

# **The Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) on the Recruitment of Accountants: A Case Study of Listed Firms on the Stock Exchange of Thailand**

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to analyze the essence of the Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) that impacts the accounting profession in Thailand and to survey the knowledge and understanding of public listed firms on the agreement, as well as their attitude toward workforce mobility among countries in the AEC and the accountant's qualification before and after the AEC. The analysis is based on relevant documents, questionnaire and interviewing the director of accounting in companies listed on the Stock Exchange of Thailand.

Overall, the research results show that most of the samples have knowledge and understanding of MRA in the field of accounting profession at low level. The attitude toward workforce mobility is positively oriented, and strongly agree with the workforce mobility in the accounting profession. Accounting professionals must prepare on the following issues. working experience, training or workshop of potential development, English language skill in efficiency level. In addition, educational institutions should develop programs to be compatible for stepping into AEC. The requirements of accountant qualifications from the perspective of Thai Listed Firms in the Stock Exchange are as of following: complete Bachelor's Degree, know Thai accounting standards, reporting standards, English language skill.

**Key Words:** ASEAN Economic Community ASEAN Free Trade Accountants

## Introduction

The upcoming ASEAN Economic Community : AEC in 2015 has made the member nations in this region more interesting, with more role and more negotiation power on the world economic arena. AEC is more than a beginning of free trade and mutual agreement on reduced tariffs; actually, it is a gateway to lead ASEAN to Single Market and Production Base. This also covers mutual agreements on free trade, investment services, and workforce mobility in 5 fields, i.e. products, services, investments, workforce, and funds, as well as the standardization of all relevant criteria. Of course, this has an effect on businesses and there will probably be a shortage of workforce in different professions due to Mutual Recognition Agreement : MRA on the following 7 fields of occupations: engineering, nursing, architecture, exploration, medicine, dentistry, and accounting. (Department of Trade Negotiations, 2012) The workforce in any countries that meets the qualification criteria, as mutually agreed, on education, training, and work experiences will be accepted among all members and can work in whatever ASEAN countries they want.

Moreover, the free workforce mobility may affect the labor market of accountants in Thailand. As the demand of labor market of accountants is increasing, the demand and supply in this workforce are not proportional at all. The educational institutes still cannot produce enough accountants, whether undergraduate or diploma programs, to satisfy the need of the overall market, although Ministry of University Affairs, which is responsible for the control of workforce production, used to set up a 15-year plan to deal with this problem. The said plan was based on the idea that the production of graduates for the labor market could not be done within a few years; instead, it took at least 4-5 years to do that. However, there is still no balance between the workforce and the demand of labor market (Phoompanich, 1999).

Therefore, it is impossible to produce any workforce within a short period of time. To prepare for the policy of free workforce mobility in 2015, there should be a plan to develop and produce the domestic workforce and meanwhile increase its potential in order to compete with the others.

Besides, this will create opportunities for Thai labor to work in other countries, and satisfy the need for accounting profession of labor market.

### **Literature Review**

Mutual Recognition Agreement : MRA was established to find out the mutual recognition in terms of qualifications of those who work in the field of service, especially the professions of physicians, engineers, and accountants, etc. The objective thereof was to define the mutual qualifications of education and work experiences in each field of profession by providing common criteria for work permission in any country. In addition, the agreement was aimed to help and facilitate ASEAN professionals when moving to work in any ASEAN members. Each field of professions had quite similar main features in MRA, including objectives, definitions, extent of mutual recognition in qualifications and rights of foreign professions, agencies in charge of professions, rights of supervision, ASEAN profession coordinating commission, mutual exceptions, dispute settlement, and amendments to Accounting Profession Act B.E. 2547 (instead of Auditor Act B.E. 2505), which provided that the accountants had to receive a permit from or register in Federation of Accounting Professions; whereby the said accountants had to be natives or have permanent addresses in Thailand and possess good Thai language skills enough to do the accounting in Thai.

Monlada Nakpibal (2007. P.142) studied The Guideline To Interpret Labor Chapter In Free Trade Agreement: A study on Us – Chile Free Trade Agreement, and she found that the labor chapter in free trade agreement between US and Chile was still unclear in certain issues, e.g. vague interpretation of obligations in the labor chapter in free trade agreement, and different law enforcement in different countries.

Nalina Chaiya (2008, P.75-80) studied Thailand's Opportunities and Challenges Toward EU-ASEAN FTA, and she found that Thailand would benefit from this agreement once considering that GDP, economic welfare, average utility, export volume, import volume, production, and factors of production were all in positive trends.

Supanniga Geawgirdsee (2006, P.104) studied Impacts of The Association of Southeast Nations Free Trade Arena (AFTA) on Labor Utilization in the Footwear Industry, and she found that different characteristics in different workplaces would have different impacts from the free trade agreement. The said free trade would bring about more fierce competition in both domestic and international markets, which enabled the workplaces to better realize their own potential.

Supajit Panyamit (2005, P.173-174) studied The Impact of FTA in the Attitude of Logistics, and she found that most entrepreneurs required employees who had skills of logistics. Also, according to the analysis after the establishment of FTA, it was found that there were great impacts on most entrepreneurs in terms of infrastructure (land transport, maritime transport, air transport), and relevant equipment. Overall, business owners still needed to reduce the costs and expenses on transportation from the start to the stop.

## **Materials and Methods**

The research of The Study of Knowledge and Understanding in Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC): A Case Study of Listed Firms on the Stock Exchange of Thailand is a quantitative research by means of survey. The researcher divided the research methodology into the following 4 steps:

Step 1: Study and analyze the essence of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which affected accounting profession in Thailand.

Step 2: Design and develop tools to survey the knowledge and understanding in Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN, attitudes of listed firms in SET towards accounting profession and free workforce mobility within ASEAN, and the qualifications of the accountants that the listed firms expect before and after the coming of AEC. The questionnaires is modified by academic

studies and relevant research.

Step 3: Survey the listed firms to collect information about the knowledge and understanding in Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN, attitudes of listed firms in SET towards accounting profession and free workforce mobility within ASEAN, and the qualifications of the accountants that the listed firms expect before and after the coming of AEC.

Step 4: Summarize and analyze the information about the Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) on the Recruitment of Accountants: A Case Study of Listed Firms on the Stock Exchange of Thailand.

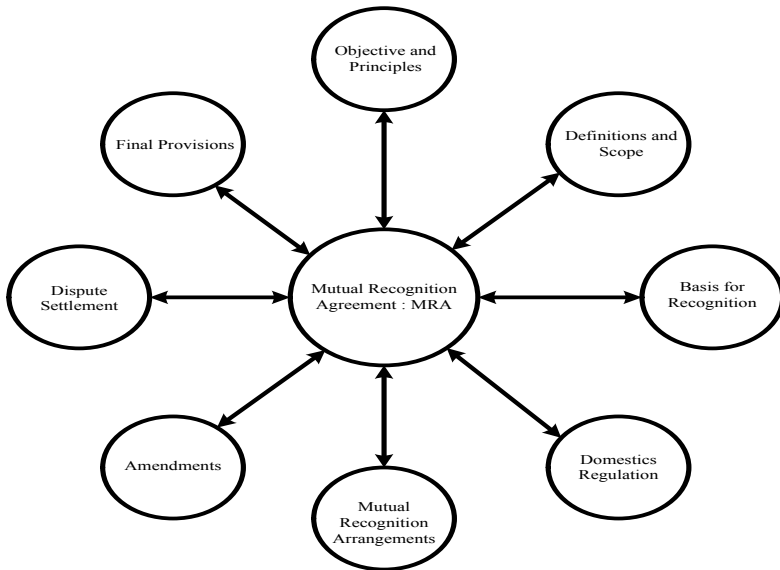
The population in this research included accounting directors of 509 listed firms in the Stock Exchange of Thailand. The samples herein were accounting directors of 250 listed firms in the Stock Exchange of Thailand, derived from random selection from finite population mean with allowable minimum error at confidence level of 1-95% (Yamane, 1973).

The researcher designed and used questionnaire as a tool to measure the knowledge and understanding in Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN. The researcher also tested the validity and reliability of this questionnaire in order to find out the suitability of construct validity and content validity from accounting and financial experts in government educational agencies and business private sectors. The knowledge and understanding in Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN were measured at Ordinal Scale based on 5 levels of intensity evaluation criteria: highest, high, average, low, lowest. For data collection, the validity and reliability of the tool were first tested by questionnaire with the real sample group of 30 firms by means of simple sampling. As a result, the validity obtained was .960. Then, the data was collected again by mailing service and 225 questionnaires were returned. The additional data was further collected by interviews via telephones. The statistics used to measure the knowledge and understanding, attitudes, and qualifications of the accountants that the listed firms expect before and after the coming

of AEC, included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and t-test.

## **Results**

According to the study and analysis of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA), it was found that the objective of the said MRA framework was to encourage cooperation in terms of services among ASEAN members, and to enhance their efficiency and competitiveness. Thereby, the future Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) must not reduce rights, authority, and responsibility of the ASEAN members to supervise and issue rules, regulations, or laws in their own countries, provided that the said actions would not bring about any problems. The issue of permit and registration of ASEAN accounting profession must comply with the rules, regulations, and agreement within these countries. The ASEAN framework for the establishment of Mutual Recognition Agreement in the field of accounting profession consisted of Objective and Principles, Definitions and Scope, Basis for Recognition, Domestic Regulations, Mutual Recognition Arrangements, Amendments, Dispute Settlement, and Final Provisions. Whereby, the said conceptual framework of Mutual Recognition Agreement in the field of accounting profession was shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** MRA Framework in the field of Accounting Profession

**Table 1** Number and percentage of the samples based on the levels of knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN

Knowledge and understanding	f	%
Knowledge and understanding	43	16.3
Knowledge but not understanding	66	25.3
No knowledge at all	146	58.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>100.00</b>

According to Table 1, only 16.3 percent of the samples had knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in ASEAN, where 58.4 percent thereof did not.

**Table 2** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviation (S.D), and t-test against the samples based on the levels of knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in terms of objective and principles in the field of ASEAN accounting profession

Objective and Principles	Knowledge level		Understanding level		Knowledge and Understanding level	
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t	Sig.
Promoting efficiency and quality	3.30 (Medium level)	0.70	2.85 (Medium level)	0.96	5.230	0.0
Enhancing cooperation in the accountancy profession	3.42 (Medium level)	0.72	2.94 (Medium level)	0.94	6.617	0.0
Respection and conforming with the Domestic Regulations	3.48 (Medium level)	0.73	2.80 (Medium level)	1.14	8.048	0.0
All negotiations between or among ASEAN Member States	3.15 (Medium level)	1.07	2.77 (Medium level)	1.14	4.694	0.0

According to Table 2, the sample group had knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in terms of objective and principles at average level; whereby the level of knowledge had significantly higher mean than that of the understanding level.



**Table 3** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviation (S.D), and t-test against the samples based on the levels of knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in terms of definitions and scope in the field of ASEAN accounting profession

Definitions and Scope	Knowledge level		Understanding level		Knowledge and Understanding level	
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t	Sig.
Accountancy Services	3.11 (Medium level)	1.10	2.84 (Medium level)	0.98	2.84	0.005
Country of Origin	3.39 (Medium level)	0.83	3.04 (Medium level)	1.04	5.112	0.0
Criteria/Standards	3.35 (Medium level)	0.73	2.74 (Medium level)	1.11	7.427	0.0
Domestic Regulations	2.75 (Medium level)	1.06	2.61 (Medium level)	1.14	1.785	0.077
Host Country	2.83 (Medium level)	0.91	2.53 (Medium level)	1.14	3.846	0.0
Practising Professional Accountant (PPA)	3.05 (Medium level)	0.92	2.61 (Medium level)	1.20	5.341	0.0
Recognition	3.08 (Medium level)	0.85	2.71 (Medium level)	1.00	5.118	0.0

According to Table 3, the sample group had knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in terms of definitions and scope at average level; whereby the level of knowledge had significantly higher mean than that of the understanding level. Except for the domestic regulations, this item had higher mean than that of the understanding, but not significantly.

**Table 4** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviation (S.D), and t-test against the samples based on the levels of knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in terms of basis for recognition in the field of ASEAN accounting profession

Basis for Recognition	Knowledge level		Understanding level		Knowledge and Understanding level	
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t	Sig.
- Education	3.15 (Medium level)	0.85	2.75 (Medium level)	0.89	5.823	0.0
- Licences	3.01 (Medium level)	0.98	2.68 (Medium level)	1.04	4.342	0.0
- Domonstration of Competencies	3.15 (Medium level)	0.80	2.68 (Medium level)	0.94	6.196	0.0
- Experience	3.30 (Medium level)	0.82	2.94 (Medium level)	0.93	5.453	0.0
- International Federation of Accountants (IFAC)	3.28 (Medium level)	0.72	2.88 (Medium level)	0.85	5.434	0.0

According to Table 4, the sample group had knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in terms of basis for recognition at average level; whereby the level of knowledge had significantly higher mean than that of the understanding level.

**Table 5** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviation (S.D), and t-test against the samples based on the levels of knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in terms of domestic regulations in the field of ASEAN accounting profession

Domestics Regulation	Knowledge level		Understanding level		Knowledge and Understanding level	
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t	Sig.
- Domestics Regulation	3.04 (Medium level)	0.91	2.58 (Medium level)	0.94	6.077	0.0
- Professional Regulatory Authority (The NAB or PRA) Granting recognition to the PPA	3.24 (Medium level)	0.94	2.82 (Medium level)	0.95	5.611	0.0
- Professional Regulatory Authority (The NAB or PRA) Monitoring the professional practice of the PPA	3.09 (Medium level)	0.96	2.68 (Medium level)	0.96	5.669	0.0
- Professional Regulatory Authority (The NAB or PRA) Setting or maintaining	3.21 (Medium level)	0.86	2.64 (Medium level)	1.09	6.409	0.0
- Professional Regulatory Authority (The NAB or PRA) Exchanging information regarding Domestic Regulations	3.05 (Medium level)	1.13	2.73 (Medium level)	1.16	4.721	0.0

According to Table 5, the sample group had knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in terms of domestic regulations at average level; whereby the level of knowledge had significantly higher mean than that of the understanding level.

**Table 6** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviation (S.D), and t-test against the samples based on the levels of knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in terms of mutual recognition arrangements in the field of ASEAN accounting profession

Mutual Recognition Arrangements	Knowledge level		Understanding level		Knowledge and Understanding level	
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t	Sig.
- Subject to the circumstances of each ASEAN Member State	2.85 (Medium level)	1.10	2.49 (Medium level)	1.04	4.78	0.00
- ASEAN Member States are encouraged to keep to spirit of the World Trade Organisation	2.90 (Medium level)	1.10	2.61 (Medium level)	1.11	3.08	0.00
- ASEAN Member States are urged to keep to the spirit of this MRA Framework	2.89 (Medium level)	1.07	2.62 (Medium level)	1.13	3.69	0.00
- The provisions of this MRA Framework shall apply to nationals of ASEAN Member States	3.13 (Medium level)	0.97	2.54 (Medium level)	1.18	6.85	0.00

According to Table 6, the sample group had knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession in terms of mutual recognition arrangements at average level; whereby the level of knowledge had significantly higher mean than that of the understanding level.

**Table 7** Attitudes of listed firms towards accounting profession and free workforce mobility within ASEAN

Factors	Attitude Level (Number of people)						$\bar{x}$	S.D
	-1 Disagree	-2 Totally disagree	0 No comment	1 Agree	2 Totally agree			
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN will enhance efficiency and quality of accounting standards in ASEAN countries as to MRA.	7	-	12	69	21		0.95 (Agree)	7.5
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN will facilitate ASEAN accountants when working in other countries with no need to take the test of basic qualifications.	-	2	7	83	17		1.04 (Agree)	0.623
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN provides opportunity to the qualified professionals to apply for registration or work permit in the member nations according to the rules and regulations in the said countries.	4	-	5	78	22		1.08 (Agree)	0.626
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN has impacts on labor market of accountants in Thailand.	2	-	26	31	50		1.18 (Agree)	0.862
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN makes accounting professionals have to prepare themselves in terms of work experiences, potential development, English language skills, and the third language.	-	-	5	36	68		1.58 (Agree)	0.582
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN prompts the educational institutes to focus on development of educational potential and curricula in order to be competitive in the world arena and get ready to enter AEC, to work in other countries, and to learn the cultures of other ASEAN nations.	-	-	1	56	52		1.47 (Agree)	0.519
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN prompts the educational institutes to produce comprehensive intellectuals, especially the skilled labor who could work in any member country of ASEAN. Thereby, the said curricular had to cover science, agricultural science, economics, business administration, computer, and English language.	2	-	10	40	57		1.39 (Agree)	0.733
Nationality of ASEAN accountants has impact on the recruitment of this profession in ASEAN due to the Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN.	4	-	17	74	14		0.9 (Agree)	0.652
Workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN helps facilitate the movement of workforce, improve skills, increase employment, and update information system of labor market.	3	-	13	74	19		1 (Agree)	0.638

According to Table 7, it was found that the samples had positive attitude towards accounting profession and free workforce mobility within ASEAN. The mean of attitude level towards free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN on the item of totally agree was at 1.58, resulting that the ASEAN accounting professionals had to prepare themselves in terms of work experiences, potential development, English language skills, and the third language. Also, the mean of attitude level towards free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN on the item of agree was at 1.47, which encouraged the educational institutes to focus on development of educational potential and curricular in order to be competitive in the world arena and get ready to enter AEC, to work in other countries, and to learn the cultures of other ASEAN nations. And the mean of attitude level towards free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN on the item of agree was at 1.39, resulting in the educational institutes having to produce comprehensive intellectuals, especially the skilled labor who could work in any member country of ASEAN. Thereby, the said curricular had to cover science, agricultural science, economics, business administration, computer, and English language.

**Table 8** Intensity level of reasons for the recruitment of accountants at present before and after workforce mobility

Qualifications of Accountants	<u>Before workforce mobility</u>		<u>After workforce mobility</u>		t	Sig.
	$\bar{x}$	<u>S.D</u>	$\bar{x}$	<u>S.D</u>		
Thai nationality with permanent address in Thailand	4.15 (High)	0.75	3.67 (High)	1.04	-7.113	0.0
Bachelor degree of accountancy or equivalent with certification from Office of The Civil Service Commission	4.23 (High)	0.69	4.44 (High)	0.59	-5.793	0.0
English language skill	3.51 (High)	0.89	4.31 (High)	0.72	-13.519	0.0
Accounting software literacy	3.82 (High)	0.83	4.09 (High)	0.87	-7.587	0.0
Computer literacy in Microsoft Office	3.97 (High)	0.79	4.30 (High)	0.69	-8.292	0.0
Literacy in Thai Accounting Standard, Thailand Financial Reporting Standard, Public Limited Companies Act, particular laws of each business, and other laws relevant to accounting profession.	4.09 (High)	0.78	4.44 (High)	0.68	-7.915	0.0
Attending the training on accounting knowledge development in terms of accountancy, taxes, and other relevant fields.	4.07 (High)	0.76	4.18 (High)	0.754	-2.668	0.008
Experiences in accountancy, taxes, and other relevant fields.	3.96 (High)	0.824	4.24 (High)	0.721	-7.339	0.0
Knowledgeable in company business	3.84 (High)	0.894	4.02 (High)	0.947	-4.320	0.0
Possess good Thai language skills enough to do the accounting in Thai	3.98 (High)	0.828	4.22 (High)	0.763	-4.776	0.0

According to Table 8, the intensity level of reasons for the recruitment of accountants at present **before** and **after** workforce mobility of ASEAN accounting profession was rated at high level by the listed firms. And the top 4 qualifications mostly considered for the recruitment were Thai nationality with permanent address in Thailand (**before** workforce mobility = 4.15, S.D. = 0.75 and **after** workforce mobility = 3.67, S.D. = 1.04), Bachelor degree of accountancy or equivalent with certification from Office of The Civil Service Commission (**before** workforce mobility = 4.23, S.D. = 0.69 and **after** workforce mobility = 4.44, S.D. = 0.59), Literacy in Thai Accounting Standard, Thailand Financial Reporting Standard, Public Limited Companies Act, particular laws of each business, and other laws relevant to accounting profession (**before** workforce mobility = 4.09, S.D. = 0.78 and **after** workforce mobility = 4.44, S.D. = 0.68), and English language skills (**before** workforce mobility = 3.51, S.D. = 0.89 and **after** workforce mobility = 4.31, S.D. = 0.72). The intensity level of reasons for the recruitment of accountants at present **after** workforce mobility of ASEAN accounting profession had significantly higher mean than that of **before** workforce mobility of ASEAN accounting profession.

## Discussion

Most of the listed firms, 58.4%, had neither knowledge nor understanding about Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of accounting profession, which was much higher than those, 16.3%, which really had the said knowledge and understanding. Once considering the MRA Framework in the field of accounting profession in details, it was found that even though the said listed firms had some knowledge, they still did not have any understanding thereof. Referring to the average points of both knowledge and understanding, the knowledge level had significantly higher mean than that of the understanding level. Perhaps, this was due to the lack of awareness in accounting profession and preparedness to enter ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in the year 2015. Furthermore, there were too many rules and regulations concerning any professions in Thailand, as seen in Attachment of Royal Decree on Forbidding Jobs for Alien Workers B.E. 2522 Especially, the accounting profession in Thailand was subject to such particular laws as Accounting Act B.E. 2543 and Accounting Profession Act B.E. 2547. (Government Gazette, 2004 and



Department Of Business Development, 2012) The above reasons complied with Modernization Theory (Wattanasirichaigoon, 2010) and the research of Soipet (2012), which found that the service sector was growing rapidly together with the industry sector and becoming more and more significant to the country's economy; however, the former was completely reserved while there was fierce competition in the industry section. This was also in accordance to the researches of Chaiprasit and Censathira (2010), and Prateepvanich (2013), who found that the government sectors and the private sectors in Thailand had to establish the guidelines of mutual operations as well as other preparedness in order to deal with the big changes of regional economic systems in the near future. In addition, this research was in line with those of Charoensuk and Charoensuk (2011), and Kaewphap (2012), who found that the first step to raise the preparedness of labor in one country was to provide its people with helpful information by means of public relation and publication.

The listed firms agreed on the free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN, which resulted in educational institutes to prepare themselves and focus on development of educational potential and curricular in order to be competitive in the world arena and get ready to enter AEC, to work in other countries, and to learn the cultures of other ASEAN nations. This was corresponding to the researches of Kaewphap (2012), Saetae et al., (2010), Charoenphon et al, (2011), Wattanavirai et al., (2012) and Pangleelart (2012), which indicated that Thailand and its educational institutes had to be reformed in a way that the education should be more universal and more updated in order to catch up with the on-going changes in the world and get ready for the upcoming AEC. Considering the rate of return on profession in Singapore and Malaysia that was three times as much as that in Thailand, more and more Thai labor might be attracted to work in other countries.

The listed firms agreed on the free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN, resulting in the educational institutes having to produce comprehensive intellectuals, especially the skilled labor who could work in any member country of ASEAN. Thereby, the said curricular

had to cover science, agricultural science, economics, business administration, computer, accountancy, and English language. This was in compliance with the researches of Sngounsiritham (2012), Charoensuk and Charoensuk (2011) referring to Pasu Dhecharin (2006), Wattanasirichaigoon (2010), Panyamit (2005), Suwanpong (2011), Sutantivanichkul (2011), and Inrak et al., (2006), which suggested that there be vision development in education management, publication of ASEAN knowledge, and promotion of curricular and instructional methods to reach international standards of ASEAN. Also, the graduates had to be well equipped with very good basic skills of English language, computer literacy, and management.

According to the survey on qualifications of accountants required by the listed firms **before** and **after** AEC, it was found that the said listed firms rated "high" for intensity level of reasons for the recruitment of accountants at present **before** and **after** workforce mobility on Bachelor degree of accountancy or equivalent with certification from Office of The Civil Service Commission. In other words, the accountants had to graduate at least with Bachelor degree of accountancy or equivalent from any educational institutes certified by Ministry of University Affairs, by Office of The Civil Service Commission, or by Ministry of Education (Department of Business Development). This was in accordance with the researches of Charoensuk and Charoensuk (2011), and Tunwasinpong et al., (2011), which found out that the newly graduates with degrees who could communicate in English, whether in daily life or in workplace, were considered quality labor.

The listed firms rated "high" for intensity level of reasons for the recruitment of accountants at present **before** and **after** workforce mobility on Thai nationality with permanent address in Thailand. This complied with the researches of Tunwasinpong et al., (2011), Nakpibal (2007), and Saetae et al., (2010), which indicated that labor from different countries also had different expertise depending on their policies of human resource management. Also, there should be obvious policies on alien labor by using legal registration.

The listed firms rated "high" for intensity level of reasons for the

recruitment of accountants at present **before** and **after** workforce mobility on Literacy in Thai Accounting Standard, Thailand Financial Reporting Standard, Public Limited Companies Act, particular laws of each business, and other laws relevant to accounting profession. This correlated with the research of Kaewphap (2012), who found that there was instructional management to prepare the students in the faculty of accountancy for the competition in ASEAN market labor. Thereby, the said management was based on the framework of Federation of Accounting Professions, which enabled Thai accountants to compete with their counterparts in other countries.

The listed firms rated "high" for intensity level of reasons for the recruitment of accountants at present **before** and **after** workforce mobility on steady trainings for the development of knowledge about accounting and relevant taxes. This corresponded to the researches of Inrak et al., (2006), Wattanasirichaigoon (2010), Chaiya (2008), Geawgirdsee (2006), and Tunwasinpong et al., (2011), which recommended that both government sectors and private sectors should develop skilled labor to increase productivity of human capital and competitiveness, and to get Thailand ready for the upcoming AEC.

## **Conclusions**

The principle of MRA Framework in the field of accounting was to provide a guideline to be used as a basis of negotiation in mutual recognition agreement for ASEAN accounting profession in the future, whether bilateral or multilateral, with standard criteria of mutual recognition, i.e. education, examination, experiences, recognition process, information and document systems, disciplines and ethics, universal standards and practices. Thereby, the future Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) must not reduce rights, authority, and responsibility of the ASEAN members to supervise and issue rules, regulations, or laws in their own countries, provided that the said actions would not bring about any problems. The said agreement established MRA Framework in the field of accounting profession, which consisted of Objective and Principles, Definitions and

Scope, Basis for Recognition, Domestic Regulations, Mutual Recognition Arrangements, Amendments, Dispute Settlement, and Final Provisions. Regarding the accounting profession in Thailand, there were several rules and regulations because the said profession was reserved only for Thai citizens as provided in the attachment of Royal Decree on Forbidding Jobs for Alien Workers B.E. 2522, also applicable to accounting profession in attachment 3 of the said act. Therefore, the reservation of some professions was deemed as an obstacle for the foreign labor unless authorized by Director General of Department of Business Development, under the consideration of Foreign Business Commission presided by Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce.

It was found from the overall research of the listed firms already had a little knowledge and understanding of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of ASEAN accounting profession.

The listed firms had positive attitude towards accounting profession and free workforce mobility within ASEAN, once considering the top three items with the highest ratings. It was found that, the mean of attitude level towards free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN on the item of totally agree, resulting that the ASEAN accounting professionals had to prepare themselves in terms of work experiences, potential development, English language skills, and the third language. Next, the mean of attitude level towards free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN on the item of agree, which encouraged the educational institutes to focus on development of educational potential and curricular in order to be competitive in the world arena and get ready to enter AEC, to work in other countries, and to learn the cultures of other ASEAN nations. And finally, the mean of attitude level towards free workforce mobility of accounting profession within ASEAN, resulting in the educational institutes having to produce comprehensive intellectuals, especially the skilled labor who could work in any member country of ASEAN. Thereby, the said curricular had to cover science, agricultural science, economics, business administration, computer, accountancy, and English language.

The intensity level of reasons for the recruitment of accountants at present **before** and **after** workforce mobility of ASEAN accounting profession was rated at high level by the listed firms.

### **Suggestion**

The results of this research showed that the listed firms had positive attitudes towards accounting profession and workforce mobility within ASEAN, indicating that the said listed firms also had awareness and preparedness for the changes after entering AEC.

The government agencies should propagate, especially to all units in charge, the information about Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in the field of ASEAN accounting profession, e.g. ASEAN rules, privileges, provisions, and conditions concerning different vocations. In addition, there should be a systematic development of framework, profession standards, skilled-labor standards, qualifications of jobs or occupations, and expertise of accountants as well as the code of ethics thereof.

To enhance the potential and competitiveness of labor in the long run, the educational units should develop comprehensive curricular that covered science, agricultural science, economics, business administration, computer, accountancy, and English language. Also, to equip the students of accountancy with accounting expertise, there should be an emphasis on the knowledge of Thai Accounting Standard, Thailand Financial Reporting Standard, International Financial Reporting Standard, Public Limited Companies Act, particular laws of each business, and other laws relevant to accounting profession, which were all updated and in current use. Moreover, the students should be promoted in terms of different skills such as computer literacy, accounting software, and English for communication and learning. Not only that, the students should be taught about cultures, virtues, and morals of ASEAN members so that they would graduate as quality intellectuals of the society, which corresponded to the demand of ASEAN labor market and the beginning of sustainable free trade on professional services.

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