions may take place’ (SC 2002, p.26). He claimed that after his various regional initiatives were implemented Thailand was stronger and more influential in everyone’s eyes compared to when the financial crisis exploded (Thaksin 2002d). In order to realise his Asian co-operation scheme, not only did Thaksin promote concomitant regional initiatives but he also adopted a strategy to position Thailand’s Asian identity as a central pinion of his foreign policy agenda.
6.3.2 Advocating Asian consciousness for Asian regionalism

Thaksin's foreign policy in relation to regional co-operation can be again related to Thailand's domestic politics in the aftermath of the 1997 Financial Crisis. The Thaksin administration became a mediating actor between the country's domestic backlash and the internationalist coalitions. The former was supported by the traditional elite and local capitalists found in such venues as the palace, intellectual centres (i.e. universities), the local banking industry, the middle class, agro-industry, entertainment producers, automobile parts producers and the urban poor who suffered most from the crisis. Thaksin's business interests in the telecommunication sector also belonged to this group as a sector that required state protection from foreign competition in domestic market. The internationalist approach, on the other hand, was preferred by certain sectors of the bureaucracy (especially the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Thailand), export-intensive industries, and joint venture companies with foreign firms, and multinational firms (Pasuk 2004, pp.7-8).

The compromise structured between the two domestic forces resulted in Thailand's re-orientation towards a position reflecting neither a totally inward-looking nor totally internationalist outward-looking approach. As Etel Solingen suggests, Thaksin's coalition promoted a hybrid of policy, an 'alternative to internationalisation and "inward-looking" models' (2004, p.205; 2005, p.7). This foreign policy was rather a selective regionalist outward-looking orientation. The regionalist approach, while remaining open to the international economy, assigned priority to the expansion of co-operation within a selected geographical area, which in Thaksin's view, was Asia. By pursuing this regional approach focusing on Asia Thaksin also thought Thailand would be able to assert its role and easily helped Thailand's attempt to expand its markets (Pasuk & Baker, p.123). The ACD was his brainchild setup to realise this ambition.

A strategy to promote Asian regionalism was not only meant to promote the ACD as a pan-Asian regional institution. It was also intended to advocate a shared Asian identity in support of this regional scheme. Throughout his campaign for the ACD, Thaksin emphasised how Asian countries could help each other instead of relying on 'others'. This constituted an indirect attack on the United States, its Western allies and their international institutions. However, this foreign policy posture cannot be seen as an anti-foreigner policy per se. In reality, it was hardly feasible that Thailand would have pursued
such an inward-looking direction considering its long history of international engagement
and its interest in participating in the global economy. The regionalist policy adopted by
Thaksin was more designed to be a means for mediating global shocks and uncertainties
cauised by the financial crisis and overcome through building a strong network of Asian
co-operation.

Paralleling Thaksin's domestic policy to create a strong economy through reinvigorating
domestic production and consumption was his Asian co-operative scheme. This also
envisioned the construction of a strong Asia based on its abundant resources and large
market. The Thai Prime Minister expressed this idea during the 2001 Fortune Global
Forum in Hong Kong on the topic of 'Next Generation Asia'. He argued that Asia was a
potential region for future growth. Considering Asia's population of more than three
billion, its possession of one-third of the world's economy, and its currency reserves of
more than half of the world's total, Thaksin believed that with sufficient co-operation 'Asia
will regain its leading role in the business and financial world'. (Thaksin 2001d, 2002e).
He further asserted that Asia had been pressured into a subordinate position by relying
on external markets. In these circumstances, Asian countries had to compete with each
other by offering lower costs of production and by cutting the price of their products. This
resulted in augmenting the benefit of consumers and producers in the West, while Asian
peoples received only minor shares. Therefore, Thaksin proposed that

It is necessary for Asia to change from competing with each other to sell
their products outside the region to deepening the linkage of regional
trading networks...to expand intra-Asian trade' (Thaksin 2001d).

Thaksin and Surakiart started to promote their pan-Asian co-operation idea around the
Asia continent in 2001, focusing on cultivating Thailand's natural strategic partners in the
region. Thaksin travelled to China, Japan, Hong Kong, and India, seeking their readiness to
co-operate with Thailand as a core group (SC 2002; Thaksin 2002b). It can be seen that
Thaksin's initiative was successful and supported by these major Asian countries due
partly to Thailand's continued good relations with them. At the same time, by courting
these major players Thailand realised that other smaller nations would be interested in
joining the ACD as well.
On the inauguration of the ACD in 2002, Thaksin emphasised how Asia had been glorious in the past until it was humiliated by colonialism during the nineteenth century. He further observed that in the twentieth century Asia revived and attained prosperity and wealth until the 1997 Financial Crisis. Coupled with the rise of international terrorism, Asia had been weakened and needed to protect itself from further uncertainties. However, Asia still lacked a forum that covered the whole region and could instil sufficient confidence into Asian countries. Asia could not be strong unless a shared Asian identity was generated. He insisted that:

The emergence of Asian-consciousness, and with it Asian confidence and creativity, will be a key factor in the maturing of the region... The turning point will come when Vietnamese soap operas top the TV rating in Indonesia, when Indonesian pop stars play to packed stadiums in Thailand, when a Thai fashion designer sells clothes like hotcakes in Shanghai and when a Chinese feature film breaks box office records across Asia (Thaksin 2001e).

Thaksin believed that the ACD would be an effective channel for Asian countries to address their mutual interests in co-operation because its interoperability was not dependent on a consensus of the whole, but rather on a like-minded group prevailing in discussion (Thaksin 2002a). Therefore, the ACD avoided other impasses on voting issues. Consistent with his approach to free trade negotiation, his model for regional multilateralism also rested upon a ‘2+x model’, that is, any co-operative project can be started with at least two countries while others can join later.

To operationalise this Asian consciousness within the ACD, Thaksin did not hesitate to use a language that was intended to stir up the Asian consciousness even in his Asian Bond scheme. He stated that the Asian Bond would be a financial instrument to help maximise Asia’s potential and ‘prevent exploitation of [Asian] reserves by others against the interest of [Asians]’ (Thaksin 2002a). Though realising the similar development of such financial mechanisms elsewhere in Asia, especially within the ASEAN+3 framework, Thaksin reasoned that such a mechanism was likely to benefit a limited numbers of countries, and could only be called ‘an “East Asian Bond”, not an Asian Bond’ (Thaksin 2005a). He further asserted, ‘while the EU seems to offer Euro currency and Eurobond to us in Asia, is
it an appropriate time for us to offer Asianbond to our European partner?’ (Thaksin 2002a). He hoped that the Asian Bond could be a financial investment alternative for the region and outsiders. It would ‘attract more capital for development projects’ in the region. Once developed and widely accepted it could help Asian financial market ‘become more mature’, and ‘contribute to overall stability’ of the regional ‘and world’s financial system’ (Thaksin 2005c).

Since the proposal of the Asian Bond, Thailand has rigorously pursued the plan. Thaksin directed the Finance Ministry and the Bank of Thailand to conduct a technical study while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for mobilising diplomatic support for the scheme. However, gaining internal agreement over the Asia Bond was not as easy as initially expected despite Thaksin’s direct command. Tej Bunnag9 recalled that Thaksin also had to put in an enormous effort to convince both economic agencies to share his vision and support him in this financial scheme (interview on 29 February 2008).

After raising the Asian Bond idea at the inaugural meeting in Thailand, According to the MFA’s document (2003b), the MFA invited the governor of Hong Kong’s central bank and the Pakistani Finance Minister for discussions about details of the plan in mid-August 2002. The parties agreed on three steps. First, the Working Group on Financial Co-operation in the ACD would be set up. Hong Kong would be responsible for technical studies while Thailand was in charge of marketing the scheme. The Working Group convened for the first time in May 2003 in Bangkok to draft a formal plan for the Asian Bond. Second, it was agreed that the Asian Bond Fund would be established by each interested party pooling one per cent of its currency reserves into this fund. India and Pakistan committed to contributing US$1 billion and US$50 million to the fund, respectively. Third, three elements would be put in place: (1) a credit rating agency; (2) securitisation; and (3) a credit guarantee facility developed by professionals and recognised internationally. Thailand took a proactive role in campaigning for this scheme both within Asia and beyond including in APEC, ASEAN+3, NAM, and World Economic Forum. This resulted in many major Asian economies supporting the Asian Bond, including China, Japan, India, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the

9 The former Thai Ambassador to the China, the UN, France, and United States, the MFA Permanent Secretary during Thaksin, former senior advisor to the King, and former Foreign Minister during the Samak government.
ASEAN member states. This support was evident in the Chiang Mai Declaration on Asian Bond Market Development at the 2nd ACD Ministerial Meeting in June 2003 (MFA 2003b).

Thus, Thailand’s role in propelling the ACD process was significant. Although the ACD initiative was criticised by many extra-regional observers as merely being another ‘talking shop’ without any significant substance (Matichon, 19 May 2002, pp.2, 5), Thaksin had demonstrated that he could exercise his political leadership successfully to mobilise Asian countries’ support for his regional initiatives. In fact, as argued by Vitavas Srivihok, Director-General of ASEAN Affairs, ‘we [Thailand] wanted it to be a ‘talkfest’ for a while so that it could break the ice and build mutual trust and confidence’ (interview on 4 January 2008). Thailand’s strategy in the ACD was to emphasise its core value as an element of informal discussions. That would promote a sense of regional belonging amongst Asian states (MFA 2003c). This was demonstrated by the acceptance of major Asian economies including China, Japan, and India including other members’ active participation in their priority projects. Despite the common interest of the ACD member countries shown in various co-operative projects it cannot be denied that Thaksin and his foreign policy team’s attempt to raise Asian identity or consciousness as a group vis-à-vis other regional groupings also contributed to the progress of the ACD.

Therefore, we can see a nexus between Thailand’s domestic politics and its foreign policy direction. Anti-Western sentiment and nationalism after the financial crisis not only influenced the Thaksin government to adopt a more populist policy as a political compromise. It also supported the idea of repositioning Thailand as a linkage between Asian sub-regions in a way in which Thailand’s profile could be elevated in the international community, hence self-perception was sustained. It resulted in Thaksin’s Forward Engagement Strategy bridging co-operation across Asia. The ACD performed the role of a conduit for regional commerce and identity. Thaksin believed that this historically changed the geo-politics of Asia in the sense that the ACD was the only forum that was able to include countries across the entire Asia continent. In his opinion, it was an important step for Asia to become a unified actor and to lead the world (Thai Post 16 June 2002, pp.1, 9; Matichon 19 June 2002, p.2).
6.3.3 Managing regional order

The Forward Engagement Strategy based on the three major regional initiatives—ACD, BIMSTEC, and ACMECS—also had significant implications for the regional order in Asia. Thailand's foreign policy during Thaksin marked an interesting move of a medium-sized state in Southeast Asia that sought to not only to maintain but also to restructure the regional order. With regard to the aforementioned domestic and foreign policy direction, Thaksin's regionalist approach suggests that Thailand at this time may have attempted to reshape the region in a way to which major Asian powers accorded greater status. In explaining this strategic calculation, Thaksin hoped to achieve his foreign policy objective of:

[building] a peaceful environment in the region so as to open up opportunities for every country in Asia as a whole to help each other to develop Asian economies. This is to achieve a goal of building Asia as a significant trading partner with the United States and the EU, including each country increasing intra-regional trade and decreasing markets outside the region (MFA 2001h)

From the above statement, several essential points can be derived. First, Thailand wanted to strengthen Asian co-operation as it had done through focusing on various regional initiatives including ACD, BIMSTEC, and ACMECS. Second, it can be concluded that, though not explicit, Thai foreign policy-makers preferred to see the emergence of an Asian regional bloc to compete with the United States and the Europeans. Ultimately, by pursuing this policy direction Thailand would play a central role both in Southeast Asia and throughout the wider region (MFA 2002e).

(a) Consolidating the Asian bloc

To reiterate, the experience of the 1997 Financial Crisis strongly influenced the Thaksin government's view towards the global economy. Thai foreign policy-makers were not reluctant to express their frustration with the crisis and perceived that the ongoing development in the world trading system in its aftermath worked against Thailand and Asia's benefit. While Thailand and Asia still needed to trade with the United States and the EU, Thaksin was of the view that closer economic partnership within Asia was only the
way to gain tangible and enduring benefits. An MFA policy paper clearly articulated this view:

Being too content with the status quo, Asians might lose the chance of enjoying the benefits of having the largest market in the world, whereas Latin Americas are now scheduled to join NAFTA and East Europeans are to join the EU, giving the two economic blocs enormous bargaining power (MFA 2002f).

The NESDB also expressed this view. Its policy recommendations also advocated Thailand increasing its bargaining power in the world trading system. It strongly recommended that Thailand create conditions in which that country and its trading partners could collectively direct and write the rules and patterns of the international trading and financial system (MFA 2002i). This policy recommendation clearly echoed Thaksin’s idea and directive to strengthen a unified Asian voice in the international community.

This logic explains why Thailand actively promoted various schemes for regional cooperation based exclusively on Asia. By consolidating Asian economic ties, Thailand hoped that Asia as a whole could act collectively to interact with other regions from a position of strength. The MFA asserted that the Forward Engagement Strategy was aimed at seeking to 'connect existing regional frameworks to networks and cooperative frameworks in other regions...between Asia and Latin America, between Asia and Eastern Europe' (MFA 2002f). This strategy carried 'a sense of region' as a way to respond to uncertainties in the world economy emanating from unequal resource distribution that traditionally favoured the West. The shaping of an Asian regional bloc was therefore underlying Thaksin's idea.

Moreover, the Forward Engagement Strategy also demonstrated Thailand's strategies of what Evelyn Goh calls the 'omni-enmeshment' of major power and 'complex balance of influence' (Goh 2007p.?). This was through the creation of a complex web of economic cooperation and layers of dialogues where talks are more frequent and conflicts are neutralised, hence contributing to the maintenance of regional order. In the view of Thaksin's foreign policy team, the major players in Asia consisted of China, Japan, India,
and ASEAN with whom Thailand must play an active role to facilitate interactions amongst them.

The rise of China, though not explicitly expressed amongst Thai policy-makers in a negative sense, is still viewed as a challenge in the perception of Thai foreign policy-makers. Thailand’s policy paper for the national strategy towards China during the Thaksin government identified the main policy towards China as ‘preventing and eliminating the Chinese threat to Thailand’ (MFA 2001d). By realising its own weaker bargaining position, Thailand needs ‘to use co-operative and constructive engagement policy at both bilateral and multilateral level’ (SC 2003) so that China would play a constructive role in the international community. Thailand also wanted China to support its own aspirations and that of ASEAN vis-à-vis other major developed countries. Thailand received China’s full support for its ACD initiative (SC 2003). At the same time, Thailand tightened the bilateral strategic partnership with China by starting to negotiate the Joint Action Plan on Strategic Partnership that outlined various collaborative aspects to mark their thirtieth anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2005 (Smith 2005). The Action Plan was later concluded and signed in 2007 after Thaksin was ousted by the September 2006 coup.

While cultivating close ties with Beijing, Bangkok tried to find a balance in its position. The visit of Surakiart, the Foreign Minister, to Japan in 2001 signified Thailand’s desire to enmesh and balance the Chinese. An MFA report of his visit states that Surakiart discussed the role of China with the Japanese Foreign Minister. He stated: ‘China is increasingly playing her role in Asia and at the global level. Thailand also wants to see Japan to play an active and constructive role equally to that of the Chinese counterpart’ (MFA 2001c, p.2). He then raised the ACD initiative and proposed that Japan should join this forum. In a later meeting, Thaksin reiterated the ACD plan with the Japanese Prime Minister in which the latter expressed his interest, and expressed his belief in the significance of co-operation between Japan and ASEAN (MFA 2001c, p.4).

At the same time, Thaksin also noticed that India was increasingly trying to insert its presence in Southeast Asia through its ‘Look East’ policy (MFA 2001e). He, therefore, was not reluctant to pull an India factor into his regional scheme. Thai-Indian relations were boosted at both the bilateral and regional levels as evidenced in the FTA agreement,
BIMSTEC, and ACD. Thailand also agreed with India and Myanmar to develop a road link which enabled India to increase its role in Myanmar and reach mainland Southeast Asia more conveniently. By doing so, China's growing economic and geo-political influence could also be checked to a certain extent.

To summarise, Thailand sought close ties with major Asian partners by enmeshing these actors into a web of bilateral and regional co-operation. While China and Japan were members of the ASEAN+3, India was included in the picture through BIMSTEC. Ultimately, the effect of Thai diplomacy has not only maintained a co-operative atmosphere in the region but also strengthened regional bargaining power with outsiders, especially the United States. This concept was confirmed by Thaksin in the Cabinet meeting in December 2001. He agreed that Asian co-operation under ACD would be supported by three core groups of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and West Asia. He further asserted that Thailand needed to strengthen its relations with each core group first and expand to other parts of the region especially China, India and Japan. Their participation in these three regional powers in the ACD would secure the success of Thailand's regional strategy (SC 2001, p.1).

Thaksin saw his country as having a geographical advantage in pursuing regional co-operation as a link between Asian sub-regions. Once this regional scheme was stabilised 'Thailand [could] use it as a card to attract more attention especially from the United States to attach more significance to Asia and Thailand than its current stage' (SC 2001, p.2). However, the reluctance of the United States to fully help Thailand and some other Asian economies during the Financial Crisis still haunted Thailand's policy-makers. Southeast Asia was also not a priority of US foreign policy when compared with the Middle East and East Asia. Therefore, Thailand's regional approach to build Asian regionalism was designed, in part, to compensate for Washington's distancing itself from the region.

This sub-section has given a picture of how the Thaksin administration tried to assert Thailand's role in regional politics. It can see from the above discussion that in order to strengthen the regional order Thaksin chose to employ a strategy that positioned Thailand as a central mover in this enterprise. This strategy dealing with regional powers can be seen as 'active' or 'assertive' but may not represent 'proactive' foreign policy.
behaviour per se as defined by this thesis. It can be argued that it meant to contain conflict and possible emerging regional instability, hence maintaining status quo. However, from another perspective this Forward Engagement Strategy was also regarded as 'proactive' since it also introduced changes in some regional arrangements that Thailand thought it could gain benefits especially the regional financial architecture and trading regime. This is still debatable but at least affirms Thailand's attempt to play a leading role in regional affairs. Notwithstanding this difficulty to fully engage in 'proactive' policy behaviour regarding bigger regional players, Thailand's proactive role in sub-regional mainland Southeast Asia continued.

(b) Continuing interest in mainland Southeast Asia

Whilst Thailand under the Thaksin government asserted itself as a central link in an Asia-wide co-operation, its interest in mainland Southeast Asia was also strengthened. Thailand attempted to project its centrality once again in this sub-region. Its emphasis on leading mainland Southeast Asia was emphasised by Surakiart; he states:

Thailand is a regional hub for this part of the world, a position recognised by President Bush and President Prodi in their Joint Statement during the Prime Minister's visit to the United States and the European Commission. We have revitalized our relations with the neighbouring countries, both near and far (Surakiart 2004a, p.23).

Apart from existing sub-regional co-operation in Mekong sub-region monitored mainly by ADB, this time Thailand initiated its own sub-regional scheme, ACMECS, once again. That body was not only an apparatus for Thailand to narrow the development gap between old and new ASEAN states but also to consolidate its own leadership in this area. However, what differed from previous initiatives for the Mekong Basin was that we can see the Thaksin government was committed to perform a greater leading role and gradually towards more structural leadership. This can be seen from its provision of more systemic financial and technical assistance to its neighbouring countries under the ACMECS scheme. At the same time, the policy was crafted with consideration of political and socio-cultural sensitivities stemming from Thailand's bitter experiences with its neighbours throughout the post-Cold War period.
**Thailand's leadership in ACMECS**

With the realisation that Indochina could be a source of Thailand's further economic growth, Thaksin placed a great importance on bridging the development gaps between his country and others in Indochina by using Thailand the engine to drive economic development in them. This approach was dubbed by Thaksin and Surakiart: 'prosper thy neighbours' slogan (MFA 2005b, p.26).

Thailand's leadership under ACMECS can be observed in a number of ways. At the First ACMECS Ministerial Meeting in 2004 Thailand announced that it had approved THB100 million for 42 immediate projects, and was planning to inject THB10 billion into co-operation and development schemes for neighbouring countries for which THB4 billion had already been approved (MFA 2004). In addition, Thailand volunteered to build the ACMECS website as an information centre for public relations and co-ordination amongst ACMECS members (ACMECS n.d). Thailand also pledged to initiate unilateral tariff reductions for new ASEAN member countries under the ASEAN Integration System of Preference (AISP) (MFA 2004). At the ACMECS Summit in 2005 Thailand then announced the elimination of tariffs on all agricultural products from Indochinese countries under the contract farming projects and expressed its readiness to include handicraft items as well (SC 2006). By the end of 2006, it was reported that Laos was offered zero per cent tariff for its 225 agricultural products, and 5 per cent for additional 82 products (DFT n.d.).

This tariff reduction programme would also link to the proposal of contract farming. Thailand proposed a contract farming arrangement for its neighbours (particularly Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar) to grow economic crops such as cassava and sugar cane. Both parties would benefit. While low income Indochinese countries would receive more investment in rural areas and their farmers could earn more stable incomes, Thailand would procure raw materials at cheaper prices for consumption and intermediate goods production such as bio-fuel (MFA 2004). Under contract farming projects small and medium farmers would also establish linkages with regional and global value chains and markets through Thailand and higher-income countries such as China and Vietnam (Zola 2007). According to one ADB report, the contract farming scheme under ACMECS has been an exemplar for Asia-Pacific co-operation as ‘a promising way of creating or promoting market linkages in the Asian region’ (Sununtar 2008, p.16). Its effects would touch upon core issues of regional development, especially poverty reduction and
capacity building in low-income countries, contributing to bridging the development gap hence promoting regional stability at the wider level.

Moreover, Thailand also played a role in mobilising third-party support under the Partnership for Development scheme, which included Australia, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand and the ADB. At the 2004 Ministerial Meeting Japan confirmed that it would support the improvement project for Savannakhet Airport in Laos. France also pledged its financial support for ACMECS projects, while Germany and Thailand were to sign a memorandum of understanding for development partnership targeting in third countries in Indochina (MFA 2004). In 2006, Thailand also contributed THB100 million for the implementation of an anti-avian flu programme. It pledged financial support for the construction of a bridge between Thailand and Laos in Nakhon Phanom province, and for 50 per cent of the construction cost of the Chiang Khong- Houayxay bridge (SC 2006).

The ACMECS therefore represented another successful attempt by Thailand to crystallise its leadership in Southeast Asia. Similar to other Thai sub-regional initiatives, ACMECS embodies the grandest vision of Thai policy-makers since Chatichai's first dream of turning the region into a prosperous market. This vision was also reiterated by Thaksin:

> Southeast Asia as a whole cannot rise as long as its poorer members are still mired in poverty. My government is working with our neighbours to close, or at least narrow, the gaps within ASEAN. This is being done, amongst other things, through the framework of the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, or ACMECS. It is a momentous task, involving change on a grand scale, in terms of both time and resources. But it is a task that must be undertaken...in accelerating the transformation of this former battlefield into a marketplace, as envisioned a decade and a half ago (Thaksin 2005c).

*Increasing structural leadership through aid policy*

Even though Thailand is still a developing country, it started to emerge as an aid donor during the Thaksin government. This signifies an attempt to continue to play a role as a helper and to increase Thailand's leadership and influence by providing assistance to developing countries especially in Indochina and through the ACMECS scheme. To
support ACMECS schemes especially in the areas of technical assistance and human resource development, Thailand revamped its aid policy. Although Thailand's aid to foreign countries started as early as the 1980s, it was limited to humanitarian assistance to countries affected by natural disasters. Aid programmes were not systematised until 1992 when the Anand government expanded the programme. However, Thailand's overseas development assistance programme did not play an active role due to financial resource constraints, and Thailand was still a net recipient of aid.

Thailand's aid policy started to change under the Thaksin government when it announced that Thailand must emerge from a net recipient status to become a donor country following the last repayment of IMF Stand-by Arrangement in the end of July 2003, two years ahead of schedule (BOT n.d.). Thaksin declared that Thailand would stop receiving foreign aid as a recipient, but would solicit aid partnerships on the basis of equality. In this connection, he pledged to increase the foreign assistance programme focusing on Thailand's neighbours. Thailand started by offering export credit of THB3 billion to Myanmar, and THB2 billion to Cambodia and Laos (Thaksin 2003b, 2003c). Following this attempt, it can be seen that Thailand provided overseas assistance totally accounting for 0.6 per cent of gross national income in 2003, and stabilised at around 0.1-0.13 per cent in from 2005 onwards (World Bank 2010). These figures are interesting if compared with those of the United States, 0.11 per cent in 2001 (UNDP 2003, p.228) and 0.17 per cent in 2004 (UNDP 2006, p.343).

The Thai Prime Minister also restructured Thailand's aid agency during this time. Thailand's aid agency—the Department of Technical and Economic Co-operation (DTEC), was transferred from the Office of the Prime Minister to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2002 under bureaucratic reform. However, DTEC was dissolved and re-established as the Thailand International Development Co-operation Agency (TICA) in 2004. This revamp aimed at creating a unified role for Thailand's foreign affairs team and equipped with financial tools that would promote Thailand's role in international community. The new role of TICA was no longer 'to coordinate development cooperation programmes extended to Thailand and to liaise with donor governments and international organisations', but to 'steer and coordinate Thailand's technical cooperation activities under bilateral, regional, and multilateral frameworks' (TICA 2005, pp.6, 8).
This meant TICA’s role changed to support Thailand’s role in international affairs by providing assistance to foreign countries. Its objectives focused on promoting Thailand as a centre for technical co-operation in Asia. The assistance programmes under TICA were constructed to achieve six major tasks. First, the ‘bilateral programme’ was designed to provide direct assistance to a particular country by ways of development and training projects, the secondment of Thai experts, and the provision of equipment. Second, the ‘Annual International Training Courses Programme’ (AITC) was organised to support capacity building of developing countries by transferring Thailand’s experience and knowledge crucial to development process. Third, the ‘Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries Programme’ (TCDC) promoted the sharing of knowledge and technology amongst public officials from the Southern Hemisphere. Fourth, the ‘Third Country Training Programme’ (TCTP) aimed at promoting Thailand as a training ground for various international organisations in the region such as WHO, ESCAP, and UNDP. Fifth, the ‘Trilateral and Regional Cooperation Programme’ reflected Thailand’s proactive role in provision of aid and its commitment as an emerging donor country. It also provided an opportunity for Thailand to mobilise and pool financial resources with third-party donor countries to assist other developing countries. The focus was on human resource development and capacity building. Sixth, TICA also supported a volunteer programme under the project ‘Friends from Thailand’. It dispatched young volunteers to developing countries to carry out missions in human resource development and help promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges, such as Thai language instructors (TICA 2005, pp.11-14).

The connection between ACMECS and Thailand’s overseas assistance programmes has been Thailand’s active role in ACMECS itself, especially in terms of its strong commitment to provide technical assistance to Indochina. Thailand thus uses its various aid programmes to support this role. As pledged by Foreign Minister Surakiart, Thailand became ‘committed to addressing and resolving difficulties encountered by [its] neighbours... major strategic areas have been identified which will be addressed by the relevant Thai agencies’ (Surakiart 2004c, p.117), one of which is ‘technical assistance aimed at capacity building’. According to TICA’s Deputy Director, Apinan Phatarathiyanon, as ‘TICA was now under the MFA it was easier to carry out this mission without delays in inter-agency co-ordination’ (interview on 15 February 2008).
According to TICA’s statistics, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam benefited most from the TICA assistance programmes, receiving 62.25 and then 60 per cent of total assistance in 2003 and 2004, respectively. Overall, from 1999-2004 amongst these four countries Laos and Cambodia also ranked top in aid destination from Thailand, accounting for 31 and 22 per cent of net value (TICA 2005, pp.52-56). Moreover, under the TICA’s bilateral programme to the four Indochinese countries, Thailand granted technical assistance mostly in the areas of public administration and agriculture development valued at THB11.37 and THB 10.16 million in 2003, and THB 7.99 and THB 7.5 million in 2004 (TICA 2005, pp.67, 81) Thus Thailand’s aid policy and ACMECS scheme are mutually supportive, enabling Thailand to project its leading role in regional development.

According to Apinan in the same interview on 15 February 2008, unlike OECD countries in which aid policy is used mainly to support trade facilitation Thailand’s policy has assumed an ‘aid for development’ approach. That means Thailand has not focused on financial assistance unnecessarily but rather on technical assistance, based on Thai expertise and experience in collaboration with other advanced countries. These technical assistance programmes are conducted in Thailand and use Thailand’s facilities, benefitting that country in several ways. As a former aid recipient, Thailand is in a more suitable position to share its good and bad experiences in development. Thai experts are more understanding of the real conditions of developing countries than many technical trainers from the first world. This is more conducive to and effective for knowledge transfer and sharing, hence creating partnerships between Thailand and countries from the South. Although Thailand may not be involved directly in some programmes, such as in TCTP, it still gains from the money spent in the country by training organisers and participants, and a favourable impression of Thai hospitality is given.

Eventually, these technical assistance programmes benefit not only from the development of the developing countries, especially as a tool to bridge the ASEAN divide. They ultimately consolidate Thailand’s leading position and sphere of influence in mainland Southeast Asia. In Apinan’s words,
Thailand's overseas assistance also builds a pro-Thai perception amongst new generation leaders especially in CLMV countries in the long run, similar to what the American used to do in East Asia (interview, 15 February 2008).

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has assessed the continuity of Thailand's foreign policy preference in positioning itself as a leading actor in promoting regional and sub-regional co-operation. It discussed how the Thaksin government managed to find a fair ground to pursue regionalist foreign policy and to assert Thailand's role in regional political economy despite Thailand's domestic inward-looking sentiment and economic difficulties after the 1997 Financial Crisis. While acknowledging his electorate's inward-looking attitude, Thaksin also needed to satisfy the internationalist forces in Thailand to restore its competitiveness after the financial crisis. The outcome was a visible 'dual-track' approach applied to Thai foreign affairs. Whilst pursuing a populist policy at home Thaksin also extended this approach to strengthen regional co-operation partly through promoting a regional consciousness amongst Asian countries. Therefore, a major foreign policy characteristic under this government was the 'Forward Engagement Strategy' based on three regional schemes—ACD, BIMSTEC, and ACMECS.

This chapter has also demonstrated further that the Forward Engagement Strategy was largely motivated by Thailand's aspirations for regional leading role. It has shown throughout the chapter that this ideational factor played an integral part in this foreign policy strategy. This case also shows how the idea of regionalism in the Thaksin government was extended to cover various levels of regions, not only in mainland Southeast Asia. This extension of regional construction can also reflect, what Cantori & Spiegel (1970) propose, the increasing level of communication amongst nations and the motivational element of power in which the Thai decision-making elite was willing to seek a leading status in international affairs (pp.408-409).

The Forward Engagement Strategy confirms several important elements in Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy that were cited and assessed in Chapter Four. That is, this strategy emphasised using foreign policy as a state instrument for increasing Thailand's competitiveness in the world economy by way of creating regional
multilateralism. At the same time, it also focused on consolidating Thailand’s leadership in mainland Southeast Asia as a sphere of influence. This foreign policy direction is similar to that of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation discussed in the previous chapter.

However, the Forward Engagement Strategy was unique in at least one respect. Instead of totally falling back to its traditionally reactive behaviour as many observers may have predicted, Thai foreign policy during this time was even more proactive in its nature. This policy proaction was reinvigorated by the perception amongst policymakers (led forcefully by Thaksin himself) that Thailand must regain its pride and leading role in the international community. The Forward Engagement Strategy thus shows that Thai foreign policy-makers were not reluctant to bring back its regional aspirations. Without such leadership consciousness the scope and influence of Thai foreign policy would have been much more limited.

This proaction was certainly and greatly inspired by Thailand’s self-perception as a leading state in, at least, mainland Southeast Asia. Therefore, regardless of the remaining economic difficulties it was no surprise to see Thailand’s foreign policymakers to push forwards its proactive role in international arena. Thailand’s regional role was manifested in its promotion of intra-regional co-operation, hence sophisticating its entrepreneurial and intellectual skills. This resulted in Thailand’s ability to bridge various regional arrangements and major actors under the ACD scheme. At the same time, its structural leadership was gradually built through the capability to use its own resources to influence the development of mainland Southeast Asia. This capacity was centred on its aid policy and the multilateral co-operation of ACMECS in which Thailand was undeniably a sole leading actor amongst the members. Therefore, it can be seen that Thailand's self-perception and its regional aspirations influenced the way in which Thailand set about achieving national interests and subsequent policy actions.

Lastly, the case of Thai foreign policy analysed in this chapter also reflects an interesting aspect of the foreign policy of medium-sized powers. It suggests that their foreign policy strategy in international relations may not only be dependent on having a systemic structure. In some cases, the strategy can be strongly influenced by their
own internal context and ideational factors. Comparing the two cases of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation and the Forward Engagement Strategy, it can be seen that both operated in different systemic contexts. The former was conducted in a relatively normal situation while the latter evolved as a product of regional financial turmoil. However, the policy outcomes of both were likely to be consistent in terms of Thailand’s policy preference to exercise its leading role. Therefore, the systemic structure may not entirely shape policy preference in every aspect although it may be important in constraining policy implementation. Instead, it is suggested that an ideational factor or regional aspirations in this case, played a certain role in which Thailand’s policy preference was constructed in response to a particular crisis. Attempting to exercise its regional influence seems to be, again, amongst indispensable choices in Thailand’s foreign policy agenda.

The next chapter will therefore be a concluding part that draws all the major findings to reconfirm the thesis’s main argument for the role of self-perception in Thailand’s post-Cold War foreign policy. It will also discuss the major contributions that this thesis offers to the body of knowledge in the related fields and policy practitioners, as well as the possible future research agendas.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to enhance the understanding of the changing nature of Thai foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. The approximate period under study is around two decades between the late 1980s and the mid 2000s, specifically between the Chatichai Choonhavan government (1988-1991) and the Thaksin government (2001-2006). It has been argued that Thai foreign policy behaviour during this period increasingly departed from a 'reactive' foreign policy, as traditionally ascribed by most scholars in the field, to a more proactive approach. However, unlike previous studies in Thai foreign relations that take material factors as the sole determinants of change, this thesis has sought to examine the role of ideational factors as another aspect in foreign policy-making. The role of self-perception in determining Thailand's foreign policy preferences to play a leading role in mainland Southeast Asia and beyond has been specifically discussed.

7.1 The major findings

The author first assessed three dominant explanations of Thai foreign policy behaviour, in Chapter Two. Indeed, the main argument of this thesis is fundamentally derived from the shortcomings identified in these explanations of Thai foreign policy behaviour. It is shown in Chapter Two that the conventional school of thought in the study of Thai foreign policy has established an understanding of Thai foreign policy behaviour as reactive foreign policy based on the realist approach. It is labelled the 'bending with the wind' diplomacy due to its high degree of flexibility. This description is grounded in Thai diplomatic history regarding its responses to external great powers in the colonial period and during the tensions of the Cold War. Within this conventional view, this reactive and accommodating posture towards external forces contributed to Thailand's success in maintaining its survival and sovereignty. That is, Thailand is flexible in choosing and changing policies to side with any power potentially gaining preponderance in
the international system. Despite the fact that the Cold War ended and Thailand's traditional post-war security threats largely disappeared, the reactive foreign policy thesis focusing on its flexibility is still used to explain Thailand's foreign relations, not only with major powers but also with other parties and issues.

Two other existing explanations apply other factors, apart from security, to explain Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy direction. The influence of 'democratic norms' and 'personal interest and ambition of political leaders' are particularly featured. Yet, these alternatives cannot explain the important, overall trend in Thai foreign policy. The former is mostly associated with Thailand's democratisation especially after the May 1992 massacre and more specifically under Democrat-led governments. At the same time, although such as idiosyncratic explanation makes sense in several cases in which political leadership was extraordinary, it does not generally explain the political leadership and style of the Democrat Party that was the major ruling coalition throughout much of the post-Cold War Thailand. Moreover, many foreign policy initiatives formulated during the Democrat government also explicitly demonstrate Thailand's clear intention to exert regional role at different levels. This policy behaviour does not readily fit within any of the existing approaches to Thai foreign policy.

This thesis has accordingly questioned mainly the applicability of the 'conventional wisdom' in analysing Thailand's foreign policy behaviour in the post-Cold War era when such monumental structural change has occurred at the international level. The diffusion of the Cold War tensions and greater economic interdependence since the mid-1980s have lifted many constraints and created greater room for small and medium countries to adjust their conduct of external affairs. Thailand benefited from these changes and was at the forefront of promoting peace in Indochina during the 1990s and beyond.

Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's policy of 'turning the battlefields into marketplaces' opened up a new phase of Thailand's foreign relations. This policy change does not fit with the reactive foreign policy behaviour generally ascribed to Thailand. It was mainly through the Government's own initiative and with a notable absence of clearly defined external pressures that Thailand elected to
exercise this policy option. In fact, this policy was initially opposed by many key stakeholders both within Thailand and among its foreign allies. Notwithstanding such initial resistance, the 'turning battlefield into marketplaces' approach had a great impact on ensuring Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War period by re-arranging Thailand's foreign policy priorities. Thailand's foreign policy, thereafter, explicitly attached greater importance to economic issues and development, especially in mainland Southeast Asia. Thailand's regional role largely stemmed from its activities in these policy sectors.

Thailand's attempt to exercise the leading role and influence in this geographical area recalled the traditional concept of 'Suvarnabhumi'(the Golden Peninsula) and Pan-Thai-ism. These concepts reflect Thailand's desires to be an epicentre or a leader on Southeast Asia. However, these ideas were initially taken lightly in the literature of Thai foreign policy analysis, and were viewed merely as the reference point of certain ultra-nationalist military elites. Considering Thailand's involvement in initiating its own series of regional co-operations since the Chatichai government, this thesis takes the view that ideas associated with Suvarnabhumi actually influenced foreign policy in contemporary Thailand much more than was previously thought. As Tej Bunnag also mentioned in the interview, 'in fact, even the name of Thailand's new international airport—Suvarnabhumi—given by HM the King somehow envisioned the centrality of Thailand in this region' (interview on 29 February 2008). Based on such a view this thesis investigated this idea and its relevance to Thai foreign policy-making in the post-Cold War period. Its findings suggest that conventional wisdom on Thai foreign policy should incorporate an ideational approach to foreign policy analysis to broaden understanding of Thailand's foreign policy behaviour.

7.1.1 Thailand's self-perception existed as a basis for regional aspirations

This thesis also concurs with the ideational notion that actors' interests are not exogenously determined. As the cognitive approaches discussed in Chapter Three argue for the relationship between self-perception and interest. Therefore, it is important to understand the way in which 'individuals or states' identities shape or are the basis of interests' (Reus-smit 2005, p.197). Therefore, Chapter Three traced
the origin of how Thai people and their elite understand and view themselves, through the context of 'self-perception'.

This chapter reaffirmed that Thailand's self-perception is closely associated with the 'Suvarnabhumi' concept, and that this was a product of the modern Thai nation-state building process. In that process, nationalism was used by political elites in different periods, with the same purpose in mind, to form national characteristics and knowledge shared by different groups of people residing in the newly demarcated territories, or to use Benedict Anderson's words (1983), to shape an 'imagined community'. This 'imagined Thailand' was constructed mainly through Bangkok's promotion of so-called 'official nationalism'. This version of nationalism underscores the superiority of Thais and the central Thai culture over other nations and ethnic groups.

To consolidate their country's nation-state building projects, Thai elites since King Rama V have employed various strategies to enforce, popularise, and imbue an official nationalism into the Thai people. Bangkok has pursued overt national consolidation policies, as evidenced in the case of the Siamese court in Bangkok forcing other small kingdoms militarily to accept it as the sole sovereign for modern Siam/Thailand. This approach was also illustrated by the Phibun government's Cultural Mandates to promoting 'proper Thai-ness'. However, it was the indirect enforcement of official socialisation processes that embedded the 'imagined Thailand' amongst the citizens. The most important instrument employed to impose official nationalism as a dominant view was popular education. Research in Thai nationalism shows that Thai education has continuously emphasised Thailand's regional centrality in Southeast Asia, its past victories and its expansion into present-day neighbouring countries. This version of history is still found being taught in Thai schools, even today.

Moreover, Thailand's Cold War experiences also deepened the sense of Bangkok's regional centrality and its neighbours were often regarded as tangible threats to Thailand's security. Thailand's role as an American ally and a frontline state in the region against communism during this period mirrored its struggle for influence over mainland Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 also
sensitised Thailand to a historical enemy who had always challenged Bangkok's geographical sphere of influence. Thailand's role was therefore to repeat what it had done before—to ward off the Vietnamese. Thai calls for support from great powers and from the international community in this episode placed Bangkok in the world political spotlight. The conclusion of the Cold War and the resolution of the Cambodian issue both elevated confidence and esteem amongst Thai policymakers relative to their country's centrality in the region.

These historical experiences invariably encouraged Thais to cultivate a negative image of other nations, particularly their neighbouring countries which are portrayed as uncivilised, subordinate, treacherous, or untrustworthy. Thais thus tend not to view themselves in close association with the citizens of their immediate neighbouring countries despite their sharing of cultural, historical, linguistic, religious, and ethnic roots. Chapter Three concluded that this nation-building and socialisation process has resulted in a formation of a 'self' and 'other' dichotomy in which the self is superior and the others are inferior. In other words, the Thai self-perception was formed around the core idea of Thailand's 'higher' status, hence Thailand was deemed by its policy elites to be a leader of the region especially in mainland Southeast Asia. This self-perception also interacted with the structural environment in the Cold War timeframe resulting in Thailand defining its national interest as protection of its security from communist neighbours. Policies grounded in distrust therefore dominated Thailand's foreign policy behaviour throughout the post-war era.

However, Thai foreign policy before the end of the Cold War focused mainly on preserving the country's security. Its active role in both alliance politics and regional co-operation can be still regarded as a reactive foreign policy. It was the reaction to changes in regional political environment that may have affected the continuity of Thailand's national security pillars—nation, religion, and monarchy. Proactive foreign policy, defined by the Two Good Theory as a policy that seeks change the external environment in order to elevate a state's position in the international order, was less likely to emerge until the Cold War tension declined.
7.1.2 Emerging regional aspirations in the globalisation

In Chapter Four, it was shown how the decline of the Cold War and rise of economic globalisation actually involved both material and ideational changes in Thailand. The evolving ideational structure prevailing during the end of the post-Cold War attached great significance to neo-liberalism. This, in turn, facilitated the transformation of modern capitalist economies towards neo-liberal free market principles and democracy. This ideational change resulted in many states around the world restricting their roles in economic affairs and democratising, especially after the collapse of the former Soviet Union (Fukuyama 2004, p.20). Despite decreasing their direct roles in the economy, states still remain prominent in promoting economic environments conducive to growth and investment. Strengthening a state's economic competitiveness through various competitive and co-operative strategies has increasingly become a major focus.

As stipulated by ideational theories, 'agents and structure are mutually constituted' (Reus-smit 2005, p.197). These structural changes prompted the transformation of the Thai state in terms of its political and economic goals, as well as the adjustment of its self-perception. As the accommodating and reactive foreign policy behaviour may have been particularly conditioned by Thailand's traditional security dilemma, the decline of Cold War tensions and new structural environments certainly impacted on Thailand's foreign policy behaviour.

Chapter Four discussed this process of transition. It demonstrated a connection between the internationalisation of the Thai economy, the changing nature of the Thai state, and its policy-makers' cognitive aspects. The internationalisation of the Thai economy that occurred during the 1980s means that Thailand became deeply integrated into the world capitalist economy. In this system, 'international competition' was a prevailing concept prescribing states' interest and policy directions towards promotion of trade and foreign investment. Not only did the internationalisation of Thai economy transform Thailand's production structure into export-led growth but it also facilitated change in the political structure itself. A more 'globalised' Thai economy brought about the growth of the capitalists and the middle class within Thailand and their direct involvement in politics. This eventually resulted in the end of the previous quasi-democratic political system led
by the military and the reintroduction of an elected civilian government led by Chatichai Choonhavan and supported by businessmen. As Anek Laothamatas (1991) argues, the increasing role of capitalists transformed Thai politics from 'bureaucratic polity' to 'liberal corporatism'. This type of state, in turn, reinforced the idea of competition, co-option, and co-operation as concrete policy components to sustain and increase Thailand's economic competitiveness.

Not only did the logic shaping this type of Thai state evolve from selected ideational and material structures, it also developed in accordance with existing cognitive elements. Chapter Four demonstrated that Thailand's self-perception developed into a more co-operative mode whilst its core element relating to its self-appointed sense of superiority remained intact. In other words, the Cold War antagonistic perception towards neighbouring countries gradually outmoded amongst Thai foreign policy-makers in the post-Cold War era. Yet, the view of Thailand as a 'leading nation' in Southeast Asia remains an important operational idea amongst Thai policy-makers. Their self-perception was still centred on the idea of Thailand's leading position in the region but it became more tied to co-operation than to power competition of the Cold War. This resulted in Thailand seeking to exercise its regional leading role—its so-called 'regional aspirations'. This thesis has found that this characteristic of Thai foreign policy has been sustained throughout the post-Cold War period as an important element in Thailand's foreign policy.

Chapter Four therefore concluded that Thailand's regional aspirations in its foreign policy have developed in line with three major characteristics. First, foreign policy has become a part of the Thai state's effort to advance Thailand's competitiveness in the international economy. To achieve this goal Thailand needs to secure and search for comparative advantage. Mainland Southeast Asia, therefore, has been designated as Thailand's pivotal area of influence. Thailand's exercise its leading role in this geographical area therefore constitutes the second characteristic. Third, however, Thailand's relatively limited structural power requires it to utilise multilateral approaches to regional co-operation. Depending on circumstances, Thailand thus views its role in regional co-operation primarily as a bridge, facilitator or co-ordinator in the broader regional co-operation. These features were examined by employing two case studies in key Thai foreign policy during
this period, namely, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiatives (or the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation), and the Forward Engagement strategy.

7.1.3 Crystallising regional aspirations in the early stage

Since the Chatichai government, Thailand's foreign policy has been preoccupied with identifying new and acceptable regional arrangements. Thailand was not reluctant to embrace the idea of promoting sub-regional co-operation as a means to strengthen its economic competitiveness and to exercise regional influence. Parallel to the ADB's Greater Mekong Sub-region, the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was one of the first regional initiatives proposed by Thailand in the early post-Cold War period. The thesis has argued in Chapter Five that the persistence of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative since its commencement in 1993 until the early 2000s was mainly due to Thailand's ambition to maintain its regional role in this area.

The evidence showed that Thailand started to systematically assert its role in arranging economic co-operation in the sub-region to serve Thailand's interest. However, regarding its size and power especially compared to China, Thailand was willing to lead the co-ordination and sometimes equally shared financial responsibility in the scheme. Apparently, limited economic benefits, competing projects of the same kind (particularly the ADB's Greater Mekong Sub-region), and poor co-ordination between the Thai public and the private sector realising the economic objectives in this initiative weakened Thailand's ability to sustain the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation. However, most stakeholders in Thailand especially in the public sector still shared a similar view of Thailand's leading role in this regional project. Ultimately, the life of the initiative could have been shortened and not lasted for almost a decade without self-perception and regional aspirations interceding to the extent they did in Thai foreign policy calculations.

Chapter Five also showed that the promotion of transport linkages in this initiative became an important instrument for Thailand to persuade other participating countries that they shared a common interest in its success. This was a tangible symbol of Bangkok's attempt to weave the Mekong sub-region into its sphere of influence through pursuing these linkages. The success of this campaign further
ensured that Thailand would become the centre of gravity in mainland Southeast Asia's overall economic development efforts.

Thailand's leadership in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation project signified that its foreign policy behaviour no longer conformed to the conventional view of reactive policy. This is, to a great extent, owing to Thailand's decisiveness to effect change in Southeast Asia's political and economic environments despite various external factors—China and other regional actors amongst the most important ones. As an emerging regional power, China could certainly make or break the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. However, Thailand did not allow its destiny to be placed in the hands of the Chinese. Although Bangkok was willing to share leadership in this initiative to some extent, it was extremely proactive in its own right seen in it investing financial resources and co-ordinating efforts to allow and encourage its smaller neighbours—Laos and Myanmar—to participate in the project.

Although the ADB and, to a certain extent, ASEAN were also involved in the Quadrangle Growth initiative, they viewed it as complementary to the broader GMS project. However, Thailand did not allow its role to be overshadowed by these regional actors or institutions. Even during the Financial Crisis in 1997, when the merging of the initiative into the GMS project seemed to be economically rational, Thailand refused to relinquish its primary role in the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation initiative. Thai policy-makers initially rejected the idea of merging the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation into the GMS and persisted in maintaining this stance for quite some time.

It was concluded in Chapter Five that Thailand's self-perception had crystallised in its foreign policy with clear aspirations of regional leading role in the case of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation. Its aspirations to establish a central position for itself in mainland Southeast Asia's economic development politics means that Thailand needed to gain leadership based on support from its less developed neighbours. The Quadrangle Economic Co-operation was a testing ground of such an approach. Multilateral co-operation emerged as a Thai policy preference and gained consensus within Bangkok's policy-making circles. Through advocating sub-
regional co-operation in mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand was able to ensure that the rearrangement of the regional political economy of the sub-region after the Cold War would work in its own favour. Moreover, Thailand's role as a broker between China and ASEAN could be secured by engaging with Beijing in sub-regional development initiatives that focused on narrowing the gap between new and old ASEAN member countries.

7.1.4 Elaborating regional aspirations in the Forward Engagement Strategy

The case of 'Forward Engagement Strategy' in the Thaksin government discussed in Chapter Six also demonstrated the role of self-perception in Thai foreign policy. Unlike the case of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation, when Thailand experienced economic growth and growing confidence, the Forward Engagement Strategy was implemented in the aftermath of Thailand's worst financial crisis in its history. This crisis created a domestic backlash coalition which centred around anti-American and anti-globalisation sentiments. A more inward-looking approach to economic development came to dominate Thai society, ranging from the influential King, well-respected intellectuals, and governmental agencies to grass-root organisations. This was reflected in Thailand's embracing such concepts as 'sufficiency economy' and 'local wisdom' as the alternative development strategies.

Despite this growing inward orientation, however, Thailand's foreign policy did not become totally reactive. On the contrary, Thaksin was initially able to convince his constituency that under his leadership, the Thai economy would be restored through continuing to exercise and strengthen the country's role in regional affairs. He clearly articulated Thailand's self-perception and spelled out its regional aspirations as a rationale for his strategy. Indeed, he chose to implement an even more assertive foreign policy amidst Thailand's economic difficulties. Coupled with the political and economic turmoil in other parts of Southeast Asia and the retirement of other outspoken Southeast Asian leaders such as Lee Kwan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad, Thaksin's strong domestic support and expressive personality helped him project his international profile.

Thaksin implemented his Forward Engagement Strategy through the promotion of three major regional initiatives, ACMECS, BIMSTEC and ACD. These three initiatives
complemented one another to support Thailand's self-assigned role as an important bridging actor in the region.

The ACMECS served as Thailand's foundation to consolidate its leadership in mainland Southeast Asia. Importantly, ACMECS advanced this interest through Bangkok's determination to exercise more structural leadership through revamping its aid programmes directly targeting the Indochinese states. If aid schemes were meant to strengthen Thailand's political and economic leverage over these countries, why was a bilateral approach not sufficient? The answer may rest simply on the fact that, as opposed to hegemonic strategy that entails unilateralism in military and economic terms, regional leadership requires multilateral channels and coalitions (Doran 2009, pp. 95-97). By supporting multilateral fora, Thailand's status became increasingly prominent. This leadership image would eventually work in favour of enhancing Thailand's position in the region and bringing about a further connection between mainland Southeast Asia and the outside world.

Thailand was also enthusiastic about adopting a bridging role between various parts of Asia. Its regional plan for deepening relations with the Indian subcontinent was renewed through BIMSTEC. By promoting closer ties with South Asian counterparts, Thailand felt it could be a 'natural gateway' to South Asia for ASEAN. This meant Thailand would be able to promote its economic competitiveness and to seek partnerships from South Asia as part of its grand strategy for shaping Indochinese economic development. On the other hand, by instigating close ties with India, Thailand hoped to trigger a snowball effect of support from other regional powers, especially from China for a wider regional forum—ACD. In short, closer ties in BIMSTEC especially with India were deemed as serving as another building block for the formation of ACD.

The ACD was Thaksin's ultimate ambition to forge an exclusively Asian bloc. To promote this regional initiative, he invested enormous effort in seeking political support from major Asian counterparts through diplomatic campaigns and moral persuasion. Thailand utilised its existing ties with major economic partners to restructure regional economic architecture focusing on increasing intra-regional economic interactions in both trade and investment. The Asian Bond initiative in
the ACD was a significant move in this regard. It was timely and became a political catalyst for raising concerns for a more independent and more robust financial arrangement amongst Asian countries at a wider level.

Thaksin also believed that successful regional co-operation required a shared vision and identity. Based on Thailand's bitter experience with Western countries and institutions during the 1997 Financial Crisis, Thaksin advocated an Asian consciousness within the ACD through deepening interaction within Asia. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, his approach was mainly based on his belief that Asia had enormous potential but had long been marginalised by the United States and Europe. Therefore, he called for closer co-operation amongst Asian countries by his ACD initiative was one a stepping stone towards this goal.

Thailand's active promotion of regional initiatives under the Thaksin government supports this thesis' main argument that Thailand's foreign policy behaviour no longer strictly followed its posture of 'bending with the wind' diplomacy. Thailand instead exercised its leading role on every possible front. Its structural leadership in mainland Southeast Asia was elaborated into a more systematic approach even in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Thailand's approach to mainland Southeast Asia's economic development was more cautious so as to gain trust amongst its less developed neighbours even though Bangkok's core expectation was to increase its influence within the region. Beyond mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand also built up its international profile through the exercise of 'entrepreneurial' and 'intellectual' leadership in Asia. To operationalise this strategy, Thailand's role became increasingly significant. Thaksin swiftly re-organised Thailand's public sector including the foreign service so that it was capable of taking on a more effective and assertive role. Thaksin and his top policy-makers also played a crucial and direct role in promoting Thailand's ongoing regional initiatives. This, in fact, had the psychological effect of elevating morale amongst both the Thai private sector and regional audiences and resulted in stronger confidence in the Thai government's regional schemes. This was somewhat different to the case of the Quadrangle Economic Co-operation where Prime Minister Chuan predominantly entrusted the Thai bureaucracy with the implementation of Thai foreign policy strategy.
7.1.5 Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that Thailand's self-perception of itself as a leading actor in Southeast Asia is relevant in the study of Thai foreign policy. Self-perception was sustained through a socialisation process in Thai society which was, in large part, a state-building project. Therefore, it became an institutionalised idea in the policy component, accepted by both the country's policy elites and by the Thai people at large. Its effects continue today and have resulted in Thailand's attempting to establish for itself a leading role in regional politics. Regional aspirations have also increasingly become institutionalised and influenced over what Thai foreign policy-makers have come to consider what is necessary and possible for achieving Thailand's national interests. Therefore, this thesis concludes that this general policy preference has played a role in Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy.

Although analysing a foreign policy is a complicated task, this thesis has demonstrated that ideational factors have an effect on certain aspects of Thailand's foreign policy. They have ensured that Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy can no longer be decisively labelled 'reactive' as depicted by the 'bamboo bending with the wind' characterisation. The end of the Cold War brought Thailand's desire to change its external environment on its own terms into full view and its foreign policy behaviour has gradually more developed into proactive posture. Thailand continues this posture by endeavouring to position itself as a catalyst for change in regional affairs—whether this be either as a leading actor in mainland Southeast Asia, or as a 'bridge' between various levels of regional co-operation.

Starting from Prime Minister Chatichai's 'turning the battlefields into marketplaces' policy, Thai foreign policy has been consistent with its regional aspiration, to lead the region in its own ways. This continuity in Thailand's post-Cold War foreign policy behaviour is well captured by the former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun's remarks (1991):

Our approach and style may be different but, basically, we will continue with the main thrust of the policy of turning 'battlefields into
marketplaces' as seen in the larger context of bringing peace and stability throughout the whole of Southeast Asia.

The cases of Quadrangle Economic Co-operation and Forward Engagement Strategy demonstrated this uninterrupted idea inherited through generation of policy-makers at least since Chatichai's time.

7.2 Contributions and implications of this study
The study of Thai foreign policy in this thesis has three major implications. First, it contributes to the expansion of knowledge in the field of Thai foreign policy. Second, it offers some insights relevant to the broader field of international relations. And, third, it renders some policy implications to practitioners of Thai foreign policy.

7.2.1 Contributions
As noted in Chapter One, Thailand is a major actor in Southeast Asia; however, the study of Thai foreign policy studies is at present somewhat dormant. This thesis has therefore tried to 'reinvigorate' the debate in this field by challenging the essence of conventional wisdom about Thai foreign policy. By questioning the view of Thai foreign policy behaviour as a reactive one, this thesis offers several points of discussion.

First, it offers an alternative approach to traditional avenues for studying Thai foreign policy-making. It introduces analysis on the ideational factor as a component of Thai foreign policy studies, apart from the threat perception concept popularised during the Cold War. Although some scholars have attempted to identify some universal values and norms factors in Thai foreign policy—mainly human rights and democracy—the major pitfall lies in the representation of such concepts.

As argued in Chapter Two, this shortcoming is evident from the Thai government's recent heavy-handed approach to the separatist problem in the southern provinces, the latest military coup d'état in September 2006, and the violation of human rights in the political tension during 2009-2010. If democracy and human rights were
embedded in Thai policy-makers’ thinking, such incidents may not have occurred. It is the author’s view that an ideational factor directly relating to Thailand, if it has an impact at all, should cut across different regime types and actors in Thai politics. Therefore, this thesis has chosen the examination of Thailand’s self-perception in the first instance.

Second, this thesis has focused on a ‘black box’ in Thailand’s foreign policy-making process by emphasising the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. Scholars have attempted to explain this ‘black box’ by employing different approaches to understand Thai foreign policy, notably, as summarised by Monsak (2003) through leaders’ personalities, bureaucratic politics, military politics, domestic consensus, and systemic approaches (pp.5-17). These different dimensions of Thai foreign policy tend to answer a similar question of what makes foreign policies different under differing regimes, leaders, or contexts. However, none of these directly offer answers to the following question: ‘is there any commonality despite these variations? If so, what could explain the common or shared characteristics of Thai foreign policy?’ The constitutive approach in this thesis has revealed that Thai foreign policy, at least, in the post-Cold War era has shown certain aspects of a motivation or aspiration to become a leading actor in the region. This aspiration was explained by the policy-makers’ common self-perception that was formed in Thai history, then implanted and reconstituted through socialisation processes.

Third, by highlighting ideational aspect of in the study of Thai foreign policy, the limitations of the materialistic and rationalist paradigms dominating current Thai foreign policy analysis are pointed out here. Considering that policy-makers are, after all, only human, it is understandable that they make decisions based on not only their or the country’s rational self-interest but are also influenced by their own ideas such as beliefs, norms, perceptions, and memories. In many instances, these ideational factors play a role as guidelines in their decision-making. Therefore, any foreign policy analysis without reference to any possible ideational factor may only lead to a partial conclusion. This thesis has attempted to fill this gap by testing the influence of certain ideas on Thai foreign policy-making.
It has revealed that the selected ideas investigated in this study—self-perception and regional aspirations—have at least offered Thai foreign policy-makers an interesting approach to pursue their foreign policy both at Thailand's own initiative and as a response to external factors. In other words, the thesis has asserted that ideational factors are relevant in the way in which Thai foreign policy-makers chose their preferred strategies to realise their national interest.

Moreover, foreign policy-making is certainly part of a country's overall political process, and its relevance to political development in a specific polity must be addressed. This thesis takes such a linkage into consideration and fit Thai foreign policy within this context. By associating the origin of Thailand's self-perception to the emergence of nationalism as part of the modern Thai nation-state building, this study has attached itself with the broad literature of Thai studies, especially in the study of Thailand's political development. The findings in this thesis thus help illuminate not only a relationship between modern Thai state formation, nationalism, and political development, but also help explain these factors' impacts on Thailand's overall international relations.

7.2.2 Implications

The major findings of this thesis also have theoretical implications that are broadly related to the foreign policy analysis subfield of international relations. These implications address several important points regarding the current weaknesses of foreign policy research with relevance to developing countries. This thesis can therefore be viewed as helping to provide a foundation for a better understanding of foreign policy behaviour of developing states in general.

First and foremost, this thesis has added Thailand's case to a broad compilation of empirical studies underpinning ideational hypotheses. Pointed out by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (1993), the reflectivist criticism of the rationalist model is useful in offering an analytical understanding of the role of ideas in foreign policy-making. By employing this theoretically novel approach, researchers can examine not only 'what strategies are devised to attain interest' but also 'how preferences are formed and how identities are shaped...[and] matter in foreign policy-making' (p.6).
However, these scholars also suggest that the weakness of the reflectivist theory is in its abstract and limited empirical support. Despite increasing number of studies adopting this research agenda, the focus, again, is on developed countries especially Germany and Japan such as in the works of Péter Katzenstein. Therefore, this thesis offers an understanding of the role of ideas such as those expressed variously as self-perception, identity, self-image, or role—not only in general reference but also specifically for developing countries.

Second, this thesis also generally addresses a longstanding debate about should international relations be a predictable pattern of state behaviour without reference to human actors' involvement or, conversely, a more complicated behaviour dependent upon human beings' irrational behaviour. By tackling Thailand's international behaviour through the lens of foreign policy analysis, this thesis is in line with the latter approach. It underlines the fact that decisions are made via an imperfect human rationality that is bound by historical precedents, personalities, past experiences, and cultural and social predispositions (Hudson & Vore 1995, pp.211). As reflected in the case study chapters in this thesis, the main enquiries set out directly to answer some anomalies in each case which are unpredictable by exclusively using systemic or rational theories. However, these anomalies were explainable if the influence of ideas, which in fact were shaped by a complex political socialisation through history, is taken into consideration.

Third, this thesis has filled the gap in the lack of research into the foreign policy of developing countries. As Justin Robertson argues (2005), the current stage of foreign policy research still exhibits a major weakness in theorising developed countries' experiences and applying them to a broader set of generalisations. The most common theme in foreign policy analysis involving developing countries is either the study of their policy responses to external pressures (especially from great powers) or the investigation of the management of relations of developed countries with the third world. Only a small number of cases are directed to an independently formulated foreign policy (Robertson 2005, pp.3-5). Although this thesis also acknowledges the external pressures affecting various aspects of Thai foreign policy decision-making, the focus of how ideational factors played such a
prominent role, in fact, addresses foreign policies that were mainly driven from within a particular state.

Fourth, this thesis also provides a broad understanding about a type of foreign policy related to new state's capacity to shape relations in a developing world setting. Studies by some scholars in foreign policy analysis note that developing countries are less likely to exercise international leadership due to resource constraints which make their foreign policy mostly reactive (Robertson 2005, pp.19-24). The findings of this thesis have drawn an opposite conclusion. In spite of its limited resources and economic difficulties, Thailand persisted in its attempts to exercise international leadership through brokering its own regional initiatives throughout the post-Cold War period. This means, as the thesis claims, that Thai foreign policy should more accurately be described as increasingly proactive. The case of Thai foreign policy in this thesis can therefore be used as a building block towards theorising how developing countries manage to exercise international leadership in various ways.

7.2.3 Policy implications
The gap between theory and practice is always a concern amongst academics and practitioners. Practitioners mainly find theoretical approaches 'such as structural realist theory and game theory' too abstract and simplistic to apply in real situations, which are more complicated and specific (George 1999, p.9). Therefore, an actor-specific theory serves as a compromise to 'bridge the gap'. It helps 'our understanding why certain foreign policy decisions are made' by both individuals and a group of decision makers, especially 'when there is an idiosyncratic, culturally shared conception of what is good foreign policy' (Hudson & Vore 1995, pp. 229). It is concluded here that because this thesis has touched upon cultural and ideational issues in foreign decision-making, it should be able to deliver useful policy-relevant issues to Thai foreign policy-making.

This contrasts with the conventional wisdom based on the generalisations about reactive foreign policy behaviour which normally cast doubt on Thailand's proactiveness. This thesis instead offers a perspective that Thailand has attempted to undertake a proactive role in the region. It suggests that certain ideational
aspects of policy-making underline a broad spectrum of policy-making elites in the post-Cold War period. The style of policy management matters in carrying out a successful implementation. Therefore, the author views that analyses are flawed if they overlook attempt of decision-makers to lift Thailand's international profile and only criticise that such a policy is merely designed for personal advantage. The findings in this thesis have revealed that such a policy preference is somehow common and broadly shared amongst policy-makers, not specific to any particular group.

Therefore, this thesis, at least indirectly, has endeavoured to raise policy practitioners' awareness about Thai aspirations regarding regional leadership. Such a trend contains psychological effects shaping the country's foreign policy. In short, a country's self-perception and its perceived role help outsiders to expect its possible international responsibilities, hence create more certainties in an anarchical world. If Thai policy-makers were more understanding of cognitive aspects and of their own efforts in their desire for Thailand to exercise a regional role, it would help that country to consolidate its leadership aspirations by encouraging and maintaining policy continuity and unity through successive regime changes.

In fact, many regional initiatives proposed by Thai governments were useful for strengthening regional benefits. Thailand's role in sub-regional schemes, especially in the Mekong River Basis, has undeniably facilitated the integration of new ASEAN members into that organisation. This has benefited ASEAN not only in terms of bridging economic development gaps but also socialising and harmonising political differences. This has gradually created a more peaceful environment in Southeast Asia. The Thaksin government's foreign policy and its consciousness of leadership would have created the likelihood of achieving further progress, had the September 2006 coup not interceded. Policy initiatives in that strategy were also highly relevant to East Asia's attempt to consolidate East Asian regionalism and its prevention of political and economic turmoil. Thai proposals to reform and regulate Asian financial architecture such as the Asian Bond in the ACD were similar to those recently proposed in the 2009 G20 London Summit to resolve the Global Financial Crisis. If Thailand's leading role was strengthened it could
potentially perform a constructive function towards regional political and economic stability.

Finally, this thesis underlines the importance of Thailand's neighbouring countries to Thailand's foreign policy and its leadership aspirations. Thai foreign policy needs to be crafted in a way designed to modify the longstanding distrust of its smaller neighbours of Thailand's perceived intention to exploit and dominate their economies, politics, and cultures. Many Thai government officials have already understood that these ideas need to work their way into the wider Thai public. Thailand's foreign policy towards neighbouring countries can no longer be separate from other domestic issues. Similar to how education was used to implant Thailand's self-perception of its superiority in its own society, as discussed in this thesis; cultural sensitivities can be an important tool by which to change Thai attitudes towards other countries in the region. Without a serious move by Thailand's political elite to raise this concern and change public attitudes towards its neighbours, Thailand's regional leadership cannot be easily sustained.

7.3 Suggested future research agenda

This thesis has introduced ideational factors into Thai foreign policy analysis. It has shown that ideational factors are important to Thai foreign policy-making in the post-Cold War period as they have shaped policy preference and direction. The study has also attempted to facilitate debate on ways that future research can engage to develop a greater understanding of the influence of ideas in various aspects of Thai foreign policy.

Future research along such lines can explore several objectives. First, it can present more case studies that examine how Thailand's self-perception and regional aspirations have played a major role in other foreign policies. The structuring of such studies would help establish an increasingly systematic analysis of Thai foreign policy. Second, researchers can study further, how self-perception and regional aspirations are institutionalised in Thai foreign policy-making mechanisms. Again, this task requires advanced and detailed studies into policy-making processes. Third, additional research might extend this type of approach to
explore other relevant foreign policy not exclusively included in this thesis, particularly Thailand's foreign security policy. With regard to various considerations—such as the rise of China, the advocacy for ASEAN's identity, and the emerging economies of Indochinese states in the 2000s—an analysis of the role of Thailand's self-perception and regional aspirations can suggest linkages between Thai foreign policy elites' ideational and material components and the kind of regional security arrangements in which Thailand wants to participate and play a role. A detailed study of Thailand's aid policy can also be useful in assessing the influence of regional aspirations in Thai foreign policy. All of these inquiries would enhance meeting the imperative of better understanding of how Thailand as a key regional actor in Southeast Asia perceives and behaves within its region and in the wider world.
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TICA; see Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency.


TSCH; see Thailand Supreme Commander Headquarters.


UNCTAD; see United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

UNDP; United Nations Development Programme.
UNESCAP; see United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.


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