Regionalism in world politics is a growing phenomenon. Regional cooperation has come to play greater role because of the changes in the geo-political and strategic environment at the global level since 1991. The processes of regional integration have received a great support through the establishment of the European Union (EU) in Europe and the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN) in Asia. The ASEAN countries have opened-up the idea of offering partnership to regional powers in the vicinity of the region. This process has been undertaken in order to expand and open-up its market to new members, it is also looking to integrate the region in real terms. The economic integration process of ASEAN 10 with +3 is ongoing and this requires the strengthening of the existing networks.

ASEAN has encouraged the formation of several sub-regional groupings to promote trade, investment and tourism in the region. Out of the many sub-regional projects formulated in the region, two are worth mentioning. They are the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). The GMS which came into being in 1992 with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is multi-dimensional in nature. The GMS is one of the most recent proposals for Growth Triangles (GT) of the Southeast Asian countries. The GMS proposal includes the cooperation of Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Yunnan (China) all of which are traversed by the Mekong River, the world's twelfth longest river.

GMS is a grouping of countries seeking partnership from which East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) emerges as its major project. It was the byproduct of the strategic initiative evolved at the 8th ministerial meeting of ADB in Manila (1992) wherein the idea and concept of economic corridors were proposed. ADB reported that several Mekong riparian countries were in transition to more market based and diversified economies. Although some countries of the Mekong sub-region are developed and competitive, majority of them remains poor and dependent.

One of the major initiatives within the framework of EWEC was to reduce poverty in the corridor by supporting the development of rural and border areas. It intends to increase the income generating capacity of low-income groups by providing employment opportunities and promoting tourism, which is one of the fast growing sectors in the region. It was reported that in the first decade of its formation (1992-2005), the GMS "priority projects worth around US $5.2 billion have been
either completed or being implemented.” Thus, by mid-2002, 10 major infrastructural projects like building better transport facilities, inter-connected energy development, facilitating easy cross-border movement of goods and people, the development of fiber optic tele-communication backbones, the promotion of GMS as a single tourist destination, development of strategic environment framework, promotion of cooperation on HIV/AIDS and human resource development are reported to have been either completed or under implementation.

Besides the above programmes during 1995-2005, various important social, cultural, economic and political agreements were signed and agreed upon bilaterally and multilaterally by the member countries. These includes the 1995 Agreement on the Co-operation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin; the 1999 landmark trade accord; 2001 Flood Management and Mitigation Agreement between Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam; and the 2002 Mekong Enterprise Fund.

Therefore, the present study “East-West Economic Corridor Initiative and Thailand, 1995-2005,” examines conceptual framework achievements and limitations of the proposal. This thesis has been studied in five chapters.

The first chapter gives an introductory look on the conceptualisation of East-West Economic Corridor.

The second chapter examines the structure and functions of East-West Economic Corridor and how it has promoted relations with neighbouring countries.

In chapter three, Thailand’s role in EWEC has been critically analysed. Further, Thailand’s neighbourhood policy and a regional vision has also been evaluated.

Chapter four has focused on the plans and policies of the member countries (Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and China).

Chapter five examines the responses and policies of external powers (USA, Japan, India and China) and international organizations particularly that of EU and ESCAP towards EWEC initiatives.
Chapter six at the end, has concluding observations, where the role of Thailand in EWEC has been summarised. Here it is noteworthy to mention that while writing the synopsis, I had some hypotheses and the following have been tested:

1. Political differences and unequal levels of economic development in CLMV have worked against the ethos of multilateral cooperation.

2. EWEC is by and large the function of external economic assistance and therefore its success depends on external donors and agencies.

3. EWEC project supports development activities of CLMV and it may be projected as a model of sub-regional cooperation.

Indo-China region still faces many internal and external challenges. For instance, several Mekong countries are in the transition stage towards market-based and diversified economies. Although some areas of the Mekong sub-region are developed and competitive, much of the sub-region remains poor and dependent on subsistence farming. However, it is surprising to find that, in general, national trade policies of most EWEC countries are biased against the agriculture and natural resource-based activities that are particularly important to economic development along the Corridor. At present, substantial policy and procedural barriers hinder the movement of goods across borders within the EWEC, causing unwarranted delays and transport costs. The trend at the national, provincial and local levels seems to be moving on the same line, because EWEC countries agreed on an overall ambitious programme, the practical development vision and efforts are lacking. Besides, internal political crisis within the region like entry restrictions into countries like Myanmar by its military ruler, accompanied by the large-scale incidents of human rights violation and the inter-state conflict resulting from border disputes impinge on the successful implementation of EWEC programmes.

Further, all the major GMS Programmes including the “hard” (infrastructure development) and “soft” (multi-country agreements and reforms) implementation depends on foreign aids. Similarly, in the development and implementation of the EWEC, state and non-state actors like the Asian Development Bank, Japan Bank and others have played a major role. Therefore, the success or failure of the GMS and EWEC Programmes largely depends on the support of the donors.
Despite problems, EWEC have proved a successful venture, in which the role of Thailand have been appreciated. This study has made an effort to trace the origin and evolution of EWEC, as a concomitant of Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), and analyse various plans and programmes under its auspices to contribute to overall development of the deprived Indo-China region.