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# YOUTH PEACE ESSAY

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**Youth and Peace in ASEAN: Young People's  
Contributions to Peace in ASEAN through  
Cultural Diplomacy**

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by Nguyễn Thành Long

# Youth and Peace in ASEAN: Young People's Contributions to Peace in ASEAN through Cultural Diplomacy

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Culture represents the most quintessential things of a country, appearing in several areas and helping to differentiate one country from another. However, cultural conflict is one of the most complex forms that directly affects existing peace. Cultural conflicts often arise due to the lack of understanding of and exposure to diverse cultures around the world. In such a context, cultural diplomacy emerged as the most effective tool to foster sustainable and peaceful relations between nations through interaction and dialogue by using culture as a resource in the twenty-first century. ASEAN is one of the most successful organizations that includes member countries with the most undeniable cultural richness and diversity. Therefore, preventing cultural conflict and creating cultural harmony in the region will greatly and further contribute to peace in ASEAN.

Before analysing the case of ASEAN, we should also acknowledge that the success of European integration stems from cultural similarities among EU member states that help forge a common identity of a strong Europe. Because of cultural diversity, it is arduous for ASEAN to achieve a common cultural identity like the EU. Instead, ASEAN countries should build ASEAN common identity based on "unity within diversity". In other words, we will not seek a cultural unification among countries, but ASEAN countries should use cultural diplomacy at both governmental and non-governmental levels to create awareness and promote cultural diversity as a prominent feature of ASEAN according to its roadmap of "awaring-understanding-respecting-accepting". With the above route, it will be easier for the people of ASEAN to accept the process of ASEAN unification. They will still be able to maintain their own "self" in the national cultural identity while feeling part of a larger diverse culture. The interaction between countries will further enrich the national cultural quintessence.

One key to achieving peace by using cultural diplomacy is to raise awareness and understanding of all ASEAN peoples towards the cultures of the member states. Currently, young people make up a significant portion of ASEAN's population, and because cultural diplomacy and unification strategies are long-term, the role of young people is crucial. They are considered as "the seeds" of ASEAN's peace. The current young generation, especially Gen Z, is characterized as creative, dynamic and receptive towards a world that is constantly changing.



These features of young people fit very well with the strategy of using cultural diplomacy to foster peace and prosperity in the region. To cater to the aspirations of stability and development in ASEAN, some recommendations are given below to effectively combine cultural diplomacy with peace in ASEAN:

First, ASEAN countries should approach implementing cultural diplomacy in the field of education with youth as the most crucial target. Education plays a very important role because it helps attract learners' attention through access to languages and cultures of other countries. At the national level, ASEAN countries should develop joint studies to integrate into the national education curriculum thematic topics on the history and culture of ASEAN societies in general and of each country in particular and add additional courses on learning the languages of ASEAN countries. In addition, countries should also support educational institutions to provide scholarships specifically for students in the ASEAN region to enhance their connection. We also need to focus on extra-curricular activities for students, such as organizing competitions to learn about ASEAN cultures or encouraging the establishment of clubs for students who share a passion for ASEAN cultures and societies. In general, cultural diplomacy in education will be the foundation for young people's acceptance of ASEAN's common identity.

Secondly, with cultural diplomacy in the field of education serves as the foundation, cultural diplomacy for young people will be easier to succeed when the opportunities for exposure and cultural experience expand. Through education, young people have already cultivated either a certain interest or a strong passion for the culture of ASEAN countries. As a result, they will more smoothly and openly participate in cultural exchange programs, cultural festivals, cultural productions relating to ASEAN countries. For example, the trend of learning Thai language in Vietnam is on the rise because of young people's admiration for Thai movies and music. In addition, in order for culture to be effectively embraced by young people, culture must be spread in a creative, innovative and not stereotypical way. The roles of designers, event organizers, filmmakers, musicians, etc., should be emphasized especially when they involve young people, because as mentioned, young people have a very "different" and very "artistic" taste, which is the secret recipe for a particular culture to become more attractive. On top of that, there must be forums for the voices of young people to be heard in the most authentic way.

Thirdly, it is essential to encourage young people to use media and social networks for cultural diplomacy. Certainly, the barrier of geographical distance will be the biggest hurdle that needs to be overcome so that the youth of ASEAN can connect and interact with each other. Media and social networks are key to



addressing this issue. It will help spread information and reach young people across the region. This interaction is extremely important for smoothly creating a common ASEAN identity. Countries can work together to build a social network specifically for Southeast Asians, through which connection and sharing will be more pronounced.

In conclusion, the voices of young people will increasingly need to be heard and respected. Their role is to be "cultural ambassadors". They will bring the best of the country to introduce and make it attractive to fellow ASEAN citizens from other states. Culture will certainly become a solid bridge to foster and maintain peace in the ASEAN region.

(This article is written based on the author's personal point of view, so it needs to be researched further based on data.).

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