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## **Intellectual and Entrepreneurial Leadership: Reflection on Thailand's Emerging Middle Power Diplomacy in the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Thailand's diplomacy was considerably more active during Thaksin's premiership than the governments after him. Thailand's intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership in the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) is characterised as a catalyst, facilitator and manager state as described in the behavioural middle power approach. Utilising the behavioural model of the middle power approaches, this study argues that Thailand is a potential emerging middle power state in Asia for its role in intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership in the ACD. Even though the ACD after 2006 was somewhat negligent due to Thailand's internal political strife. The ACD remains a significant foreign policy reflecting Thailand's middle-power status.*

**Keywords:** *Thai foreign policy, middle power, intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Thaksin Shinawatra and his newly formed Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thai) Party received a landslide victory in Thailand's 2001 general election rendering Thaksin the Prime Minister of Thailand. The situation marked a new direction of the country's internal politics in view of constituting a successful move of the democratic process. It also counted as the first time in Thai political history in which an elected-Prime Minister could complete his term of four years without significant political hindrances. Many populist policies under Prime Minister Thaksin gained widespread appreciation, particularly among rural populations in the north and northeast of Thailand, which became strongholds of the Thai Rak Thai party. Thaksin's popularity increased when he and his government were able to pay back the debts to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) caused by the Asian economic crisis in 1997. Within the parliament, he consolidated power by controlling a majority of seats, which facilitated a smooth process of introducing and managing new policies.

The Thai Rak Thai party then won the next general election in 2005. However, his second term was short-lived because of a coup based on allegations of corruption, parliamentary dictatorship and, most importantly, disloyalty to the King. The incident marked the beginning of a prolonged political conflict until the present. During his premiership, domestic policies were created to attract Thai citizens and foreign policies formulated to advocate Thailand's interest beyond the Southeast Asia region. His focus on securing domestic popularity played a role in shaping Thai foreign policy (Chachavalpongpun, 2016, p. 20).

This study argues that new changes and stability in Thai domestic politics in this period contributed to the adoption of a more creative and assertive foreign policy. In Thaksin's era, there were several foreign policies implemented, such as the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Asian Bound Market, Free Trade Agreement (FTA), as well as Bangkok Process and the Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya - Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). This article focuses on Thai foreign policy and strategy on intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership, as reflected in the ACD. It examines and analyses Thailand's middle power behaviour by utilising the middle power's behavioural approach as a framework for analysis. Specifically, intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership of the behavioural middle power model is applicable for the analysis of Thailand's middle power status. The author chose this criterion because it is a major element in the middle power's behavioural models, which can explain

how Thailand's foreign policy explicitly impacted the international community. However, this study solely pertains to examining the intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership of Thailand. It disregards the other behavioural middle power concepts such as niche diplomacy and providing leadership in crisis management. With this limitation, the other behavioural middle power concepts, as previously mentioned, would need specific attention in separated pieces of critical study to further justify Thailand as a middle power in those particular concepts. Additionally, the "emerging middle power" concept highlighted by Jordaan (2003) helps not exaggeratedly understand Thailand's middle power status.

## METHOD

This study used a qualitative research approach. Data were collected from various sources, including books, academic articles, government documents, reports, Facebook pages, and official websites of related organisations and institutions. The gathered data were analysed using the descriptive analysis to support the argument on Thailand's middle power diplomacy in the ACD. The study applied the intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership of the middle power approaches for the analysis of Thailand's emerging middle power in the ACD.

## FINDINGS

### *Middle Power Concept*

Apart from the interest of great powers, the middle power concept has gained increasing recognition among scholars of international relations. The concept can be traced back to the classical writings of Thomas Aquinas (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 309) and Giovanni Botero in the renaissance era, whereby Botero was the first scholar who wrote on a medium rank of states as the second tier of three categories of states, namely, 1) imperial or great state, 2) middle power state and 3) small power state (Schweller, 2014, p. 2). According to him, the middle power state is "A relatively large state that exists without any assistance from others" (Lee, 2016, p. 24).

After World War II, a new international system was created in which the United States and European countries, i.e. the UK and France, became major powers. Other subordinate countries such as Canada and Australia asserted themselves in the newly created system by defining their roles following middle power diplomacy. Ravenhill identified that "The concept became popular by the persistent Canadian claims to middle power status after 1945" (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 309). In this connection, R.G. Riddell, a senior Canadian diplomat, defined a middle power as "A country [that] possesses various features such as the size of the country, natural resources, the readiness for responsibility, security and influence of the countries, similar to that of major power countries" (as quoted in Bernard Wood, 1987). Similarly, Australia's Minister for External Affairs, Herbert Evatt proposed "The concept of middle powers with a view to secure his country's national interest in a new world order after World War II" (Ungerer, 2007, pp. 538-51). Since then, Canada and Australia have been recognised as traditional middle powers.

According to Patience (2014), there are three typical approaches of how to understand middle power. First is from a realist perspective. The second outlook considers being in light of a liberal-institutionalist or regionalist school. The third perspective derives from the constructivist analysis (p. 211). Although the middle power concept is still subject to the ongoing debate, the three approaches have become a core analytical framework for scholars interested in examining middle powers.

Scholars have first described a middle power in terms of the countries' capability and structure (for example, see Holbrad, 1984; Ping, 2005; Emmers and Teo, 2015; Fels, 2016). They considered the capabilities a middle power possessed relative to other countries. The capabilities and structures that scholars have considered include the size of the country, geographic area, number of population and military expenses. Bernard Wood also suggested the Gross National Product (GNP) as an economic determinant to classify a middle power. He contended that countries with a GNP rank from 6 to 36 could be considered middle powers (Wood, 1987, p.5). Notably, this approach of middle power is highly influenced by realism. Moreover, scholars in this group have concerned about how middle power is

measured objectively. Therefore, the method utilised for the measurement is to compare statistical records of indicators or determinants to classify a middle power rank.

Furthermore, the concept has evolved to include the behavioural approach as an alternative approach to analysing middle power states. Scholars in the field have presented various behavioural indicators of how to understand middle powers. Cooper, Higgott and Nossal (CHN) were among the first group of scholars who associated middle power concept to the countries' foreign policy. They grouped patterns of behaviours to classify the country's middle power category. In other words, they considered the country's diplomacy or the manners in which countries conduct their foreign policy objectives as their justification of a middle power, rather than a definition based on physical attributes and capabilities alone. According to the CHN, middle power can be viewed in five 'Cs': capacity, concentration, creativity, coalition-building, and credibility (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 310).

For the behavioural approach, Cooper suggested that a state that utilises a multilateral solution in international affairs, compromises in international conflict, and displays itself as a good international citizen, is recognised as a middle power (Shin, 2015). However, Efstathopoulos (2017) argued that the traditional behavioural model is not sufficient to explain foreign policy internationalism's effectiveness and efficiency because it emphasised only diplomatic preferences rather than influence. Alternatively, he came up with "an additional distinctive category that prioritised ideational influence and entrepreneurial effectiveness as a key prerequisite for identifying middle powers" (Efstathopoulos, 2017, p. 1). He also proposed additional criteria for identifying middle powers, including "providing leadership in crisis management and demonstrating activism as intermediates in international disputes and conflict", "performing niche diplomacy to secure their influence in international regimes", and "providing intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership" (Efstathopoulos, 2017, pp. 10-12).

Apart from the capability and behavioural approach, the identity approach is the latest conceptualisation of how to identify a middle power. Carr proposed this approach by looking at the self-proclaimed middle power. Finnemore and Sikkink suggested "Knowing about a state's perception of its identity should help us to understand how the state will act" (as quoted in Carr, 2014, p. 76). This approach is based on constructivism. However, its weakness is in its inclination to regular changes that can cause instability for this identity-based definition of a middle power. Also, its dependence on policymakers' claims alone can lead to the illegitimate identification of a middle power (Carr, 2014, p. 76).

In an attempt to differentiate traditional and emerging middle power, Jordaan (2003) sought to view countries that perform their diplomatic acts following the US-led international system and play a supportive role for maintaining the system as traditional middle powers, such as Canada and Australia. In contrast, the emerging middle powers are countries that became new democratic countries but held some undemocratic characteristics in their internal governances. The emerging middle powers are sometimes antagonistic to the international system (Jordaan, 2017, p. 8). The emerging middle powers are mostly developing countries, including countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (Ping, 2005).

### ***Thailand as A Middle Power***

The literature on Thailand as a middle power is limited. Most studies focus on its status as a middle power in the Asia-Pacific region based on its capabilities (see Ping, 2005; Emmers and Teo, 2015; Fels, 2017). For instance, Jonathan Ping (2005) developed three methods to identify the relative position of states. He drew the case studies of Indonesia, Malaysia, and other Asia-Pacific countries, including Thailand, for testing nine variables statistically, namely population, geographic area, military expenditure, GDP, gross domestic product percentage real growth, the value of exports, gross national income per capita, trade as a percentage of GDP, and life expectancy (Ping, 2005, p. 72). After examining all indicators statistically, Ping proposed a list of 14 middle powers in the Asia-Pacific region for the year 2000: Australia, Canada, Chile, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Turkey (Ping, 2005, p. 104).

Similarly, Emmers and Teo (2015) adjusted Ping's middle power variables based on a country's capability and suggested their method and variables for testing middle powers in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on the study results, Thailand is categorised as one of the middle powers in the Asia-Pacific region (p. 189). Enrico Fels (2017) utilised statistical cluster analysis to investigate middle power states' capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region. He concluded that Thailand had obtained a cluster three position, the middle power rank, in three subsequent case years (2002, 2007, and 2012). According to Fels, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam in Southeast Asia were categorised in the middle power group for a single case year, and they failed to stay in the category in the subsequent case years (Fels, 2017, p. 359).

In a book derived from his speech on the topic "Thailand in Easternisation Era: the Changing World", Anek, a Thai scholar, argued that "Thailand must stop acting as a subordinating country or only ally herself with major powers. We have to eliminate this kind of world view and replace it with a new one saying that Thailand must act herself as a middle power country" (Anek, 2015, p. 28). However, he did not clarify the characteristics of middle power for Thailand.

As mentioned above, the studies on Thailand as a middle power or an emerging middle power are solely limited to examining its capabilities. The alternative ways of viewing Thailand's middle power are absent. Therefore, this article aims to shed light on the behavioural middle power approach in terms of intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership by specifically addressing Thailand's role in the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD). Nevertheless, before discussing further, a conceptualisation of intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership needs to be clarified.

### ***Intellectual And Entrepreneurial Leadership***

Intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership is a vital essence of middle powers (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 311). Apart from structural leadership that refers to a party using its dominant material powers to impose on its partners, Young suggests that intellectual and entrepreneurial leaders must be inclusive in the leadership category (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 311). He pointed out that an intellectual leader is a person who relies on the power of ideas to shape how participants in institutional bargaining understand the issues at stake and to orient their thinking about options available to come to terms with these issues. Moreover, the entrepreneurial leader is an individual who is skilful of negotiation to influence how issues presented in the context of institutional bargaining and to shape mutually acceptable deals bringing concerned parties together on the terms of significant contracts yielding benefits for all (Young, 1991, p. 288).

Scholars then connected the intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership notion to the concept of middle power because they consider it a useful concept in reflecting the behaviour of middle power states (see Cooper et al., 1993; Ravenhill, 1998; Efstathopoulos, 2017). As such, middle powers' ability to offer the leadership, in turn, relies on their bureaucratic capacity (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 312). Evan and Grant argued, "It is creativity that enables middle power to lead – "if not by force of authority, then at least by force of ideas" (quoted in Ravenhill, 1998, p. 312). They suggested that "quick and thoughtful diplomatic footwork" can compensate for a middle power's relative economic, military or political weakness (Ravenhill, 1998, p. 312). Ravenhill (1998, p. 325) also suggested that "An emphasis on diplomatic capabilities and the capacity to provide intellectual leadership is a useful starting point in attempting to define the core characteristics of middle powers." Moreover, Cooper and his colleagues introduced three patterns of middle power regarding entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership:

*Catalyst: Entrepreneurial middle powers may act as a catalyst for a diplomatic effort, providing the intellectual and political energy to trigger an initiative and, in that sense, take the lead in gathering followers around it.*

*Facilitator: In the early and middle stages, the focus would be on agenda-setting. The actor (or actors) would be a facilitator for some form of associational, collaborative, and coalitional activity.*

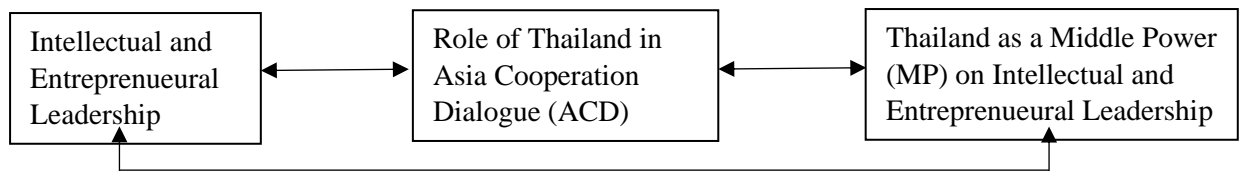
*Manager: A third stage would be that of a manager, with a heavy emphasis on institution-building. Institution-building is used here in its broadest sense to include not only the creation of formal organisations and regimes but also the development of conventions and norms (Cooper et al., 1993, pp. 24-25).*

In this study, the three patterns are useful for examining Thailand's role in providing entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership.

According to Efstathopoulos (2017, p. 12), intellectual leadership allows states to shape negotiating outcomes through innovative policy-making ideas, while entrepreneurial leadership refers to bargaining skills that help to build consensus and overcome deadlocks. Such leadership forms allow middle powers to act as catalysts, facilitators and bridge-builders in regime formation and management. Specific approaches note that such forms of leadership can aggregate to a broader "directional leadership" and constitutes examples for others to follow and persuade other states to adopt specific ideas and negotiating positions (Efstathopoulos, 2017, p. 12). Middle powers also possess a mixture of (limited) material and ideational resources which can be used to perform the assertive diplomatic role (Efstathopoulos, 2017, p. 12). In contrast, major powers would act by using their structural leadership, their physical capability, instead of depending on intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership for their foreign policy endeavour (Efstathopoulos, 2017, p. 13). Efstathopoulos argued, "States that qualify as middle powers would need to be effective in providing intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership not only in support, but also against the interests of major powers, and be effective in securing some of their core demands" (Efstathopoulos, 2017, p. 13).

According to the above discussion, Thailand's role in Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) is analysed for the extent to which it corresponds to intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership as an essential part of the middle power approach (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Framework for Analysis



*Note. Compiled by the authors*

### ***The Asia Cooperation Dialogue (Acd)***

#### ***Establishment of the ACD***

The Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) is a continent-wide forum of Asian countries. It was initiated by former Prime Minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra (2001 – 2006), which aims to establish a meeting platform for Asian countries. The forum was inaugurated on 18 June 2002, at Cha-Am, Phetchaburi province of Thailand. Prime Minister Thaksin, his Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai, together with the Foreign Ministers and special envoys from 17 other Asian nations were present in the inauguration of the ACD (Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong, 2016, p. 17).

Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong (2016, p. 17) indicated that the notion of the ACD appeared the first time when Surakiati Sathethai, later Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, on behalf of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party, proposed the idea of the ACD at the First International Conference of Asian Political Parties, held in Manila in 2000. Surakiati addressed that Asia is a significant continent. It is crucial to have a forum for discussing cooperation at the regional level (Chachavalpongpon, 2016, p. 100). In the 34<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Hanoi in July 2001, the idea was reintroduced after the TRT party won the general election in 2001 and further

discussed at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat held in Phuket in February 2002 (Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong, 2016, p. 17).

In his inaugural speech of the ACD on 19 June 2002, Thaksin announced:

*Through the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, we have in mind a stronger Asia that can compete and contribute more effectively to the world economy. We have in mind an Asian region that can maintain a self-supporting system to cushion ourselves from external shocks, be they political or economic. We have in mind a region where all member countries work to complement one another's comparative advantages as well as mitigating disadvantages. We have in mind a region where information and knowledge are shared, and countries work closely together through collaborative networks. We have a vision of Asia as a continent that is the most desirable place to live, to travel and to do business in. We have a vision of a strong and self-confident Asia. We have a vision of a more influential Asia for the best of the world (The ACD, 2002).*

According to his opening remarks, there are three main objectives of the ACD as follows:

First, the ACD aims to provide a non-institutionalised arrangement for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Having a region-wide dialogue, the ACD will encourage existing cooperative frameworks and will create cooperation among strategic partnerships in the areas of common interests. There is a missing link, which is now being filled.

Second, the ACD will help to improve national and regional capabilities to make Asia a reliable partner for other regions. The adverse impacts of globalisation have challenged Asia. Therefore, Asian countries need to cooperate and utilise Asia's unique home-grown ingenuity and enhance complementary strengths for international competitiveness. ACD can foster an enabling environment for development.

Third, the ACD will serve as a forum for Asian countries to exchange views with one another in a sincere manner on international trends and developments that directly impact Asia.

Also, according to the ACD website, the objectives of the ACD are as follows:

- 1) To promote interdependence among Asian countries in all areas of cooperation by identifying Asia's common strengths and opportunities which will help reduce poverty and improve the quality of life for Asian people while developing a knowledge-based society within Asia and enhancing community and people empowerment;
- 2) To expand the trade and financial market within Asia and increase the bargaining power of Asian countries instead of competition and, in turn, enhance Asia's economic competitiveness in the global market;
- 3) To serve as the missing link in Asian cooperation by building upon Asia's potentials and strengths through supplementing and complementing existing cooperative frameworks to become a viable partner for other regions;
- 4) To ultimately transform the Asian continent into an Asian Community, capable of interacting with the rest of the world on an equal footing and contributing more positively towards mutual peace and prosperity (The ACD, 2020).

Moreover, the ACD aims to constitute a missing link in Asia by bringing all Asian countries together and creating an Asian community in which it will not duplicate any existing organisations or frameworks (The ACD, 2020). The ACD promotes various values such as positive thinking, informality, voluntarism, non-institutionalisation, openness, respect for diversity, the comfort level of member countries and the evolving nature of the ACD process. In other words, the cooperation and coordination in ACD are based primarily on reaching common goals without issuing any pressure on states. On its inception, there are 18 founding members of ACD. Those are Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei



Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (The ACD, 2020).

According to the ACD website, there are currently 34 ACD member countries as follows: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Turkey and Nepal.

### ***Operation of the ACD***

Since the inauguration of the ACD, the founding member countries have agreed on two-dimensions, namely dialogue and projects. The dialogue dimension is to promote interaction and participation among the ACD member countries, particularly ACD Ministers and Government officials. The project dimension is to urge the ACD member countries to become "prime movers" voluntarily. Each member country can become the "prime movers" in their interest areas, which can benefit the whole Asian cooperation (The ACD 2020).

For the first decade of its operation, there are two levels of meetings based on dialogue mechanisms, namely the ministerial and senior official levels. The ministerial meeting functions as an annual session for all ACD member countries to meet informally. The meeting format is guided by flexible, informal and no agenda manners. It is known as Sofa Meeting, which is

*A meeting format uniquely employed in the ACD Ministerial Meetings...Ministers are seated on sofas instead of the meeting room and discuss issues of mutual interest without prepared notes or structured agenda to induce the exchange of views and ideas freely. Only an indicative list of topics is provided to the Ministers to facilitate the flow of the meeting (quoted in Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong, 2016, p. 19).*

Regarding the ministerial meeting sessions, Chachavalpongpun (2016, p.103) described that "The ACD is a process where there is no agenda, no assigned speakers, no specific topic prepared for and agreed in advance by senior officials. The host only prepares and issues a Chairman's Statement for reference." The ministerial meetings were organised from 2002 – 2019. The latest meeting, the Sixteenth ACD Ministerial Meeting, was held in Doha, the State of Qatar in May 2019. The meeting focused on (1) Moving forward the cooperation in the six pillars, (2) Establishment of the Asian Community by 2030, (3) Raising awareness of the ACD and consolidating partnership with other International Organisations and Cooperation Frameworks in sub-regions and Asia, (4) Take stock of the progress of all cooperation activities organised by the ACD member states, and (5) Strengthening the ACD Secretariat (MFA, Thailand, 25 April 2019). The Ministers also adopted the Doha Declaration as the outcome document. Besides, the Breakfast or High Tea meeting is organised regularly in September as a sideline of the UN Assembly meeting, allowing ACD Foreign Ministers to meet and discuss ongoing projects and programmes of the ACD and other regional and international issues (The ACD, 2020).

In attempting to upgrade the meeting, the First ACD Summit, introduced by Kuwait, was held in Kuwait City, from October 15-17, 2012. The ACD Summit was then agreed to set up in a three-year duration. At the First Summit, Kuwait and Thailand advanced an initiative for the ACD permanent secretariat (Shinawatra, 2012). Nevertheless, only the Provisional Secretariat was agreed to proceed, not Permanent Secretariat. The Second ACD Summit was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from October 9 – 10, 2016, under the theme "One Asia, Diverse Strengths" (The ACD, 2020).

On the project-based dimension, there were 20 areas of cooperation (see Table 1), which were later grouped into six pillars of cooperation in the Fourteenth ACD Ministerial Meeting: (1) Connectivity, (2) Science, Technology and Innovation, (3) Education and Human Resources Development, (4) Interrelation of Food, Water, and Energy Security, (5) Culture and Tourism, and (6)

Promoting Approaches to Inclusive and Sustainable Development (MFA, Thailand). Each member country voluntarily subscribes to and acts as prime movers and co-prime movers based on their interest and expertise. Unlike other cooperation frameworks, the ACD does not require a consensus from member countries to mobilise the projects.

Table 1: *List of ACD Areas of Cooperation and their Prime and Co-prime Movers*

<b>Areas of Cooperation</b>	<b>Prime Movers and Co-prime Movers</b>
1. Energy	Bahrain, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Qatar, China, the Philippines, Lao PDR, and the United Arab Emirates
2. Poverty Alleviation	Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Vietnam
3. Agriculture	China, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan
4. Transport Linkages	India, Kazakhstan, and Myanmar
5. Biotechnology	India
6. E-Commerce	Malaysia and Bahrain
7. Infrastructure Fund	Malaysia
8. E-Education	Malaysia and Iran
9. Asia Institute of Standards	Pakistan
10. SMEs Cooperation	Singapore and Sri Lanka
11. IT Development	Republic of Korea and Russia
12. Science and Technology	The Philippines
13. Tourism	Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Bahrain
14. Financial Cooperation	Thailand and Kazakhstan
15. Human Resources Development	Vietnam and Thailand
16. Environmental Education	Japan, Qatar, and Bahrain
17. Strengthening Legal Infrastructure	Japan
18. Road Safety	Oman
19. Natural Disaster	Russia
20. Cultural Cooperation	Iran, India, and Bahrain

*Note.* There are 20 areas of cooperation in the ACD, whereby individual members are voluntarily self-assigned for the area(s) of their best expertise.

## ***Role of Thailand in ACD: An Analysis of its Intellectual and Entrepreneurial Leadership***

### ***Catalyst***

Thailand, as an initiating country of the ACD, has demanded the continued existence of the ACD. The idea of building up the Asia-wide forum has been initially ignited even before Thaksin becomes the Prime Minister of Thailand. As mentioned earlier, Dr Surakiati has first introduced the notion since the First International Conference of Asian Political Parties in Manila, the Philippines in 2000. The idea was then reiterated in the 34<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam in 2001 and again in ASEAN Retreat 2002 in Phuket. The ACD was successfully established in June 2002 in Cha-Am, Thailand, where 18 Asian Foreign Ministers met together for the first time. Thailand's initiative aims to promote the ACD to be a continent-wide cooperative framework guided by positive thinking and participants' comfort level (The ACD Website). The ACD can also be viewed as a grand diplomatic project of Thailand targeting the larger regional sphere of the entire Asia continent, going beyond conventional Southeast Asia's multilateral frameworks such as ASEAN, EAS and ACMECS.

Since then, Thailand has supported the new cooperation framework seeking for the solution of current regional and world problems, and enhanced cooperation among Asian nations. Another concrete idea initiated by Thailand under the ACD framework was the "Asian Bond Market." It was introduced in 2003 by Prime Minister Thaksin during the second ministerial meeting in Chiang Mai. Thaksin presented this project through the "Chiang Mai Declaration on the Asian Bond Market Development," which aimed to consolidate Asian financial sources to create economic stability and make Asia's financial structure more balanced. Thaksin stressed that:

*Asia possesses more than half of the world's monetary reserve which was deposited outside Asia. If the Asian Bond Market is established, some of the monetary reserves can be transferred to Asia, which can be used for regional trade and investment. This situation can help generate more prosperous in Asia rather than depositing this capital outside the region (Chachavalpongpun, 2016, p. 110).*

Connors pointed out that the Asian Bond Market is part of Thaksin's financial solution to the Asian financial crisis. The ultimate aim was to create a robust Asian bond market to gradually reduce dependency on foreign capital and prevent possible instability (Chachavalpongpun, 2016. p.110).

Even though the country had passed a period of internal conflict that resulted in the negligence of the ACD, the new military-backed government eventually hosted the Second ACD Summit in 2016 after its postponement from 2014. Don Pramudwinai, Thai Foreign Minister, reaffirmed its commitment to the ACD (Pramudwinai, 1 May 2019). In this way, Thailand's role as a catalyst or an initiator is apparent in the ACD. The active leadership of Prime Minister Thaksin was undeniably a significant factor for such moves by Thailand. After Thaksin's era, Thailand's strong commitment towards the ACD remains persistent with a short period of stagnation because Thai leadership sees the opportunity to uphold a good image for the international community, reflecting its middle-power status.

### ***Facilitator***

Thailand plays substantive roles in facilitating, coordinating and accommodating all ACD members to maintain and enhance the role of the ACD more effectively. For example, Thailand voluntarily hosted the first and the second ACD Retreat in 2002 and 2003, respectively, to install a standard and direction of the ACD forum. Then it gave steady support (during Yingluck's government) when Kuwait called for improving meeting structure of the ACD to Summit level, as stated earlier until all members reached an agreement and further established a Provisional Secretariat in Kuwait's capital in 2013 (The ACD Website).

Thailand's act as the ACD coordinator can be viewed from its role in following up all member states' plans and upcoming activities. For example, in the Breakfast Meeting held in the UN headquarter, New York on 18 September 2005, Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs chaired the meeting to view the progress of the ACD projects and future activities (The ACD website, 2005). Apparently,

Thailand becomes the country involved in all levels of the ACD meeting preparations such as the sideline meeting in the UNGA, the ACD ministerial meeting and the ACD Summit. Notably, the ACD Ministers' Meeting on the Sidelines of UNGA 61 on Thursday, 21 September 2006 agreed on:

*the necessity for the ACD to put into place a Coordinating Group comprising the previous, present and future hosts of the annual ACD Ministerial Meeting plus Thailand (ACD Coordinator), which will be a regular forum responsible primarily for making substantive preparations for each year's annual ACD Ministerial Meeting (The ACD Website, 2006).*

Moreover, Thailand's contribution to the ACD was evident in all processes, particularly during the Second ACD Summit hosted by Bangkok in 2016. First, it provided the ACD direction and vision of 2030 considering Asia as a continent of inclusive and sustainable growth, seamless connectivity, stability, peace with its people at the centre towards building an "Asian community" (MFA, Thailand, 2016).

Second, it pushed forward ACD's six pillars of cooperation that are in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely, (1) interrelation of food, water, and energy security; (2) connectivity; (3) science, technology and innovation, (4) education and human resources development; (5) culture and tourism; (6) promoting approaches to inclusive and sustainable development (MFA, Thailand, 2016).

Third, it reaffirmed its commitment as a "prime mover" in promoting inclusive and sustainable development approaches and introduced the late King Bhumibol's sufficient economic philosophy for the balanced economic growth and social development (MFA, Thailand, 2016). Notably, Thailand has been entrusted by ASEAN member countries as a representative and a coordinator to promote concordance between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN on sustainable development goals (SDGs) (ASEAN Information Centre, 4 October 2016). Moreover, it requested to be part of the 2021 Voluntary National Review of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (Letter of Permanent Mission of Thailand to the UN, 2020). In this regard, Thailand's role in sustainable development, as a prime mover, is recognised internationally.

### **Manager**

In the managing role, several Thai personnel have been in charge of the ACD mission. Following this, a seasoned Thai diplomat, Mr Bundit Limschoon, was nominated for the first ACD's Secretary-General. After him, Thailand remains attached to this managing function by proposing a former Thai ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of South Africa, Dr Pornchai Danvivathana, to serve as the second ACD's Secretary-General (Facebook Page of Royal Thai Embassy, Kuwait, 12 August 2019). Moreover, as appeared on its website, two names of Thai ladies are acting as staff of the Secretariat in Kuwait City. They are responsible for the Government Affairs Coordinator and Economic Analyst positions in the ACD (The ACD Website). In functioning the work of the Secretariat, Thailand urged ACD's member states to discuss a protocol and mechanism for selection of ACD's Secretary-General to reassure the efficiency and continuity of the Secretariat's mission (MFA, Thailand, 2016).

Moreover, Thailand has played a significant role in the ACD's institutional building by encouraging all member states to improve the organisation's status from a forum to provisional Secretariat and from the provisional Secretariat to the permanent establishment even though member states are reluctant to change for the latter. Member states might feel uncomfortable when they are bound with the laws and regulations enacted after changing the organisational structure to the permanent Secretariat. In other words, member states are aware of the change that might cause complexity in their relationship.

Since the onset of the cooperation, Thailand has promoted the norm of peaceful engagement among Asian nations to work together and create the Pan-Asia Cooperation regardless of enormous diversity among the member states. The member states can also be prime or co-prime movers based on

their expertise (Pramudwinaai, 1 May 2019). Most importantly, the ACD was designed to overlook the differences among member states by implementing a non-consensus basis. Thailand, the designer of the ACD, is aware of this fact that there are some conflicting areas between Asian nations that need to be carefully managed.

After seventeen years of the cooperation, Thailand pushes forward and stimulates the faster movement of the cooperation among the member states with the idea of “partnership for sustainability” for the guiding principles of the ACD. Such sustainability includes the 5 *Ps*: people, partnerships, peace, prosperity and planet. These elements are rooted in the spirit of the ACD (Pramudwinaai, 1 May 2019).

In this connection, Thailand, by its Foreign Minister, has reaffirmed its commitment in 2019:

*I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm Thailand's commitment to lend the hands to ACD in whichever way we can towards the strengthening of the ACD Secretariat to help drive forward our cooperation for more tangible results* (Pramudwinaai, 1 May 2019).

### ***Challenges of the ACD and its implication for Thailand***

Some hindrances cause stagnation in ACD operations. First, the lack of leadership is a critical obstacle that resulted in the poor mobilisation of tasks. Prime Minister Thaksin had promoted the ACD between 2002 – 2006. It had been relatively enthusiastic compared to the period after him. The coup conducted in 2006 toppled down his government caused downplay of the ACD. Simultaneously, the rise to power of the Democrat Party somewhat affected Thailand's involvement in the ACD.

Amidst the domestic conflict, the Democrat-run government had not taken the ACD seriously because it would have given credit and popularity for Thaksin's affiliation. Chachavalpongpun argued “[t]his explains why the ACD is currently being left in a rather neglected state, especially as long as the Democrat Party [Thaksin's opposition] remains in power” (quoted in Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong, 2016, p. 23). Thaksin admitted it in his speech in the 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting held at the Republic of Tajikistan in 2013 “Since I left office in 2006, I do detect some decline in interest, with only two new members [of the ACD] admitted since then” (MFA, Tajikistan, 29 March 2013).

Thai domestic politics continued to affect Thailand's leading role in the ACD and other foreign policies when General Prayut Chan-o-cha conducted a coup against and ousted Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra from the office in 2014. The international community, particularly the Western world, worried that the Thai democratic system was being under siege and terminated. During the military government, Thai foreign policies were of the passive rather than active implementation. The recalibration of Thaksin-inspired foreign policies under the Yingluck government was entirely disrupted. The Second ACD Summit and the Fourteenth ACD Ministerial Meeting had to be rescheduled from 2015 to 2016 (Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong, 2016, p. 23). Although Kuwait's attempt to take the leading role, Thailand remains a facilitator and manager for the development of the ACD.

Second, political will is a problematic factor that affects what member states perceived towards the ACD and caused by the loose structure of the ACD. Moreover, the outcomes and achievement of the ACD were invisible, with the major powers not paying much attention to the ACD. Additionally, the impact of the ACD has not been realised since it operates on non-consensus. Small countries take advantage of being present in the same forum alongside more influential states to increase their international recognition. For example, Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong stated “The lack of political will among ACD members is also a critical problem for the forum. ACD members claim to be in favour of rhetorical goals, but so far, most of them have only paid lip service to deliver the substantial cooperation goals...” (Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong, 2016, p. 24). Chachavalpongpun also analysed:

*The lack of interest in the ACD has not only been felt in Thailand. It is reported that the Thai Foreign Ministry has to work extremely hard in convincing and lobbying ACD members to send representatives to attend some of its many meetings. Some meetings had to be postponed or even cancelled because of insufficient participants (quoted in Bunyavejchewin and Nimmannorrawong, 2016, p. 24).*

The lack of a political will can also be seen from the disagreement to set up the Permanent Secretariat as member countries preferred the Provision Secretariat and the loose structure instead of a rule-based institution. However, Don Pramudwinai, Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs, highlighted two acts that can promote recognition and visibility of the ACD in the world. First, promoting partnership for sustainability in two levels, one among the ACD member states themselves and the other through creating synergies with other partners and regional organisations such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC, SAARC, CICA, ADB, AIIB.

Second, taking symbolic actions so that ACD's voices and efforts could be heard and felt by taking advantages of the sideline meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to raise the profile of the ACD in international fora. According to Pramudwinai, Thailand would showcase their home-grown best practices on growth and sustainability on behalf of the ACD and commit towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for SDGs. Moreover, the promotion of the ACD can be conducted through all member states rendering support to the UN's Secretariat in organising the ACD Day (Pramudwinaai, 1 May 2019). Third, Thailand's negligence in the ACD after the Thaksin and Yingluck government affected the ACD's operations. Its website was neglected with not much-updated information and activities conducted by the framework. With this, the active mobilisation of the ACD requires a more substantial commitment of the member countries.

## CONCLUSION

During Prime Minister Thaksin's government, Thailand initiated the ACD for the Asia-wide cooperation, which corresponds with the intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership concept of the behavioural middle power models. Based on its role in the ACD, Thailand considerably influences the ACD as a catalyst, facilitator and manager state. Bangkok regulates the directions, mechanisms and procedures of the forum and cooperation. For example, Thailand proposed the direction and vision 2030 aiming at creating "Asian Community." In facilitating task, Thailand is the ACD coordinator and involves in all meeting levels of the ACD. In managing the ACD, Thai nationals served as the Secretary-General of the ACD for two consecutive nominations. Bangkok has shown critical roles in institutional building and development.

Moreover, Thailand designed the work of the ACD to be a non-consensus based on a voluntary basis for the member states to choose for their area of expertise. This practice becomes the norm of the member states' engagement in the ACD. Although the government after Thaksin has not taken much attention towards the ACD, Thailand is persistent to play a facilitator and manager role within the framework and reaffirms the responsibility and commitment towards the ACD. Therefore, Thailand's role in the ACD can explicitly reflect its middle power status. Based on Thailand capabilities and its foreign policy and strategy shown in the ACD, this article argues that Thailand is a potential emerging middle power for its intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership roles.

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