



## **Korea's Changing Roles in Southeast Asia: Expanding Influence and Relations**

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Thank you very much, Prime Minister Lee Hong-Koo. I'm surprised that you remember all those things that I have done. Even I forget them sometimes. Good morning, Dr. Reed, the Representative of The Asia Foundation here in Korea, and Professor Kim Woo-sang of the Institute of East and West Studies, Yonsei University. Certainly, thank you very much Vice Minister Kwon Jong-rak of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Republic of Korea. Distinguished guests, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is, indeed, a great privilege for me to be in Seoul as the Secretary General of ASEAN, and it is my first visit here in this capacity.

Korea is a very, very important Dialogue Partner, one of the three in the ASEAN Plus Three, which is a very unique group of countries and peoples who have decided to come together as a result of the financial crisis back in 1997. Former Prime Minister Lee introduced me as taking the helm of the Foreign Ministry in late '97, but I don't want you to have the wrong impression that I engineered the financial crisis. We came into government as a result of the crisis because the previous government who caused it gave up. But we realized from that crisis, which occurred in early July 1997, that really we were more integrated, we were more connected than we realized, than we were aware of. Because it first occurred in Bangkok. The next day it was Malaysia. The next week it was Indonesia, and the next week it was the Philippines and not very long after that it was South Korea.

Japan was large enough to absorb the impact. China was big enough to sustain the blow. But South Korea was very much affected. So a sense of community really emerged then. It was for the first time that Former Prime Minister Mahathir called a meeting of his initiative. If you recall, this was the EAEC [East Asia Economic Community], which had been opposed quite actively by other powers outside the region. But as a result of the crisis, EAEC came into reality in the form of ASEAN Plus Three, and we described the three as important economies adjacent to ASEAN-- all three of you in alphabetical order China, Japan, and South Korea. I have to say that because South Korea may feel a bit disappointed not being mentioned first. Only by alphabetical order.

And as Professor Kim Woo-sang said, middle powers, small powers, banded together in the form of ASEAN and connected with other powers in the region. We became the cornerstone, we became the centerpiece of many other architectures in the region. I think we could claim that we were the centerpiece of APEC, because Australia, back in the late '80s, felt that the growth in Southeast Asia, in East Asia, was very, very

dramatic. And it wanted some connection with the region. So it came up with the idea of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC. That was in 1989. Since then, it has been elevated to the point of having a leadership summit every year, ever since President Bill Clinton. Along the way, the Europeans felt that they were being left out, so they proposed something called Asia Europe Meeting, ASEM, that came into being in 1996. But you know what happened in 1997. We were all down.

So the momentum of ASEM lost its force quite a bit during the times that we were down. We were all back on our feet by 2003, performing well beyond the period prior to the crisis. And now we are going full force, creating our own community in Asia - very ambitious. A sense of community is building quickly. A lot of people are talking about ASEAN now, and ASEAN has become a household word. You have ASEAN hotel, ASEAN Barbershop.

The best one I saw was in Pattaya. A fleeting sign, ASEAN something. And I asked my driver, back up, back up, I just want to see what ASEAN that was, being incoming Secretary General of ASEAN. He backed up and he said, sir, it's ASEAN Massage Parlor. So I can tell you that the whole region is excited about the word ASEAN, and I'm glad that you are also signing on and would like to take part in our community building. Mr. Vice Minister, thank you very much for creating the Korea-ASEAN Center. Even though you are not revealing the location of it, I know for sure it won't be Pyongyang. I know for sure it won't be Panmunjeom, either.

Southeast Asia and Korea were close even before ASEAN was created. If you go to Panmunjeom, just take a peek at the Armistice Hall or Room. You will see two flags. The Filipino flag and Thai flag. We were here, we were there at the frontline, shoulder to shoulder with our Korean brothers and sisters. But ever since, Korea has been developing by leaps and bounds, and has performed a miracle in economic and national development. It has become a rightful member of the OECD, a seal of approval that you have made it in national and economic development. You have become our very, very important trading partner, as the Vice Minister said. Number five, only after China, Japan, the U.S., and the EU. The volume is large and increasing - \$70 billion plus U.S. dollars, according to the Vice Minister.

Korea-ASEAN FTA is evolving very actively. We are entering the fourth step of that trade agreement. Some reservations here and there, but it is going on very, very effectively. And we hope that we can seal this process of FTA evolution between Korea and ASEAN before the summit this year in Bangkok, when all ten countries of ASEAN are expected to ratify the ASEAN Charter. And the charter shall become the ground rule - the blueprint for our community building into the future.

The ASEAN community will be built on three pillars. First is political [and] security, and we have the ASEAN Regional Forum for that. And we have South Korea as a member in that 27-member security forum in the Asia-Pacific. The next is the ASEAN economic community. We are hoping to turn it into one market, 567 million strong. Ten economies, integrated - one market, one production base, one investment area with free mobility for what we call "qualified and skilled labor."

Just dream with us. In 20 years time, 567 million people shall become almost 700 million. Just dream with us -- with the cooperation of Dialogue Partners like South Korea, one-third of our population by that time, almost 300 million people shall become middle class or the middle income. Just imagine what that middle-income bracket of Asia, almost 300 million people, will be for ASEAN's industry - for Korean industry, Korean commerce, and Korean investments.

Just like Aristotle said 2,000 years ago, the middle class shall be the transmission belt of all the good things in any society. They will ask for participation, they will ask for transparency, they will ask for accountability. They will be the anchor and stabilizing factor of that society. And imagine the entire ASEAN grouping will be anchored on that middle class 20, 30 years from now. That's where Dialogue Partners are looking, because they are also very much interested in the rising middle class in China and India. ASEAN too can create and offer a vibrant market with purchasing power for our Dialogue Partners adjacent to ASEAN -- Korea, China, and Japan. Korea now.

So Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, there is a large space for South Korea [in] your interaction with ASEAN countries. You can choose any of the three pillars. Security - you are already in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and it is with a sense of pride that I can tell you I brought North Korea into the ARF when I was the chair of ASEAN back in 2000. I had to court Mr. Pak, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea, DPRK. I had to hold his hand in Catalina, Columbia, during the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement. From there it so happened that Cuba wanted to host the summit of the group of 77 plus China.

Mr. Castro sent two planes to pick us up in Catalina to go to Cuba. And we had to wait at the airport for over 12 hours because the planes were late and when they got there, they couldn't fly. I was holding Mr. Pak's hand and tried to lobby him, please come, please be available, please be in the region sometime during the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok. That was before the Six-Party Talks. I told him, "it just so happens that the sunshine policy has become fruitful, and some of your partners in the ASEAN Regional Forum would like to talk, so please be available and hop over to Bangkok and let's have coffee."

I had to work with the Royal Government of Cambodia because King Sihanouk has the best relationship with DPRK among all of us in the ASEAN countries. Even his bodyguards are North Koreans. I'm not revealing any secrets. His cook is North Korean. His servants, when we sit at the table with him, are North Koreans. That's when I got the idea that it's got to go through His Majesty, King Sihanouk. I talked to Prime Minister Hun Sen, he said yes, we will work on that. But lo and behold, rather than being available in Cambodia or in a capital near Bangkok ready to come in, we got a message from Pyongyang saying that they wanted to join ASEAN officially, fully, the ASEAN Regional Forum. To the point where the original members of the ASEAN Regional Forum became suspicious. Why would they want to come in at this late moment and so enthusiastically? Nevertheless, Mr. Pak came to Bangkok and became a full partner of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

My only regret was that during the Six-Party Talks, all six participants are members of the ARF but not one word is being uttered about ARF. My idea was at least that ARF

should have a special envoy flying around, listening, delivering messages. But we were thought to be too weak, too ineffective, and not ready, not up to the requirements or the challenge. Well, my response to that is if you treat a child like a child forever, he will be a child forever. Give ARF some responsibility and it will be up and coming. And I hope from now onward, ARF will be more effective, acting like a mature individual, ready to engage with the world. That's the ARF security and political community.

Economic community, you are already there. Already active, already engaged, already participating and contributing.

I think for South Korea, the third pillar is extremely important, Mr. Prime Minister. We've heard of this "Korean Wave" traveling to Southeast Asia, this *Hallyu*, which is going to be discussed here. You can see it in various forms and manifestations. Hip-hop music, movies, cuisine, movie stars going around. They are like the Beatles in the '60s, with the teenagers jumping up and down, screaming, welcoming them.

But it also could be regarded as an imposition, much like the Japanese experience in the mid-'70s. When Prime Minister Tanaka toured the region at the height of Japanese investment and presence in Southeast Asia, he was greeted with demonstrations and screams and shouts and burning of effigies. I was still a student at Thammasat University at that time, and was not part of it. The Japanese turnaround came with Prime Minister Fukuda in 1977, and his Fukuda Doctrine for Southeast Asia - heart-to-heart talk, intimate engagement. Not only in economic relations, but also socio-cultural development.

We are building the third pillar, socio-cultural, among ourselves, where the people of ASEAN will have their space, where the NGOs will have their space, where the academics will have their space, where the media will have their space. I think this is an entry point for South Korea into ASEAN community building.

I think that will be very useful, effective, and beneficial cooperation between South Korea and ASEAN countries in the cultural field, in the cultural space, in the area where we need to bring people together, where we need to guide all peoples of the ASEAN plus three to get to know each other more, to accommodate and appreciate each other's cultures more. Without that, without a strong socio-cultural space or pillar, the political-security community and the economic community will be built on a shaky foundation. I do hope that this idea will be taken up seriously by the government of South Korea and we may begin with a Korea-ASEAN Center, as the Vice Minister has promised to me that it will be fully established before the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in July, in Singapore, before Thailand takes over the chairmanship.

Now, I'm sure you'll be covering many, many issues, many, many areas of cooperation and coordination between South Korea and Southeast Asia and ASEAN. But I do hope that you will not forget the people-to-people exchange, that you will not forget the social dimension of our community, you will not forget the real issues that matter most to the people, and that is their livelihood. So I'm glad, professor, you mentioned the issue of human security, you mentioned the issue that would certainly make life more secure, more happy, and more prosperous, because the idea of human security is not the traditional idea of security. It's not about sovereignty or territory or preparing for

wars or talking about weapon acquisition. It is about the real security of the human person.

So we are talking about the protection of people under threat, forced migration, running away from conflicts, vulnerable. We are talking about illiteracy and poverty. We are talking about health. We are talking about human development. We are talking about human empowerment. All these can also be part of the socio-cultural pillar of ASEAN community building. I think that this entry point would be very much appreciated and very much welcome in Southeast Asia and ASEAN.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, this is a new age, an age of globalization, when it is no longer adequate to think of ourselves as a Korean national, to think of ourselves as a Thai national, to think of ourselves even as an ASEAN national, or even Asian national. The world is facing so many impasses, so many deadlocks, so many problems that seem to be unsolvable, so many imbalances. And, you know what? Our phenomenal growth itself here in the region has contributed to some of those imbalances and some of those impasses.

So the challenge before East Asia - ASEAN included, South Korea included - would be how to contribute to the resolution of those deadlocks, impasses, and imbalances. The second largest economy, second highest contributor to the UN – Japan - is not in the UN Security Council. That's an anomaly. Fast-growing, soon-to-be number one economy, China, is not in the G8. And the imbalances in trade, in payment that have occurred around the world, and the fluctuation of currency values affecting economies, affecting the health of our economies, all these things are occurring right in front of us. The question is what can Asians, what can East Asia contribute to the resolutions of those problems? That's the challenge before us.

As I began with saying that ASEAN had contributed to the creation of many other architectures in the region, I'm submitting to you, finally, that together ASEAN and East Asia, ASEAN and South Korea, can think about ways and means to work together in order to contribute to the resolutions of many, many of the global problems that we are facing, as the human family, as humanity. So it is a generation that has to think about new ideas, new initiatives, and new approaches to the old problems.

Let me end by quoting somebody far away from this region but certainly one who has influence in Southeast Asia - Jalad ad-Din Rumi, a Muslim mystic, poet, Persian, who later on migrated to Anatolia, Conia. Six centuries ago, he surveyed the terrain of the Middle East and said we need a new beginning, we need new ideas, we need new approaches. He said vendors of all goods are gone, people of all ideas have receded into history. We need a new beginning. He said we are the new vendors. And he said this is our bazaar. I'm leaving you with this thought: that East Asia, now, is our bazaar. We are the new vendors. We'd better come up with new merchandise. We'd better come up with new ideas, and I'm glad we're beginning here, this morning, talking about the new role for Korea in Southeast Asia, because this is a new bazaar being built for all of us. Thank you very much.

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