

**CAMBODIA'S
ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP IN 2022**

Priorities and Challenges

EDITED BY

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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

As Cambodia takes over the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from Brunei, this small but fierce country is taking over at a time of momentous challenge to the organization and the world.

Cambodians are astutely aware that their chairmanship of ASEAN will be watched closely from home and abroad. With the Kingdom at the helm of the organization many views this opportunity that demands undivided attention from the many actors involved in its preparation and execution.

For the past two years Southeast Asia has had to grapple with a challenge well-outside of the conventional political experience of a region already prone to challenges: The world-wide Covid-19-pandemic. In a region, where the service industry increasingly grows in importance and skilled labor becomes ever more valuable, the wholesale disruption of regional and especially people-to-people links has caused economic havoc on a scale that is still difficult to describe.

In late 2021, signs of better times seem to be on the horizon with national borders becoming again more open to travelers. Cambodia is now posited to preside over a return to normalcy or at least a semblance of it.

The other big challenge ASEAN will take into 2022 is of a more conventionally political but no less at least equally difficult nature: The ongoing instability in Myanmar will continue to make things difficult for the currently 10 member-states of ASEAN.

Finally, there is the broader state of play of international politics in 2021: With the People's Republic of China flexing its muscles in the region and the United States of America trying to regain influence deemed to been lost over the last decade, ASEAN is finding itself increasingly situated between a rock and a hard place, with calls to its member states to choose sides increasing in volume, threatening to undermine the very concept of ASEAN-centrality.

But the Cambodian chairmanship of ASEAN is not just all about challenges but also about opportunities both for the Kingdom and for the region as a whole. Where does ASEAN want to go in the 55 year of its existence? What are the areas where the organization can grow and gain in stature?

These are the questions the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in Cambodia have asked us and our authors in this book. Over three sections and 15 chapters, we will look at the past, present and future of the organization, the internal and external situations facing ASEAN and finally the priorities and challenges facing it under Cambodia's leadership.

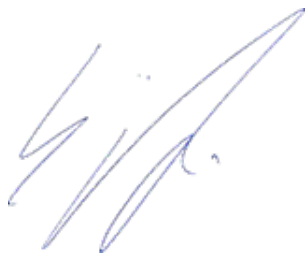
AVI and KAS are proud to have worked together on this project, that we hope will make a contribution to project the future trajectory of ASEAN under Cambodia's stewardship and further afield. A diverse cast of the most renowned experts and researchers from Cambodia, Southeast Asia and around the globe has submitted chapters to this book reflecting not just a diversity of different topics but also of national backgrounds, perspectives and viewpoints. We hope that you, dear reader, will find the topics you will encounter over the next few hundred pages stimulating.

We wish you an insightful and hopefully thought-provoking read.

Phnom Penh, 3 December 2021,

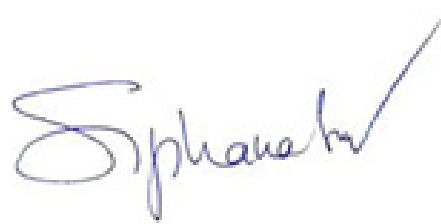
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This book project entitled “Cambodia’s ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022: Priorities and Challenges” would not have been possible to publish in a timely manner without firm commitment, tremendous support, and strong cooperation from multiple contributors, including the editorial team, authors and everyone who was involved with this book project. Therefore, we would like to express our highest appreciation to all of them.

As the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is still raging on around the globe, presenting formidable difficulties in conducting daily activities or projects, we managed to accomplish this book according to schedule. It is worth noting that the book was commenced in January 2021, and the whole book manuscript was ready and submitted for publication in November 2021. In this regard, we indeed owe our heartfelt thanks to all the contributing authors for their untiring perseverance in submitting their chapters. Despite the hectic schedule and tight deadlines of the entire process, they accepted the additional workload with a kind understanding and prompt responses over the course of an almost one-year-long journey.

Moreover, we would like to express our great appreciation to the teams at the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in Cambodia, who worked in tandem to make this project a reality.

Dr Chheang Vannarith, AVI President, and all the Directors of AVI Centres, particularly Dr Leng Thearith, Dr Cheunboran Chanborey and Dr Ngoun Kimly, have provided constant encouragement and vigorous support for this book project. Throughout the entire process, the team at KAS Cambodia, namely Mr Maurizio Paciello and Mr Lim Chhay, have been very supportive and helpful in taking part in the selection of authors, facilitating typesetting, designing, and preparing the book for publication and printing.

Several individuals at AVI also deserves our great appreciation, particularly Mr Lim Menghour, Ms Him Sothearoth, Mr Sovan Piseyrattanak and other AVI’s colleagues whom we could not mention all the names, for their excellent coordination and communication with the reviewers, editors, authors and KAS team to ensure things proceeded as planned as well as for their facilitation and help pertinent to administrative arrangements.

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SECTION 01

INTRODUCTION

Following the establishment of the Second Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993, the Cambodian government adopted an “open door” policy through its engagement with the outside world, especially its regional integration into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since becoming a full member of ASEAN on 30 April 1999, Cambodia has always regarded ASEAN as one of the most important and relevant platforms to enhance peace, stability, and prosperity of the Kingdom and the region at large. Thus, ASEAN has become the cornerstone of Phnom Penh’s foreign policy, as Cambodian foreign policymakers are convinced that the regional grouping provides a strategic window of opportunities for Cambodia to regain its regional role and promote its national interests regionally and internationally.

Economically, Cambodian leaders strongly believed that Cambodia’s participation in ASEAN would pave the way for the Kingdom to spur its economic development by promoting trade, investment, tourism, agriculture, and physical infrastructure development. Diplomatically, Phnom Penh was convinced that ASEAN would enable Cambodia to expand its foreign relations, especially with great powers. ASEAN was considered a regional diplomatic club due to its enmeshment with the great powers in several regional frameworks, including the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Plus Three, and the East Asia Summit. Strategically, Cambodia’s membership in ASEAN was motivated by the belief that ASEAN would safeguard the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

For over the last two decades, Cambodia has viewed ASEAN as a catalyst of regional economic integration and diversification, a shield to protect its sovereignty and independence, and a platform to promote its national identity and prestige. The Kingdom has been fully supportive of the regional architecture and order, particularly the ASEAN Community Building. Thus far, Cambodia has assumed the ASEAN Chairmanship twice in 2002 and 2012. Noticeably, the Chairmanship in 2012 created diplomatic deadlock, as the ASEAN foreign ministers failed for the first time to issue a joint communiqué, widely known as the ‘Phnom Penh Fiasco’.

As the ASEAN Chair, Cambodia had to take responsibility for the Phnom Penh Fiasco. However, the Kingdom should not have been solely blamed for the diplomatic crisis for the simple reason that ASEAN’s decision is based on consensus. The countries that should be held accountable were indeed those that tried to introduce new wordings on the South China Sea. Moreover, the Phnom Penh Fiasco also reflected the fluid security environment in the region, as the US and China were destined to confront in this part of the world after the Obama administration announced the “Pivot to Asia” in late 2009. This strategy was seen, at least in the eyes of Chinese policymakers, as an attempt to encircle China. Controversially, at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi in 2010, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared publicly that the US had a national interest in the South China Sea, especially the freedom of navigation and overflight.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hindered the regional community-building process, as evidenced by the current negative economic growth throughout the region. Thus, it is increasingly evident that ASEAN would not achieve its key milestones, i.e., the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity 2025, within the agreed timeframes. Consequently, the upcoming ASEAN Chairs, including Cambodia, may have to do the heavy lifting in the future.

The political crisis in Myanmar will remain as another hot potato for ASEAN. The group is expected to perform a key role in mediating the crisis. Despite ASEAN's considerable efforts in resolving the issue, the Myanmar problem is likely to linger and shows little sign of positive progress. The bloc has been wedged between the respect for the non-interference norm and the promotion of democratic values as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter.

Despite its mammoth efforts to be the good Chair in 2012, Cambodia was criticised for obstructing the issuance of the joint statement on the South China Sea. Although it is not fair to blame Cambodia, the said incident has adversely affected Cambodia's image in the region and beyond. Therefore, the hot issue of the South China Sea will continue to pose a big challenge for ASEAN as a whole and for Cambodia as the next chair.

Even worse, the exacerbating geopolitical rivalry between the US and China has created tectonic shockwaves to the regional order, affecting ASEAN centrality. It will generate tremendous pressure and challenges on Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. Several outstanding challenges that are likely to cloud the Kingdom's Chairmanship include the increasing tensions over the South China Sea, the politicisation of water management in the Mekong River, the Taiwan Strait, the de-nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, so on and so forth.

To tackle the above challenges and uphold ASEAN centrality, Cambodia needs to ramp up its diplomatic efforts in coordinating, compromising, and engaging with its ASEAN fellows and dialogue partners in a constructive manner. In other words, the Kingdom needs to act cautiously in managing the differences and interests of ASEAN members and its external partners. Unfortunately, this appears to be an 'easier-said-than-done' task for the Kingdom. Therefore, soliciting policy inputs and insights from scholars, researchers, policy practitioners, and relevant stakeholders is crucial for this small state's assurance of successful chairmanship.

The Asian Vision Institute (AVI) and Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Cambodia have worked together to produce a timely and relevant policy book entitled, "Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022: Priorities and Challenges", to identify opportunities and challenges ASEAN may face during Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022. In this regard, the book contributors include but are not limited to policy advisers, researchers, analysts, and practitioners in the field.

The book makes the following contributions: (1) identifying opportunities and challenges that may arise during Cambodia's upcoming ASEAN Chairmanship; (2) exploring priorities and key deliverables for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship; (3) identifying the constraints and challenges that Cambodia may encounter; and (4) soliciting policy inputs for policymakers to enable Cambodia to act as an effective ASEAN Chair in 2022 in enhancing the four main pillars, including the ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, and ASEAN's External Relations.

The book, a collection of policy-oriented research papers, is expected to provide a better understanding of Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 for relevant stakeholders inside and outside the region, as well as the public. In addition, the recommendations on practical policies are drawn upon to assist Cambodian policymakers in successfully hosting the ASEAN Summits and related meetings in 2022. This book also serves as a solid piece of policy-oriented research, which provides diverse perspectives from policy advisers, scholars, researchers, investors, and practitioners.

BOOK OUTLINE

This book is segregated into three parts consisting of 14 main chapters. Section II, which contains three chapters, offers inside-out perspectives from regional scholars and researchers on ASEAN Community building. Chapter 1 explores the journey of ASEAN in the last 54 years and the road ahead for ASEAN Community building and the active contributions of Viet Nam to this regional association. The chapter highlights that ASEAN needs to realise the goal of ASEAN Community 2025 and move forwards to realise the post-2025 vision, while consolidating its centrality and its stance as a reliable and sustainable partner to regional and external countries. Chapter 2 offers broad insights into Brunei's ASEAN Chairmanship and the lessons for Cambodia in 2022. In addition, the chapter provides the lessons and experiences from Brunei's ASEAN Chairmanship in handling three issues, namely the South China Sea, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Myanmar crisis. Chapter 3 attempts to examine ASEAN community-building efforts from an outside-in perspective by contrasting these efforts to the European Union (EU). The chapter mainly argues that ASEAN's community-building efforts have been distracted by member states' domestic politics and affected by the increasingly complex and contested regional environment.

Section III, which has five chapters, examines ASEAN and its relations with external partners. Chapter 4 aims to offer thoughts and insights into the future of ASEAN-China relations and explore the impact of COVID-19 and major-power competition on ASEAN-China relations. The chapter illustrates that ASEAN and China need to carry on the spirit of cooperation to address the challenges and maintain peace and prosperity in the region. Chapter 5 explores Japan's emerging ASEAN policy under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) by focusing on its continuities and discontinuities from the 1977 Fukuda doctrine, the guiding principles for Japan's ASEAN policy from then, and provide policy proposals for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. Chapter 6 studies the evolution of ASEAN-US relations since 1977, analyses the US's foreign policy towards ASEAN, particularly under Joe Biden's administration, and offers policy recommendations for a successful Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. Chapter 7 aims to provide insights on ASEAN-EU relations as a strategic partnership. The chapter argues that ASEAN and the EU will have to strengthen their ties in the political and security domain more effectively to produce concrete and context-sensitive outcomes. Chapter 8 discusses the implications of US-China competition on the geopolitical landscape in the South China Sea, explores the ASEAN way of conflict management and resolution, and proposes some pathways towards the realisation of lasting peace in the South China Sea.

Section IV, which has six chapters, highlights the priorities and challenges that Cambodia may face during ASEAN Chairmanship 2022. Chapter 9 aims to study the roles of ASEAN in the evolving regional security architecture since its existence and provides some suggestions for Cambodia to enhance ASEAN's peace and stability amid the newly emerging regional security issues.

Chapter 10 studies the importance of rural villages in supporting Southeast Asia development by highlighting innovative village initiatives among ASEAN Member States. The chapter argues that a platform for an innovative approach should be established in Cambodia to support and promote the national development of the Kingdom. Chapter 11 mainly illustrates the digital transformation in ASEAN by highlighting recent trends and the impacts of digital services and adoption in the region, especially in mitigating the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter proposes that Cambodia, as the Chair of ASEAN in 2022, promote ASEAN as a platform to capitalise on mobile data and its uses to combat the pandemic. In this case, there is a need to boost digital literacy among member states and enact policy frameworks to safeguard the safety of data used in the region. Chapter 12 discusses the opportunities and challenges of the people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN community from a Cambodian youth perspective, highlights the significant role of regional youth diplomacy in contributing to the ASEAN community vision, and studies US-China power competition's impact on ASEAN Community building. Chapter 13 examines cultural diversity and tourism by focusing on World Heritage Sites, cultural diversity, the importance of cultural values, the negative impacts of COVID-19 on cultural conservation and tourism development, and ASEAN cultural linkage and tourism development promotion in the post-COVID-19 recovery. Chapter 14 discusses the opportunities and challenges that Cambodia may face during its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 and provides a key summary of Cambodia's preparation for this milestone event.

The concluding chapter presents a synthesis and summary of the book. Finally, it highlights useful and practical policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders, particularly Cambodian policymakers, to better prepare for a successful ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022.



CHAPTER 01

ASEAN Community: A Vietnamese Perspective

Le Trung Kien

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967, when Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand signed the Bangkok Declaration as the founding document of ASEAN. Subsequently, Brunei acceded to the association on 7 January 1984. On 28 July 1995, Viet Nam became the 7th member of ASEAN while Laos and Myanmar joined it on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia joined on 30 April 1999. For Viet Nam, the accession to ASEAN was one of the most critical milestones in the country's regional and international integration. This historic event was also the demonstration of the tireless efforts of Viet Nam and ASEAN in transforming Southeast Asia, once a region fraught with conflicts, into one of dialogues, cooperation, mutual trust, and solidarity. This chapter explores the journey of ASEAN Community building in the last 54 years, the road ahead, and Viet Nam's active contributions as a member of this regional endeavour.

ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING: THE 54-YEAR JOURNEY

The word “community” conveys a sense of shared identity, solidarity, and togetherness. The sense of belonging to a community is positive regarding being secure, caring, and proud. Within ASEAN, the term “community” has been reflected as “a big family”, “under one roof”, just to name a few. The rationale of building the ASEAN Community reflected the prevailing trend of the era when ASEAN was established. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the second wave of globalisation and the rise of regionalism. Against this backdrop, countries worldwide worked together for joint development, peace and stability and established regional organisations. On 8 August 1967, five Southeast Asian countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, declared the establishment of ASEAN. The journey of the ASEAN Community has begun since then with the motive “in the spirit of equality and partnership to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations”, as stated in the Bangkok Declaration (ASEAN 1967). The ASEAN Founding Members made clear that the association would be open to all states in Southeast Asia. The community of all ten Southeast Asian countries would ensure peace and stability, leverage the size of the market and production base, and cultivate a harmonious society of diverse cultures.

Community building efforts in ASEAN gained momentum in 2003 as stated in the Bali Concord II, “ASEAN Community shall be established comprising three pillars: political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation” (ASEAN 2012).

From that moment on, the ASEAN Leaders have envisioned the three pillars of the ASEAN Community as follows: the ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) to ensure that countries in the region live peacefully with each other and with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment; the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region; and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) to create a cohesive Southeast Asia in partnership as a community of caring societies.

The ASEAN Community building process was further strengthened with the adoption of the ASEAN Charter. In 2015, the 25th ASEAN Summit adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on “ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, ASEAN Community Vision 2025” and the three Community Blueprints. The ASEAN Community, which came into being on 31 December 2015, has made ASEAN a politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible community. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 puts forward “a peaceful, stable and resilient Community with enhanced capacity to respond effectively to challenges, and ASEAN as an outward-looking region within a global community of nations, while maintaining ASEAN centrality...vibrant, sustainable and highly integrated economies and ASEAN empowered with capabilities, to seize opportunities and address challenges in the coming decade” (ASEAN 2015).

To realise such a community vision, the APSC Blueprint 2025, AEC Blueprint 2025 and ASCC Blueprint 2016–2025 have been implemented. The APSC Blueprint envisages ASEAN to be a rules-based Community of shared values and norms, a cohesive, peaceful, stable, and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security, and a dynamic and outward-looking region in an increasingly integrated and interdependent world (ASEAN 2021). The AEC Blueprint 2025 aims to achieve the vision of having an AEC by 2025 that is highly integrated and cohesive, competitive, innovative, and dynamic, with enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation, and a more resilient, inclusive, and people-oriented, people-centred community, integrated with the global economy (Ibid). The ASCC Blueprint 2025 strives for a community that engages and benefits the people and is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic (Ibid).

REVIEW OF ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING PROCESS

Major achievements

As time passed, the 54-year journey of ASEAN Community building has yielded fruits of rapid economic growth, sustainable peace, and longstanding stability in the region. As stated by Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen, "All these have been achieved through the strong political commitment of the Leaders of ASEAN countries to come together for the good of the community, drawing on the synergies released by the framework for cooperation" (Hun 2017). Former Secretary-General of ASEAN Le Luong Minh also stressed, "The forward-looking strategic vision outlined in the Bangkok Declaration constituted a solid premise for the ASEAN Member States, different in political systems, economic structures and religious beliefs but bonded together by close historical and cultural ties, to thrive beyond themselves, respect and leverage on their differences and successfully built the ASEAN Community of unity in diversity" (Le 2020). In 2020, under the Viet Nam's Chairmanship, ASEAN released the "Mid-term Review of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 Blueprints", which assessed progress in the first five years of implementation of the Blueprints, identified gaps, and offered recommendations on the way forward.

In the political and security pillar, within the framework of the current ASEAN Community, peaceful relations among the ASEAN Member States are sustainable. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia has been established as a foundation of inter-state relations with the participation of nearly forty countries. ASEAN and China announced a draft Framework Code of Conduct in 2017 and a Single Draft Negotiating Text in 2018. The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and the ADMM-plus for external partners have laid the foundation for ASEAN's defence and military cooperation between ASEAN and partner countries (Beginda 2019).

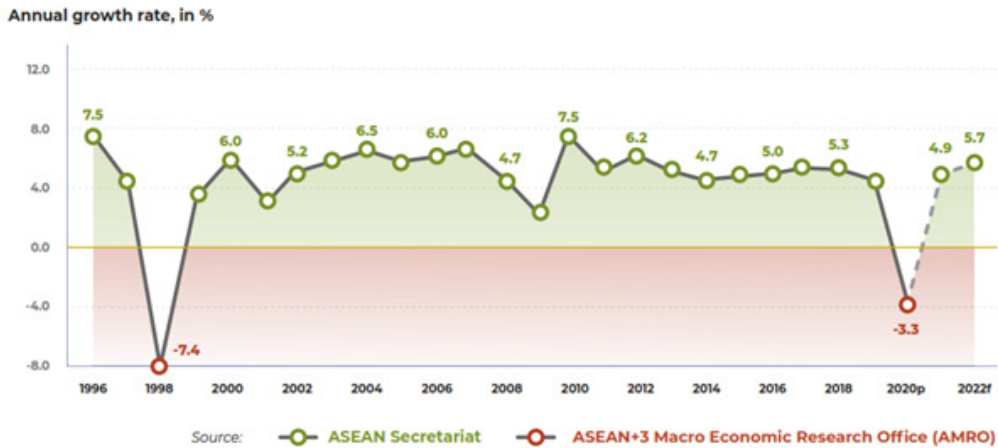
policies are drawn upon to assist Cambodian policymakers in successfully hosting the ASEAN Summits and related meetings in 2022. This book also serves as a solid piece of policy-oriented research, which provides diverse perspectives from policy advisers, scholars, researchers, investors, and practitioners.

A strong ASEAN Community is also a community in which the ASEAN's voice is heard, and regional powers respect the ASEAN's centrality in regional architecture. The concept of ASEAN centrality was coined in the ASEAN Charter. Article 1.15 of the Charter stipulates, "To maintain the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners in a regional architecture that is open, transparent and inclusive" (ASEAN 2021). The ASEAN centrality has been proven by its inventiveness and leading roles in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus).

In the evolving regional architecture, ASEAN has been adaptive. In 2019, ASEAN issued the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The Outlook is “intended to enhance ASEAN Community building process and to strengthen and give new momentum for existing ASEAN-led mechanisms to face challenges better and seize opportunities arising from the current and future regional and global environments” (ASEAN 2019). At the 36th ASEAN Summit hosted by Viet Nam, The Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, stressed the need to “continue to strengthen ASEAN Centrality and unity as the way to be safe and prosperous region and a beacon of hope for multilateralism in these trying times” (Lee 2020). Up until now, ASEAN has ten Dialogue Partners, including all major powers, five Development Partners and Sectoral Dialogue Partners, and official relationship with more than 90 countries. ASEAN-led institutions and arrangements are still the most relevant for channelling efforts to succeed against current and future challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the economic pillar, ASEAN has essentially become a single production base, the world's third-largest market with about 650 million people and an essential link in global production and supply chains. In all the three aspects - physical, institutional, and people-to-people - the ASEAN Community has bonded even closer as ASEAN citizens can move freely within the bloc. Cooperation is reinforced in almost all walks of life. With a combined GDP in 2020 of about 3,11 trillion USD, (Statista). ASEAN has become the fifth largest economy globally and the third largest in Asia. The region is poised to become the fourth-largest economy in the world by 2050 (US-ASEAN Business Council 2021). Until April 2021, 54.1 per cent of sectoral work plans in the AEC had been completed, while 34.2 per cent were being implemented (ASEAN 2021). Within the bloc, the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement has been established. In addition, the network of ASEAN's FTA with partners has strengthened the AEC's continued growth trajectory. These include ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA, ASEAN-China FTA, ASEAN-India FTA, ASEAN-Republic of Korea FTA, and ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership. On 15 November 2020, ASEAN signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement along with Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. The covering of about 30 per cent of global GDP and 3 per cent of the world's population makes RCEP the largest FTA in history. Such efforts have helped lower production costs for businesses and facilitate trade and investment within ASEAN and between ASEAN and partners.

FIGURE 1. REAL GDP GROWTH OF ASEAN, 1996–2021



Source: *Mid-Term Review of ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025*

In the socio-cultural pillar, the progress of implementing the ASCC is encouraging. As of May 2020, 71,8% of the actions and activities in the work plan of ASCC Blueprint had been implemented, including 24,8% was completed.

Types of activities comprise capacity building (29.5%), research and publication (23.9%), public outreach (21.0%), policy formulation (19.2%) and groundwork (6.5%) (ASEAN 2020). On improving the youths' competitiveness and productivity, a series of activities have been organised to equip the youth with 21st-century skills needed in the era of rapid digital transformation, urbanisation, and climate change. The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-School Children and Youth (OOSCY) has been implemented to provide life-long learning, accreditation, and skill development. In addition, the ASEAN Labour Ministers' Statement on the Future of Work: Embracing Technology for Inclusive and Sustainable Work has provided an inclusive framework to help the ASEAN workforce catch up with future skills and work. On healthy lifestyle, the physical wellbeing of the ASEAN Community has been promoted through activities to reduce the non-communicable diseases, combat anti-microbial resistance, and prevent malnutrition. On the environment, the ASCC has also introduced initiatives to reduce marine debris pollution, mitigate the transboundary haze in the region, and build climate-resilient cities. The ASEAN Coordination Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Response and Management (AHA Center) is responsible for developing disaster risk management and climate change adaptation capabilities. In 2019, ASEAN celebrated the ASEAN Cultural year through several initiatives to promote the roles of culture in the region's sustainable development. Finally, raising greater awareness of ASEAN is a vital part to heighten the sense of the ASEAN Community.

The ASEAN Communication Master Plan 2018–2025 (ACMP II) has exerted the bloc's efforts towards the "ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities for All".

Key challenges

Despite significant achievements, the progress of ASEAN Community building has not always been smooth. As reminded by N. Hassan Wirajuda, the former Foreign Minister of Indonesia, it took five years to "translate this into charter-based provision" despite an agreement in principle on the ASEAN Community concept. Moreover, the recent development of the regional and international situation has complicated the ongoing progress of ASEAN Community building. Some key challenges to the ASEAN Community building are as follows.

First, the ASEAN boat is sailing across high seas of increasing uncertainty and disruption. The increasing geopolitical tensions among major powers, especially between the U.S. and China in the region, and the enduring fallout of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic are, among others, big waves affecting the ASEAN Community building. The competition between the U.S. and China continues to worsen down the road. "If ASEAN is to live up to its aspirations of unity and centrality, ASEAN Member States must demonstrate leadership through [a] decisive action on difficult issues even if this may even mean having to [utilise] the consensus-based mechanism differently from the past" (Noor 2020). How to achieve such leadership will be challenging for ASEAN in the time to come. In addition, the outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020 has created additional constraints that are unfavourable for regional multilateralism in general and for ASEAN Community building. This unfolding situation has posed the looming risk of not realising all the priorities and goals of the ASEAN Community by 2025.

Second, although ASEAN Member States have made progress in raising the awareness of the ASEAN Community, recent polls have shown mixed results. In the Poll on ASEAN Awareness 2018, across the 10 ASEAN Member States, 96% of the respondents were aware of ASEAN. However, fewer than one-third claimed to know the ASEAN Community and its three pillars (ASEAN 2018). From the historical perspective, one obstacle to the sense of the ASEAN Community is the cultivation of different national narratives in each of ASEAN Member States (Dira 2016). In addition, the diversity in government systems, economic systems and cultures in the bloc has added more complexity preventing the spirit of togetherness and shared values within ASEAN from converging.

Third, each of the ASEAN Community pillars has its challenges. For the APSC, key challenges include the shifting balance of power in the region, the issue of the East Sea, the domestic political situation of ASEAN Member States, and increasing danger posed by non-traditional security threats. For the AEC, the development gap within ASEAN is still prominent with a broad spectrum of income levels. In 2019, the GDP per capita of Singapore was about 65,233 USD (World Bank Data), while that of Myanmar was about 1,410 USD (World Bank Data). In 2017, the World Bank's Global Findex showed that 98% of people had a bank account in Singapore, while in Cambodia, the number was 22% (World Bank).

These statistics illustrate the urgent need for ASEAN to ensure that the regional economic integration progress is conducive to narrowing development gap among the ASEAN Member States. In addition, as the digitalisation of the ASEAN economy is under way, there is a risk of fragmentation and incompatibility among different systems of technology used by the ASEAN Member States. Given the different pace of digitalisation within ASEAN, this challenge may further widen the digital gap among the ASEAN members. For the ASCC, the changing demographics may pose a challenge. Such challenges are intertwined and require cross-pillar solutions and a stronger communication strategy. For example, given the growing sophistication and transboundary nature of cyber-threats, more collective measures are needed to ensure open, secure, stable, accessible, and resilient cyberspace to support the digital economy and social stability.

VIET NAM'S ACTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

The accession of the Viet Nam to ASEAN in the mid-1990s was a historic moment for both Viet Nam and ASEAN. From the national interest point of view, it is quite evident that the ASEAN membership of Viet Nam was driven by pragmatic reasons of creating a stable and peaceful regional environment for the country's security and economic growth. From the constructivist approach, Tung (2007) argued, "Viet Nam joining ASEAN was also part of a broader process in which the country forged a new state identity in the post-Cold War era" (Nguyen 2007). There was a recognition in Viet Nam that "by working with ASEAN it can have a greater impact on regional and global events, rather than by just acting alone" (Le and Hoang 2013). The ASEAN membership has helped Viet Nam acquire a new image and new international status.

It is clear that the Southeast Asian region is vital for Viet Nam. Therefore, it is in Viet Nam's interest to contribute to ASEAN Community building. As stated by former Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Manh Cam, "The Asia Pacific region, at first Southeast Asia and East Asia, places an important position in the foreign policy of Viet Nam" (Nguyen 2009). In 2000, former Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Dy Nien said, "ASEAN membership increasingly provides us with the feeling of being on board with other ASEAN countries, which promotes better mutual understanding and sympathy" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam). The former Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung also referred to ASEAN as "a great family" (People's Daily 2007). ASEAN countries endeavoured to construct an ASEAN Community, Viet Nam "finds it quite comfortable in its support for and commitment to this grand project" (Nguyen 2007). Furthermore, the recent 13th National Party Congress of the Communist Party of Viet Nam decided to elevate Viet Nam's multilateral diplomacy, emphasising ASEAN among other partners (Le and Lai 2021).

For ASEAN, Viet Nam's accession contributed constructively to the expansion of the association with ten member countries. General Secretary of the National ASEAN 2020 Committee Nguyen Quoc Dung mentioned that Viet Nam had acted "as the bridge between the mainland Southeast Asia and maritime Southeast Asia" (Nguyen 2020). Such a progress has consolidated peace and stability in the region and helped create a united, inclusive, and open ASEAN Community. Since joining ASEAN, Viet Nam has been an active participant and contributor to the ASEAN Community building process (Lim 2020). The contributions of Viet Nam to the ASEAN Community building are reflected in five key areas.

First, Viet Nam has been very active in contributing to the formulation of strategic directions and major decisions of ASEAN in various fields. For example, in 1998, Viet Nam hosted the sixth ASEAN Summit, which adopted the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA).

The HPA is the first in a series of plans of action to realise the ASEAN Vision 2020 that is of "ASEAN as a concert of Southeast Asian Nations, outward-looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and a community of caring societies" (ASEAN 1997). In addition, with the foreign policy of being active, proactive and responsible, Viet Nam has participated in formulating key documents such as The Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (1995), ASEAN Vision 2020 (1997), Bali Concord II Declaration (2003), Vientiane Action Program (2004), ASEAN Charter (2007), Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009–2015 and ASEAN Vision 2025, AEC Master Plan, AEC 2025 Consolidated Strategic Action Plan, and Master Plans on ASEAN Connectivity and ASEAN Integration Initiative Work Plans.

Second, Viet Nam has successfully assumed its rotating Chair of ASEAN in 2010 and 2020. In 2010, as shared by the former Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Gia Khiem, the theme "Toward the ASEAN Community: From Vision to Action" was chosen as "it portrayed the goal that ASEAN wished to reach through specific actions, rather than general calls" (Pham 2020). In 2010, Viet Nam chaired the 16th Summit to issue the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on Recovery and Sustainable Development. Since then, ASEAN economic integration has focused more on sustainability, the balance of opportunities, and benefits for its member countries. This was the first time that ASEAN launched a model for developing the ASEAN Economic Community based on the harmonisation of many policies from economic to social, and from environmental to macroeconomic management policies. Furthermore, as the Chairman of the ASEAN Connectivity Task Force in 2010, Viet Nam and ASEAN members developed the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC), adopted at the 17th ASEAN Summit in October 2010. MPAC aims to create closer linkages in transport infrastructure and information technology, especially in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, laying the foundation for expanding connectivity.

In 2020, as ASEAN Chair, Viet Nam showed the spirit under the theme “Cohesive and Responsive” when working closely with the ASEAN member countries to overcome challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and recover the regional economy. Facing an unprecedented situation, ASEAN has shown its solidarity and unity in mobilising the overall strength of the ASEAN Community to respond to the pandemic, while maintaining the momentum of ASEAN’s cooperation and regional connectivity.

ASEAN is among the first regional mechanisms to take early and practical steps, such as convening a Special Meeting of the ASEAN Coordinating Council in February 2020 to step up collective responses to the pandemic. In addition, ASEAN has strengthened cooperation with other countries and international organisations to improve epidemic prevention and control effectiveness.

At the 37th ASEAN Summit held in November 2020, the Leaders approved several initiatives on cooperation in responding to Covid-19 and epidemic risks, putting into operation the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund, the Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies, the ASEAN Standard Operating Procedures in response to Public Health Emergencies, and the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases. ASEAN also approved the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, the ASEAN Travel Corridor Agreement, and the synchronous implementation plan on all three the pillars to support people and businesses. In particular, the Ha Noi Declaration on the ASEAN Community’s post-2025 vision emphasised, “A caring and sharing, cohesive and responsive ASEAN Community, in which ASEAN Member States are bonded by regional solidarity and cooperation, where ASEAN identity and the sense of belonging are promoted” (ASEAN 2020).

Third, Viet Nam is among the most active players in regional economic integration. The country is among the top two countries with the highest implementation rate of priority measures in the AEC Master Plan 2015. Viet Nam is currently among the top four countries with the highest implementation rate of the AEC Blueprint 2025 (People’s Daily 2020). It has participated in comprehensive cooperation with other ASEAN countries in trade in goods, services, investment, agriculture, transportation, telecommunications, intellectual property protection, competition policy, and consumer protection. By 2010, Viet Nam had reduced import tax for nearly ten thousand tariff lines to 0 per cent-5 per cent, according to the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT). Such record accounts for 97.8 per cent of the tariff lines, of which there are 5,488 tariff lines at the tax rate of zero per cent. On 1 January 2018, Viet Nam eliminated tariffs on 98% of tariff lines imported from ASEAN countries. This is the highest reduction in import tax among all Free Trade Agreements (FTA) that Viet Nam has signed. It is also one of the leading countries in implementing and piloting trade facilitation measures such as the ASEAN Single Window and self-certification of origin and trade database. Compared to when Viet Nam joined the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1996, the total import-export turnover between Viet Nam and ASEAN increased by more than 16 times, from 3.26 billion USD in 1995 to nearly 53.598 billion USD in 2020 (Viet Nam Financial Times 2021).

As of the end of July 2020, the registered foreign direct investment (FDI) capital of investors from ASEAN reached about 82.2 billion USD, accounting for 21.6% of total registered FDI in Viet Nam. As of the end of June 2020, Viet Nam's direct investment in Laos reached more than 4.9 billion USD in registered capital, followed by the Cambodia market with a total investment of nearly 2.8 billion USD (Figure and Event 2021).

Fourth, Viet Nam has been eagerly pushing initiatives to ensure that the ASEAN Community building process has a trickle-down effect, benefiting all people, groups, and businesses in ASEAN. Viet Nam has given priorities and driven initiatives promoting welfare, social services for disadvantaged groups, and social work professions in the regional work plans.

Such efforts included developing the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection and the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region. Furthermore, together with ASEAN countries, Viet Nam has put great efforts in expanding the labour market in ASEAN countries and strengthening the recognition of skills among ASEAN countries.

Fifth, Viet Nam has contributed constructively to the expansion of ASEAN's relations with external partners. In 2010, it had two important initiatives to expand the East Asia Summit with Russia and the U.S. and participated in the establishment of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+), with the first ADMM+ hosted by Viet Nam. The country has also successfully assumed the role of country coordinator of ASEAN-China relations (2009-2012), ASEAN-EU relations (2012-2015), and ASEAN-India relations (2015-2018). It is now the country coordinator of ASEAN-Japan relations (2018-2021).

By participating in the ASEAN Community building process, Viet Nam has enjoyed great benefits from a stable and peaceful region for the country's socio-economic development. An ASEAN comprising 10 Southeast Asian nations is the foundation of each member's peaceful and stable regional environment, including Viet Nam. The accession to ASEAN is a milestone for Viet Nam to further open its door to the world and accelerate its international integration process. The political commitments and principles of sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, non-interference, and consensus have laid the foundation for Viet Nam and the other ASEAN Member States to strengthen the open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture, as well as the ASEAN Charter and the United Nations Charter.

After 25 years as an ASEAN member, Viet Nam considers the region one of its leading economic and trade partners. The membership of AEC provides it more opportunities to access regional and external markets, thereby expanding markets and diversifying export products. In addition to the benefits for economic growth, the economic integration into ASEAN has helped Viet Nam attract foreign direct investment, creating opportunities for Vietnamese enterprises to improve their competitiveness. In addition, the positive impacts from the AEC will contribute to making changes in the development and improvement of domestic policies, laws, and procedures, more in line with international standards. Being an active member of the AEC has accelerated the extensive and comprehensive economic cooperation between Viet Nam and other countries in the region and the world.

By participating in ASEAN socio-cultural cooperation, it can learn from other ASEAN Member States and partners. Some key cooperation areas include poverty reduction, human resource development, information technology, management experience, and capacity building, aiming to effectively handle transnational challenges such as environment, natural disasters, climate change, and epidemics.

MOVING TOWARDS ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2025

Looking ahead, ASEAN is entering a critical period in the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the preparation for the post-2025 Vision. Given the challenges mentioned above in the community building process, ASEAN needs to uphold solidarity, unity, and mutual assistance, particularly in maintaining its centrality and strategic interests.

First, on the political and security pillar, ASEAN needs to strengthen its centrality as a driving force in promoting dialogue processes; building trust for peace, security, and stability in the region; and responding more proactively and effectively to the challenges. ASEAN needs to make more active contributions to efforts to promote regional and global peace and development. In the context of growing tensions among major powers, ASEAN commands the central role, both geographically and politically, in leveraging the ASEAN Centrality to encourage an inclusive, peaceful, and integrated evolution of the Indo-Pacific region (Le 2020). It is critical to uphold ASEAN Centrality so that each member and ASEAN can act as active partners rather than as pawns in the strategic chessboard of any external force. ASEAN may not be designed for solving conflicts. However, the association is well-positioned in preventative diplomacy on contentious issues in the political and security realm. A “track 2” or “track 1.5” approach may be conducive to exploring innovative solutions where internal and external factors constrain the government’s actions. An ASEAN Community was first advanced by scholars in the academia and think tanks and has subsequently embraced by ASEAN’s Leaders (Muthiah 2015).

Second, on the economic pillar, a strong ASEAN Community must rely on closer regional economic linkages. In particular, ASEAN needs to put more effort into actively promoting ASEAN’s role in linking sub-regional cooperation with ASEAN’s development process so that all people and regions have the opportunity to contribute to the ASEAN Community. In addition, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development is critical to building the ASEAN Community, especially when Covid-19 and natural disasters are threatening to slow down the growth of the whole region. Therefore, ASEAN needs to step up measures to support businesses to restore production, business, jobs, and livelihoods for people, while focusing its resources and efforts at the highest level on reducing the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic gradually.

Third, on the socio-cultural pillar, an ASEAN Community must truly be a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN. It is foremost essential to place the people at the centre of the ASEAN agenda, cutting across all the three pillars of the ASEAN Community. Facing with the rise of non-traditional threats to regional peace and stability, it is high time that ASEAN focused more on human security. In addition, a people-centred ASEAN is more than just creating an ASEAN identity. It should also be the process of building cohesiveness among people in the Member States and encouraging people's participation in the process of community building in all walks of life. The building of the ASEAN Community must be driven by all citizens, not only by government officials, politicians, or researchers.

Fourth, a strong ASEAN Community must be built upon higher awareness of the ASEAN Community and its pillars. It is important for citizens of the Member States to feel that they belong to the bigger ASEAN family. It is also equally important to facilitate the frequent exchanges of ideas among stakeholders on the ASEAN Community building. In a community with diverse identities, each member state must know how to balance national interests with the community's shared interests.

Fifth, to realise the goals of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, it is imperative to further cultivate a culture of compliance through capacity building and harmonisation of national legal systems and enhance human and financial resources required for the implementation and coordination by relevant agencies, especially the ASEAN Secretariat. It is also time that appropriate actions be taken to update the ASEAN Charter to allow more flexible application of the principle of consensus, which will not prevent the community from moving forward, while leaving no member behind. Given the Covid-19 impacts and complicated geopolitical landscape, ASEAN needs to improve the institutional capacity and effective operation of the ASEAN apparatus and ASEAN Way to adapt to the new contexts.

CONCLUSION

It is now a challenging time and a critical period for ASEAN in realising the goal of ASEAN Community 2025 and moving forward in line with the Post-2025 Vision. The Vietnamese people have a saying: "Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men". ASEAN will continue to consolidate its centrality in the regional architecture and its stance as a reliable and sustainable partner to regional and external countries. As ASEAN will turn 55 in 2022 under the upcoming Cambodia's Chairmanship, the endurance and relevance of the association will prove that ASEAN can be more united, more cohesive, more responsive, and more capable of delivering the benefits to people of the ASEAN Member States.

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CHAPTER 02

Brunei Darussalam as ASEAN's 2021 Chair

Mathew L. Bukit and Hannah Elyse Sworn

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the turmoil of a global pandemic and expected completion of the Code of Conduct (CoC) for the South China Sea (SCS), Brunei Darussalam inherited the ASEAN chair in a particularly challenging year that only grew more so with the February coup d'état in Myanmar. This chapter contributes to the valuable but overlooked study of the ASEAN chair by applying Tallberg's work on the effect of chairs on institutional efficiency and distribution and Young's typology of leadership to ASEAN's unique institutional features. The first ten months of Brunei's 2021 term are evaluated according to its approaches to the SCS, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the coup in Myanmar. These issues are analysed concerning how Brunei exercised entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership to marshal legitimate and efficient institutional outcomes that complied with ASEAN's norms, as well as how Brunei balanced distributive considerations to maintain intra-ASEAN trust.

Brunei was able to exclude the SCS from the ASEAN 2021 agenda thanks to overcrowding caused by COVID-19, reflecting efforts to secure preferential distribution in line with its economic interests. However, Chinese actions that aggravated other ASEAN claimants and an in-person summit with China forced Brunei to place the SCS back on the agenda, forgoing biased distribution favouring efficiency and maintaining intra-ASEAN trust.

In the first half of 2021, Brunei demonstrated intellectual leadership in its approach to the COVID-19 pandemic by employing a strict lockdown model with early success. Despite this, the Sultanate stagnated by defaulting to a lockdown when faced with an outbreak of the virus in August, while other ASEAN members pioneered the more economically productive endemic model. Brunei exercised significant entrepreneurial leadership in driving ASEAN's response to the Myanmar coup. To maintain ASEAN centrality, it established and represented a unified ASEAN disapproval (but not outright condemnation) of the coup to the international community—mainly via chair's statements. However, these efforts ran into resistance as Myanmar's military regime prevaricated on the five-point consensus, and intra-ASEAN fissures hindered the body's response. The chapter concludes by offering broad insights on the ASEAN chair as well as lessons for Cambodia in 2022.

THE FUNCTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHAIRS: EFFICIENCY AND DISTRIBUTION

The role of institutional chairs is generally overlooked in International Relations literature. The small body of work that exists in this area focuses on chairs in the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the United Nations (UN). Tallberg (2010) provides the most authoritative work on chairs' institutionalised, formal leadership as a functional response to the collection action failures that impede institutional bargaining.

According to Tallberg (2010, 245–246), chairs are afforded two types of special power resources to surmount these collective action failures: a) privileged information gained from bilateral encounters that allow the chair to broker agreements; and b) procedural control over negotiations, including agenda-setting and summarising the outcomes of meetings. Chairs can leverage these resources to overcome agenda-setting, negotiation, and representation failures with two effects: efficiency and distribution.

Institutional efficiency denotes the degree to which institutional outcomes maximise absolute gains (Tallberg 2010, 249). Institutional efficiency is improved when chairs help overcome negotiation stalemates that result from parties being unable to either agree upon an agenda or identify an “underlying zone of agreement” (Ibid, 244). Both Monheim (2016) and Park (2016) attribute the successful results of the 2010 UN Cancun climate summit to Mexico’s strong chair—including its agenda management, transparent and inclusive negotiation management, and capability of its bureaucracy and leaders—juxtaposed with Denmark’s weaker chair of the 2009 Copenhagen conference. On the other hand, distribution concerns how gains are divided among parties (Tallberg 2010, 249). When chairs are considered “strategic and opportunistic actors with an independent set of preferences,” influential ones are more likely to secure “agreements with distributional implications structured in their favor” within the parameters of a zone of agreement (Ibid, 246).

This literature draws attention to some of the universal aspects of chairs, namely their ability to overcome collective action problems common to all institutions and exploit their favourable position for self-interested distribution (Ibid, 245). However, ASEAN’s institutional environment differs from its Western counterparts, and it is important not to decontextualise the ASEAN Chair from the body’s distinct brand of regionalism (Ba 2014). For instance, a focus on chairs in integration-centred studies of EU regionalism risks overlooking the important ideational and normative context of sovereignty in non-Western regionalism (Acharya 2016, 114). A notable exception is Suzuki (2020), who looks explicitly at the informal agenda-setting and brokerage functions of the ASEAN chair in marshalling the bloc’s idiosyncratic decision-making. In this sense, the ASEAN chair must be viewed as reflecting both its formal and informal institutional environment.

THE ASEAN CHAIR: LEADERSHIP, LEGITIMACY, TRUST, AND RECIPROCITY

Tallberg's framework (2010, 247) highlights three variables in the institutional environment that impact a chair's influence: a) the broadness of mandate and level of control the chair is afforded over negotiations; b) whether decisions are made by majority or unanimity, which either facilitates or complicates the reaching of an agreement among diverse actors; and c) whether the chair rotates or is elected, as the former creates "dynamics of diffuse reciprocity that work to the advantage of negotiation chairs...as all eventually get their privileged opportunity to direct the negotiations." The framework advanced in this chapter integrates ASEAN's normative and social contexts with these factors by linking the legitimacy of and trust in the ASEAN chair first to Young's entrepreneurial and intellectual forms of leadership in reaching efficient outcomes, and second to the moderation of self-interested distribution within the context of sustained interaction and the shadow of the future.

The ASEAN Charter empowers the chair with a broad mandate to "promote and enhance the interests and wellbeing of ASEAN...through policy initiatives, coordination, consensus and cooperation; foster ASEAN centrality¹; ensure an effective and timely response to urgent issues or [crises] affecting ASEAN; represent ASEAN in strengthening and promoting closer relations with external partners; and any other tasks and functions as may be mandated" (ASEAN 2007, 28). This mandate also involves the important function of chairing ASEAN's meetings and bodies for a year and serving as a mediator for disputes between ASEAN members if requested (Ibid, 23, 27). Although not directly articulated in the Charter, the chair also serves as the body's spokesperson via the chair's statements and takes responsibility for agenda-setting. This broad mandate provides the ASEAN chair with significant procedural control and many opportunities to affect bargaining, especially considering ASEAN's intentionally small secretariat and 'thin' institutionalisation (Johnson 1999).

Decision-making within ASEAN must be undertaken by consensus, which places a burden on the chair to broker unanimous agreements that accommodate a wide range of state preferences. Consensus, alongside peaceful dispute settlement and informal, non-confrontational deliberations, reflects ASEAN's central norm of non-interference, which is rooted in the principles of sovereignty, neutrality, and regional stability (Acharya 1997, 328–329; Stubbs 2008, 458–459). Drawing on Young's typology of leadership², these norms can be viewed as protecting ASEAN members from domination by one another via structural leadership, which involves the use of material power to apply pressure on negotiating parties via coercion or reward.

¹'ASEAN centrality' is the principle that ASEAN should take the main role in addressing issues in the region.

²While Stubbs (2014) has applied Young's three types of leadership to explain how ASEAN as a whole has led East Asian institution building and Rattanaseevee (2014) to Indonesia's role in ASEAN, this typology has not been used to explain leadership of ASEAN by its chair.

Instead, the ASEAN chair needs to exercise entrepreneurial leadership by influencing “how issues are presented” and forging “mutually acceptable deals”, as well as intellectual leadership by leveraging “the power of ideas to shape how participants...understand the issues at stake and to orient their thinking about options available” (Young 1991, 288). The ASEAN chair exercises these forms of leadership by identifying and pursuing areas of acceptable cooperation in the face of starkly divergent preferences and using new ideas to that end (Suzuki 2020).

Legitimacy is essential to the exercise of both entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership, enabling the chair to “mediate between competing interests of the member governments” and “create or exploit new opportunities to push forward their ideas or policy options” (Metcalfe 1998, 420; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011, 656). It is a subjective, relational belief that the rules embedded in an institution should be respected and reflect “the approval and assent of the negotiating parties” to the chair’s roles and functions (Hurd 1991, 381; Park 2016, 785; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011, 659). Therefore, the chair’s roles and functions are inextricable from the institution’s formal and informal norms, and its legitimacy reflects the extent to which it fulfils these. In the case of ASEAN, the chair’s legitimacy hinges on its ability to marshal unanimous agreements via informal, non-confrontational negotiations. This unofficial function is perhaps more important than its official ones (Tang 2016).

The annual rotation of the ASEAN chair within the body’s small membership facilitates diffuse reciprocity, projecting a shadow of the future associated with ‘cooperation’ and ‘defection’ in an iterated prisoner’s dilemma (Axelrod 1984). A chair must decide whether to ‘defect’ by exploiting its position for its interest and, by doing so, risk being on the receiving end of the same behaviour by other chairs when the position is rotated to them in the future. This dynamic discourages the ASEAN chair from skewing distribution, surrogating for ASEAN’s lack of punitive sanctions for chairs that defect in “wander[ing] from proper behavior” (March and Olsen 1998, 938).

The tension between the maximisation of national interest and the relational aspect of expected reciprocity in regular, continuous interactions is captured by Walker and Biedenkopf (2020, 441–442) in their discussion of trust in institutional chairs. When negotiating parties trust a chair, they “are more willing to accept vulnerability by ceding control over parts of the process and allowing the chair to intervene as a mediator” (Ibid, 442). Built over time through sustained social interactions, trust is a key but overlooked leadership resource that contributes to a chair’s influence but can be lost quickly. Trust in a chair rests on its perceived ability, integrity, and benevolence.

In the context of the iterated prisoner’s dilemma and distribution, integrity is particularly relevant, encompassing “the expectation that...the chair should merely facilitate the will of the parties rather than trying to impose her preferences” (Ibid, 442). Benevolence, which is “an intersubjective concept” that reflects the quality and duration of the chair’s relationships with negotiating parties, is also important in this respect (Walker and Biedenkopf 2020, 443). Trust overlaps with and is essential to legitimacy. The latter is negatively impacted when a chair exercises leadership in a way that biases distribution in either its favour or that of another negotiating party (Metcalfe 1998, 420; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011, 659).

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. The next section examines how Brunei balanced distribution and efficiency in its handling of the SCS. In the second, its brief intellectual leadership in tackling COVID-19 using the strict lockdown model is discussed. While other ASEAN members then spearheaded an endemic approach to reopening their economies, Brunei’s intellectual leadership dissipated as it defaulted to a lockdown—despite having relatively high vaccination coverage—to deal with an outbreak after fifteen months of no community transmission. The section thereafter analyses how Brunei exercised entrepreneurial leadership in its approach to the Myanmar coup by establishing and representing a common ASEAN position to the international community. However, internal divisions and the intransigence of the junta have encumbered Brunei’s efforts. The chapter concludes with two general insights into the ASEAN chair as an institutional function as well as three specific lessons for Cambodia, which will chair ASEAN in 2022.

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Even beyond its immediate claimants, the SCS is a contentious issue for ASEAN chairs with regard to distribution. As the issue has become interwoven with economic relations with China. Despite not being a claimant itself, Cambodia gained notoriety over its 2012 ASEAN chairmanship in what became known as the ‘Phnom Penh Fiasco’. For the first time in its history, ASEAN was unable to issue a joint communique due to an impasse over the inclusion of the SCS (BBC, 2012). In contrast, Vietnam explicitly prioritised the issue as ASEAN’s 2020 chair, with its prime minister referring to China’s “irresponsible actions” in the SCS in his opening address to the 36th ASEAN Summit in June 2020 (Shim 2020). Vietnam later issued a chair’s statement that reaffirmed the importance of international law in resolving the SCS, in particular the United Nations Conventions on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) (ASEAN, 2020). Although the issue’s contentiousness has not subsided since 2012 by any means—evidenced, for example, by the Philippines’ 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration case against China—agreement on a single draft negotiating text of the long-awaited CoC in 2018 has advanced negotiations towards a final agreement, even if the draft text still manifests major unreconciled differences between ASEAN claimants and China (Thayer 2018).

Despite its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) overlapping with China's nine-dash line and a tacit claim to the contested Louisa Reef (NBR 2021), Brunei avoids public discussion on the SCS where possible, especially compared to ASEAN's more vociferous claimants, the Philippines and Vietnam. One month after the June 2020 ASEAN Summit, the sultanate announced that "specific issues [related to the SCS] should be addressed bilaterally by the countries directly concerned" (Brunei Darussalam MFA 2020). Brunei's preference for bilateralism is consistent and was operationalised in its 2009 resolution of contested maritime claims with Malaysia (Brunei Darussalam and China 2013; NBR 2021). Thus, contra perspectives that paint the 2020 statement as a "critical development in the tiny sultanate's views on the region and a rising China" marked no departure from the orthodoxy (España and Uy 2020).

There are two interrelated reasons for Brunei's approach to the SCS. First, Brunei has by far the smallest claims in the SCS and "has not taken action to assert its territorial claim over Louisa Reef in recent years" (NBR 2021). With a limited stake in the security aspects of its claims, Brunei prioritises hydrocarbon reserves in its EEZ that are essential for its oil-dependent economy (NBR 2021; Jennings 2017). Second, the growing importance of economic relations with China is interwoven into Brunei's strategic calculus on its claims. China has become an essential economic partner for Brunei. It is the sultanate's largest source of imports, and a trade deficit with China steadily grew to USD 243 million in 2019 (Storey 2018, 3; ADB 2020, 7). Brunei's economy contracted between 2013 and 2016 with fluctuating oil prices but rebounded with three years of growth that was self-admittedly "closely linked to foreign investment, mainly by Chinese businesses" (Xinhua, 2020a). The most substantive investment is a USD 3.45 billion joint venture with China's Zhejiang Hengyi Group to build an oil refinery and petrochemical plant, which could bring another USD 13.65 billion investment, pending Brunei governmental approval (Xinhua, 2020b).

The tangible value of Chinese investments jeopardised by advocating for an ASEAN-centric multilateral solution to its maritime claims outweighs that from the increased likelihood of consolidating and thus solely enjoying the benefit of resource extraction from this contested area. This is compounded by the fact that China has continuously proposed joint development of the resources in their contested claims, rendering the worst-case scenario of unresolved claims far more favourable than the worst-case scenario of attempted consolidation and losing them altogether (Storey 2018).

Consistent with its economic interests and preference for bilateralism on the issue, Brunei would rather de-emphasise the SCS as ASEAN chair, especially to mitigate the risk of being at the centre of flaring tensions and inevitably upsetting at least one party by mediating. Brunei thus announced that it was unlikely to pursue the finalisation of the CoC as ASEAN's 2021 chair, tabled in principle until physical negotiations could be resumed (Bandial 2021a).

Although the SCS is a highly salient and controversial issue (which correlates with reduced agency for a chair in multilateral negotiation), Brunei was able to advance its interests by deemphasising the SCS in the short term (Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2015). This was primarily due to the immediacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains firmly foregrounded in the public policy considerations of ASEAN members. The pandemic permitted Brunei to displace the SCS from the ASEAN agenda using the chair's special procedural agenda-setting resources, delegated to avert "overcrowded or unstable agendas" that contribute to collective action failures (Tallberg 2010, 244).

However, recent events have prevented Brunei from continuing to exclude the SCS from the 2021 ASEAN agenda. First, tensions continue to mount as China's controversial new coast guard law permits it to fire upon foreign vessels, increasing the stakes of miscalculation and the likelihood of escalation from accidental incidents (Darmawan 2021). The particularly thorny dispute between the Philippines and China boiled over explosively in May when Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin tweeted an expletive-filled demand for the withdrawal of Chinese vessels from contested waters (Al Jazeera, 2021a). In the same month, the less vocal Malaysia protested an apparent airspace incursion from the People's Liberation Army Air Force aircraft near Sarawak (BBC, 2021). Second, an in-person Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in early June forced Brunei to face the finalisation of the CoC. The meeting produced a joint statement between China and ASEAN that—although delayed by alleged disagreement over language—pledged self-restraint from actions that could "complicate or escalate" tensions and committed to resuming CoC negotiations (ASEAN and China 2021; Law and Soeriaatmadija 2021).

Virtual negotiations resumed after a year's hiatus in July 2021, albeit informally as "exchanged views", but it seems that the CoC will not be finalised by the 2021 completion target set by Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang in 2018 (Zhou 2021; Septiari 2021). Moreover, growing polarisation between aggrieved claimants and avoidant non-claimants diminishes the scope for an ASEAN-wide zone of agreement, thereby increasing the difficulty for Brunei to exercise entrepreneurial leadership on an issue that has been and continues to be prone to stalemates (Zhou 2021). Although Brunei avoided mediating the CoC at the beginning of its term, rising tensions and the issue's controversial status forced it back onto the ASEAN agenda. To have obstinately excluded it would have jeopardised institutional efficiency and distributive reciprocity, eroding the legitimacy of the ASEAN chair's entrepreneurial leadership by undermining the trust undergirding ASEAN's unique brand of institutional bargaining.

COVID-19

Public policy related to the COVID-19 pandemic has been a controversial and divisive issue globally and within ASEAN, reflecting the difficult decision over whether to implement lockdown measures that can save lives but produce negative economic effects requiring costly stimulus packages (Baldwin 2020). Prior to vaccine rollouts, COVID-19 policies in ASEAN fell into two general strategies: strict lockdowns that contained community spread and minimised deaths but were accompanied by an economic recession, or little-to-no lockdown measures that prevented recession but resulted in a higher death toll. Brunei was an early adopter of the former strategy alongside Vietnam, Singapore, and Laos.

While each country's COVID-19 policies are domestically determined, Brunei exercised regional intellectual leadership of the COVID-19 lockdown model in the first half of 2021. Like Vietnam, which chaired ASEAN in 2020, Brunei won admiration for its successful early handling of the virus, adopting strict travel restrictions that prevented local transmissions for fifteen months while other states experienced devastating second and third waves driven by the more contagious delta variant (Bakar 2021). Alongside Myanmar, Vietnam and Brunei were the only ASEAN countries to experience positive economic growth in 2020, reporting GDP growth of 2.7 and 2.9 per cent, respectively (Nguyen 2021; Brunei Darussalam DEPS 2021). In February 2021, Brunei had the highest level of domestic approval for its handling of the virus among all ASEAN countries (Pham 2020; The Star, 2021).

Brunei's early success in handling the virus and positive economic performance equipped it with the energy and authority to lead ASEAN that other members might not have, preoccupied with containing growing cases and mitigating economic crises. As Vietnam oversaw the bulk of ASEAN's emergency response to COVID-19 in 2020, Brunei's primary goal as chair focused on the secondary effects of the virus and preserving regional stability to allow "ASEAN member states to focus on battling the pandemic" (Hayat, 2021). This manifested in an emphasis on ASEAN's post-pandemic economic recovery and resilience under Brunei's chair. For example, in May, ASEAN's Accelerated COVID-19 Economic Support Programme held a workshop on "Turning Adversity into Opportunity: ASEAN's Participation in Global Value Chains in a-Post COVID World" (ASEAN 2021b).

However, as lockdown fatigue, vaccine rollouts, and the aggressive spread of the delta variant coalesced to force a COVID-19 policy reckoning around the world, Brunei fell behind in orienting ASEAN members toward new approaches to handling the virus. From October 2021, Singapore and Malaysia led the shift to a more sustainable 'endemic' model by reopening their economies and managing an inevitable jump in cases with high vaccination rates (Mogul 2021; Zainuddin 2021).

Desperate to escape the crippling economic costs of repeated lockdowns, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia planned to follow the same endemic approach as their vaccination programmes slowly progressed. Despite having a vaccination rate higher than all these three countries, Brunei defaulted to a lockdown to deal with an outbreak that began in early August after fifteen months of no local transmissions, with cases continuing to escalate after the stricter measures were introduced (Han 2021; Bandial and Bakar 2021; Bakar and Bandial 2021). Once an intellectual leader of the lockdown model, Brunei did not join Singapore and Malaysia in pioneering the endemic approach needed for ASEAN to move toward economic recovery and a new normal.

THE MYANMAR COUP D'ÉTAT

After almost a decade of civilian rule in Myanmar, a coup on 1 February 2021 removed the elected civilian government and restored Tatmadaw rule under General Min Aung Hlaing. ASEAN's response to the crisis has been a central test of its authority amidst ongoing debates about its ability to secure 'progress' as opposed to 'process' and deliver results on Myanmar after two decades of 'constructive engagement' (Jones and Smith 2007; Jones 2010, 495). Moreover, ASEAN's handling of Myanmar has historically endangered its important international trade relationships, for example when the EU cancelled ASEM economic meetings in 2004 and US politicians threatened secondary sanctions on ASEAN members in response to inaction on Myanmar (Jones, 2008, 281-282).

Brunei took a central role in driving ASEAN's response to the crisis, which has thus far delivered mixed progress. Nonetheless, Brunei's approach highlights the need for chairs to not only solve endogenous negotiation failures between its members but also exogenous representation failures. Institutional representation is crucial in an international environment where "multilateral negotiations seldom take place in a vacuum but tend to be nested within broader political processes", and it is necessary for a chair to "represent the collective" of its members (Tallberg 2010, 245). Moreover, the EU, US, and various international bodies have cast harsh criticism on ASEAN's handling of Myanmar in the past and undermined ASEAN centrality by unilaterally imposing sanctions on Myanmar (Jones 2008). As ASEAN chair, Brunei thus focused on establishing ASEAN as the primary vehicle for resolving the crisis and communicating this to the international community to dispel the common critique that ASEAN norms breed paralysis. To this end, Brunei employed the chair's special procedural power to exercise entrepreneurial leadership toward institutional efficiency, buttressing an external representation of intra-ASEAN coherence vis-a-vis Myanmar. The sultanate leveraged both privileged information resources from bilateral encounters and procedural control over negotiations (in this case the chair's statement), but to differing degrees dictated by the unique institutional context of the ASEAN chairpersonship. In doing so, Brunei tested the limits of—but stopped short of violating—ASEAN's norms of non-interference and decision-making by consensus.

On the day of the coup, Brunei released a strongly worded chair's statement expressing disapproval of the political situation by emphasising democracy, respect for human rights, and "the return to normalcy in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar", but without directly denouncing the military government (Hayat 2021; ASEAN 2021a). The use of this lexicon represented the exercise of entrepreneurial leadership. It advanced a broad position potentially amenable to all ASEAN members by remaining non-confrontational toward the junta but treating the crisis as a problematic issue that could not be simply accepted. Treating the coup as an unavoidable regime change would have spelt severe criticism for ASEAN and unilateral actions from the international community, undermining ASEAN centrality.³ In this respect, Brunei effectively leveraged the chair's statement as a special tool of communication to express this sentiment without the need to achieve formal consensus beforehand, which would have delayed the statement and likely watered it down considerably. Doing so communicated the appearance of a united position of disapproval within ASEAN and temporarily placated an international community that strongly denounced the coup.

Circumscribed by the divergent positions held by ASEAN members, the 2 March 2021 Informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting produced a subdued chair's statement on Myanmar. Nonetheless, Brunei "released an unprecedented statement" in tandem via its foreign ministry to reiterate the points pertaining to human rights, democracy, and the interests of Myanmar's people in its previous chair's statement (Hayat 2021; Brunei Darussalam MFA 2021a). By using its foreign ministry, Brunei circumnavigated the constraints imposed by ASEAN's norms, technically abiding by ASEAN's rules while advancing its position regarding its official capacity as chair. The subsequent ASEAN special summit on Myanmar, held in Jakarta on 24 April 2021, reaffirmed ASEAN's authority to address the crisis: The UN Security Council endorsed the resulting five-point consensus, and the meeting served as the setting for a delayed meeting between Min Aung Hlaing and UN Special Envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener (Desker 2021). One of these five points was the appointment of a special envoy of the ASEAN chair to Myanmar to mediate negotiations and visit the country to meet with all the parties concerned. Brunei once again used its special procedural resources as chair to broker the five-point consensus by placing a sensitive sixth point regarding the release of political prisoners in the chair's statement to prevent the conflict that could have endangered the meeting's outcome. This allowed the body to reach an efficient consensus without completely sacrificing this contentious point, signalling ASEAN's concern with political prisoners to the international community.

³ Young (1991, 298) distinguishes intellectual leadership as a "deliberative or reflective process" that takes place before "fast-paced negotiations" because of the time needed to articulate these ideas and "new ideas generally have to triumph over the entrenched mindsets or worldviews held by policymakers". In the case of Brunei and the 2021 Myanmar coup, ideas about human rights and democracy as related to addressing recurring political issues in Myanmar were articulated long before 2021. Brunei has not been an intellectual leader of this approach to Myanmar compared to perhaps Singapore and even more so the US, the EU, and human rights organisations. However, Brunei was able to exercise entrepreneurial leadership by quickly drawing on these antecedent ideas to frame the issue to ASEAN members and represent a particular position to the international community.

Following this initial flurry of activity, the momentum on Myanmar and Brunei's efforts to exercise entrepreneurial leadership in locating a common zone of cooperation between ASEAN members slowed for two reasons. First, deep divisions exist within ASEAN on how to approach the coup. The Mekong countries—comprising Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—are inclined to accept the new government under ASEAN's principle of non-interference. However, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines are less inclined to accept the new regime and believe that the junta must enter into dialogue with the ousted government and cease violence against civilians. Thus, when a UN resolution was drafted to denounce the coup, ASEAN united in submitting a letter requesting that language calling for an arms embargo on the junta be removed (Ghosh 2021). Yet, when the resolution—with watered-down language regarding arms sales—went to vote in the UN General Assembly, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, and a representative of Myanmar's ousted civilian government voted in favour while Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand abstained, publicly exposing the deep rift within ASEAN (Reuters, 2021d). Second, the Tatmadaw proved obstinate in enacting the five-point consensus, calling the points "suggestions" within days of the special summit and a month later stating that they were "not ready" to proceed with its implementation (Reuters, 2021c; Jaipragas 2021).

Predictably, Western stakeholders grew impatient with the pace of ASEAN's approach to the crisis. In March, the EU imposed sanctions on individuals in the Tatmadaw, and the US stepped up sanctions previously imposed in February (Reuters, 2021b). Without an approved special envoy a month after the 24 April summit observers suggested that ASEAN's momentum had stalled. Brunei's appointed ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi and the country's Second Foreign Affairs Minister Erywan Yusof conducted an unofficial visit to Myanmar in early June, submitting a list of potential special envoy nominees for the junta's consideration (RFA, 2021). Subsequently, Brunei published a statement about the visit on the ASEAN website that referred to the assumed titles of the military government leaders while also mentioning the envoy's call for the release of all political prisoners (The Jakarta Post, 2021; Park 2021). The statement likely perturbed both ends of the ASEAN spectrum of opinion on Myanmar—simultaneously seeming to legitimise the assumed governmental role of the junta and push for the contentious release of political prisoners—and was promptly taken down from the website (Law and Soeriaatmadja 2021). Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia publicly expressed discontent with ASEAN's lack of progress, endangering the image of intra-ASEAN cohesion (Reuters, 2021a).

Brunei regained its footing and reconciled internal disagreement on whose nominee should assume the role of the special envoy, brokering an agreement to appoint Erywan Yusof for the position at the 54th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 2 August, despite Indonesia's discontent (Allard 2021). This time, ASEAN documents were carefully worded so as not to inadvertently legitimise the junta, which Indonesia bluntly highlighted in a separate statement. Nevertheless, the junta remained dilatory on the five-point consensus. Refused a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, Yusof postponed his visit to Myanmar, reiterating that he would not proceed until he was granted access to "all parties concerned" (Bandial 2021c).

With the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia wanting to bar Min Aung Hlaing from attending the ASEAN Summit in late October to retain the body's credibility, Yusof labelled the junta's inaction as "tantamount to backtracking" on the five-point consensus. International pressure also grew, with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres delaying a virtual meeting with ASEAN ministers at the last minute to avoid legitimising the military regime, allegedly until a decision is made on Myanmar's representative to the UN (Nichols 2021). The issue of the summit was brought for discussion at an ASEAN meeting on 15 October, where it was decided that the junta would not be invited (Bandial 2021 d). Noting "insufficient progress in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus by Myanmar as well as concerns over Myanmar's commitment," a chair's statement released by Brunei after the meeting outlined that "there was no consensus reached for a political representative from Myanmar to attend" and that "a non-political representative from Myanmar" would be invited instead (Brunei Darussalam MFA 2021b). Once again, Brunei exercised entrepreneurial leadership through the chair's statement to reframe the decision and intra-ASEAN divisions as a lack of consensus over the junta's invitation rather than over the junta's ban. This made the decision seem less controversial for the ASEAN members who likely advocated for the junta to be invited, while still attracting the praise of the US, EU, and other Western stakeholders for acting (US Department of State 2021). Nonetheless, a resolution to the crisis seems out of reach, as the junta's cooperative veneer gives way to a steadfast intransigence.

Brunei's handling of the Myanmar political crisis suggests that the chair's statement is a more valuable institutional resource than asymmetric information gained from bilateral meetings and backchanneling. While Brunei met privately with the junta in February and worked collaboratively with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to convene the informal foreign ministers' meeting and special summit, Indonesia took the lead in shuttle diplomacy that "has kept the door open to talks with the junta" (Bandial 2021b; Tan 2021). Bilateral encounters are not a unique or privileged source of information for the ASEAN chair, diminishing the significance of this power resource. Rather, they are an informal institutional feature of ASEAN, whose members consider bilateralism "a more appropriate, flexible and practical approach to the conduct of regional inter-state relations" and thus generally "adopt a policy of 'thinking multilaterally but acting bilaterally'" (Acharya 1997, 333). Comparatively, the chair's statements proved effective in representing a united ASEAN throughout the crisis to retain ASEAN centrality and raise the release of political prisoners alongside the five-point consensus.

CONCLUSION

This chapter illustrates how, as ASEAN chair, Brunei has exercised entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership on three key issues confronting the body in 2021. This case study highlights two broad insights into the mechanisms that enable and constrain the ASEAN chair. First, the dynamics of the iterated prisoner's dilemma manifest in the rotation of the ASEAN chair, which moderates biased distribution to maximise institutional efficiency and maintain intra-ASEAN trust. Brunei's handling of the SCS demonstrates this. Second, special procedural control in the form of chair's statements and agenda-setting power are more useful resources for the ASEAN chair than asymmetric information resources obtained through bilateral interactions with negotiating parties. ASEAN's longstanding proclivity for bilateralism democratises access to information on preferences, and the chair is not specially privileged in this regard. Brunei utilised the chair's statements to exercise entrepreneurial leadership on Myanmar and agenda-setting control to temporarily side-line the CoC for the SCS but was less able to use bilateral interactions and backchanneling to address the Myanmar crisis. This highlights how the utility of power resources available for chairs varies according to both the formal and informal institutional environment.

Brunei's 2021 chair is useful for Cambodia's 2022 tenure, with lessons to be gleaned from each of the three issues discussed in this chapter. First, rising tensions in the SCS will coalesce with the lapsed 2021 deadline on the finalisation of the CoC to make for another SCS-centric chair for Phnom Penh. Cambodia will be keen to transcend the stigma of the 2012 Phnom Penh Fiasco. Still, it will come under scrutiny for its handling of this issue, particularly how it will balance efficiency and distribution. To avoid a repeat of 2012, there must be acceptance that a lowest common denominator of agreement is preferable to no agreement, which would threaten Cambodia's legitimacy as ASEAN chair and the trust that enables ASEAN cooperation. Cambodia can take cues from Brunei on balancing preferential distribution with the dictates of efficiency to reach some form of agreement. There is a point at which the chair must check the pursuit of its national interests to maintain the trust and reciprocity that forms the (sometimes rocky) foundation of ASEAN cooperation. As the shadow of the future within ASEAN is constructed on the positive expectations of unbiased distribution and reciprocity rather than punitive mechanisms, there is a short-term allure to preferential distribution, but this would undermine the legitimacy and entrepreneurial leadership of the ASEAN chair in the longer run.

Second, Cambodia has been successful in containing the community spread of COVID-19, experiencing a less severe spike from the delta variant and thus far achieving ASEAN's second-highest vaccination rate (CSIS 2021). Poised to reopen as early success stories like Brunei have recently stumbled, Phnom Penh can aspire to the intellectual leadership of the endemic approach in 2022 while strengthening ASEAN's post-pandemic recovery (Khmer Times, 2021).

Finally, Brunei's approach to tackling the Myanmar crisis has proven that positive momentum in efficiency and representation is not easily maintained. If the situation remains unresolved, Cambodia will be tasked with mediating intra-ASEAN impasses, appealing to the Myanmar military government, and appeasing an international community impatient with the worsening crisis and ASEAN's response. Cambodia can also consider the valuable lesson of leveraging the chair's statement and its foreign ministry to advance its agenda.

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CHAPTER 03

ASEAN Community- Building: An Outside-In Perspective

Yeo Lay Hwee

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded at the height of the Cold War era. Against this backdrop, with the confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia and other regional disputes still fresh in the memory, ASEAN began with the modest aim of trying to reduce internal tensions so that each member state could focus on its own economic development and political consolidation. The original aim of ASEAN, as envisaged by its founding members, was modest – to keep the peace in Southeast Asia through respect for each other’s sovereignty and adherence to the principle of non-intervention. ASEAN was to be a forum, a tool for member states “to manage common threats of communist insurgencies while balancing internal sensitivities and conflict” (Lee 2007).

Despite this political and security backdrop however, explicit reference to security cooperation had remained conspicuously absent in the agenda of ASEAN. Indeed, ASEAN’s founding document, the Bangkok Declaration of 1967, mentioned nothing about security cooperation beyond the general statement that one of the aims and purposes of the Association would be “to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter”. The rest of the aims and objectives revolved around cooperation in the socio-economic, cultural and scientific, and technical fields.

However, given the end of the Cold War and the challenges that a changing security and economic climate has brought, ASEAN must adapt in order to remain relevant. The grouping has gone from avoiding any explicit reference to a security role and eschewing institutionalised cooperation in the economic, political, and security arena to the drafting of the ASEAN Charter and articulation of its the ASEAN Community by 2015 idea, a big step both psychologically and normatively. The shift from a very low-key, implicit security role of managing tensions through dialogue and diplomacy to one more openly promulgating the aspirations of an ASEAN Community is itself a result of a constellation of different driving forces.

This paper attempts to examine ASEAN Community building efforts from an outside-in perspective, contrasting these efforts to those of the European Union (EU). The latter came about as a result of several bold decisions to transform Europe from a continent of war to one of peace. The community building effort that followed this aspiration may have witnessed its fair share of crises and setbacks, but from the days of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to the European Union of today, it is remarkable what has been achieved.

ASEAN: FROM SECURITY-POLITICAL CONCERNS TO ECONOMIC COOPERATION

ASEAN was founded on the 8th of August 1967. Against the backdrop of the Cold War tensions and regional instabilities, the single biggest motivation for setting up ASEAN was fear. According to the former Foreign Minister of Singapore, S Rajaratnam, the main reason for setting up ASEAN was “fear of a triumphant and expansive communism, and fear of being manipulated, set against one another, kept perpetually weak, divided and ineffective by outside forces” (as quoted in Kwa 2006, 91).

The founding members of ASEAN articulated the need to band together to present a “united” front in the face of communist threats and to ward off “external interference” allowing individual member state governments to establish effective control over their domestic territories and focus on building up “national resilience” – a euphemism for ensuring regime survival and state security. In addition, a largely unstated but important underlying objective was to establish a framework for peaceful intra-regional relationships between member states – in short, the need for confidence-building amongst neighbours after years of confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia (1962–66), the ejection of Singapore from federal Malaysia in 1965, and various other border disputes that took attention away from domestic development and state and nation-building efforts.

ASEAN's narrative of its own institutional development is coloured by euphemism, as reflected in its founding document the Bangkok (ASEAN) Declaration. The Declaration states in the broadest possible ambit that the aims and purposes of ASEAN encompass everything from accelerating economic growth, social progress, and cultural developments to promoting regional peace and stability and active collaboration on all matters of common interest. The only rudimentary mechanism sketched out to achieve these ambitious aims was a Foreign Ministers meeting to be rotated annually and a Standing Committee composed of accredited member state ambassadors to be chaired by the host country's Foreign Minister, or his representative. Unlike the European Union (EU), ASEAN's original objective was not peace through regional integration, but rather dialogue to promote intra-regional confidence and cooperation to protect member states' autonomy vis-à-vis major powers in the region.

Geopolitical and strategic drivers as well as external factors played an important part in ASEAN's development. Whereas European integration was driven primarily by memories of its bloody past and the need to contain nationalism and manage inter-state rivalry, ASEAN's inception was caused by concern over future conflicts in a very volatile region. Thus, it could be said that the EU was driven principally by its history and ASEAN more by its geography (Yeo and Matera 2015, 270).

ASEAN's progress in its formative years was very slow, occasionally marred by residual disputes fuelled by continued mistrust amongst its members. However, major developments in the region and internationally, including the accelerated withdrawal of British forces east of Suez in 1968 and Nixon's Guam doctrine in 1969 following setbacks in Vietnam, added to the sense of uncertainty and insecurity that ultimately kept members together. In addition, a détente between the US and the USSR, as well as Nixon's overtures to China in the early 1970s, led to fears that the major powers would effectively carve out the Southeast Asian region by bringing parts of it into their respective spheres of influence. This led to the half-hearted attempt (due to differences in opinions amongst member states) to establish Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN).

Similarly, the impetus for holding the first ASEAN Summit in 1976, almost a decade after ASEAN was founded, was a response to the developments in mainland Southeast Asia. The withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam in 1973, followed by the communist victories in Saigon, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane in 1975, significantly altered the political configuration of the region. A communist Indochina was thus a major catalyst for greater cooperation in ASEAN.

During the Summit, the most notable document signed was the Treaty on Amity and Cooperation (TAC). TAC made explicit the principle of non-interference in each member state's internal affairs and the right to national self-determination free from external interference, subversion or coercion. The Treaty also called upon member states to renounce the threat or use of force and settle differences or disputes by peaceful means, reflecting the underlying political and security concerns driving ASEAN's continued development.

The TAC was a direct response to the events in Indochina. Together with the Declaration of the ASEAN Concord, it set out in greater detail a plan of action for expanding ASEAN cooperation that has since shaped ASEAN discourse. The concept of the ASEAN Way for example, which only became common discourse much later in the 1980s, can be traced back to the TAC. The agreement by the leaders to set up an ASEAN Secretariat was another important signal of their strong commitment to regionalism.

From a purely state-centric narrative of a diplomatic community, emerging from years of preoccupation with Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia between the late 1970s and 1980s, ASEAN's attention only switched to economic cooperation in the post-Cold War era of heightened economic competition. This was unlike the path taken early on by the EU in which economic integration and the creation of a common market were seen as a way to achieve peace and reconciliation. These cooperative efforts were underpinned by a strong legal framework and formal institutions. In contrast, ASEAN's cooperation was underpinned by dialogue and diplomacy. In contrast to the institutionalised model of regional integration in the EU, institutional minimalism, emphasis on consultation and decisions by consensus were celebrated as the ASEAN Way.

ASEAN's shift towards the EU lexicon of community building and the creation of a single market came about in the aftermath of multiple crises from 1997 to 2000. The Asian Financial Crisis (AFC), the transnational haze blanketing Southeast Asia due to the burning of forests and peatland for palm oil plantation, and the mayhem in Timor Leste following its independence vote all made ASEAN look "helpless", "disunited" and unable to provide a coordinated response. Many external observers predicted that ASEAN would become irrelevant unless it radically transformed itself. Internally, ASEAN elites were very much aware of the need to answer their critics and rebuild the credibility and legitimacy of the institution. The international standing of ASEAN was profoundly damaged by these crises, particularly in the eyes of its external partners in the broader Asia-Pacific region. However, at the same time, they were not prepared to fully concede the ASEAN Way. The typical discourse that follows such accusations of irrelevance is the need to supplement the ASEAN Way with institutions and embrace the "rhetoric of governance, democracy and human rights" (Lee 2012).

ASEAN began to take small steps towards reinventing itself in an attempt to remain relevant to its member states and the region. More importantly, it sought to regain legitimacy within the broader global community. ASEAN leaders understood the importance of being seen as a unified institution to allay any fears about Southeast Asia's inability to return Western investments. Hence, many declarations and initiatives to restore ASEAN's image in the eyes of the global community were issued. First, the ASEAN 2020 Vision was adopted, which was then followed by the Hanoi Plan of Action calling for the acceleration of AFTA and the reform and expansion of the ASEAN Secretariat. All of these measures were meant to show the world that ASEAN was becoming a more unified, coherent and effective regional organisation (Narine 2009).

The AFC also revealed the interdependence of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asian economies leading to the creation of the ASEAN + 3 (APT) forum. Economic cooperation began to take centre stage as ASEAN members realized that individual actions were not enough to restore previous competitiveness and high levels of economic growth, especially in the face of competition from China and India. As former Secretary-General of ASEAN Severino noted in his book, the then prime minister of Singapore and a few other ASEAN leaders "were deeply concerned over the weakened ability of ASEAN countries to attract foreign direct investments, on which all of them depended for sustained economic growth" (Severino 2006, 343). The response was to embark on an ambitious programme to build an ASEAN Economic Community. At the 2003 ASEAN Summit, to signal their seriousness about regional integration, the leaders adopted the ASEAN Concord II, declaring that "an ASEAN Community shall be established comprising three pillars, namely political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation that are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing to ensure durable peace, stability and shared prosperity in the region".

The intensification of economic cooperation within ASEAN and desire to build a Single Market was also a response to the impact of heightened globalization and the opening up of China as it emerged as the world's factory. To compete with China and also benefit from China's rise, there was and still is a need for ASEAN to deepen its economic integration. This led ASEAN to examine the EU experience and brought with it the narrative of the need for greater institutionalisation and a more rule-based ASEAN. The European Union and its single market were often invoked as a reference point during this period for ASEAN to make its market of over 600 million consumers a more attractive option for investors and economic partners via greater internal integration.

The narrative of building an ASEAN Community was made to regain its economic competitiveness and strategic credibility. The EU, ASEAN's dialogue partner, was more than happy to share its regional integration experience and actively supported such capacity building towards achieving an ASEAN Community by 2015. However, to achieve this goal, a review of ASEAN's processes and institutions was necessary. Such a review, in turn, led to the drafting of an ASEAN Charter that would spell out the aims, aspirations, powers and structure of the institution, aiming to establish it as a rules-based organisation.

The ASEAN Charter was signed in November 2007 and came into force in 2008. The Charter drafting process demonstrated interesting divergences, with the compromises being made essentially causing ASEAN to remain an inter-governmental organisation. This was in line with the ASEAN way of non-interference and decision-making based on consultation and consensus, while also reiterating many of the fundamental principles contained in the TAC. There were some institutional innovations, such as creating the ASEAN Community Councils to take on the mantle of building an ASEAN Economic Community, an ASEAN Political and Security Community and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Taking a leaf from the EU's institutional structure of the COREPER (Committee of Permanent Representatives), ASEAN Member States were required to appoint a permanent representative (of Ambassador rank) to the ASEAN Secretariat based in Jakarta. The ASEAN Secretariat was also to be strengthened to oversee and report on the progress of community building. The most significant shift in response was the call for the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Body, which was welcomed by ASEAN civil society. This was also part of the shift towards a narrative for a more people-oriented ASEAN.

For a decade after the 2003 ASEAN Concord II pronouncement to build an ASEAN Community, there was much optimism that ASEAN was on track towards becoming a more people-centred entity benefiting from regional integration—helping to close development gaps, strengthen democracy and good governance, and achieve peace, security and stability. Unfortunately, ASEAN has thus far fallen short of the goals and aspirations that it has set up for itself. Lofty goals and aspirations have not been matched by the real institutional changes and reforms needed to achieve them.

The EU's experience in regional integration and community building was politely acknowledged but never fully accepted. ASEAN leaders took careful note with regards to specific technical issues, such as the mutual recognition or harmonization of standards for manufactured products to achieve cost efficiency and facilitate the flow of goods within the ASEAN Economic Community. Yet ASEAN was not ready to make the leap towards pooling sovereignty and delegating a certain degree of authority and power to independent institutions, as the Europeans did in their community-building project.

ASEAN COMMUNITY-BUILDING: CHALLENGES AND PITFALLS

The word integration did not appear in ASEAN's vocabulary until the 1990s. And for most of its development, ASEAN had rejected the EU model of integration. It was only after the Asian Financial Crisis that institutionalisation and integration became buzzwords in ASEAN. By declaring its aspirations in 2003 to build an ASEAN Community, the comparisons to the EU became ubiquitous with talks of moving towards a rule-based organisation, adopting an ASEAN Charter and acquiring a legal personality. Yet, despite all the discussions about integration and community-building, the ASEAN Community and ASEAN regionalism is a far cry from the textbook understanding of regionalism and integration.

ASEAN has thus far seemed to develop its own brand of "regionalism". Its development trajectory has not followed that of the European Union, as it has stayed firmly in the political sphere of power politics without developing an inner sphere of community truly governed by treaties, rules and laws. The EU wanted to use the legal institutions to tame the power politics that wracked its nations and led them to disaster. In contrast, ASEAN has continued to rely on traditional diplomacy to reach a grand bargain for peace and stability in Southeast Asia. Yet recent efforts in charter-drafting and the pronouncement of an ASEAN Community signal some aspirations to move beyond power politics and diplomacy to cement a more permanent and proactive role in the region. Henceforth, it included the narrative of ASEAN being in the driving seat and the importance of maintaining ASEAN centrality in the Asia-Pacific.

ASEAN has moved progressively away from loose intergovernmental collaboration towards far more explicit security activism (as seen in its initiatives such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting) and a greater emphasis on economic cooperation reflected in the objectives and Blueprint for the ASEAN Economic Community. It has tried to maintain two parallel tracks—one for "security regionalism" through dialogue and confidence-building via the ARF, the ADMM Plus and the East Asia Summit (EAS); and the other for "economic regionalism" through emphasising both intra-ASEAN integration in the form of the ASEAN Economic Community and broader integration into the global market by pursuing FTAs with its dialogue partners.

However, the reality is that there are complex linkages between economic and security regionalism on the one hand and the increasing volatilities in the security landscape of the Asia-Pacific region on the other. Moreover, the rise and assertiveness of China has constrained ASEAN's room for diplomatic manoeuvrability and impacted its appetite for economic integration.

In the first decade of the 21st century, when China was biding its time, hiding its strength and expounding a peaceful rise-narrative, ASEAN's economic relations with China flourished. However, even as economic ties grew closer, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea between several ASEAN members and China were never far from the surface. History and geography conspired to leave a residual distrust and suspicion against China, despite growing economic interdependence. Hence, US presence in the region was very much welcomed as a counterweight to a rising China.

These changing big power relations in the region combined with the return of geopolitics and the rising tide of nationalism and protectionism will pose challenges to ASEAN's further development. ASEAN has achieved a lot in the less complex, bipolar environment of the Cold War and even thrived during the unipolar moment of the US-led Western-centric order. However, it is not certain that ASEAN will succeed in its community-building efforts in the current era of uncertainty.

Just as ASEAN began to take small steps towards greater institutionalization in response to the post-Cold War environment, its security climate would become far more complex. With the passing of the bipolar world order and then the unipolar moment, the question has come – what can ASEAN do about the intensifying rivalry between the US and China?

The economic reality now is also far different from the economic conditions in the late 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. In a relatively benign economic environment under US hegemony characterized by openness and growth in the developed countries, ASEAN members needed only to “manage” economic growth using an export-driven strategy. However, as growth has slowed and debt continues to pile up in the developed world, developing countries, including those from ASEAN, need to be far more astute to create the necessary conditions for growth. Adding to the already complex economic landscape and the possible bifurcation of technological developments between the US and China, the region faces a pandemic like never before. The full economic impact of Covid-19 and the socio-political fallout is still being played out. How can ASEAN cope with all these difficult challenges?

Some in ASEAN might think that the choices and decisions ASEAN made may have little or no impact whatsoever on the broader canvas of the regional order. The latter would be shaped purely by big power relations and how the US-China rivalry develops. The shift in narrative from the Asia-Pacific region to the Indo-Pacific region and the formation of the Quad, an alliance between the US, Japan, India and Australia in the Indo Pacific, has caused many to predict the “demise” of ASEAN.

ASEAN's demise has been bandied about several times since its founding in 1967. Some analysts did not expect it to last more than a decade. Then, it was predicted that the glue that had held ASEAN together during the Cold War era would no longer remain as Member States faced external and domestic pressures on human rights and democratization in the immediate post-Cold war years. The Asian Financial crisis also dealt a big blow to ASEAN's credibility, and many then portrayed it as a sunset organization. The rebound embodied in the bold pronouncement to build an ASEAN community could not have been envisaged at the cusp of the 21st century. The enthusiasm and optimism both internally and externally towards the community-building project following the 2003 Bali Summit caught many by surprise.

However, the current challenges are different—not only immense in scale but also complex in nature. How will ASEAN manage the tensions between “parochialism and nationalism” and “globalization and complex interdependence”? And what about its relations with China which are marked by paradoxical trends of increased economic interdependence but decreased trust in the security arena, in particular, pertaining to Chinese policy and behaviour in the South China Sea? How will ASEAN navigate the increasing rivalry between the US and China and balance its relations with these two superpowers? And last but not least, what kind of recovery and transformation from the ravages of Covid-19 can we expect in the region, given that a second, third or fourth wave is hitting several ASEAN countries?

The Covid-19 pandemic has seemed to put the brakes on ASEAN's community building efforts, which were already flailing even before the onslaught of Covid-19. Gains made towards achieving the ASEAN Community in 2015 began to regress as pushback against globalization and nativist and far-right movements took root across the developed economies. Brexit, the US election of Trump and his America First rhetoric and policies, and technological disruptions unleashed a torrential shower on the integration project. When the most successful regional project, the European Union, showed signs of disintegration after the British voted to leave after over 40 years in the European community, a note of caution was sent to ASEAN on how far and how fast to push the vehicle of economic integration.

ASEAN's community-building journey has never been smooth-sailing. The classic “two steps forward and one step back”, often encountered when embarking on a difficult journey, was to be expected, but in the case of ASEAN, it sometimes felt more like one step forward and two steps back. Both domestic politics and external forces conspired to make ASEAN's community-building efforts exceedingly difficult. When internal unity, leadership and long-term strategic thinking are required, several ASEAN members are plagued by political instability and domestic power struggles. Without the requisite institutions and technocratic capacity similar to that which the EU has painstakingly built up in their regional integration, ASEAN's ability to make real progress is held hostage by the political inertia and lack of regional leadership, with members becoming too self-absorbed in their own domestic political troubles.

Compounding these internal challenges is the external environment. In the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, attention was turned to competition in the economic arena—the dominance of the neo-liberal economic agenda which touted the importance of free trade, market discipline and economic integration. The so-called Washington Consensus was further thrust upon the ASEAN economies after the Asian financial crisis. However, the Washington Consensus was challenged by the 2008 Global financial crisis, the rise of China and increasing income inequality. Moreover, the election of Donald Trump sounded the death knell of the Washington Consensus. The retrenchment of the neo-liberal agenda has given fuel to a more economically nationalistic agenda that has always been present to some degree in Asia but was kept under wrap during the euphoria of market liberalism and fundamental belief in free and open trade. With the latter increasingly being questioned, it was not surprising to see a rise in non-tariff barriers in the last 2-3 years. Behind the border, such measures continue to be stumbling blocks towards achieving an ASEAN Economic Community.

ASEAN's struggle to build a single market characterised by the free flow of goods, services and investments, as well as the free flow of capital and skilled labour, is not helped by complex, non-traditional security threats as well as worsening strategic tensions between China and the US. Moreover, all of these challenges are exacerbated further by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seen from the perspective of the EU, a longstanding ASEAN-dialogue partner that has tried to support ASEAN's integration in recent years, the lack of progress in ASEAN's community-building comes down to the group's repository of cooperation norms and its organizational structure. The ASEAN Way, with its emphasis on consultation and consensus and its jealously guarded principle of non-interference, limits what ASEAN can truly achieve. The over-worked and under-resourced ASEAN Secretariat is a far cry from the European Commission—an EU institution that is the “guardian” of the EU treaties and acts as its conscience, turning principles of treaties into applicable laws and policies. The EU has engaged in several programmes to help build capacity in the ASEAN Secretariat. However, the real crux of the problem is the unwillingness of the ASEAN Member States to delegate more power to the Secretariat. The ASEAN Secretariat is a secretariat in its most literary sense, preparing the papers and taking notes of the meetings and decisions made. It has no power to initiate policies or ensure the compliance and implementation of decisions or policies agreed by the ASEAN Member States.

Also absent from the ASEAN's organizational structure is an institution similar to the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU). Thus, while the ASEAN Charter conferred ASEAN with a legal personality, the truth is that ASEAN's cooperation remained firmly driven by national interest and political bargaining, not by institutions and legal norms.

While it seems obvious that ASEAN's organizational structure and lack of institutional capacity are stumbling blocks towards community-building, the more important reason for the slow progress in is the increasingly divergent interests driven in part by domestic political developments which have become more complex and polarized due to the impact of social media, rising inequalities, etc. As elaborated earlier in this section, ASEAN suffers from a lack of regional leadership because several members are deeply embroiled in domestic political troubles. The military coup in Myanmar is just one stark example of this.

Will ASEAN members be able to snap out of such a political quandary and breathe new light into their regional community-building efforts? The signs thus far are mixed.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING 2.0?

The COVID-19 pandemic and February 2021 coup in Myanmar have shone a spotlight on the immense challenges that ASEAN faces. Community-building appears to be on hold as several ASEAN countries continued to struggle with containing the spread of the virus and its fallout. While several ASEAN countries did relatively well in containing COVID-19 during the first wave of the infections in 2020, the second and third waves fuelled by the Delta variant beginning in 2021 have worsened the situation in many key ASEAN economies, from Indonesia and the Philippines to Malaysia and Thailand. Even Vietnam, which has been hailed as one of the countries successfully keeping COVID-19 under control, is now under pressure from outbreaks amongst workers in its manufacturing industries.

Yet, ASEAN does not have the luxury to stand still in its community-building efforts. If it continues to backslide, it risks sinking into oblivion. During the 37th ASEAN Summit held in 2020, ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), which set out broad strategies and implementation measures to address the region's socio-economic challenges in three different phases—from the short-term reopening stage to medium-and-long-term recovery and longer-term resilience and sustainability. The adoption of the ACRF signals the ASEAN members' recognition that addressing the crisis requires coordinated actions and the strengthening of cooperation with ASEAN's partners.

One of the most significant achievements amid the COVID-19 pandemic has been the conclusion of the ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA) on 4th June 2021. The conclusion of CATA and the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement in 2019 point the way towards a community-building approach that actively involves ASEAN's partners in fostering and "forcing" more intra-ASEAN coordination and cooperation.

As the rivalry between the US and China has intensified, a 2021 Southeast Asian survey by ISEAS-Yusof Ishak institute showed that the majority of Southeast Asians do not want to be forced to choose between the two. Instead, they would prefer ASEAN to enhance its resilience and unity to fend off external pressures from the US and China (The State of Southeast Asia Report 2021, 2). Japan and the EU have now become the frontrunners and preferred partners in the hedging games against the US-China rivalry.

For ASEAN to build its resilience and work toward a cohesive community, the roles of Japan and the EU should be seriously examined. ASEAN Member States need to engage Japan and the EU more proactively to build connectivity as a requisite for the ASEAN community. There is great potential in ASEAN putting more substance into its recently elevated EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership and applying the technique of “intra-regionalism” through “inter-regionalism”. ASEAN members can build more internal coherence through step-up engagement with the EU, including reviving the inter-regional EU-ASEAN FTA. Suppose a comprehensive, high-quality FTA is not possible at this juncture. In that case, ASEAN could use the example of CATA to pursue a sectoral agreement with the EU in other functional areas such as renewable energy and more.

A more active application of the ASEAN X principle or introducing “opt-outs” similar to those adopted by the EU, such as Denmark and the UK opting out of the single currency, would also be a way for ASEAN to continue with deeper regional cooperation amongst members ready to proceed. This principle is especially important as we face dilemmas posed by the coup in Myanmar. As ASEAN dialogue partners such as the EU impose sanctions on Myanmar, we have to learn from the decade of experience between 1998 and 2008 not to allow this incident to become an infamous millstone in our community building efforts for ASEAN (Yeo 2020).

Community-building 2.0 should also be a more bottom-up approach and involve more public-private partnerships than the old school, state-centric, top-down approach. The digital transformation that has been accelerated because of COVID-19 and the growing digital economy are full of opportunities. As noted by Lee Joo-Ok, Head of Regional Agenda, Asia-Pacific of the World Economic Forum (WEF):

A survey conducted on 60,000 ASEAN youths revealed that ASEAN youths adjusted to the Covid-19 environment by significantly increasing their digital footprint: 87% of youths increased usage of at least one digital tool during the pandemic, 42% picked up at least one new digital tool, and about 25% e-commerce sellers were a first-time user. Moreover, a significant majority of youths confirmed their intended permanent use of the digital tools beyond the pandemic. (Lee and Nguyen 2021)

ASEAN has moved forward with regional policy efforts to support the digital economy. It has developed a framework for cross-border payments, a plan to promote smart manufacturing and guidelines for the 5G ecosystem. “To complement ASEAN’s efforts, the World Economic Forum’s Digital ASEAN Initiative is bringing people together to pursue solutions on data policy, digital skills, e-payments and cybersecurity” (Lee and Nguyen 2021). The tech start-up scene in Southeast Asia is also flourishing, and young entrepreneurs in ASEAN will be one of the driving forces of ASEAN Community Building.

Community-building 2.0 also requires ASEAN to become more cohesive, flexible, and agile at the same time. It may sound paradoxical, but the dilemmas ASEAN faces between its economic development and security require a certain degree of cohesiveness as well as nimbleness.

For the first 30 years, ASEAN focused on playing a balancing and hedging game, employing all the necessary measures to maintain regional stability. A combination of external fear and challenges as well as an internal quest to build trust and modernity kept the five founding members of ASEAN together. However, with the enlargement of ASEAN and the emergence of an increasingly complex situation fuelled by the end of the Cold War, the rise of China and now increasing competition between the US and China, external fear and challenges appear to have split the ASEAN members, leading to less coherence.

ASEAN is now at a critical juncture in which it has to manage a worsening strategic environment while also trying to build internal coherence, made more difficult because of greater political pluralism and social awareness. Faced with these forces, ASEAN (logically) needs to move towards greater integration to attain a centrality of substance rather than merely rhetoric in the region (Yeo and Matera 2015, 284–285). At the same time, agility and resilience are crucial in an increasingly volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous world, still ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. All of these achievements will, however, not appear serendipitously. On the contrary, it requires leadership—not hegemonic leadership or leadership by the biggest or richest—but thoughtful and creative leadership.

CONCLUSION

The “regionalist” impulse of ASEAN and the EU in their founding years and later efforts at community-building must be understood within their historical contexts, which have resulted in different trajectories. The EU was infused with a certain moral, political finality of an ever closer union with the implicit long-term vision of a peaceful, united Europe in its early years. In contrast, ASEAN was more modestly crafted with no grand vision, except to hold communism at bay, keep interference from big powers to a minimum and maintain the balance of power in a volatile region. The idea was that member states would come together when necessary, whether against a common threat or when the balance of power was in danger of being overturned.

The European vision of an ever closer union has led to a certain linear, teleological thinking of deepening integration through a set of common institutions and policies and policy coordination in an ever greater number of areas. In contrast, ASEAN’s developments were shaped in unexpected ways via the members’ actions in response to the changing regional environment. Thus, for example, it took almost ten years before ASEAN held its first Summit and decided to set up an ASEAN Secretariat in response to the communist victory in Vietnam.

It would take ASEAN another 15 years until the end of the Cold War as a new wave of globalization took hold before economic integration began to take centre stage with the proposal of a free trade area.

The journey towards building an ASEAN community began only in 2003 in the aftermath of the AFC alongside the opening up of China and increasing apparentness of its economic weight. As a result, ASEAN started to pitch a much more economic-oriented narrative, presenting itself as a region with good economic fundamentals and high potential. Indeed, ASEAN's full economic potential could only be unleashed with greater internal economic integration and further assimilation into the global economy.

Unfortunately for ASEAN, its community-building efforts have been distracted by member states' domestic politics and made more difficult by an increasingly complex and contested regional environment. How ASEAN and its member states respond to the various challenges to revive its community-building project will determine the future fate of ASEAN.

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CHAPTER 04

ASEAN-China Relations in the Age of “New Normal”

Yang Yue

INTRODUCTION

Thirty years have passed since ASEAN and China established dialogue relations in 1991. Chinese President Xi Jinping-2020-credited ASEAN-China relationship as “the most successful and vibrant model for cooperation” in the Asia-Pacific region and an exemplary effort to build a community with a shared future for mankind at the opening ceremony of the seventeenth China-ASEAN Expo in November 2020. ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi also commended that ASEAN and China had built up mutual trust, deepened pragmatic cooperation and reinforced the traditional friendship over the 30 years (As of 7 June 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China listed on its website https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1882093.shtml).

Standing on a new historical starting point, both sides are committed to further cooperation on much wider fronts and at a much deeper level. However, against the backdrop of two “new normals”, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and the new type of major-power competition, more wisdom and efforts of ASEAN and China are needed to push forward bilateral relations healthily and sustainably. This chapter aims to offer some insights on the priorities for the 2022 Cambodia’s ASEAN chairmanship and the future of ASEAN-China relations based on taking stock of the 30-year ASEAN-China dialogue relations. It also explores the impact of the “new normal” on ASEAN-China relations.

OVERVIEW OF 30 YEARS OF ASEAN-CHINA DIALOGUE RELATIONS

Cooperation is a resounding message delivered by ASEAN and China in the past 30 years, which has witnessed growing maturity and stability of ASEAN-China dialogue relations. Many milestone achievements have been made so far. First, ASEAN and China attach great importance to their foreign relations. China is the first to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), the first to establish a strategic partnership with ASEAN, the first to express its willingness publicly to sign the Protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-free Zone, the first to express clear support of ASEAN’s central position in regional cooperation, the first to sign FTA with ASEAN, and the first to map out the mid-and long-term development plans of bilateral relations by adopting the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership Vision 2030. ASEAN Regional Forum is the second multilateral mechanism China joined after the United Nations (Nie 2013). The support of China to ASEAN centrality and its multilateralism has encouraged other external powers to elevate the standing of ASEAN in their foreign relations and update their relations with ASEAN as well. The Obama administration signed TAC and became an East Asia Summit member in 2010, which is perceived by southeast Asian academia to be a product of the US feeling encouraged by the demonstrative role of China (Kamaruddin and Galas 2020).

At the twenty-third ASEAN-China Summit, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed to elevate bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership, and both sides agreed in principle to bring the relations to new heights, which demonstrates their strong commitment to healthy and sustainable bilateral relations in the future.

Second, consultation and dialogue are upheld by ASEAN and China to push forward bilateral relations healthily and stably. China was a country of dialogue and consultation with ASEAN before it became a full dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1996. Politics and security were the main themes of bilateral talks when ASEAN and China started their dialogue relations. Both intended to build an enabling and peaceful external environment for their development at that time. ASEAN-China relations are the most institutionalised among ASEAN's relations with all external partners. Both sides have established a multi-level dialogue mechanism to properly handle and manage the differences to maintain the general direction of friendly cooperation. The Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) was signed in 2002 and has been earnestly implemented since then. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN and China have been continuously carrying out dialogues through both online and offline platforms on implementing the DOC to maintain the peaceful situation in the South China Sea and advance maritime cooperation. The consultations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) have been stalled by the pandemic. However, both sides agreed to restart and expedite the consultation process at the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of dialogue relations between China and ASEAN held in Chongqing, China, in June 2021. In the Co-Chairs' Statement on the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting (2021), both sides reaffirmed that the COC needs to be under international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, which indicates not only the determination of both sides to maintain the peace in the South China Sea but also China's strategic reassurance towards ASEAN by responding to concerns of the ASEAN Member States (AMS), i.e., making the COC under international law.

Third, practical cooperation is the focus of ASEAN-China relations. The 30-year bilateral cooperation has yielded fruitful results on the fronts of politics and security, economy, society and culture, and people-to-people exchanges. On the political and security front, ASEAN and China are strongly committed to shelving and managing the differences through dialogues and consultation and promote practical cooperation to deepen mutual trust and maintain regional peace and stability. ASEAN and China had their first milestone joint maritime exercise in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, between 22 and 28 October 2020. "The ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise 2018" marked the first time ASEAN held a military exercise with a single country and the first time China had a maritime exercise with ASEAN as well. The drill aimed at advancing defence and maritime security cooperation between ASEAN and China, and the application of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, through which mutual trust has been further strengthened.

China and ASEAN countries have also carried out maritime cooperation by setting aside disputes and pursuing joint development. China is willing to offer more public goods for regional countries, such as all-weather tsunami detection and early warning services. China's international tsunami warning centre, established in 2018 which monitors major earthquake subduction zones in South China, Sulu and Sulawesi seas and provides 24-hour uninterrupted warning services, is the result of practical maritime cooperation between countries in the South China Sea (As of 8 February 2018, the Xinhuanest listed on its website http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/08/c_136959424.htm).

Economic ties between ASEAN and China are a highlight of the 30-year dialogue relations. Bilateral trade volume jumped from less than \$8 billion in 1991 to \$684.6 billion in 2020, which witnessed the historical moment of ASEAN and China becoming the largest trading partner of each other. The conclusion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will further boost the bilateral trade bonds. The alignment between the BRI and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity has been accelerated, and many projects have progressed steadily. The COVID-19 pandemic has further tested the time-honoured good neighbourliness between ASEAN and China. Both have carried out fruitful cooperation on the pandemic fight at bilateral and multilateral levels, drawing the two even closer and laying a greater foundation for building a more solid ASEAN-China community. China has delivered more than 190 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to ASEAN countries (As of 3 August 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China listed on its website https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1897344.shtml). The China-ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund, the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund and the Special Fund for Asian Regional Cooperation have been set up to deliver tangible benefits to the people. For people-to-people exchanges, more than 65 million personnel exchanges were conducted in 2019, and nearly 4,500 flights went between China and ASEAN countries every week. There are also more than 200, 000 foreign exchange students, and more than 200 pairs of sister cities were formed according to the statistics of 2019 (As of 8 June 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China listed on its website https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1882088.shtml). The platforms and mechanisms such as the China-ASEAN Expo, China-ASEAN Education Cooperation Week, and China-ASEAN Young Leaders Scholarship have played an important role in boosting bilateral people-to-people exchanges.

Many valuable experience and best practices learned and collected from the 30-year ASEAN-China dialogue relations should be carried on maintaining the momentum of the bilateral relations and elevate it to new heights. However, the way ahead is not without stumbling blocks. Two daunting challenges facing ASEAN and China are the COVID-19 pandemic and increasingly tense major power competition. Against this backdrop, the following part discusses the impact of these two challenges on ASEAN-China relations.

THE IMPACT OF “NEW NORMAL” ON ASEAN-CHINA RELATIONS

With the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and major power competition returning to the centre of the US national security strategy at the end of 2017, we have entered the age of “new normal”, which affects ASEAN-China relations in no small way. The age of “new normal” imposes both opportunities and challenges on ASEAN-China relations. Therefore, navigating through it successfully matters a lot to the future of ASEAN-China relations.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ASEAN-CHINA RELATIONS

Though ASEAN Member States and China have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic fight speaks volumes about the spirit of cooperation and good neighbourliness of both sides. The virus outbreak has cost peoples' lives and livelihoods, and economies of both the AMS and China. China's GDP contracted by 6.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2020 and rebounded consecutively in the following three quarters by 3.2 per cent, 4.9 per cent and 6.5 per cent. 2020 saw the increase of China's GDP by 2.3 per cent (As of 18 January 2021, the Xinhuanet listed on its website http://www.xinhuanet.com/2021-01/18/c_1126994121.htm). With the effective measures implemented, the pandemic in China has been contained successfully and quickly. Though there are sporadic local cases, there has been no massive outbreak in China like what happened in Wuhan in early 2020.

The pandemic has affected the AMS in an all-round way as well (The ASEAN Secretariat 2020). Since April 2021, the AMS has undergone the second pandemic wave, which has gravely worsened lingering economic damage from the first virus wave. According to the International Monetary Fund (2021), the overall GDP of the AMS is projected to increase by 5.2 per cent. Income per capita in 5 ASEAN economies (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam) will still be 6 per cent lower in 2024 than expected before the pandemic. However, the second wave might drag down the economic recovery in the region. The recovery outlook of Southeast Asia, to a large extent, hinges upon controlling the virus, international trade, and the macro-economic policy of AMS governments (Rajah 2021).

The fight against the pandemic has strengthened the cultural commonality, mutual trust, closer cooperation between the two sides, and even provided the new growth points for bilateral relations. The pandemic has triggered reflections on the cultural similarity. While methods and ways of responding to the pandemic vary greatly across different places, they also reflect the cultural commonality of specific regions (Gelfand et al. 2020).

The AMS and China prioritise saving people's life in dealing with the pandemic and respecting science, which has demonstrated the advantage of their cultural commonality, which will lay a solid foundation for building a stronger ASEAN-China community of shared future.

At the bilateral level, China and individual ASEAN countries have conducted close cooperation via both governmental and social channels. When the COVID-19 pandemic first broke out in China, ASEAN countries provided China with both material and emotional support in a timely and effective manner. When the virus spread to ASEAN countries, China was ready to provide its assistance. Under the 10+1 framework, the ASEAN health sector at national and regional levels responded immediately to the outbreak as early as the first week of January 2020 when China shared the first report pneumonia cases to the ASEAN Secretariat. Numerous meetings, video conferences, and discussions between ASEAN and China on how to combat the coronavirus have since been held. The Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on COVID-19 held in Vientiane, Laos, on 20 February 2020 is the first multilateral international conference dedicated to the issue since the outbreak, which demonstrates the readiness of ASEAN and China to embark on multilateral cooperation and sets an example for global cooperation on the fight against COVID-19 (Yang and Li 2020). Currently, in the new normal of the pandemic fight, both sides continue to carry out extensive cooperation on vaccine R&D, production, procurement, vaccination, implementing China-ASEAN Public Health Cooperation Initiative, and China's supporting ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies.

Despite the pandemic, ASEAN became China's largest trading partner in 2020, with a trading volume of \$684.6 billion (As of 25 January 2021, the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China listed on its website <http://asean.mofcom.gov.cn/article/jmxw/202101/20210103033653.shtml>). Thanks to the high complementarity in economy and trade between the two sides and policymaking support of the BRI and ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA), the regional economic cycle in the area will surpass the global one, thus deepening the interdependency of countries in the region.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of secure production and supply chains, thereby triggering the shortening of the supply chain. As such, trade ties between ASEAN and China will be further strengthened, given their geographical proximity. While large-scale infrastructure projects in various countries have been somewhat affected by the pandemic, most of the infrastructure projects under construction along the Belt and Road Initiative have been proceeding smoothly, with sufficient measures taken to prevent COVID-19. Steady progress has been made in such projects as the China-Laos Railway, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, the Malaysia East Coast Railway, and the Brunei Hengyi Petrochemical amid the first wave of the pandemic. China and some ASEAN countries also quickly established the "fast track" and "green lane" for essential travels of people and supplies during the pandemic fight in 2020, which has helped stabilise the regional production and supply chains and promote economic recovery.

The digital economy spawned by the pandemic will be a popular focus for cooperation between China and ASEAN. Both sides have made signs of progress in cooperation on e-commerce, technological innovation, 5G networks, and smart cities in recent years. They can go online to actively explore areas of cooperation like telemedicine, medical supplies, trade and business opportunities. Health tourism and the biomedical industry will become key investment areas after the pandemic, with promising projects for China, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and other countries to collaborate on. Online education and shopping are also likely to prosper (Yang and Li 2020). China proposed to formulate the Action Plan for Digital Economy Cooperation, explore the China-ASEAN Digital Security Initiative, and advance technological innovation at the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in celebration of the thirtieth Anniversary of Dialogue Relations (As of 7 June 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China listed on its website https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1882097.shtml). The economic tie between ASEAN and China is also bound to benefit from RCEP. It is estimated that China exports will gain between \$244 and \$248 billion from RCEP, accounting for nearly 50 per cent of the total export growth of all RCEP members. In addition, China's tariff-elimination commitments under RCEP will further accelerate supply chain relocation from China to Southeast Asia. As a result, China's imports of labour-intensive goods from ASEAN countries are set to grow significantly (Zhang 2021).

To a certain extent, the pandemic has become a touchstone for the bilateral relationship, which has raised the community's awareness and pushed practical cooperation across various fields to a new level. Many economic and social scars left by the pandemic badly need joint efforts from both sides to address. As such, cooperation is the only choice for ASEAN and China.

THE IMPACT OF MAJOR POWER COMPETITION ON ASEAN-CHINA RELATIONS

Given its unique geographical locality, Southeast Asia is the core area of the US Indo-Pacific strategy and China's BRI, making it the hotbed of the strategic competition between China and the US. As far as China is concerned, the geographic value of the AMS is self-evident. It is the gateway for China's natural resource imports and maritime routes and an important strategic partner for political, economic, and regional cooperation. As far as the US is concerned, preventing China from dominating Southeast Asia has become its core concern in the region since the return of major power competition to the centre of the US national security strategy during the Trump administration.

The increasing influence of China in East Asia has already become a big concern of the US since the Obama administration, which is also why the Obama administration unveiled the Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy. To respond to the BRI, the Trump administration has built a trilateral partnership for infrastructure investment in the Indo-Pacific with Australia and Japan and a US-Japan Power Partnership in the Mekong. However, few concrete projects have emerged from these initiatives (Dollar, Stromseth, and Finan 2021). In June 2021, the Biden administration and the G7 leaders launched the bold new global infrastructure initiative, the Build Back Better World (B3W), which was also framed as a response to the BRI. Given substantial investments in domestic anti-pandemic and infrastructure by the Biden administration, it remains doubtful that the US can offer an alternative to the BRI.

From the end of the Cold War to the first decade of the twenty-first century is the period of US strategic quiescence in Southeast Asia since the US judgement on East Asia was peaceful and regarded the rise of China as an economic phenomenon (Ott 2013). After that, however, the US changed its view of China. It began to express concerns about China's rising influence in Southeast Asia in 2010. The US policy toward Southeast Asia was immediately made in the context of competition among major powers. With China-US relations having taken a sharp turn for the worse during the Trump administration and continuing its downward spiral after President Biden took office, we are living in a world of a new type of major power competition, which is different from the Cold War between the US and the former Soviet Union, featuring competition on the military and ideological fronts and proxy wars, and the competition between the US and Japan on the economic front.

Biden's administration perceives China as "the only competitor capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system" (The White House 2021). Thus, the US aims to out-compete China by investing in its people, economy, and democracy; restoring US credibility and reasserting forward-looking global leadership; setting the international agenda; working alongside others to shape new global norms and agreements that advance the US interests and reflect the US values; bolstering and defending the US unparalleled network of allies and partners; and making smart defence investments (The White House 2021). Compared with his predecessor's policy toward China, Biden has continued to identify China as a "strategic partner" and taken a tough stance on China while changing the approaches of competing with China to some extent. The Biden administration's policy toward China affects ASEAN-China relations in the following ways.

Biden's South China Sea policy imposes a threat to regional peace and stability. The development and economic growth of the AMS and China have long benefited from a peaceful external environment. Though the South China Sea issue is a big challenge facing ASEAN and China, there is an important bilateral consensus on and increasing bilateral willingness to manage disputes through dialogues and consultations.

Both sides have been maintaining online and offline dialogues and consultations on the effective implementation of the DOC to advance the pragmatic maritime cooperation and are willing to conclude the COC at an early date.

On the contrary, Biden's South China Sea policy disrupts the peace and stability in the region. Biden's administration is outdoing the Trump administration in bluff and bluster with a higher frequency of "Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP)" and reconnaissance aircraft activities and playing up "grey area" tactics. Different from Trump's fighting alone against China, the Biden administration tends to make concerted efforts with its allies and partners to address the "Chinese challenge". In the South China Sea, the Biden administration institutionalises and normalises FONOP and incites anti-China forces among the ASEAN claimants to inflame regional tension. Hying up "Niu'e Reef incidence" in 2021 is an example.

The Biden administration also holds that the South China Sea arbitration ruling is consistent with UNCLOS, binding on China and the Philippines. However, Biden's continuing strategy of demanding China abide by its interpretation of UNCLOS while refusing to ratify it can only fail (Valencia 2021). The AMS resumed confidence in the US after Biden won the 2020 presidential election, while the Biden administration has not brought about peace and stability to the region as what the AMS expected (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute 2021). The South China Sea has become a flashpoint since US-China relations got frosty, and the Biden administration has seemed to not reverse this trend so far. There remains the risk of US-China conflict in this contested area.

Biden's economic, trade, and high-tech policies toward China have undermined the open, free, and stable multilateral trade system and international high-tech cooperation, from which the AMS and China have benefited. Biden's "middle-class diplomacy" is by nature no different from Trump's "America First" doctrine, which echoes Trump's misunderstanding of how the modern economy works. Both are fundamentally mercantilist in their intention to promote more exports but discourage more imports, and both hide behind what they perceive to be an isolationist public attitude (Schake 2021).

Currently, Trump's trade war tariffs remain under the Biden administration. Biden continues to uphold tech-nationalism by implementing a "small yard with a high fence" policy, i.e., prohibiting in a targeted and scoped manner the US investments in Chinese companies that undermine the security or democratic values of the US and its allies and imposing more sanctions on Chinese companies. The US Innovation and Competition Act of 2021, passing the Senate in June 2021, includes \$250 billion investment in R&D and local production of such high-tech as semiconductors and chips (The United States Innovation 2021). The Quad intends to build a "democratic high-tech alliance" in the Indo-Pacific to deal with China (The United States Innovation 2021). Some AMS can benefit from the US-China trade conflict and high-tech companies' relocation from China in the short term.

However, in the long run, the US-China trade war will slow down the global economy and undermine the free and open trade system, hurting the AMS economies. The US-China technology decoupling is also estimated to cause 5 per cent of GDP losses for many economies and forces AMS to face technological bifurcation in the region (Cerdeiro et al. 2021). With the US continuing to look inward and favour protectionism, the US is highly likely to take punitive measures against the AMS, especially those not willing to join “democratic high-tech alliance” if production and supply chains of high-tech companies transition from China to the AMS instead of reshoring to the US.

With China-US competition becoming fierce, ASEAN is also forced to take a side between the two major powers. However, both countries have reaffirmed their support for ASEAN centrality and promise of not pressuring ASEAN to pick a side. The US ambivalent engagement with ASEAN after the end of the Cold War and assistance for or cooperation with the AMS coming with political strings solidify AMS perception of being forced to take a side by the US. During her visit to Cambodia in June 2021, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman tried to draw the Cambodian government away from China and push democratic reforms (Strangio 2021). When the US-China competition becomes tenser, the AMS is projected to encounter more pressure from the US. The AMS and China are permanent neighbours. With the increasing influence of China in the region and historical memory of the tributary system, the most recent three years (2019–2021) have witnessed a continued decline of trust in China (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute 2021). As such, ASEAN-China cooperation will be adversely affected. It is a case in point that some AMS have reservations about the Chinese proposal of updating the ASEAN-China strategic partnership to a comprehensive one since they believe relations upgrade means “China first”, a sort of balancing act against the US and a tilt toward the regional giant (Sang 2021).

PRIORITIES FOR CAMBODIA’S ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP IN 2022

To better live with the “new normal”, Cambodia, as ASEAN Chairman in 2022, needs to take into consideration the following tasks as the priorities.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF COVID-19 AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The prevailing idea among public health experts and epidemiologists is that the coronavirus will never be eradicated. The Economist (After the Disease 2021) published a normalcy index, tracking flights and traffic and retailing across 50 countries and taking the pre-pandemic average as 100. According to the index, the worst performer is Malaysia, scoring just 27. The main reason is that vaccination remains incomplete. COVID-19 has exposed how fundamental health is to share economic prosperity.

As pandemic fight becomes a new normal, prevention and control of COVID-19 and economic recovery will still be Cambodia's first and foremost task as the 2022 ASEAN chair. It is urgent and important for policymakers to consider the means of striking a balance between pandemic control and economic development. Such a balance hinges upon vaccination and a solid public health system since the key factor shaping the recovery outlook of the region and the globe at large is controlling the virus. In this regard, as the 2022 ASEAN chair, Cambodia is duty-bound to push for better regional cooperation among the AMS and between ASEAN and its external partners on vaccine multilateralism, public health capacity building, safer green lanes, supply chain resilience and digital economy. Cambodia also needs to use ASEAN chairmanship to reframe global discourses to counter voices promoting vaccine nationalism and geopolitical rivalry.

Specifically speaking, Cambodia can do the following things: 1). further accelerate cooperation in vaccine-related initiatives in the region by prioritising and investing in the Regional Strategic and Action Plan on ASEAN Vaccines Security and Self-Reliance for 2021–2025; 2). strengthen the state-to-state cooperation in the medical field, especially among medical institutions and universities, to lead in medical education, joint scientific research, training, academic exchanges, and technical cooperation to better deal with a public health crisis; 3). promote dialogues and organise meetings to establish safer green lanes and safe travel bubbles and enact joint protocols and acceptable vaccine types for travel, based on mutual understanding, mutual trust, agreement, and respect; 4). strengthen regional cooperation under RCEP, the BRI, ACFTA and others to maintain an open trade and investment environment such as the smooth functioning of international transport and customs and including provisions for the smooth operations of supply chains into agreement negotiation if possible; and 5). strengthen regional cooperation on the digital economy, especially improving technology infrastructure to support digital platforms that can assist people in meeting their daily needs and activities during the pandemic.

The pandemic offers new opportunities for ASEAN-China cooperation. More importantly, both sides are willing to work together to take on challenges and embrace opportunities. The areas of cooperation have been formulated in the newly adopted Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2021–2025). It is imperative for both ASEAN and China to fully implement this action plan in the five years to come. ASEAN could leverage China's new dual-cycle development pattern, the conclusion of RCEP and the momentum of China's economic recovery to promote its priority development agendas.

STICK TO AN OPEN AND INCLUSIVE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Openness and inclusiveness are the secret of ASEAN's success. Being open and inclusive becomes even more precious for ASEAN today when it has encountered the tensest ever major power competition since the end of the cold war. Major powers, not limited to China and the US, such as India, the EU, Japan, the UK, ROK, and Russia, have proposed several cooperation initiatives in the region. Such a scenario benefits that more countries attach great importance to southeast Asia in their foreign policy agenda. However, the challenge is to align these initiatives favouring ASEAN, especially since some initiators see others as a threat. ASEAN states are ready to play a role as "an honest broker" in ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which sends the outside world a positive signal that ASEAN intends to play an even more proactive and constructive role in tackling the increasingly fierce major power relations in the region. ASEAN is a critical pillar for regional cooperation. In this connection, Cambodia's key to leading ASEAN in 2022 to serve as an honest broker lies in pursuing an open and inclusive regional architecture and further diversifying ASEAN's external partners while maintaining ASEAN's autonomy.

There exist extensive consensuses between ASEAN and China on open and inclusive regional architecture, open and free trade system, inclusive multilateralism, and managing differences through dialogues and consultations. China enjoys many firsts in developing and strengthening its relations with ASEAN. By doing so, China can contribute more to regional development, encouraging others to upgrade their relations with ASEAN and deepen their cooperation with ASEAN. In the age of new normal, consensuses between ASEAN and China should be further consolidated and expanded for ASEAN-China relations to continue to serve its demonstrative roles among all ASEAN foreign relations.

Choosing a side is not the DNA of ASEAN, and China has no intention to push ASEAN to do it either. ASEAN-China cooperation is not exclusive and not a type of cooperation among alliances targeting the third party. The BRI proposed by China is by nature inclusive, and China even welcomed the US to join when it proposed the BRI in 2013.

China is also open to initiatives launched by other countries, such as the CPTPP. ASEAN-China economic ties register historic growth, thanks to keeping the market open despite the US-China trade war and the pandemic. The conclusion of RCEP is an excellent example of ASEAN's and China's strong commitments to an open, transparent, and fair multilateral trade system. It will certainly deliver tangible benefits to both sides.

Facing major power competition and some countries' inward-looking and protectionism, the AMS refuse to take a side between major powers, continue to open the market and even much wider, and are strongly committed to building an open and inclusive regional regime by engaging more external partners. As such, China needs to support the role ASEAN intends to play by enhancing third-party cooperation in Southeast Asia and engaging more partners, especially the partners who intend to work with China but are reluctant to endorse the BRI. The BRI features openness, inclusiveness and multilateralism, and China is willing to cooperate with countries, including the US, under the framework of ASEAN. In this regard, the role of ASEAN as an honest broker and strategic bridge is highly commended by China. ASEAN could play an important role in shaping the China-US dynamic in the region, since neither country can dominate the region.

SAFEGUARD A PEACEFUL AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION

ASEAN's development and prosperity have been attributed to the long peace maintained by the regional countries since the end of the Cold War. However, with major power competition becoming tenser, the peace and stability in the region are being jeopardised. The US and its allies have started to increase their military activities in the South China Sea since the Trump administration. However, the same period witnessed the increasing willingness of both ASEAN and China to maintain the peace and stability of the region by fully implementing the DOC and pushing forward COC negotiations despite the pandemic. In the Co-Chairs' Statement on the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2021, China has made strategic reassurance to ASEAN once again by reaffirming that the COC needs to be under international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. China is also willing to expand practical maritime cooperation with ASEAN such as blue economy, marine environmental protection, fishery resource conservation, and maritime disaster prevention and mitigation (As of 7 June 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China listed on its website https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1882097.shtml). As such, it is crystally clear that regional peace and stability is put at high risk by the party coming from outside the region.

What matters for Cambodia when assuming the 2022 ASEAN chairmanship is to lead in the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes in the South China Sea. David C. Kang (2017, 3) argued, “the East Asian reality runs counter a largely Western narrative that views China’s rise as a threat and the region as increasingly unstable.” It is a great boon for the people in the region that the AMS see the rise of China as an opportunity for their development. China has not occupied an inch of the territory of other countries in the process of its rapid rise since the late 1970s, which is solid evidence of its peaceful rise. It is also self-evident that China always upholds “common prosperity” when it develops itself. Moreover, China shares the same culture, priorities, and regional perceptions with the AMS, such as putting people first in governance, prioritising economic growth and social integration in their social development, and desiring an open and inclusive regional architecture. As the 2022 ASEAN chair, Cambodia could leverage its role to construct the common regional narrative by communicating our shared culture, priorities, and regional perceptions to the countries from outside the region. After all, any country with intrusive attempts at military-first leadership is doomed to fail in the region.

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CHAPTER 05

Japan's New ASEAN Policy under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Its Continuities and Discontinuities from the Fukuda Doctrine and the Role of Cambodia

Toshiya Takahashi

INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship has started amid the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine diplomacy, increasing tensions of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and the unresolved Myanmar's 2021 coup. It also faces an intensifying great power rivalry between the United States and China in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, Japan announced its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision in 2016 and uses this in its ASEAN policy today. It was a reaction against China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) over its geopolitical and geo-economic presence and influence in the Indo-Pacific region, especially Southeast Asia. For ASEAN, Japan and China are two important economic partners. Thus, their competition might have negative impacts on ASEAN's centrality and economic integration. Can ASEAN work with Japan's FOIP while maintaining a good relationship with China? This is an important question that ASEAN must deal with in the coming years. ASEAN has to manage its Japan and China policy while maintaining its centrality and autonomy.

This chapter examines Japan's emerging ASEAN policy under the FOIP by focusing on its continuities and discontinuities from the 1977 Fukuda doctrine, the guiding principles for Japan's ASEAN policy from then. It provides policy proposals for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. Most of Japan's new ASEAN policy under the FOIP continues its conventional policy under the Fukuda doctrine. Still, two points are different from the past: value diplomacy and a quality-of-infrastructure proposal. This chapter examines the contents of the two and the Japanese intentions behind them. First, the chapter outlines the 1977 Fukuda doctrine and focuses on its neutrality to ideologies and respect for ASEAN autonomy in Japan's ASEAN policy. Second, it examines the idea and policy fields of the FOIP and focuses on value diplomacy and the quality-of-infrastructure proposal as the new points in Japan's new ASEAN policy. Third, it shows how Japan-China and the US-Japan relationships will influence Japan's competition with China. Finally, the chapter provides policy proposals for ASEAN chairmanship by focusing on Japan's domestic rationales for its economic assistance to ASEAN and Cambodia during the FOIP era.

JAPAN'S ASEAN POLICY UNDER THE FUKUDA DOCTRINE

The 1977 Fukuda doctrine has been the key guiding principle for Japan's ASEAN policy. After the doctrine was announced, it became a turning point in post-WWII Japan's ASEAN policy from an economic-oriented one to a broad engagement in Southeast Asian regional order and development. Under this doctrine, Japan has pledged to be a non-military power, used economic assistance as its main policy measure, and upheld equal partnership based on mutual confidence, trust, and "heart-to-heart" understanding, cooperating with Southeast Asian countries' efforts to strengthen its solidarity.

It has “supported the growth of ASEAN member states, particularly in infrastructure and human resource development” (MOFA Fact Sheet on Japan-ASEAN Relations).

The influence of the Fukuda doctrine on Japan’s ASEAN policy thereafter can be found in the following two points. First, though it was not sufficient, Japan attempted to be neutral to ideological differences among ASEAN members during and after the Cold War. During the Cold War, Japan’s ODA to Southeast Asia did not necessarily follow the US Cold-War policy. For example, after the Vietnam War, Japan sought to provide its ODA to Hanoi in 1970, distancing itself from the US Cold War policy and providing disaster relief until its ODA was resumed in 1992. Japan also supported an ASEAN-initiated peace process for Cambodia from 1989 using its person-to-person relationships with Cambodia (Yano 2015, 212–220). While the United States imposed sanctions on military-ruled Myanmar in the 1990s, Japan has continued to provide its ODA from a non-ideological stance on Myanmar’s development. Second, Japan’s ASEAN policy under the Fukuda doctrine respected ASEAN’s autonomy. Japan avoided using its economic support to control recipient countries. It did not take a forceful diplomatic style to impose Western values and ideas on ASEAN members. However, it is a member of G7, which are composed of Western liberal democracies.

The ideological neutrality and the respect for ASEAN autonomy were maintained in ASEAN-Japan joint statements in the post-Cold War period. For example, in a press conference after the 2001 ASEAN Plus Three, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi asserted that Japan could find significance in its cooperation because of ASEAN’s diversity in culture, religion, race, and economic capability. He added that Japan would walk with ASEAN and maintain a frank partnership (MOFA Japan-ASEAN Relations). About a decade later, the 2013 Vision Statement of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation continued to emphasise “partnership” and used it as the headings for its policy list: partnership for peace and stability, partnership for prosperity, partnership for quality of life, and heart-to-heart partnership (Ibid.). Thus, the Japanese political stance to ASEAN, which was determined by the Fukuda doctrine, has been maintained even in the post-Cold War context.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE FOIP

In 2016, Japan announced the FOIP, a geopolitical vision for its policy to Southeast Asia, India, and Africa. It was a reaction against China’s BRI though its early use of the term “strategy” was replaced with “vision”, and its competitive nuance with China was moderated later. The earliest official statement of Japan’s Indo-Pacific can be traced back to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s 2007 speech at the Indian Parliament titled, “Confluence of the Two Seas”. In the speech, he emphasised an enlarged Asia stretching from the Pacific to the Indian Oceans and the importance of shared fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the respect for basic human rights and strategic interests.

In his policy speech at the 196th Session of the Diet in 2018, Abe stated, “Japan will work together with countries with which we share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law...to ensure the peace and prosperity of this region stretching from Asia and the Pacific Rim to the Indian Ocean.” (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)

Japan’s FOIP has three policy fields: diplomacy, economic cooperation, and support for capacity building. Firstly, Japan will actively be engaged in diplomacy to maintain and promote a present liberal order by espousing freedom of navigation and free and open trade. Secondly, economic cooperation is the continuation of the conventional policy, but Japan proposes an idea, i.e., the quality of infrastructure. Japan’s quality-of-infrastructure proposal is the idea that hard infrastructures such as roads, bridges, and power plants should be constructed and maintained with long-term durability and cost-effectiveness. Last but not least, the support for capacity building in Indo-Pacific countries intends to strengthen maritime security and safety, counterterrorism, and disaster risk reduction by supporting maritime law enforcement, human development, and equipment for them.

While it is based on the continuation of Japan’s conventional economic assistance, the FOIP espouses liberal and democratic values and supports capacity building of ASEAN countries. Southeast Asia is the key region for the FOIP because of its historical and economic linkages to Japan. However, post-war Japan did not espouse a clear geopolitical vision to Southeast Asia because its overseas use of force was constrained by Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution, and it understood that its strategic presence in the region would remind Southeast Asian people of Japan’s wartime occupation and brutality during the Pacific War. Thus, economic cooperation was regarded as the main tool in Japan’s ASEAN policy. As a result, a geopolitical strategy was only observed in a short period during Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi’s (1957–60) anti-communist Southeast Asia policy.

The FOIP may change the above-mentioned reserved posture to some extent. It encourages Japan to ensure geopolitical interest in Southeast Asia, but it should be noted that the origin of the FOIP had a utopian background as a diplomatic vision. It was written by a small group of bureaucratic elites close to Abe and originally reflected his anti-China attitudes and policy before 2017. The key writer, an ex-officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Masakatsu Kanehara, was strongly influenced by Halford Mackinder’s geopolitics in the first half of the twentieth century (Suzuki 2017, 73–4, 81–4). However, the application of Mackinder’s idea to Japan’s present Southeast Asia and China policy lacks practical considerations of Japan’s power in relations to the Indo-Pacific region and China. Because of this, how Japan’s FOIP can be implemented to meet the vast geographical area from Southeast Asia to Africa is not well planned. Most of the FOIP’s key elements, except for its espousal of liberal and democratic values and maritime capability building, continue the conventional economic cooperation under a new banner of “FOIP”.

The core of the FOIP lies in the power of norms (Cannon 2018; Takahashi 2021). Japan intends to use this power for locking China in the conventional maritime and free trade order (Takahashi 2021). The FOIP espouses norms such as the rule of law, the freedom of navigation, openness, free trade, diplomacy, and economic cooperation to distinguish its influence and presence from China's BRI. Japan hopes to encourage China to respect the present maritime order and the free and open trade. Under the FOIP, Japan does not intend to create a power balance against China in the region. Instead, it seeks to promote multilateral dialogues and economic cooperation by espousing norms. Japan's 2020 Diplomatic Bluebook notes that maintaining and strengthening rules, not power, is necessary for stability and prosperity in international relations and the regional order in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, rulemaking should be an international public good and will be able to contribute to international society (Diplomatic Bluebook of Japan 2020).

VALUE DIPLOMACY AND THE QUALITY -OF-INFRASTRUCTURE PROPOSAL UNDER THE FOIP

VALUE DIPLOMACY BETWEEN ASEAN AND JAPAN

There are two points of change in Japan's ASEAN policy under the FOIP, both of which cannot be found in the Fukuda doctrine. One is the emergence of Japan's "value diplomacy". Japan's ASEAN policy under the FOIP espouses liberal and democratic values at the diplomatic front, called value diplomacy (Takahashi 2021). The espousal of liberal and democratic norms is new in Japan's ASEAN policy and is what the Fukuda doctrine avoided. References to liberal and democratic values in Japan's ASEAN policy have increased in political and diplomatic statements. In January 2013, Abe chose Southeast Asia as the first destination of his diplomatic visit during his second premiership (2012–20) and announced the Five Principles of Japan's ASEAN Diplomacy. Two of the five principles were related to liberal and democratic values: 1) protect and promote universal values, such as freedom, democracy and basic human rights; and 2) ensure the free and open seas are governed by laws and rules and not by force (MOFA Japan-ASEAN Relations).

Value diplomacy appeared in Japan-Mekong cooperation as well. The Tokyo Strategy 2018 for Mekong-Japan Cooperation "underscored the importance of continued efforts of each country to reinforce a free and open order based on the rule of law" (MOFA Japan-Mekong Cooperation). It added that countries of the Mekong region "welcomed Japan's policy to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific" and "expressed their determination to steadily implement the Mekong-Japan Cooperation projects which contribute to and complement the promotion of a free and open Indo-Pacific" (Ibid.). Japan's active references to liberal and democratic norms in its ASEAN diplomacy are increasing.

On the other hand, ASEAN is not opposed to Japan's espousal of liberal and democratic values, but its approach is different. It announced the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019 to "enhance ASEAN's community-building process and to strengthen existing ASEAN-led mechanisms" (ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific). The AOIP lists values and norms ranging from "openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, complementarity with existing cooperation frameworks, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit and respect for international law" (Ibid.). As to ASEAN's external relations with great powers, the focus of the AOIP in the value list is "inclusiveness" (Acharya 2021, 118-120). Inclusiveness intends to show ASEAN's will not to exclude China from multilateral dialogues and economic cooperation. China is indispensable to ASEAN's economic growth and development, and the inclusion of China in multilateral dialogues and economic cooperation is, as a matter of fact, in its actual policy. However, ASEAN is cautious about value confrontation, which may jeopardise its centrality and inclusive growth, which is a different posture from Japan's FOIP.

Despite this difference between the FOIP and the AOIP, their coordination has been observed so far in diplomacy. Japan did not consider ASEAN's inclusiveness an obstacle to the FOIP and allowed a value consensus, respecting ASEAN's autonomy as the Fukuda doctrine did. In a 2020 speech at Bahasa, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimitsu Motegi stated that he respected ASEAN's diversity in history, culture, ethnicity, and religion. He said, "Japan has never pushed ASEAN to accept any specific idea...and has consistently deliberated, together with you, what is truly necessary for ASEAN's growth and development" (MOFA Japan-ASEAN Relations). A similar value consensus between the FOIP and the AOIP was also observed following Japan's diplomatic statements. In 2020, Motegi stated that Japan would fully support AOIP's goals but emphasised clear rules with transparency, freedom of navigation, and peaceful resolutions of all disputes in the seas. A section on Mekong-Japan Cooperation and Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which was added to the 12th Joint Statement of the Mekong-Japan Cooperation, noted "the importance of continued efforts to maintain a free, open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture, and confirmed that both the AOIP and Japan's FOIP shared relevant fundamental principles in promoting peace and cooperation" (MOFA Japan-Mekong Cooperation).

Japan has no strong intention to impose liberal and democratic values on ASEAN. Its acceptance of the value consensus between the FOIP and the AOIP comes from the following reasons. The first reason is Japan's espousal of liberal and democratic values in the FOIP was originally a political tool to distinguish itself from China. It is for idealistic identification of the FOIP in relation to the BRI to press or encourage China to follow the present order that the United States has created and maintained. Because of this, the FOIP attempts to promote liberal and democratic values but whether ASEAN countries will accept them for their actions is not necessarily prioritised in diplomacy.

Second, under Japan-China competition, Japan is in a difficult political position to impose liberal and democratic values on ASEAN unless the latter is willing to accept. Japan and China are competing for an influence on ASEAN, but this competition works for ASEAN's advantage. Japan needs ASEAN support and wants to attract their interest in the present liberal order and Japan's economic cooperation, hopefully reducing China's increasing influence in South-east Asia. Therefore, if Japan excessively forces ASEAN to accept its values, it might stimulate the latter's inclination to China. To obtain ASEAN's support for its presence, Japan has to make a concession on value diplomacy.

Third, Japan's approaches to liberalism and democracy are often relativistic. They are not the same as the Western ones. According to the 2021 Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders, Japan was only in 67th place among 180 countries, even though it is the oldest democratic country in East Asia. Furthermore, Japan as an Asian country can understand an Asian way of interpreting Western values. It can understand ASEAN's nuanced support for liberal and democratic values and its discomfort with coercive means to achieve them. As a result, Japan can share this relativism from its traditional culture, and its attitudes to values are less principled. Thus, the difference between Japan and ASEAN on liberal and democratic values may not be necessarily an obstacle for ASEAN-Japan value consensus at the diplomatic level. This is different from Japan's ideological neutrality in the Fukuda doctrine, but Japan's diplomatic attitude may be similar in enabling compromise on value differences.

JAPAN'S QUALITY-OF-INFRASTRUCTURE PROPOSAL

The other point, which is not found in the Fukuda doctrine, is Japan's quality-of-infrastructure proposal. An emphasis on infrastructure is the continuation of Japan's ODA policy to ASEAN under the Fukuda doctrine, but the quality of infrastructure is a new attempt to add special meanings to Japan's ODA projects and distinguish them from China's. The idea of the quality of infrastructure is not of Japanese origin, but Japan now emphasises this in its economic projects, especially the construction of bridges, roads and electronic facilities, and seeks to enhance ASEAN connectivity through this idea.

Japan's quality-of-infrastructure proposal entails a normative meaning of the development of hard infrastructures. In other words, it addresses how infrastructure should be beyond initial cost considerations. The long-term maintenance costs and sustainability of infrastructures are considered in the idea of the quality of infrastructure. There is a broadly shared view that high-quality infrastructures are required for economic growth, and a better investment environment should be prepared. Huge projects are appealing, but the problem is a deficit. Japan's quality-of-infrastructure proposal also conveys a political message for competition with China.

It asserts that Japanese-made roads, bridges, and power plants have advantages in quality. For Japan's quality-of-infrastructure, in the 2018 East Asia Summit, the Japanese government raised its continuing projects for the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) and the Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) that connect the Mekong region.

Japan has developed principles of the quality of infrastructure through multilateral dialogues. For example, the 2016 G7 Ise-shima Summit announced the G7 Principles for Promoting Quality Infrastructure Investment, which include ensuring effective governance, reliable operation and economic efficiency; ensuring job creation and capacity building; and transferring of expertise and know-how to local communities. It also addressed social and environmental impacts and an alignment with economic and development strategies, including climate change and environment, and enhanced effective resource mobilisation (MOFA G7 Japan 2016 Ise-shima).

Furthermore, the 2019 G20 Osaka Summit adopted the G20 six principles for quality infrastructure Investment: 1) Maximising the positive impact of infrastructure to achieve sustainability; 2) Raising economic efficiency in view of life-cycle cost; 3) Integrating environmental considerations in infrastructure investments; 4) Building resilience against natural disasters and other risks; 5) Integrating social considerations in infrastructure investment; and 6) Strengthening infrastructure governance (The Government of Japan, G20 Japan 2019). In addition, Japan formed a Trilateral Partnership for Infrastructure Investment with the United States and Australia to coordinate financing of major projects and their quality for sustainable infrastructure development with high standards (Rajah 2021, 101).

Japan's quality-of-infrastructure proposal will definitely benefit ASEAN and contribute to its connectivity and economic integration even under Japan-China competition. It is the enhancement of Japan's past economic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, but the quality of infrastructure includes an idea of how hard infrastructures and economic cooperation should be for the recipient countries. It may stimulate China's effort to raise the quality of its infrastructure projects. It can raise standards for economic cooperation and the possibility of cost-effective development through a "good" competition between Japan and China. Through multilateral or minilateral cooperation, including both Japan and China, may have a positive influence on China's infrastructure projects and can be a norm for economic cooperation in ASEAN. Japan's quality-of-infrastructure proposal is new and not included in the Fukuda doctrine, but it may encourage high-standard economic cooperation for ASEAN. It is a discontinuity from the Fukuda doctrine, but ASEAN's economic cooperation would be strengthened as the recipient.

GREAT POWER CONFRONTATION AND JAPAN'S FOIP

ASEAN now faces great power confrontation between China and the United States, and its centrality in multilateral dialogues is challenged. Japan has maintained an independent ASEAN policy under the Fukuda doctrine, but there is a possibility that the great power confrontation might influence Japan's ASEAN policy under the FOIP. China attempts to increase its presence and influence in Southeast Asia through economic assistance and investment, and, as to the COVID-19, it has actively implemented vaccine diplomacy. On the other hand, the United States has changed its gear to a commitment to the Indo-Pacific. The Trump administration replaced the term Asia-Pacific with Indo-Pacific in the US 2017 National Security Strategy and announced the US Indo-Pacific vision in 2019. The Biden administration has endorsed this vision and changed Trump's forceful diplomatic stance, intensifying the US engagement in Southeast Asia.

Under the increasing confrontation between China and the United States, ASEAN may face a binary choice between the two great powers, which is the worst scenario for ASEAN (Stromseth 2021, 2-3, 8-9). Is Japan's ASEAN policy under the FOIP likely to change in the face of the US-China great power confrontation? As we have seen, Japan's ASEAN policy under the Fukuda doctrine took a non-forceful stance towards ASEAN over ideologies and respected ASEAN autonomy, but the FOIP has a competitive element with China. If the competitive element of the FOIP dominates Japan's ASEAN policy, ASEAN might face another choice between Japan and China.

On the one hand, Japan-China bilateral relationship is now in a "long period of mutual distrust", and its moderation is hard to expect soon. Though it has become moderated since 2017, the bilateral relationship always moves backwards and forward, and it is difficult to see stable progress. Sources of tension will not disappear. On the surface, Tokyo and Beijing have confirmed a strategic partnership in bilateral talks, but underlying distrust and emotional antagonism, which are found on both sides, continue to influence their relationship. On the Japanese side, its recent moderate and cooperative stance to China from 2017 is only supported by a small group of pro-China Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) political elites such as Chairman of LDP Toshihiro Nikai and Foreign Minister of the Suga government Motegi. A territorial dispute on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea has escalated, and the Japanese public show strong antagonism against China's coast guard operations around the islands. China's increasing naval expansion in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and its tightening authoritarian control of Hong Kong and Xinjian have caused Japanese public opinion anti-China reactions. On the China side, Japan's increasing references to Taiwan in diplomatic statements and domestic politics have caused distrust. Some LDP conservative politicians and security experts assert Japan's military involvement in defence of Taiwan. This may be a denial of a Japan-China consensus leading to the 1972 diplomatic normalisation and will weaken the Japan-China relationship.

Japanese neo-conservatives have continued negative campaigns against China and attempted to deny history, which are underlying Chinese distrust with Japan. Under the long period of mutual distrust, positive effects of the Japan-China relationship on ASEAN are difficult to expect.

On the other hand, Japan and the United States now share the idea of the FOIP and are making a competitive front against China. The Biden administration shows a strong commitment to the Indo-Pacific region to counter China's increasing influence. In April 2021, Japan and the United States announced a joint statement, called the Global Partnership for a New Era, in which both countries confirmed their FOIPs as a shared vision. While Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga denied the containment of China, a political front to counter China in the Indo-Pacific is being led by recent actions of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which is composed of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. The Biden administration is strengthening the Quad to be the key political coalition against China. It has been developed into a coalition of not only military exercises but also a diplomatic front. It was originally proposed by Japanese Prime Minister Abe in 2007 and resumed by Japan in 2017. In 2021, the Quad announced a joint statement, called the Spirit of the Quad beyond security cooperation. While this statement emphasised a united effort to maintain norms in the Indo-Pacific such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity, it expanded policy fields to COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy and climate change (The White House 2021). In addition, Japan's active diplomacy for US-Japan cooperation to counter China's influence is observed beyond the Indo-Pacific. In July 2021, Foreign Minister Motegi visited four Central American countries for economic cooperation, such as COVID-19 vaccines, the quality of infrastructure, and human resources development to support the United States (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 16 July 2021). This change suggests that Japan's ASEAN policy might be more influenced by US ASEAN policy in terms of the competition with China. Japan's bilateral relations with China and the United States in the above-mentioned contexts provides a hint that the FOIP might become more competitive with China in Southeast Asia though their diplomatic attitudes to ASEAN differ.

CAMBODIA AS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN JAPAN'S FOIP AND CHINA'S BRI

In the face of Japan's new ASEAN policy under the FOIP, how should the 2022 Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship be? The Cambodia's Chairmanship should greatly focus on the development of Japan-ASEAN economic relations. Overall, Japan's new ASEAN policy under the FOIP may not negatively influence ASEAN and Cambodia's Chair, except for an external "indirect" effect of intensifying US-China great power confrontation. As examined above, Japan's value diplomacy is still relativistic and adjustable to the realities of ASEAN, and its quality-of-infrastructure proposal will be beneficial for all.

Cambodia should seek positive outcomes of Japan-ASEAN relations under the FOIP in economic cooperation, as was under the Fukuda doctrine. For the Cambodia Chair, development issues such as the economic gap within ASEAN would be important in relation to Japan. This is the core issue of CLMV countries leading to connectivity and inclusive growth in ASEAN's preferred terms. Cambodia can understand the importance of this issue well, and, as a country of the CLMV, it is in a good position in promoting this issue in its 2022 ASEAN chair. On the other hand, Japan understands, from the accumulation of its cooperation with CLMV countries, that development is still important for ASEAN's connectivity and inclusive growth.

Japan's will to contribute to ASEAN's connectivity and inclusive growth through economic cooperation does not change. Its ODA to Southeast Asia continues to be supported by the public. In a democracy, foreign policy must be accountable to the legislature and the public. Especially, ODA is often a matter of public debate because its policy outcome is difficult for taxpayers to evaluate. As a result, the accountability and transparency of ODA policy are required for public support. Japanese public support for ODA, especially in Southeast Asia, is continually high. Due to its insufficient accountability and transparency to the Japanese public, Japan experienced declining public support for ODA from the 1990s to the middle of the 2000s, but, during the second half of the 2010s, about 80 per cent of those surveyed positively considered ODA and more than 30 per cent supported more assistance (Ando 2019, 4). A MOFA survey of Japanese public opinion on foreign policy in 2018 showed that, among regions, those who were surveyed continually thought that Southeast Asia should be the top destination of Japan's development assistance (MOFA 2018). That survey also made clear that the public considered Japan's ASEAN policy should be strengthened in all policy fields, from economic relations to people-to-people exchanges, defence and security cooperation, and infrastructure and human resource development (Ibid.). Oppositions to Japan's ODA in Japanese public opinion were often observed in the 1990s, but they were not directed to the significance of ODA itself for development, but to Japanese ODA practices: how Japan's ODA is effective or what it brings about in ODA recipients was questioned (Tsukamoro 2004, 92-3). It is a question of accountability and transparency. Considering the above public opinion, Japan's ODA to ASEAN continues to be strongly supported by the Japanese public as far as the accountability and transparency are sufficient.

On the other hand, Japan's increasing commitment to Cambodia's economic development is also clear. Japan is a key ODA donor for Cambodia and has increased its support. In 2020, Japan doubled its ODA assistance (580,613,101 USD) and became the largest ODA donor for Cambodia, replacing China (491,867,084 USD). Both Cambodia and Japan seek to deepen their economic relationship beyond ODA. The 2007 Joint Statement on the New Partnership Between Cambodia and Japan showed that they agreed to enhance economic relations and mutual understanding and address regional and global challenges. The two countries reaffirmed "the importance of fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law, and welcome Cambodia's steadfast progress toward realising these values" (MOFA Cambodia).

In 2020, Cambodia completed legal procedures for the First Protocol to Amend the Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Partnership between Japan and ASEAN, which enables the promotion of service trade and investment between Cambodia and Japan. Cambodia needs to diversify external economic partners and add Japan to its list (Chheang 2021). Its 2022 chairmanship would be a chance for strengthening relations with Japan in its development as well.

In economic cooperation with Japan, Cambodia should keep an eye on its domestic rationales of economic cooperation. One group of Japanese conservative political and diplomatic elites find a rationale of Japan's Cambodia support in a geopolitical competition with China under the banner of the FOIP. This competition rationale is now a strong trend among Japanese decision-makers. It has promoted Japan's ODA to Cambodia, but this is too utopian and lacks an understanding of Cambodia's realities. This is no more than a desk plan in Tokyo without seeing the realities in Cambodia. The other group finds a rationale in Japan's development cooperation itself which has been observed in most of Japan's ODA projects. This group is composed of liberal political and diplomatic elites and opinion leaders. Though its influence has been weakened under the FOIP, most Japanese public share the same rationale. According to a 2018 public opinion survey by the Cabinet Office of Japan, the largest number of those surveyed considered the primary role of Japan's foreign policy was to maintain international peace through human resource contribution, regional stability, and peaceful resolutions of conflict (Cabinet Office 2018, 28). Among the Japanese public, the linkage between Japan's ODA and geopolitical interest is still weak, the same as the Fukuda doctrine. Cambodia should consider the importance of the latter rationale in development issues and obtain the best from Japan's economic cooperation by appealing to Japan's liberal rationale even under the FOIP.

Economic development today requires respect for the autonomy of recipient countries. For development in ASEAN and Cambodia, balancing Japan's and China's economic cooperation is necessary. China has an advantage in geo-economics and has invested more in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, Japan is weaker to compete with China over business investment due to its geographical distance. Thus, ASEAN and Cambodia will need to balance a strong China and a weak Japan in economic cooperation and business investment. One idea for Cambodia is its planned allocation for Japanese and Chinese investment in different business sectors or local areas. A similar allocation may have been practised, but this will continue to be important for balancing Japan and China. In addition, the moderation of Japan-China competition can be sought by creating minilateral institutions, including both as members. For example, the Mekong region may be a pilot case for seeking this inclusion. There are some institutions for developing the Mekong region, but Japan and China separately join different institutions. Minilateral institutions in which both Japan and China join would be a place to find mutual benefits in their cooperation for development in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

Japan's new ASEAN policy is emerging with the FOIP as a geopolitical vision. The FOIP espouses liberal and democratic values at the diplomatic front and hopefully attempts to lock China in the present liberal maritime order and free trade. Value diplomacy and the quality-of-infrastructure proposal has two points in Japan's new ASEAN policy, which are not found in the 1977 Fukuda doctrine. They are new but will not necessarily change Japan's neutrality to ideological differences and respect for ASEAN's autonomy as the Fukuda doctrine endorsed. Under Japan-China competition, Japan's value diplomacy is relativistic and adjustable, and Japan's quality-of-infrastructure proposal has merits for ASEAN. Nevertheless, there remains a possibility that Japan's ASEAN policy under the FOIP may be more competitive with China because the Japan-China relationship is in a long-term mutual distrust, and the US-Japan relationship is moving towards competition with China through the Quad.

However, Cambodia's Chair is an opportunity to balance Japan's economic cooperation and China's one to moderate ASEAN's economic gap and realise its connectivity and inclusive growth. FOIP's competitive element should be tamed between Cambodia, ASEAN, and Japan. Cambodia should draw on Japan's liberal rationale for economic assistance in its relations with Japan and create economic projects upon this rationale. Cambodia and ASEAN have an advantage in balancing China's and Japan's economic support because the latter two are competing to increase their presence and influence. Cambodia may create minilateral or multilateral institutions, including both Japan and China, to provide a place for them to find their mutual benefits in cooperation. For Japan, value diplomacy in the FOIP excessively simplifies complicated and delicate relationships among ASEAN countries and China. Imposing values is not a good strategy in Japan's ASEAN policy. The FOIP may change Japan's ASEAN policy to some extent, but Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship can find an opportunity to avoid a hard choice over different values and who is the donor as far as it seeks economic cooperation for actual development in CLMV countries.

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CHAPTER 06

ASEAN-US Relations during Joe Biden's Presidency: Prospects and Challenges

Bong Chansambath

INTRODUCTION

In its early days, ASEAN was viewed with scepticism by the United States, which perceived the bloc as weak and divided due to its consensus-based decision-making mechanism and diplomatic pomp and circumstance. However, Washington's attitude towards ASEAN began to evolve due to factors such as the rise of China, growing transnational threats, and regional economic growth. On its part, ASEAN needs an enduring American presence in the region to maintain peace and stability. As the 2022 Chairman of ASEAN, Cambodia will have an opportunity to shape the agenda and lead the discussion on some of the most pressing issues in the region, such as the simmering US-China rivalry, the COVID-19 pandemic, the political crisis in Myanmar, the South China Sea maritime conflict, and transnational security threats like the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), cyberattacks, and terrorism. At the same time, it will be under immense pressure from both Washington and Beijing, the mutual tensions of which have escalated into a multi-pronged strategic competition encompassing the economic, technological, military, and geopolitical domains.

This chapter consists of four sections. First, it examines the evolution of ASEAN-US relations since 1977. Second, it looks at Joe Biden's foreign policy towards ASEAN. Third, it analyzes the major challenges facing Cambodia's 2022 Chairmanship and offers policy recommendations for a successful tenure. Last, it ends with a conclusion.

OVERVIEW OF ASEAN-US RELATIONS (1977–TODAY)

Although the US has long enjoyed bilateral ties with respective ASEAN Member States going back to at least the 19th century, its official relations with the grouping only formally began in 1977 when it became an ASEAN dialogue partner. Although the relationship began as merely a political dialogue, it gradually morphed into a wide range of cooperation in different areas, including trade, political, security, and people-to-people ties. Between 1980 and 2001, ASEAN and the US held 16 rounds of joint dialogue (US Mission to ASEAN n.d.). In 2005, they released the Joint Vision Statement on the ASEAN-US Enhanced Partnership to develop a Plan of Action guiding their bilateral ties. In the first Plan of Action (2006–2011), both sides agreed to explore the possibility of convening a leader-level summit and continuing the existing consultation mechanisms, such as the ASEAN-US Dialogue Relations framework and the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC+1) Session, with the United States (ASEAN 2005). They also agreed to tighten their cooperation in public health, ICT, human resources, and the environment. Since then, both sides have adopted a new Plan of Action every five years to track progress and identify areas for future collaboration.

In 2008, the US became the first dialogue partner to nominate an ambassador to ASEAN, signalling its solidified commitment to the region. After President Barack Obama took office in 2009, Washington acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), one of ASEAN's core documents, which paved the way for the US's participation in key ASEAN-led security and strategic fora, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). One year later, Obama established a permanent diplomatic mission to ASEAN and nominated David Lee Carden as the first resident ambassador, reinforcing his "pivot to Asia" strategic policy reorientation with a greater political and economic presence. In 2015, the two sides elevated their ties to a strategic partnership. Moreover, before leaving office, Obama cemented his foreign policy legacy towards Southeast Asia by hosting all of the ten ASEAN leaders in the first stand-alone ASEAN-US Summit in Sunnylands, California, on 15–16 February 2016. However, after significant progress under President Obama's two terms in office, ASEAN-US relations experienced a period of uncertainty from 2017 to 2020 under President Donald J. Trump due to his highly unpredictable personality, trade war with China, transactional views of US foreign policy, and apparent lack of interest in Southeast Asia.

Today, US ties with ASEAN concentrate on five key areas: economic integration, maritime cooperation, emerging leaders, women's empowerment, and transnational security issues, which can be grouped into economic, political, security, and socio-cultural ties. In the following sections, this paper examines how each sector has progressed since 1977.

ECONOMIC TIES

With more than 650 million people, ASEAN is the third-largest economy in the Asia-Pacific and fifth largest in the world (East-West Center 2019). It is also the fourth-largest export destination for US goods, creating over 500,000 jobs and supporting local communities across all the 50 US states. Moreover, ASEAN is a destination of high potential for US investments due to its robust GDP growth, young population, and vast infrastructure investment opportunities.

In 2006, Washington and Jakarta signed the ASEAN-US Trade and Investment Framework Agreement to establish a Joint Council on Trade and Investment and strengthen their economic relations. Since the launch of the ASEAN Economic Blueprint 2025 in 2015, the US has been a key partner in promoting a single integrated market which fosters regional competitiveness, a resilient and inclusive community, clean energy, and equitable growth. In addition, through the US-ASEAN Business Council and the American Chambers of Commerce, both sides engage the private sector to enhance two-way trade and investment. Likewise, the US has assisted in implementing the ASEAN Intellectual Property Rights Strategic Action Plan (2016–2025) to promote public awareness, protection, enforcement, and transparency in IP management.

The total two-way trade in goods between the US and ASEAN has increased more than two-fold from USD 102.1 billion in 1995 to USD 226.8 in 2015 and USD 272 billion three years later (USTR 2019). In 2019, the US exported USD 86.1 billion worth of goods to ASEAN and imported USD 206.3 billion back from the bloc (USTR n.d.). Besides manufactured goods, ASEAN is a major partner in service trade, accounting for USD 55.1 billion of the US's service exports in 2018. In addition to trade, ASEAN is the biggest market for the US's foreign direct investment in the Asia-Pacific. For instance, as of 2019, ASEAN had received nearly USD 329 billion of US FDI, which is more than the amount flowing into China, Japan, India, and South Korea combined during the same period (East-West Center 2019). Over the last decade, US FDI inflows into ASEAN have expanded at an average rate of 10%. Over 4,200 American companies are currently operating in all of the ten ASEAN states.

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically hindered ASEAN's economic performance and growth, shutting down key sectors of the economy such as tourism, services, and manufacturing. As of the 5th of September 2021, ASEAN reported around 232,187 deaths (John Hopkins University n.d.). As a result, the region is expected to experience a 3.8% economic contraction in 2020, its first decline in 22 years (ASEAN 2020a). Moreover, by the end of the first semester of 2020, ASEAN's trade and FDI inflow decreased by 12.4% and 32.9%, respectively, compared to 2019. In response, ASEAN launched the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) in November 2020 to chart a long-term course towards post-pandemic socio-economic recovery. In support of the ACRF, the US has offered more than USD 87 million to ASEAN members in their fight against COVID-19 (US Mission to ASEAN n.d.). In addition, following the first summit with other Quad leaders, US President Joe Biden pledged to deliver at least one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to the Asia-Pacific by 2022 (Widakuswara 2021).

POLITICAL-SECURITY TIES

Shortly after taking office in 2009, President Obama declared that he would be "America's first Pacific President", signalling Washington's increasing engagement with Southeast Asia (Allen 2009). It was no surprise at all to see Obama's embrace of the region in which he spent a significant portion of his childhood. Under his presidency, the US acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and established a permanent diplomatic mission to ASEAN. Then in 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attended the 5th East Asia Summit for the first time. In addition, Obama visited eight out of ten ASEAN members, including Cambodia when it was the Chair of ASEAN in 2012. In 2013, the first ASEAN-US Summit was hosted in Brunei Darussalam. Two years later, both sides elevated their ties to a strategic partnership, allowing broader cooperation across the board. To cement his legacy in Southeast Asia, Obama hosted the first-ever US-ASEAN Special Leaders' Summit on US soil in February 2016.

The Sunnylands Summit concluded with a joint statement emphasising a shared commitment to promoting ASEAN Centrality, addressing shared transnational security challenges, and upholding a rules-based order, the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and economic openness (The White House 2016). Although the statement was broad in scope, it embedded a subtle concern shared by ASEAN and the US regarding China's activities in the South China Sea, indicating a gradual convergence of strategic priorities.

Nonetheless, ASEAN-US political relations became increasingly uncertain with the emergence of Donald Trump's presidency, characterized by unpredictability and rising geopolitical tension between Beijing and Washington. Almost one year into office, the Trump Administration released its first national security strategy accusing China of being a "revisionist power" that attempts to replace the US as the predominant power and reshape the post-WWII international order (The White House 2017). Washington's adversarial tone towards Beijing put ASEAN and its member states in a highly uncomfortable position for two reasons. First, China was and still is ASEAN's biggest trade partner, with two-way trade amounting to USD 731 billion in 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic (Global Times 2021). Although the US is also a key trade partner of ASEAN, accounting for USD 185 billion worth of exports in 2018, China still wields greater economic clout over the bloc (USTR 2019). Second, Trump's zero-sum approach towards China fuelled geopolitical and military tension, putting pressure on ASEAN to choose sides.

Compared to his predecessor, Trump appeared not to possess much interest in Southeast Asia and its diplomatic fora, such as the ASEAN-US Summit, EAS, and ARF. For example, he attended the ASEAN-US Summit only once in 2017 during his entire four-year term. While there, he left Manila early without joining the EAS and its subsequent iterations. Then in 2018 and 2019, he sent Vice President Mike Pence and his National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien to join on his behalf, respectively. Noticeably, during the 2019 Summit in Thailand, seven out of ten ASEAN leaders symbolically snubbed the meeting with O'Brien to air their displeasure about Trump's no-show for two consecutive years and their concern about his poor engagement with Southeast Asia. Although Trump later sent invitations to ASEAN leaders for a special summit in the US in early 2020, the meeting never happened due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Once COVID-19 began to spread in early 2020, Trump did an egregious job of containing the disease and resorted to stirring anti-Asian resentment among Americans, using terms such as the "Chinese virus" and "Kung flu" to try to blame Beijing for the disease. Consequently, cases of anti-Asian hate crime in America increased by 150% in 2020 over 2019, the victims of which included those of Southeast Asian descent (Hart 2021). Moreover, after four tumultuous years, public perception towards the US in ASEAN declined precipitously.

For instance, according to a 2020 survey, 47% of the respondents had “little or no confidence” in the US as a strategic partner, while 77% said that US engagement with Southeast Asia had significantly dropped under Trump compared to Obama’s presidency (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute 2020). Meanwhile, 52.2% saw China as the most influential power in the region.

That said, as Chheang (2017) noted, there were signs of assurance for ASEAN from the Trump Administration. For instance, in 2017, Vice President Pence visited the ASEAN Secretariat. He spoke highly of the strategic and mutually beneficial ASEAN-US partnership and touted a commitment to addressing shared economic and security challenges. Moreover, the US hosted ASEAN foreign ministers in Washington in May of the same year to reaffirm their ties and commemorate the 40th anniversary of their dialogue relations. Furthermore, speaking during the 6th ASEAN-US Summit in 2018, Pence regarded ASEAN as the US’s “indispensable and irreplaceable strategic partner” whose interests and visions are closely intertwined (US Mission to ASEAN 2018).

In addition to political relationships, ASEAN and the US also share solid engagements in the security realm. During the Global War on Terror in the early 2000s, the US referred to Southeast Asia as the “second front” after Afghanistan that could be a base for regional Al-Qaeda affiliates such as Jemaah Islamiah (JI) (Gershman 2002). The US overture towards ASEAN became more urgent following the 2002 bombing in Bali, killing 202 people. In response to the event, ASEAN signed the US-ASEAN Joint Declaration on Combating Terrorism to foster “exchange and flow information, intelligence and capacity-building”, signalling its increasingly welcoming attitude towards the US’s security presence (Ashley and Hayat 2021). Bilaterally, ASEAN members such as Malaysia responded favourably by supporting Bush’s War on Terror, while Cambodia worked with the US to step up its border control and destroy 233 Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles to prevent them from falling into terrorists’ hands in 2004. It also arrested four JI associates and closed a Saudi-funded Islamic school teaching Wahabism (Lum 2007; Stern 2009). Every year, ASEAN and the US regularly hold the ASEAN Plus the United States of America Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC + US) Consultation to jointly address other transnational crimes such as piracy, money laundering, cybercrime, and the smuggling of arms, drugs, and people.

ASEAN and the US also have multilateral defence relations through the ARF, EAS, and ADMM-Plus mechanisms. Created in 1994, the ARF consists of 26 Asia-Pacific countries plus the European Union and serves as a platform for engaging in political and security dialogues and promoting preventive diplomacy and confidence-building. Likewise, the EAS is a smaller platform, consisting of ten ASEAN members, China, India, Australia, Japan, Russia, the US, South Korea, and New Zealand, which brings leaders together to discuss “broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest” and promote peace and stability (East Asia Summit n.d.). Meanwhile, the ADMM-Plus brings defence ministers of the EAS countries to address shared traditional and non-traditional security challenges and foster military exchange and exercises.

Together, EAS, ARF, and ADMM-Plus put ASEAN in the driver's seat as a facilitator and a contributor in terms of fostering a stable and rules-based regional security architecture.

In addition to ASEAN-led fora, the US shares enduring military ties with individual ASEAN members. For example, Thailand and the Philippines are major non-NATO allies, while Singapore is a close security partner of Washington. Meanwhile, Cambodia conducted at least six iterations of the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) with the US Navy between 2010 and 2016 to strengthen "force readiness and interoperability" (US Embassy in Cambodia 2016). Other military exercises such as RIMPAC and Cobra Gold are held annually between the US and various ASEAN members. In September 2019, the US and the ten ASEAN members conducted their first joint naval exercise known as AUMX, in which they sailed from the Gulf of Thailand through the South China Sea before reaching Singapore. The exercise is ASEAN's concerted effort to ensure a continued security engagement with the US, improve maritime domain awareness, and combat transnational threats.

SOCIO-CULTURAL TIES

Social-cultural ties play equally crucial roles in ASEAN-US relations. The first area of cooperation is through educational and cultural exchanges. In 2013, President Obama created the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) as an exchange programme to strengthen leadership capacity among regional youths and serve as a bridge connecting US and Southeast Asian local communities and civil society groups working on various issues like the environment, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and economic development. As of 2020, YSEALI had around 5,000 alumni and 150,000 members as part of its network, many of whom are Southeast Asians 30 years old or younger (US Mission to ASEAN 2019). Another major educational exchange is the J. William Fulbright scholarship programme, which gives ASEAN students opportunities to pursue graduate education at US universities and sends American students back to ASEAN countries for research every year. Since 1949, 12,000 ASEAN scholars have participated in the Fulbright programme, including 527 Cambodians, while 5,500 American Fulbright scholars have conducted research in ASEAN countries (East-West Center 2019).

Sustainable development is another practical area of cooperation in ASEAN-US relations. After the 2016 Sunnylands Summit, President Obama released the ASEAN-US Connect as a new strategic framework to enhance the US's social engagement with the bloc. The new initiative consists of four pillars. The first element, Business Connect, links ASEAN and American companies in sectors such as ICT and infrastructure that aim to serve the ASEAN Economic Community vision. The second element, Energy Connect, equips ASEAN with necessary tools to enhance its energy security, regional connectivity and green innovation, aligning with the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2015 (US Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam 2016).

Meanwhile, the third element, Innovation Connect, fosters a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem among ASEAN business leaders. The fourth element, Policy Connect, provides capacity-building and technical support to the bloc. In addition, to foster resilient, sustainable, and innovative urbanization, the US-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership was revealed in 2018 with a USD 10 million fund to connect major ASEAN and US cities and facilitate collaboration on resource management, transportation, and health systems (USASCP n.d.).

JOE BIDEN'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ASEAN: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

After what had happened under Trump, Biden inherited the incredible burden of having to reassure partners and allies that he could simultaneously re-engage with the world, deliver his "Build Back Better World (B3W)" vision, compete with China, deal with the pandemic, launch an ambitious vaccine rollout, nurture a domestic economic recovery, and win in a legislative tug of war in the US Congress. Unfortunately, since January, Biden's foreign policy towards ASEAN has been packed with rhetoric but still lacks concrete policy substance and manifestation at the time of writing for several reasons.

First, the US does not have resident ambassadors in Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, the Philippines, and the ASEAN Secretariat. Second, although Biden has personally met Japanese and South Korean leaders, he has not yet made physical or virtual contact with any ASEAN leaders. Third, Biden's push for ASEAN to take a hard stance against the military junta in Myanmar does not resonate well with the bloc's subtle and non-confrontational manner of diplomacy. Fourth, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's botched virtual meeting with ASEAN top diplomats on 25th May created a poor impression and reinforced the notion that, like previous administrations, Biden's America is preoccupied with the Middle East and puts Southeast Asia on the back burner. Blinken's blunder stands in stark contrast to the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting which took place physically on 7th June in Chongqing. In this meeting, China was praised for its "very effective" cooperation and "essential" provision of medical supplies like vaccines (Law 2021). While the US could not manage to conduct a single virtual call with ASEAN chief diplomats, China had all ten of them fly to Chongqing amidst the surging pandemic in their respective countries. That said, Blinken made it up to his counterparts by later spending five consecutive days, from 2nd to 6th August, joining the annual ASEAN Summit and other related meetings. He reportedly demonstrated the US's commitment to ASEAN, its centrality, and the Southeast Asian region. Fifth, Thailand and the Philippines, both major non-NATO allies, were left out of Biden's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (NSSG) altogether, indicating tension between human rights and democratic values on the one hand and geopolitical interests on the other (Grossman 2021).

Sixth, although the recent visits to Southeast Asia by the Biden administration's top officials, such as Vice President Kamala Harris, sent a reinforcing message of the US's commitment to the region, they came at an unfortunate time when the US began its botched military withdrawal from Afghanistan, creating a publicity crisis for US diplomacy and its 20-year state-building project in the so-called "graveyard of empires". Moreover, as Li and Chen (2021) note, even though Harris' visit produced a few major initiatives between the US and Singapore on issues such as health security, climate change, supply chains, and cybersecurity, the question remains as to how these developments will benefit and possibly be expanded to other Southeast Asian countries that do not share the same intensity of bilateral ties with Washington. Likewise, Harris offered tough rhetoric on China and emphasised the Quad's role in safeguarding the so-called rules-based international order and responding to Beijing's activities in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, she did not lay out a clear vision of how the Quad compliments, instead of challenges, ASEAN's centrality, especially given that Biden appears to be much more personally engaged with his Quad counterparts than the ASEAN leaders to whom he has not spoken since taking office. Worse still, the Biden administration has yet to unveil a serious economic strategy that aims to deepen Washington's economic cooperation with and investment in ASEAN states (Patton and Townshend 2021).

Based on the recent policies, speeches, legislative agenda, and actions of the Biden administration, it is now possible to start dissecting its approach towards ASEAN, which comprises three main elements: (1) ASEAN as part of the competition with China, (2) the return of principles-based foreign policy, and (3) a return to multilateralism.

THE FIRST ELEMENT: ASEAN AS PART OF THE COMPETITION WITH CHINA

In the first component, Biden's foreign policy towards ASEAN is closely intertwined with, if not an extension of, its policy towards China. Biden has made it clear that competition with China is here to stay, and so are elements of Trump's policies, such as the freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea; the race to develop emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, biotechnology, and 5G networks; infrastructure development projects; and condemnation against the alleged human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

In his first speech to a joint session of US Congress, Biden described China's President Xi Jinping as "deadly earnest" in his desire to replace America as the predominant player. However, he added that Washington welcomes competition, but not conflict (The White House 2021). Compared to Trump, Biden's tone is less hostile and implicitly indicates that there is room for Beijing-Washington cooperation in areas such as climate change and North Korea's nuclear programme.

That said, if we look at the major legislation his administration has pushed, we come to a different conclusion. For instance, in June of this year, the US Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 earmarked USD 250 billion to counter China's technological catch up through investments in the semiconductor and robotics industries. Likewise, the US's Meeting the China Challenge Act of 2021 underscores the use of existing sanctions against China in response to cyberattacks and IP theft. Finally, on the 3rd of June, Biden signed an executive order expanding Trump's previous ban on US investment in and trade with Chinese companies linked to Beijing. All of these measures are purposefully designed to contain China's expanding global power.

Given Southeast Asia's geographical location at the heart of the Asia-Pacific, Biden's level of engagement with ASEAN will depend significantly on his strategy towards Beijing. Take the COVID-19 vaccine as an example. Although the US has manufactured effective vaccines, such as Moderna and Pfizer, earlier than most countries, those shots have been distributed internally to the US population and externally to major US allies. In contrast, as of June 2021, China has donated 7.3 million doses to ASEAN countries and promised to deliver at least 203 million additional doses to the bloc (Zaini 2021). It was not long after the first Quad Summit in May that the US entered the vaccine diplomacy arena, promising at least 1 billion doses to Southeast Asia by 2022 (Widakuswara 2021). Whether or not the promise will be fulfilled remains to be seen, as the US has just begun its vaccine shipment to ASEAN countries.

Infrastructure development is another area where the US engages ASEAN primarily through the lens of its competition with China. To contest China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Biden promotes the Trump-era Blue Dot Network (BDN) as a public-private partnership project to ensure transparency and environmental sustainability in major infrastructure development works across Southeast Asia. In addition, after his first meeting with Japanese leader Yoshihide Suga in April, Biden unveiled a USD 4.5 billion fund called the Competitiveness and Resilience (CoRe) Partnership, aiming to help build "secure and reliable" regional digital infrastructure (Heydarian 2021).

THE SECOND ELEMENT: THE RETURN OF PRINCIPLES-BASED FOREIGN POLICY

Although it is no surprise that the term "democracy" appeared 23 times in Biden's 24-page Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, its repeated appearance sheds light on the second cornerstone of his foreign policy regarding ASEAN and, to a broader extent, the Asia-Pacific region, democracy and human rights. Biden seems to view the US-China competition as a race to secure a world in which democracy can flourish and prove that US democracy is a more durable system than China's authoritarian one. Although both tough on China, the key difference between Biden and Trump is that Biden adopts a less hostile and explicit tone.

Before the presidential election in 2020, Biden (2020) declared that the US must “get tough” with China and called for a global summit to defend democracy from Beijing’s model of authoritarian governance. He also spoke of the “contest with autocrats” to secure “another era of democratic dominance” (Brands 2021). He claimed that the US would lead the world not by the example of its power but by the power of its example, referring to building a vibrant democracy at home that serves as a political model worldwide.

Aside from these signs, there are other indications that democracy and human rights principles are at the forefront of Biden’s policy towards ASEAN. For instance, the Quad Summit statement, Biden’s NSSG and his speech to US Congress all emphasize a collective effort, on behalf of the US and its allies such as Australia, India, and Japan, to advance democracy at home and promote democratic principles abroad over those of China’s authoritarian model. In addition, during her first trip to Thailand and Cambodia, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman reportedly urged her counterparts to uphold human rights and ensure democratic space in their countries. Likewise, Secretary Blinken raised human rights issues in his phone call with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son.

Although Biden’s principles-based foreign policy may rally major European allies, the approach may not resonate well with ASEAN members for three reasons. First, as Djalal (2021) points out, though ASEAN is concerned about China’s activities in the South China Sea, it does not necessarily see Beijing as an ideological nemesis trying to impose its political system onto others. Framing the US’s relations with China as an ideological race would lead to greater regional tension and pressure the bloc to choose sides, both of which ASEAN has been trying to avoid. Second, an emphasis on democracy and human rights may be interpreted as interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN where anti-imperial sentiment runs high and stability and development are often prioritized over civil liberties. Moreover, due to their significant economic clout, ASEAN needs China and the US to realize its own regional vision. Having to choose Washington over Beijing would contradict that very objective. Third, maintaining good relations with all powers is at the core of the principle of ASEAN Centrality, a concept requiring that ASEAN take a leadership role in regional affairs by enmeshing all major players with its own norms and various fora such as the ARF, EAS, and ADMM-Plus. Therefore, by splintering the world between democracy and authoritarian camps, which Washington has publicly supported, Biden risks alienating ASEAN and undermining its centrality. Last, a focus on human rights would backfire on the US by exposing the double political standard it applies towards an ally like Thailand on the one hand and a non-ally like Cambodia on the other hand.

THE THIRD ELEMENT: A RETURN TO MULTILATERALISM

The last element of Biden’s policy towards ASEAN is the US’s revitalization of its engagement with multilateral regional organizations.

Recognizing ASEAN's pre-eminence in the Asia-Pacific economic and security realms, the Biden administration has given agency to the bloc by officially supporting its centrality and continuing to engage it through diplomatic channels, despite the fact that such still remains inadequate. For example, the Quad Summit statement and Biden's interim NSSG mention the US's support for ASEAN and Biden also supports the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which is less hostile towards China and more strategically inclusive than the US's own "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" framing. The AOIP underscores ASEAN's norms and mechanisms, enhances the bloc's central position in fostering peace and stability for ASEAN Community building, and reasserts ASEAN's role as a "regional consensus-builder" (Acharya 2019). The 2021–2025 ASEAN-US Plan of Action recognizes that the AOIP and FOIP are not necessarily mutually exclusive and notes four potential areas of cooperation, including the maritime domain, connectivity, the UN SDGs 2030, and the economy, all of which Cambodia can capitalize on during its 2022 Chairmanship of ASEAN.

CAMBODIA'S 2022 CHAIRMANSHIP: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As the Chairman of ASEAN in 2022, Cambodia will be uniquely positioned to shape, facilitate, and set the agenda to address pressing issues facing Southeast Asia and the world. Given its geographic location, economic status, and strategic position in the region, the stakes cannot be higher. The country will face five major challenges in dealing with ASEAN-US relations during its tenure.

First, the US-China rivalry is expected to have escalated even further by the time Cambodia becomes the host in 2022. As chair, it is in both ASEAN and Cambodia's interest for the latter to be neutral, pragmatic and not allow the Beijing-Washington tension to torpedo the whole regional agenda. While the Biden administration seems determined to outcompete China in every possible domain, ASEAN and its members will come under increasing pressure from both sides to align with either of the two powers. Therefore, Cambodia should underscore ASEAN Centrality, preventive diplomacy and cooperation among like-minded friends. It should also be pragmatic enough to accommodate the different viewpoints of ASEAN's dialogue partners where possible.

Second, Cambodia's rocky relationship with the US could also negatively impact its ASEAN Chairmanship. Since the 2018 general elections, Cambodia-US relations have deteriorated significantly due to political development in Cambodia and Washington's concerns about Phnom Penh's tilt towards Beijing. The most controversial issue is the allegation that Phnom Penh secretly hosts a Chinese naval base in Ream. Although Cambodia has repeatedly rejected the claim by allowing journalists and US military officials to visit the Ream Naval Base in 2019 and 2021 respectively, Washington appears unsatisfied.

However, it has not yet presented any concrete evidence to back up the accusation. During her recent visit to Phnom Penh, US Deputy Secretary of State Sherman brought up the issue with Prime Minister Hun Sen, telling the latter to maintain “an independent and balanced foreign policy”, a statement not well received by Phnom Penh (Prak 2021). In any case, Cambodia will likely continue to reiterate its permanent neutrality and non-alignment as stipulated in Article 53 of its 1993 Constitution. In addition, it might unreservedly maintain its three “No-policies” of (1) No defence treaty with a foreign country, (2) No foreign military base on its territory, and (3) No alliance or joint combat operation (Cheunboran 2021). Cambodia might also leverage its position to solicit practical engagements with the US on the four areas stated in the AOIP: addressing shared security challenges (people trafficking, terrorism, the proliferation of WMDs, piracy, and arms control), tackling global climate change, and achieving a post-pandemic recovery in conjunction with the ACRF. The digital economy and cybersecurity are two areas of partnership between ASEAN and the US in which the latter can offer best practices and technical support through mechanisms such as the ASEAN-US Connect and US-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership. Collaboration with the US on behalf of ASEAN can also help to mend Cambodia’s relations with the US, better allowing the country to hedge against overdependence on any one single external power.

Third, Cambodia’s close ties with China may once again come under regional scrutiny as it takes on the ASEAN Chairmanship. Back in 2012, when ASEAN failed to issue a joint communique for the first time since its founding in 1967, Cambodia was heavily criticized for the debacle known as the “Phnom Penh Fiasco”. However, some accusations levied against Phnom Penh were unfair, as ASEAN was not originally intended to serve as a court adjudicating territorial disputes between its member states or its members and external actors. As Cheunboran (2016) aptly puts it, “At best, ASEAN can be a dispute-avoidance mechanism”. As the Chair of ASEAN in 2012, Cambodia was responsible for protecting the organization’s core principles of non-interference and sovereign rights among member states. Besides, Cambodia is a non-claimant state to the South China Sea maritime dispute. Therefore, allowing its chairmanship to be used by others as a geopolitical tool would bring more harm than good for Cambodia’s foreign policy, national interests, and ASEAN’s collective interests and centrality.

That being said, Phnom Penh still needs to avoid appearing too close to China without prioritizing ASEAN’s collective interests in 2022. As Suy (2021) notes, China may take Cambodia’s 2022 Chairmanship as an opportunity to push for the conclusion of the South China Sea Code of Conduct negotiations on terms favourable to Beijing before the gavel is passed on to Indonesia in 2023. Hence, maintaining a balanced and proactive stance in the face of the South China Sea issue might go a long way for Cambodia’s relations with ASEAN, the US, China, and other stakeholders.

Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely continue to hamper ASEAN’s economic growth in 2022.

Therefore, as chair, Cambodia should prioritize the implementation of the ACRF through internal cooperation among ASEAN states and the solicitation of financial and medical support from China and the Quad countries.

Lastly, the political crisis in Myanmar will likely be at the top of Cambodia's 2022 agenda. So far, the US and ASEAN are still not on the same page when it comes to dealing with Myanmar's junta leader Gen. Min Aung Hlaing. ASEAN prefers a quiet and non-confrontational approach, whereas the US wants to see the junta gone. As ASEAN Chair, Cambodia should work with fellow members and external players to push for a speedy and full implementation of the Five-Point Consensus agreed during the Jakarta meeting in April. Cambodia can also draw from its past experience dealing with civil war, domestic instability, and post-war national reconciliation to assist Myanmar's return to normalcy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ASEAN-US ties have come a long way since 1977. Beginning as a dialogue partner, their relationship has grown into full-fledged cooperation in the economic, political-security, and socio-cultural spheres. During its 2022 Chairmanship of ASEAN, Cambodia will face several challenges, such as the simmering US-China rivalry, the political crisis in Myanmar, the COVID-19 post-pandemic economic recovery, and its deteriorating bilateral ties with the US. A successful tenure will depend on Cambodia's ability to push for dialogue among interested powers both inside and outside of ASEAN, its balanced and flexible approach towards the controversial issues described above, and its willingness to put ASEAN and its own national interests at the forefront.

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CHAPTER 07

ASEAN-EU: Strategic Partners Finding Their Strategy

Carolin Löprich

INTRODUCTION

On 1 December 2020, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) elevated their longstanding relations to a Strategic Partnership. Previously organised in the form of a Dialogue Partnership, the two regional organisations stepped up their cooperation to emphasise their “shared values and principles of a rules-based international order, effective, sustainable multilateralism, as well as free trade” (EU-ASEAN 2021, 10). Not only are ASEAN and the EU the two most advanced regional integration projects in the world, but they also together represent over 1 billion people and almost 25% of global economic power. While economic ties have always been strong, certain asymmetries in the field of security and political cooperation remain (Páldi 2021). Thus, the Strategic Partnership presents an important opportunity for the two blocs to present their relationship as an important model for inter-regional cooperation, underlining effective multilateralism and their commitment to the rules-based international order in a global climate increasingly characterised by unilateralism, protectionism, and transnational crises alike. To do so, ASEAN and the EU will have to move beyond political statements by strengthening their ties in the political and security domain and producing concrete outcomes.

AN EVER-EVOLVING PARTNERSHIP

The relationship between ASEAN and the EU has grown considerably in the past decades, both in scope and depth (Chirathivat 2020; Xuechen 2018). First informal relations were established between the European Economic Community (EEC), a predecessor of today’s EU, consisting of six members, and ASEAN which then had five member countries. The ties were formalised at the 10th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in 1977 and became institutionalised with the signing of the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement in 1980. That first agreement underlined equality of the signing parties while, at the same time, underscoring the different levels in terms of development of the respective ASEAN members (ASEAN 1980). Thus, the relationship at that time can be classified as a traditional donor-recipient relationship, focusing on economic, commercial and development initiatives.

While the size of both regional blocs had changed considerably by 2007, with ASEAN consisting of ten member states and the EU of 27 member states, the dialogue was considerably expanded through the adoption of the Nuremberg Declaration. All the signing parties committed to supporting regional integration by fostering strong regional organisations to tackle local and global security issues (Council of the European Union 2007). In 2012, as part of its larger engagement with Asia, the EU took its engagement with ASEAN once again to the next level by acceding to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and adopting the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to strengthen the enhanced partnership through political and security engagement in Southeast Asia (Nuttin 2017).

The different levels of engagement outlined above demonstrate how the cooperation between ASEAN and the EU has expanded over the past 44 years from a narrow focus on trade, investment, and development to include a range of social and cultural aspects, as well as political and security dialogues. The EU has been represented with an accredited Ambassador to ASEAN since 2015 and with 25 dedicated ASEAN Ambassadors from the European member states (EEAS 2016).

Today's relationship between the two regional entities is formally based on a three-level approach (Cameron 2020). Firstly, there is a continent-to-continent Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) informal platform for a dialogue approach. ASEM includes all ASEAN and EU member states and Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Switzerland, and Russia. The EU and the ASEAN Secretariat also participate in these informal meetings as institutional partners. Secondly, there is a region-to-region structure with 20 ASEAN-EU dialogues. They can be topically clustered into five thematic groups: climate and environmental sustainability; gender, labour, and human rights; infrastructure; health and science; and trade and economy (EU-ASEAN 2021, 15). Thirdly, there are various bilateral relations between ASEAN and EU member states. The numerous consultations are organised through an extensive set of regional convening forums, including the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting, ASEAN-EU Senior Officials' Meeting, the ASEAN EU-Joint Cooperation Committee, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to which the EU is a dialogue partner (Páldi 2021).

The EU is the biggest donor to the ASEAN Secretariat with over €200 million grant funding in support of regional integration from 2014 to 2020. The two multiannual EU flagship programmes for development cooperation in ASEAN are the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI) and the Enhanced ASEAN Regional Integration Support (ARISE Plus). With funding of €20 million for 2017–2023, E-READI aims to support ASEAN integration, poverty reduction and inclusive growth, while assisting the implementation of the ASEAN Community Blueprints and supporting experience exchanges through sectoral policy dialogues. In addition, the ARISE Plus programme, endowed with €40 million for 2017–2022, supports ASEAN economic integration in trade facilitation and harmonisation, customs and transport procedures, intellectual property rights quality, civil aviation, and the integration of monitoring and statistics (Caspary 2020).

¹Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

²Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

³The five dialogues included are Environment and Climate Change, Circular Economy, Natural Capital, Sustainable Development, Green Technology.

⁴The three dialogues included are Gender Equality, Safe Migration and Labour Rights, and Human Rights.

⁵The seven dialogues included are Trade and Business, Digital Economy and Society, Road Transport, Fisheries and IUU, Euro-codes, Energy and Maritime Transport.

⁶The two dialogues included are Science and Research, and Health.

⁷The three dialogues included are Transnational Crime and Cyber Security, Maritime Security, and Security and Defence.

Since 2019, an additional €50 million for country-level national trade support programmes interventions have been made available through ARISE plus (EU-ASEAN 2021). With further initiatives in 2020 and 2021 dedicated to pandemic response and preparedness, smart green cities, governance and domestic accountability, forest governance and infrastructure investment, the EU's financial commitment to ASEAN will continue in the coming years.

However, despite the increased level of inter-regional cooperation over the past decade, the EU is often accused of preferring bilateral engagement with individual states of ASEAN over engaging in inter-regional dialogues (Gilson 2020). The EU's interest in concluding a regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN is often cited in this regard. Negotiations on an FTA were launched in 2007, following the identification of ASEAN as a priority region the year before. However, due to limited progress and convergence, negotiations already came to a halt in 2009 (Binder 2020). Since then, the EU has completed a bilateral FTA with Singapore and Vietnam. While the bilateral engagement with individual ASEAN members is occasionally criticised for side-lining ASEAN as a grouping (Mattheis 2017), it is deliberately employed by the EU as a stepping stone towards the goal of a regional FTA (European Commission 2015). After all, the success of a region-to-region engagement with the ASEAN Secretariat remains highly dependent on the functioning of bilateral relations between the EU and ASEAN Member States (Kliem 2021).

The EU's interests in supporting inter-regional relations with ASEAN are manifold. First, regional forms of governance, such as ASEAN, are considered an opportunity to manage Europe's security concerns, economic gains, and project influence in world affairs (EU 2016). Beyond that, inter-regional relations with ASEAN have a legitimising purpose and are set to preserve the regional order and increase the EU's presence in Southeast Asia. However, it is important to note that because of fundamentally differing realities, the EU's experience of regional integration only has limited applicability to ASEAN (Allison-Reumann 2020).

RECENT SETBACKS

The EU considers ASEAN “a like-minded partner in a challenging geopolitical context” (EP 2021). However, away from the rather superficial rhetoric, several disagreements illustrate that the two organisations and their members do not always have streamlined priorities. The long road to the conclusion of the Strategic Partnership demonstrates the complexity of multifaceted cooperation between numerous political actors. The proposal to engage in a Strategic Partnership was already tabled by ASEAN in 2012, eight years before the Dialogue Partnership was effectively enhanced (Demonte 2021). The reason for the delay is a last-minute veto against the lifting of the partnership from Indonesia and Malaysia. Their objection was a retaliatory measure against a recast of the EU's renewable energy directive (RED II), which refers to the palm oil sector as a critical contributor to deforestation, resulting in biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions.

On these grounds, the revised biofuels policy in RED II announces the EU's phasing out of palm oil-based biodiesel by 2030 (EP 2020a). Indonesia and Malaysia, in turn, considered the directive discriminatory against palm oil, one of their biggest export commodities. The Indonesian government accordingly filed a dispute in December 2019 at the World Trade Organization (WTO), declaring the EU's measures to be a violation of WTO's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, as well as to the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (WTO 2019). Malaysia followed by filing a similar dispute in January 2021. The palm-oil-related tension, a bilateral trade issue between the EU and two individual ASEAN members, stalled the advancement of the partnership status for both blocs for several years.

Other ASEAN members have also experienced trade disputes with the EU throughout the last years. In February 2020, the EU announced a partial withdrawal of its Generalized Scheme of Preferences "Everything But Arms" (EBA) for Cambodia, citing serious systematic human rights violations (Schmücking 2020). While the EU also considered ending duty and quota-free entry of Burmese products to the European Single Market, it ultimately decided against excluding Malaysia from the EBA benefits for progress made in the crucial area (European Commission 2020a). Still, the partial withdrawal of trade preference from Cambodia and the threat of withdrawal for Myanmar disrupted ties and probed the trust between the EU and ASEAN members.

What differentiates ASEAN from other regional EU partners is its dominant ideational guide, the so-called ASEAN Way. It promotes sovereignty norms and shields ASEAN Member States from external interference in their domestic affairs. In other words, the ASEAN Way secures member states a maximum level of sovereignty. Naturally, this impacts ASEAN's external relations with actors who have their own and sometimes diverging foreign policy priorities. Suppose the newly achieved Strategic Partnership is not an empty phrase but becomes a catalyst for effective multilateral cooperation at eye level. In that case, the EU must pursue cooperation in conformity with the ASEAN Way. Pursuing the road ahead will not be simple, with expected differences between the EU and ASEAN in traditionally controversial policy areas, such as democracy and human rights. For the EU, democracy is one of its founding values, pursuit in all external policies and a strategic interest (European Commission 2020b). In contrast, ASEAN is not intended to be a collective forum for democracy promotion (Rüland 2021). Yet, while the elevated Partnership in practice is a commitment to regular summits at the leader level, it is most importantly an opportunity for Southeast Asian and European policymakers to find common ground in areas that can only be tackled together.

ECONOMIC AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CONNECTIVITY

The overarching theme that has repeatedly reaffirmed the commitment of the relations between ASEAN and the EU is connectivity. This is an all-encompassing concept of deepening economic and social relations to enhance economic and political-cultural ties. Connectivity covers many policy areas, including institutions, infrastructure, financial and digital cooperation, energy, transport, research, trade, and investment facilitation. By including soft and hard aspects of policymaking, connectivity is suggested to establish a level playing field between the partners; foster inclusiveness, fairness, and transparency; and achieve mutual benefits, while serving the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ASEM 2017). Connectivity is hence a guiding principle and all-encompassing approach to closer ASEAN-EU cooperation. In its main communication on better connecting Asia and Europe, the EU proposes several concrete policy proposals and initiatives to enhance sustainable and rules-based connectivity, exploiting existing and planned EU networks (EC 2018). In addition, the freely accessible online ASEM Sustainable Connectivity Portal was set up to measure and monitor progress through collated and curated data and figures.

Even though the EU has officially confirmed it, many observers assess the communication on connectivity to be the EU's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative. China was declared a systemic rival to the EU in 2019. Its initiative is considered an attempt to shape globalisation according to Chinese interests, giving subsidised Chinese companies advantages over European ones and obstructing free trade. Therefore, the European approach to connectivity strongly underlines non-discriminatory market practices, a level playing field for businesses, as well as high environmental, social, and financial sustainability of the foreseen connectivity projects (D'Ambrogio 2021). This comprehensive approach is likely to face issues in multiple ASEAN countries. It could clash with political and economic priorities on normative, regulatory, and political rights in some member states. Yet, the current global economic and political climate leaves ASEAN and the EU no other option than rationalising connectivity projects as best as they can to achieve efficiency and sustainability by enhancing multilateral connectivity.

The outbreak of the global COVID19 pandemic has disrupted global economic growth and continued to unfold its impacts on individuals and governments alike. While most advanced economies are expected to regain their pre-pandemic income levels by 2022, emerging market and developing economies are much less likely to quickly recover due to highly unequal vaccine access and partial withdrawals of macroeconomic support (World Bank 2021). Meetings between EU and ASEAN officials, such as their virtual exchange on 20 March 2020, are an important channel. They provide officials with an opportunity to exchange information, share best practices, and commit to actions on disease control.

Future meetings should discuss how to best strengthen and utilise regional and international mechanisms for better vaccine distribution and mitigating the economic and social shocks of COVID19. Tourism is an important sector in this regard, as it contributes both to the socio-cultural and economic pillars. Many ASEAN and EU members largely depend on tourism inside and outside the respective regional blocs and prioritise spending and investment driven by related industries (Yeo and Tonchev 2021). The conclusion of the ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (AE CATA), the world's first inter-regional agreement on air transportation, in June 2021 was a step in the right direction. The agreement offers a variety of economic opportunities by facilitating the operation of passenger and cargo services for ASEAN and EU airlines. It, therefore, rebuilds air disruptions caused by the pandemic and offers important business, trade, tourism, and people-to-people links for the years to come (EU 2021).

Besides its numerous disruptions, the COVID-19 pandemic has generated unintended positive effects for ASEAN and the EU's digital connectivity. Traditionally viewed as a synonym for energy and transport infrastructure, connectivity during the pandemic has been proven to include a wide range of digital services, all requiring their infrastructure and investment. Accordingly, ASEAN and the EU should further increase their digital connectivity instead of using the available funding on costly and often risky transport infrastructure projects. That more than 300 million internet users are in the ASEAN region and that 40 million users used online marketplaces for the first time in 2020 demonstrates the sheer size of target groups for common actions (Yeo and Tonchev 2021). However, the pandemic has also exemplified how existing inequalities within societies can replicate themselves in the online sphere. By providing equal access to digital technologies and infrastructures to people from urban and rural areas alike, improving digital literacy for all age groups, and closing the digital gender gap (EPD 2021), the EU can support ASEAN in boosting economic and human development and ultimately contribute to strengthening all the three ASEAN community pillars.⁸

OVERCOMING THE EXPECTATION -CAPABILITY GAP IN SECURITY COOPERATION

ASEAN is, without doubt, an essential partner to the EU for regional and global security. Peace and stability in the region are of utmost priority for the EU, as 40% of its foreign trade passes through the South China Sea (Islam and Yeo 2020). In addition, ASEAN has appraised an accomplished actor in political and security discussions around the Indo-Pacific, effectively bringing balance to the great power competition between China and the US. The EU, in contrast, is still primarily perceived as a trade partner in the region and less of a political or security provider (Páldi 2020). Compared to other security actors in the region, the EU has relatively weak military capabilities because it does not possess its armed forces. This often leads to the assumption that the EU is an underdeveloped security actor.

Although this may be true for a traditional understanding of security in terms of hard-power and military engagement, it is crucial to acknowledge the implications of issues not traditionally associated with security (Zwolski 2009). These include climate change, violent extremism, irregular migration, and maritime domain awareness, which are increasingly coming to the fore for national and regional security in ASEAN. Here, the EU has enormous added value to ASEAN's security. It needs to tackle the long-held misperception of being a mere trading partner by underlining its commitment to non-military cooperation and emphasising its approach of achieving sustainable security through diplomatic and preventive measures, as well as multilateral engagement. In terms of security, ASEAN needs to recognise that the EU is a different type of security actor from China or the US, but that it offers important contributions to regional peace and stability, nevertheless. The EU, in turn, needs to focus on the areas where it can deliver to avoid miscommunications and unfulfillable expectations (Rüppel 2019). Its commitment to norms, good governance, the rules-based order, and sustainability should not be regarded as a weakness in foreign policy but rather become a unique selling point in ASEAN's regional security.

The ongoing EU engagement in preventing and countering violent extremism by supporting a multi-stakeholder approach including government, security actors, civil society and the private sector in ASEAN illustrates the potential of this approach. In 2020, the EU launched a new partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) to tackle root causes of violent extremism and promote tolerance and respect for diversity in Southeast Asia. The 18-month project considers violent extremism a result of long-term social problems, such as political and economic marginalisation, and aims to strengthen communities at risk. Throughout the first phase of the project, which started in 2018 in line with the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action, the partnership also included cooperation with YouTube and young influential video-makers to promote positive content on the issue (EC 2020c). Furthermore, as foreseen in the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action 2018–2022, the EU and ASEAN can step up their cooperation on tackling extremist violence by sharing best practices and expertise through the revision of the implementation of the ASEAN-EU Work Plan to Combat Terrorism, increasing cooperation on the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, and promoting the interaction between national law enforcement agencies in ASEAN Member States and EUROPOL (ASEAN 2018).

TOWARDS STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT: SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM

The newly achieved Strategic Partnership between the EU and ASEAN is a crucial milestone in the inter-regional relationship that offers a multitude of prospects for increased cooperation in the years to come.

⁸The three ASEAN community pillars are Political and Security Cooperation, Economic Cooperation and Socio-cultural cooperation.

While economic cooperation has always been strong between the two blocs, the inception of this new phase offers a valuable opportunity to step up the EU's political and security engagement in Southeast Asia. It has the potential to reignite the EU's enthusiasm for deepening its commitment to ASEAN as a whole instead of individual member states. At this point, the conclusion of a region-to-region FTA remains a distant endeavour, as economic and political disagreements with some ASEAN Member States persist. Inter-regional free trade should nevertheless remain the ultimate goal in the ASEAN-EU economic relationship, not least because it would be an opportunity to streamline political ties between the partners in the long term. With several geopolitical, environmental, and domestic challenges, including the post-COVID19 economic recovery, climate change and the political crisis in Myanmar, increased cooperation between ASEAN and the EU is not an option but an outright necessity. Bridging differing views between member states from both sides, especially in controversial policy areas such as democracy and human rights, will remain a major hurdle in this regard.

For both organisations to sustain the momentum of this achievement and move beyond undefined political catchphrases, agreeing on a practical framework for action will be key. Without any official definition, the Strategic Partnership, for now, is a mutual commitment to regular summits at the leaders' level. This opportunity should not be underestimated as regular high-level interactions have an important potential to increase political influence. It will be an important forum for the EU to present itself to ASEAN leaders as a viable third alternative in the power struggle between China and the US without jeopardising its non-interfering principle. To move beyond its reputation as a mere trading partner and position itself as a serious political and security actor in the region, the EU must better communicate its foreign policy priorities and red lines with ASEAN. In this context, the most important approach is underlining the common commitment to the inclusive, sustainable, and multi-lateral rules-based order.

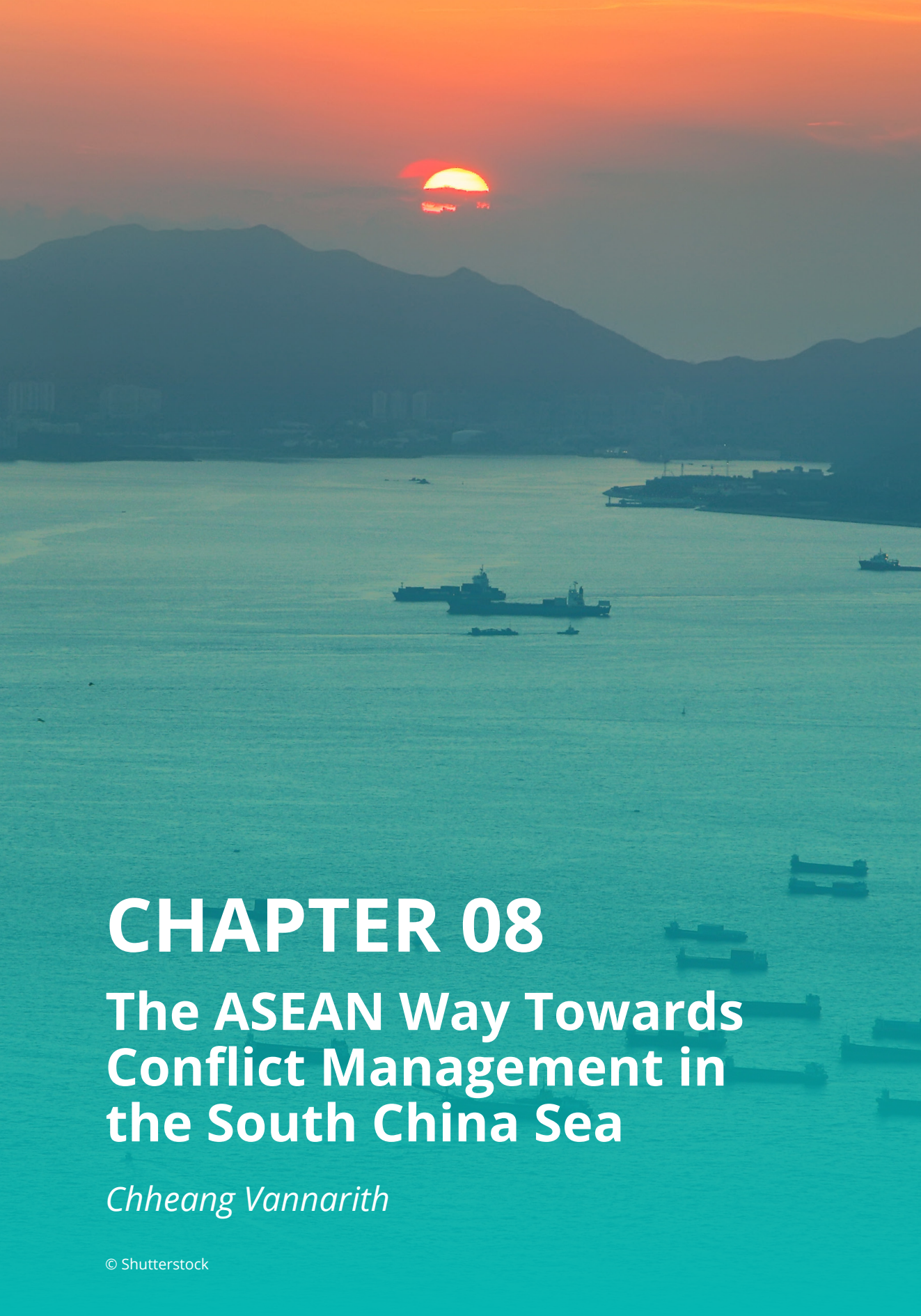
In this regard, future connectivity projects have a high potential of tackling the economic shocks of the COVID19 pandemic in Southeast Asia, including the resurgence of the tourism industry. With the engagement on digital connectivity still being in an initial state, the EU and ASEAN can shape and implement relevant international norms and standards together. In terms of security, the EU must show ASEAN that it can make an indispensable contribution in non-traditional security areas, including preventing violent extremism and climate change. The future cooperation should include coordinated confidence-building measures, capacity building, and preventive diplomacy in these fields to enhance multi-layered cooperation and foster the rules-based multilateral order. Becoming Strategic Partners has been a conscious decision that will require both partners to show sustained commitment and increase communication and investments. Going forward, this commitment will have to be filled with coherent actions, trade flows, and cooperation to promote sustainable and green growth and spread rules-based multilateralism by placing the new Strategic Partnership in regional and multilateral fora.

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CHAPTER 08

The ASEAN Way Towards Conflict Management in the South China Sea

Chheang Vannarith

INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea plays a critical role in the geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific region, as it has become the theatre of China-US power competition for regional dominance. The US views China's growing regional influence and assertiveness in the South China Sea as "the most pressing threat to existential order in the Indo-Pacific region" (Wu 2021). As a result, geopolitical tension in the Asia-Pacific region is on the rise. The room and possibilities of having effective conflict management and settlement in the South China Sea are being constrained by intensifying US-China competition. The chapter discusses the implications of US-China competition on the geopolitical landscape in the South China Sea, explores the ASEAN Way of conflict management and resolution, and proposes some pathways towards the realisation of lasting peace in the South China Sea.

US-CHINA COMPETITION

The geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea have been on the rise over the past decade. The unfolding US-China rivalry has further complicated the prospect of having a peaceful settlement of the maritime disputes in the area. The South China Sea is the theatre of the US-China contest for regional dominance. A maritime security expert argues, "The US uses intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) probes in the South China Sea to detect, track and if necessary, target China's nuclear submarines. China's response has been to develop on some of the features it occupies the capability to neutralise the US's ISR probes in time of conflict" (Valencia 2020). As a result, the militarisation of this maritime area has increased. Consequently, regional security and order are at high risk. As a result, regional security is getting more volatile and dangerous.

There are competing strategic narratives regarding the South China Sea. The widespread view, mainly constructed and shaped by the US strategic narrative, is that China intends to build a regional hegemon in East Asia and the Western Pacific by effectively controlling the South China Sea, which is the main strategic gateway for China to realise its ambition. For the US, some of the red lines are the "blatant violations of commercial freedom of navigation or attack on the forces or territory of its ally". For China, the red lines include deploying US military forces and assets that can diminish China's defence capabilities (Valencia 2020).

There are differences between the US and China about the activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). China's stand is that foreign militaries are not allowed to conduct intelligence-gathering activities, including reconnaissance flights, in its EEZ under international law. Furthermore, China requires prior approval or notification concerning the right of innocent passages for military vessels through its territorial sea.

On the other hand, the US posits that under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), it is entitled to have freedom of navigation through EEZs in the sea and does not need to notify claimants of military activities (Colin 2016).

The strategic narratives and counter-narratives have further complicated the regional situation. US policymakers and strategic thinkers largely perceive China as a peer competitor that can challenge the US's supremacy (Bader 2020). The narratives from Washington concentrate on the threats posed by China and the legitimacy and necessity of the US's interventions, including diplomatic and military measures, to prevent China from building a regional hegemon that can overtake the supremacy of the US in the region. These narratives fall into the Cold War mentality in which zero-sum game was characteristic of international relations. Nevertheless, a full-fledged new Cold War, similar to the US-Soviet Cold War, remains relatively remote (Christensen 2021). Even though the US has carried out a 'decoupling' strategy vis-à-vis China, the entangled economic interdependence between China and the allies and key strategic partners of the US will prevent the US from forming a pure, strong alliance or coalition against China.

The over-politicisation and over-securitisation of the South China Sea further complicate the process and prospect of regional cooperation in the South China Sea. China's aggressive behaviour and the construction of artificial islands and military bases in the South China Sea pose serious regional security concerns and power imbalance to the US. To China, the interventions of extra-regional powers, especially the US in the South China Sea, would trigger geopolitical tensions and fault lines. The US's containment strategy against China would only divide and destabilise the region.

Conflict management and mediation regimes in the South China Sea are affected by the quality and fluctuations of the overall China-US relationship (Oishi 2015). The South China Sea has become a theatre for China and the US to balance against each other (Mehboob 2018). An analyst argues, "The United States views China as challenging its long-standing great-power military dominance in the region, while China sees the United States as an obstacle against its rise to power as it strengthens its national security through its militarisation of the South China Sea" (Cardenas 2020). The risk of military confrontation between the two competing powers is on the rise.

The US has increased military and non-military activities in the South China Sea, especially over the past decade. The US's objective is to check the rising power of China in the region. Speaking at the UN Security Council meeting on maritime security, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken accused China of threatening regional peace and stability. He said, "Conflict in the South China Sea, or any ocean, would have serious global consequences for security, and commerce. When a state faces no consequences for ignoring these rules, it fuels greater impunity and instability everywhere" (Nicholas 2021). The US actions have created a sense of insecurity for China. China perceives the deployment of US naval ships as a direct security threat.

China accused the US of “stirring up trouble out of nothing, arbitrarily spending advanced military vessels and aircraft into the South China Sea as provocations and publicly trying to drive a wedge into regional countries.” The US itself is “the biggest threat to peace and stability in the South China Sea” (Ibid.). China has taken countermeasures to push back the US’s strategy in the region by increasing its military presence and building artificial islands in the South China Sea. Besides, one of the motives and interests of China in reaching the Code of Conduct (CoC) with ASEAN is to limit the US’s involvement in the issue (Baviera 2018).

THE ASEAN WAY TO UNLOCK THE PUZZLE

Within such a context of highly contested geopolitical rivalries, it is necessary to invite the wisdom of peace and cooperation. One of the solutions is the need to develop strategic narratives based on the history and wisdom of Asian civilisation, moving beyond the zero-sum game theory. It is important to apply “subjective and culturally specific dimensions” to understand the causes of conflict so that a more effective approach can be explored to prevent and overcome the causes of conflict. National characteristics and agency, largely shaped by history and culture, play a critical role in international relations, war, and peace (Bleiker 2001).

The Asian experiences and wisdom in dispute prevention, management and resolution can provide an alternative view and possible solutions to the complex South China Sea disputes. The problem is when a political agenda is involved, neutral, independent, and objective truth cannot be found. The over-politicisation and securitisation of the issue further complicate the prospect of having amicable solutions to the disputes. Domestic politics hence matter. Internal factors and understanding oneself and others are useful to understand the nature of international politics. International relations need to be understood as “a search for a reasonable boundary between oneself and others, rather than a pursuit of the limitless expansion of one’s space” (Huang 2001). Four key concepts that enrich conflict resolution debates, based on the Japanese experiences, are consensus, dialogue, fairness, and multiplicity (Wasilewski and Namatame 2011). In conflict resolution, other key concepts, drawing from the Chinese and Korean experiences, include harmony (Pan 2011) and justice (Bleiker and Young-ju 2011). These conflict resolution practices contribute to constructing a more cooperative world order.

Looking at the historical trend of the bilateral interactions between China and Southeast Asian countries, the main trend remains peace and development. China and Southeast Asian countries have a long history of peaceful interactions. Despite existing tensions and strategic trust deficit in the South China Sea, China and other claimants have shown their political will to preserve regional peace, stability, and prosperity.

Although there are nationalist sentiments in projecting and protecting their national interests in the South China Sea, the claimant states have exercised their restraint from accelerating the tensions and kept their communication channels open for dialogues and consultation.

The involvement of extra-regional powers or third-party interventions further complicates regional geopolitical dynamics in the South China Sea. Based on their national interest calculation, in addition to lessons learned from the past, Southeast Asian countries are not interested in taking sides or using one major power against the other. Although choosing not to take sides is getting more difficult (Choong 2020), Southeast Asian states are ready to resist any external pressure that forces them to choose sides (China Global Television Network, 2 April 2021). One of the pathways to maintain strategic autonomy is strengthening ASEAN-driven regional architecture while advancing the ASEAN principles and the ASEAN Way.

The most important inter-governmental organisation, ASEAN plays a critical role in providing strategic space and economic opportunities for the member states to manoeuvre. ASEAN, as a collective agency, can shape the future direction of the regional order. Regional order refers to common interests, values, rules, norms, and institutions that govern state behaviour and international relations. Conflicts are reduced if states are bound by these shared interests, rules, and norms. Dialogue mechanisms can help resolve states' uncertainties and concerns by signalling intentions and promoting mutual understanding.

ASEAN DISPUTE SETTLEMENT MECHANISMS

The Bangkok Declaration of 1967, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and the ASEAN Charter are the three key documents outlining the core principles of ASEAN in conflict prevention and management. The Bangkok Declaration stressed, “The spirit of equality and partnership” and “justice and [the] rule of law”. The references to conflict management in the Declaration are general political aspirations expressing the desire to “establish a firm foundation for common action to promote regional cooperation in South-East Asia in the spirit of equality and partnership and thereby contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity in the region”. And the main purpose of ASEAN is to “promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter”.

In 1971, ASEAN adopted the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) to affirm the neutrality of ASEAN. It asserts the right of every state to lead its national existence and development “free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers”. In 1976, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) was adopted.

TAC outlines the following six principles, namely (1) mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; (2) the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; (3) non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; (4) settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means; (5) renunciation of the threat or use of force; and (6) effective cooperation among themselves.

TAC sets principles as well as mechanisms to manage and resolve the dispute. Chapter IV of the TAC, which consists of 5 articles, devotes itself to the pacific settlement of disputes. Article 13 stipulates:

The High Contracting Parties shall have the determination and good faith to prevent disputes from arising. [Nevertheless, in] case disputes on matters directly affecting them should arise, especially disputes likely to disturb regional peace and harmony, they shall refrain from the threat or use of force and shall at all times settle such disputes among themselves through friendly negotiations.

In terms of dispute settlement mechanism, a High Council consisting of representatives at the ministerial level from each High Contracting Parties can be formed. Article 15 states that the High Council is tasked to take cognisance, assess the situation, and recommend appropriate means of settlement to the parties in dispute such as good offices, mediation, inquiry, or conciliation. The High Council may offer its offices, or upon agreement of the parties in dispute, constitute itself into a committee of mediation, inquiry, or conciliation. When deemed necessary, the High Council shall recommend appropriate measures to prevent a deterioration of the dispute or the situation. However, Article 16 sets some limitations. The High Council can only be formed and assume its role of mediator in a dispute if the parties involved agree on bringing the case to the Council. It reads:

The foregoing provision of this Chapter shall not apply to a dispute unless all the parties to the dispute agree to their application to that dispute. However, this shall not preclude the other High Contracting Parties, not [a] party to the dispute, from offering all possible assistance to settle the said dispute. Parties to the dispute should be well disposed towards such offers of assistance.

The ASEAN Charter adopted in 2008 incorporates and expands on the key principles enshrined in the Bangkok Declaration and the TAC. These principles relating to conflict management and dispute settlement include: (1) respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all ASEAN Member States; (2) shared commitment and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security and prosperity; (3) renunciation of aggression and the threat or use of force or other actions in any manner inconsistent with international law; (4) reliance on peaceful settlement of disputes; (5) non-interference into the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States; (6) respect for the right of every Member State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion and coercion; (7) enhanced consultations on matters seriously affecting the common interest of ASEAN; and (8) adherence to the rule of law, good governance, the principles of democracy and constitutional government.

Initiated by Indonesia in 2020, ASEAN Foreign Ministers issued a joint statement to affirm ASEAN commitment to the driving force for peace, security, and prosperity in Southeast Asia. It includes eight points.

- Reiterating the commitment to maintaining Southeast Asia as a region of peace, security, neutrality, and stability.
- Remaining united, cohesive, and resilient in promoting ASEAN principles as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter.
- Upholding the purposes and principles of the TAC (Treaty of Amity and Cooperation), the ZOPFAN (Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality Declaration) and the Bali Principles.
- Calling on all countries to exercise self-restraint from conducting activities that could escalate disputes in the region.
- Seeking to continuously build strategic trust in the Region through peaceful dialogue and cooperation.
- Affirming ASEAN centrality and encouraging the engagement with ASEAN's external partners through ASEAN-led mechanisms.
- Confirming the principles of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
- Asserting the commitment to support multilateralism as stated on the principles of the UN Charter.

ASEAN principles mainly serve as confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy. While the ASEAN principles and frameworks have been exercised to prevent and resolve inter-state disputes, judicial arbitration is a measure of last resort in dealing with territorial sovereignty disputes. For instance, Malaysia and Singapore agreed to send their dispute over Pulau Batu/Pedra Blanca for arbitration at the International Court of Justice. Cambodia and Thailand submitted their case over the Preah Vihear Temple to the International Court of Justice in 1961 and again in 2011 to interpret the 1962 Judgment.

THE ASEAN WAY

The ASEAN Way—which refers to the art of conflict prevention and management via consultation and consensus, mutual understanding and trust, mutual respect, and quiet diplomacy—has enjoyed legitimacy in regional conduct (Acharya 2001). It has even become the norm of intramural relations between ASEAN Member States and between ASEAN and external dialogue partners, including China. ASEAN's institutional design emphasises an informal, flexible decision-making process based on consultation and consensus, with a low appetite for judicial arbitration (Acharya 1997). ASEAN stresses confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy, and dispute management rather than dispute resolution.

The non-interference principle has been the strength and weakness of ASEAN in providing effective solutions to regional problems. For instance, ASEAN has limited roles in preventing and managing the border war between Cambodia and Thailand during 2008–2011. Cambodia sought support from ASEAN and the UN Security Council to mediate the dispute. Indonesia took the initiative to facilitate the dialogue and even agreed to send peacekeeping forces to the conflict zones. The United Nations Security Council, for the first time, called upon ASEAN to promote dialogues in search of a lasting solution to the dispute. However, Thailand did not support the involvement of any third party in the dispute. As a measure of last resort, Cambodia brought the case to the International Court of Justice.

Although ASEAN does not aim to build a strong rules-oriented regime, some ASEAN countries have sought legal means and third-party arbitration and adjudication. International bodies, not ASEAN, have been sought to be the venue for dispute settlement, such as the International Court of Justice (Tan 2017). This legal approach deviates from the traditional ASEAN Way of conflict resolution based on bilateral consultations and negotiations. The negotiation on the Code of Conduct between China and ASEAN is the process of rules-based regime building. From the ASEAN's perspective, the CoC is expected to be a legally binding document that will include a dispute settlement mechanism.

IMAGINING REGIONAL ORDER

Building a stable and peaceful regional order in the South China Sea is the common interest of all claimants and other regional and extra-regional stakeholders. However, it seems, as discussed earlier, that the unfolding China-US geopolitical rivalries pose a significant threat to regional peace and stability. The US and China have accused each other of destabilising the region. Hence, regional order in the South China Sea largely depends on the evolution of the bilateral relations between China and the US. A stable and healthy competition between China and the US will create favourable conditions for dialogues, trust-building and better conflict prevention and management in the region.

Unfortunately, the current state of the US-China competition is not healthy. Some have called the nature of the rivalry a new Cold War or Cold War 2.0. Notwithstanding, we can always imagine the possibilities. There are three pathways toward building a peaceful regional order. First, it is important to promote trust-based cooperation and relationship consistently and constantly. It is easier said than done, however. The parties directly concerned must refrain from taking any unilateral actions that might lead to distrust and tensions. They should openly exchange views based on mutual respect, mutual interest, and a positive-sum game. Transparency, dialogue, mutual respect, and mutual understanding are the key elements of trust-based relationship building. Trust is built by repeated compliance with rules and norms and established expectations for behaviour.

Strategic narratives are critical in promoting and socialising cooperation spirit and trust-based relationships. By reducing the narratives influenced by the Cold War mentality, regional countries can enlarge the space for frank and constructive dialogues. In this respect, the US should refrain from making statements or taking actions that are perceived to contain China. Containing China is not realistic, and it will stir growing nationalism in China. Washington needs to recognise that China is a proud nation with more than five thousand years of history, and China is not the Soviet Union. Currently, China is the world's second-largest economy that will overtake the US to become the world's largest economic power in the coming years. Most of the US's allies have strong economic ties with China. It is unrealistic to form an anti-China global alliance system like the anti-Soviet Union alliance during the Cold War because China is inextricably intertwined in the world system.

In addition, preventive diplomacy needs to be constantly developed and nurtured to reduce misunderstanding, misperception, and miscalculation, and forestall a military incident or crisis. It is in the interests of the parties concerned to actively seek solutions based on political and diplomatic means. Preventive diplomacy refers to diplomatic measures taken to prevent the disputes or conflicts from arising between parties, prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts while developing mechanisms, institutional preparedness, and policy frameworks to mitigate the risks and consequences of the conflicts if they occur. The existing ASEAN-led regional mechanisms such as the ASEAN-China Summit, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus can play a critical role in deescalating the tensions and conflicts. ASEAN used to fulfil such a role in cooling down the border skirmishes between Cambodia and Thailand in 2008 and 2011. Although ASEAN does not have an effective conflict resolution mechanism due to its stringent non-interference principle, it provides platforms for dialogues to prevent and manage conflicts.

The viable and practical way to solve disputes and differences is through dialogues and political settlement. Things need to be changed from a zero-sum game to a positive-sum game or win-win for all parties; from blame game to frank dialogues and negotiations; from sticking to position to understanding motivations; from strategic competition to strategic and economic integration; and from nationalism to regional cooperation. Both bilateral and multilateral dialogues and cooperation need to be sustained and strengthened at multiple levels or layers. Full coordination and crisis management between concerned parties are necessary. Finally, the claimants must have a political will to come to a negotiation for a lasting settlement.

Second, building a rules-based regional order is a long-term process. International Law is the foundation of international cooperation, development, management, and the solution of the South China Sea disputes. As far as the regional legal framework is concerned, the Code of Conduct built upon the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) is necessary, since it can provide more binding legal principles to shape the behaviour of the state parties to the South China Sea disputes.

ASEAN has consistently called for diplomatic and legal processes in dealing with the South China Sea issue. Vietnam, for instance, tries to put the 1982 UNCLOS as supremacy over other international legal instruments relating to maritime affairs. In the Chairman's Statement of the 36th ASEAN Summit in June 2020, Vietnam as the rotating chair of ASEAN managed to insert the phrase stressing the importance of the 1982 UNCLOS as "the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over maritime zones, and the 1982 UNCLOS sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out".

It is fundamental for the claimant states to have a common definition and understanding of the rules-based international order. China has been reluctant to use the term "rules-based international order" because the term originated in and is advocated by the West. China prefers to use international order based on international law or the international order centring on the UN Charter. In the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific adopted in 2019, ASEAN uses the term "rules-based framework". Regardless of the differences between ASEAN and China about using the term 'rules-based', both sides have agreed on certain norms and rules to control and shape their behaviour in addressing the South China Sea issue.

ASEAN and China have reached several consensuses on promoting rules-based cooperation frameworks, including implementing the DOC, the negotiation on the CoC, and the peaceful settlement of disputes based on international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. In addition to the UN Charter, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and the ASEAN Charter are critical mechanisms for rules-based regional order in the South China Sea. However, to effectively implement the rules, the claimant states must depoliticise sea boundary demarcation, and legal and technical experts should be empowered to find appropriate solutions to the issue.

The DOC provides: "The Parties Concerned reaffirm commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and other universally recognised principles of international law which shall serve as the basic norms governing state-to-state relations." The CoC is expected to add more legal value and substance to the DOC. To some, the CoC should be a legally binding regional code embodying effective enforcement measures to prevent, manage and settle the disputes. The Chairman's Statement of the 36th ASEAN Summit in June 2020, despite lacking a consensus among ASEAN Member States, hints that Vietnam and several other ASEAN member countries are pushing for the legal narrative and acceptance that the UNCLOS is "the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over maritime zones".

There are some differences among the ASEAN Member States about the primacy of the 1982 UNCLOS in solving maritime sovereignty disputes. Cambodia, for instance, is not a party to the 1982 UNCLOS and has not yet demarcated maritime boundaries with neighbouring countries.

Cambodia is not interested in constraining itself to the 1982 UNCLOS, meaning other international legal instruments should also be applied in maritime boundary demarcation. Cambodia relies on the maritime boundary lines drawn during the French Protectorate in its sovereignty negotiation with neighbouring countries. Concerning the South China Sea issue, Cambodia's position has been consistent that the claimants are responsible for finding solutions to their territorial sovereignty disputes. The early conclusion of the CoC is essential in confidence building, preventive diplomacy, and conflict management.

Third, functional cooperation is essential in nurturing a trust-based relationship and rules-based order. Some practical cooperation areas include joint research and exploration, joint development, joint exercises on Non-Traditional Security issues, and collective responses to NTS issues such as search and rescue collaboration, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and marine environment protection. However, functional cooperation cannot be realised without good faith, which means all parties concerned agree to sincerely work together on issues of common interests (targeting low-hanging fruits) and build a mechanism that can materialise functional cooperation. State and non-state actors must work together to materialise functional cooperation, especially in concretising joint development projects in overlapping claims. It is vital that the parties concerned need to negotiate in good faith and take a conciliatory approach in which they are ready to make concessions.

The DOC stresses the spirit of cooperation and understanding. Paragraph 5 of the DOC states, "Pending the peaceful settlement of territorial and jurisdictional disputes, the Parties concerned undertake to intensify efforts to seek ways, in the spirit of cooperation and understanding, to build trust and confidence." Besides, Article 19(1) of the ASEAN Agreement on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources reads: "Contracting Parties that share natural resources shall co-operate concerning their conservation and harmonious utilisation, taking into account the sovereignty, rights and interests of the Contracting Parties concerned following generally accepted principles of international law."

Regional order construction needs several binding elements, including deepened regional integration, connectivity, and interdependence. Greater economic integration, shared values and principles, and the projection of a shared future or common destiny are critical sources of building a regional order. The COVID-19 pandemic has made regional leaders realise complex interdependence between countries and the necessity of working together to resolve transboundary issues and threats. Notably, economic integration and connectivity between China and ASEAN are getting more complex and intertwined. Notwithstanding the challenges and obstacles caused by the pandemic, ASEAN and China could maintain their economic ties. As a result, ASEAN replaced the EU and became, for the first time, the top trading partner of China. The bilateral trade volume reached more than USD 685 billion. In the first half of 2021, China-ASEAN trade hit USD 410.75 billion, up by 38.2% yearly. Therefore, maintaining an open and inclusive regionalism and deepening economic integration provide a conducive regional dialogue on the South China Sea issue.

OUTLOOK

The South China Sea issue presents critical challenges and threats to regional peace and stability. The unfolding competition between China and the US in the region further complicates the prospect of having a peaceful settlement to the dispute. This chapter argues that US-China competition is the defining feature of the geopolitical development in the South China Sea. It suggests that the ASEAN principles and the ASEAN Way can become the sources of inspiration in confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution. Three possible pathways are proposed here, including promoting trust-based cooperation, functional cooperation, and rules-based regional order. The conclusion of the CoC negotiation will be a significant step towards trust and confidence building, conflict prevention, conflict management, and dispute settlement in the South China Sea. As the Chair of ASEAN in 2022, Cambodia can further facilitate dialogues and, if possible, conclude the CoC to mark the 30th anniversary of the DOC, which will be another critical milestone in promoting peace and stability in the South China Sea.

As the Chair of ASEAN next year, Cambodia will stress the importance of acting together, not just talking. The responsibility to implement it has become even more urgent in the pandemic and post-pandemic era. Under the theme “ASEAN A.C.T. Address Challenges Together”, Cambodia wishes to inspire ASEAN Member States to uphold the spirit of unity and solidarity, to be free from division and discrimination, to uphold common interests, and to join hands in addressing challenges with perseverance, agility, and ingenuity, towards realising an ASEAN Community where our people live in harmony, peace, stability, and prosperity. In his address at the handover ceremony of the ASEAN Chairmanship in October 2021, Prime Minister Hun Sen said:

Cambodia will focus on strengthening the ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN Unity, for both regional mechanism and external partners' cooperation, based on ASEAN Way and Principles stipulated in the ASEAN Charter, Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Also, ASEAN must be resilient and strong against the pressure and influence stemming from rising geopolitical competition, transnational-crime, terrorism, climate change and infectious diseases, etc., to ensure our way forward in peace, security, and prosperity. (Hun 2021)

Under the political-security cooperation pillar, Cambodia will continue to (1) strengthen regional consensus and promote collective political commitment to strengthening ASEAN centrality and relevance in shaping evolving regional architecture in maintaining peace and promoting peace, stability and harmony and prosperity in the region and beyond; (2) promote the core principles of peaceful co-existence, non-interference, and mutual respect of independence, sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC); and (3) enhance multilateralism and multilateral processes through ASEAN-led mechanisms to ensure that they remain open, transparent, inclusive, and rules-based.

Furthermore, concerning the South China Sea issue, Cambodia will continue to promote a peaceful and stable environment in the South China Sea by encouraging the parties concerned to effectively implement the DOC and the early conclusion of an effective and substantive CoC consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. This reflects the common position of ASEAN Member States at the 38th and 39th Summits in October that stressed “the need to maintain and promote an environment conducive to the CoC negotiations, and thus welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculation”, “the importance of undertaking confidence-building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties, and the importance of upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.”

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CHAPTER 09

ASEAN's Contribution to Regional Peace and Stability: A Cambodian Perspective

Lim Hokseng

CAMBODIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS ASEAN: AN INSIDE-OUT VIEW

It has become a tendency among many commentators and pundits to describe Cambodia's approach to ASEAN as ambiguous at best and harmful at worst. This conceived image is perhaps derived mainly from ASEAN's debacle during the Kingdom's Chairmanship in 2012 due to the controversial issue of the South China Sea. The incident has, by and large, pointed out ASEAN's persistent struggle with regionalism and how to manage regional peace and stability with a general tendency of pointing fingers at Cambodia.

To many, the practice of regionalism is seen logically through a conceptual lens as an instrument of a unified strength either for or against something. This strongly prescribes that a country, when becoming a part of a group, must have a shared purpose and that each country's national interest is, therefore, synonymous with the bloc's interest. Indeed, this preconceived idea makes sense for an intellectual discussion but overlooks reality. It finds no common ground to "reconcile between regionalism and the practice of nationalism" (Rajaratnam et al., 2007).

The hard truth is that ASEAN is a collection of nations with diverse domestic political, socio-cultural, and foreign policy orientations. Observably, some members are allies of the West whereas some wish to pursue non-alignment. However, all of them have economically benefited, in one way or another, from their relations with China. With such disparity, the consensus decision-making process might be the only practical road to an eventual satisfactory solution for every stakeholder. The unprecedented non-issuance of the Joint Communiqué of the 45th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the so-called "2012 Phnom Penh fiasco", is a clear consequence of the conflicting interests between national and regional as well as a breach of the bloc's principle that helps to sustain the momentum of regional peace and stability for decades.

Like other ASEAN Member States, Cambodia also sees ASEAN from the standpoint of its own domestic concerns and its political, security and economic interests. Although Cambodia's approach to ASEAN may be different from those of other Member States, Cambodia, since its entry into this regional grouping, has consistently upheld and even staunchly advocated ASEAN's interests, principles and values. Cambodia's Foreign Minister PRAK Sokhonn explicitly pointed out in his remark on the occasion of the ASEAN's 50th Anniversary, "ASEAN was attractive for Cambodia in terms of joint commitments and collective responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity and the peace that ASEAN has developed so far can only be achieved through trust, dialogue and consultation and not through polarisation or worse still agitation over the already heated tension" (MFAIC 2017).

Cambodia clearly recognises that there is a 'regional interest' that could best serve everyone, and those are peace, stability and prosperity of the region.

Without a doubt, “the maintenance and enhancement of peace, security and stability and the strengthening of peace-oriented value in the region” have been a long-established cornerstone of ASEAN and subsequently codified into its Charter (ASEAN 2008). An attempt to use an open confrontation tactic to pursue a separate national interest was not only seen as an act to destabilise peace and stability in the region but also run counter to both ASEAN’s and Cambodia’s ultimate objective of safeguarding peace and stability.

For Cambodia, its painful past caused by decades of destructive war and a modern-world tragedy has surreptitiously propelled the Kingdom to pursue the peace objective. This might entrench its firm belief that only when the region is at peace can Cambodia concentrate on its own national development and regional integration. Cambodia sees ASEAN as a key platform for interactions, cooperation, and maintenance as well as promotion of peace and stability in the region.

In 2022, Cambodia takes the role of ASEAN Chairmanship. In this regard, this chapter aims to highlight the roles of ASEAN in the evolving regional security architecture since its existence and provide some suggestions of how Cambodia as chair can enhance ASEAN as a catalyst for peace and stability amid emerging regional security threats.

ASEAN: FROM A BYSTANDER TO THE DETERMINANT OF REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Southeast Asia during the 1960s was a region overwhelmingly embroiled in tensions, conflicts and, even worse, proxies of competing great powers’ rivalries during the Cold War. There were various formations of short-lived regional organisations, for instance, the South-east Asia Treaty Organisation, which was not genuinely created by the region and often viewed as a pro-Western camp. Such a complex regional security environment had aroused some countries’ sentiment to seek an enduring basis of regional security and cooperation that could possibly prevent war, manage conflict, and promote regional prosperity (Rajaratnam et al. 2007; Acharya 2009). As a result, ASEAN came into being.

The ASEAN Declaration on 8 August 1967 unequivocally stated the grouping’s desire “to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region” (ASEAN 2016). To materialise this noble endeavour, ASEAN had to tacitly take a different course of action from its crumbled predecessor(s). Thus, it is by design that ASEAN has been a truly regional-owned and -led organisation in regional security development. It is neither possible nor feasible for ASEAN to be a self-isolated grouping. If it decides not to lead, it will then be led because there are always intrinsic tensions of great powers’ struggles, as they compete for influence and interests.

Equally importantly, engaging with non-ASEAN countries is crucial to assure the regional grouping's survival; yet it has to be manageable. This would require ASEAN, on the one hand, to stay neutral towards major powers and, on the other hand, address its internal differences. In-between, ASEAN has to strongly place an economic horse before a geopolitical cart because worsening economic conditions would create domestic confusion and chaos. It is increasingly critical given the worsening impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. As a result, economic growth constitutes one of "the main foundations for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations" (ASEAN 2016).

In its institutionalising process and in reducing security risks, ASEAN has employed a three-pronged strategy which is strongly relevant even today. First, ASEAN has advanced its role as a norm builder and promoter in its engagement with external powers. It is never an intention of ASEAN to opt for a 'hard power approach', since this would entail a disastrous element of arm race and economic ruin for the underdeveloped region (Rajaratnam et al., 2007). Rather, it sets to build a predictable interstate behaviour through shared rules, norms and principles. Within these spirits, ASEAN put into motion a narrative of neutral Southeast Asia through the promotion of the 1971 Declaration of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, despite not fully realising it (Natalegawa 2018).

It had later adopted the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in 1976, which was subsequently amended to permit non-regional countries to accede as basic governing conduct of inter-state relations in the region. In order to "promote perpetual peace, everlasting amity and cooperation", TAC renounces the use of force and the threat of using force, while promoting the settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means. With the renunciation of violence as a means of resolving disputes, the idea of building a regional "security community" has normatively emerged (Acharya 2009). Indeed, these TAC's principles have been further codified into the ASEAN Charter. The ASEAN Political-Security Community Council was created, and its blueprint was consequently adopted as a guiding path to "ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another" (ASEAN 2009).

Second, ASEAN has promoted a strategy of expansion designed to establish itself as the central player in the region. ASEAN would be incomplete generically and pragmatically without encompassing other countries geographically confined within Southeast Asia. By weaving all the Southeast Asian nations into one bloc, the prospects of enhancing security and strategic space have considerably increased. On the one hand, member states have to comply with the organisation's principled conducts while, on the other hand, reducing members' over-dependence on major powers outside the region as security guarantors. As a result, ASEAN's members had expanded from five to ten. Along with this internal expansion, ASEAN had also simultaneously managed its external relations by actively engaging with other countries outside the regional grouping. The number of ASEAN Dialogue Partners has considerably grown since 1973 to include several regional and global players such as Japan, Australia, the United States, China, India, and the Russian Federation, among others.

For ASEAN, the engagement with major powers is not only to ensure the balance of power but also to make it look neutral so that it can acquire more credibility and strategic trust. Geopolitically, ASEAN intends to transform itself from being a proxy object of major powers to being an active player, one that can direct, if not shape, the regional security environment. For external powers, the importance of ASEAN probably lies in its geostrategic location. ASEAN does serve as a potential market, but more importantly, it is on the shipping route of trade and energy from Africa and India to the Pacific and vice versa. For some major powers, Southeast Asia is a geopolitical arena for their quests for supremacy. With these regional characteristics, every country has a higher stake in ASEAN's survival and progress. ASEAN's division or domination by a single power would seriously affect others.

Third, ASEAN has advocated mutual and reciprocal interests among key players. In this regard, ASEAN rolled out various ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), just to name a few. These overlapping mechanisms accord them venues to foster constructive dialogues, embed a habit of cooperation, and build commonality of regional peace and security outlook. Some fora play special roles of their own. The APT is also implicitly trilateral cooperation designed to improve cooperation among China, Japan and South Korea. The EAS, which is supposed to include countries geographically confined in East Asia, has also included countries such as Russia, India, Australia, and the US (Natalegawa 2018). The ARF also admitted North Korea as a member. From this crisscrossing security apparatus, it would be in ASEAN's foresight that peace, stability and security in Southeast Asia cannot be addressed separately without addressing them in the entire Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN might strongly expect that these multilayer fora can build a synergy of cooperation among the members and, therefore, coalesce their matrix of interests which, in turn, further strengthen an environment of peace and stability in the region.

Although these arrangements are ASEAN's unfinished businesses, the regional transformative security outlook speaks considerably of ASEAN's success and its resilience within the spanning time of its existence. ASEAN has transformed from a once-divided region into a region that fosters trust, cooperation, and collaboration with a remarkable degree of unity. It is by far the most durable design of the hub of regional multilateral diplomacy made up of all great powers. It is not by luck but by a long and careful process of deliberation, consultation and consensus among its members, as can be obviously seen from its numerous meetings each year. How ASEAN maintains this positive momentum will be strongly tested by its capacity to handle the emerging, unfolding regional security environment.

NEW REGIONAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT: COOPERATION OR CONFRONTATION?

Regional peace and security in Southeast Asia are currently under threat from forces originating from within and outside the grouping. Those forces acutely present a magnitude of challenges to ASEAN and regional peace, stability and prosperity. There are two fundamental compounding factors that have occupied ASEAN at present and within the foreseeable future.

First and foremost, regional strategic stability has stupendously evaporated due to intensifying competitive interests among major powers. From the US, the UK, and the EU to regional countries such as Australia, Japan and India have, one way or another, crafted their respective strategies to promote their interests which all mingle in the Indo-Pacific, a newly coined geopolitical term. Their strategies possess both 'soft' and 'hard' dimensions, which have apparently defined the power relationship in the region as an interaction between intensifying competition and cooperation. While major powers' competition provides benefits to the region, they may also bring dangers. It is this latter characteristic that could potentially put the region at great peril, and the most alarming consequence of all is the strategic competition between China and the US.

For decades, regional stability has been substantiated by a cooperative relationship among great powers and muted competition for 'hard power' superiority. However, these two main pillars of strategic stability have been starkly turned into opposing each other. Both great powers are now locking horns in stiff geo-strategic competition from the Pacific to the Indian Oceans. This is so because China's continued ascendancy has changed the threat perception and assessment of both the US and regional countries (Pei 2021). From the American point of view, China's fast-growing power has been perceived as affecting the US's position and power in the region and the world. From Beijing's perspective, Washington is seen as working to undermine its national interests from the South and the East China Seas to its domestic territorial integrity, such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Taiwan.

At the time of this writing, it is hard to anticipate that each side will take a step back to accommodate each other or work out their *modus vivendi*. For China, a gesture of compromise made to the US would mean kowtowing a foreign power, a reversal to its so-called 'century of humiliation', which is unbearable and might even be impossible due to its strong nationalist impulse. It would be a Chinese 'nightmare', not a 'dream' as President Xi has captivantly projected it. For the US, invoking competition might be a commanding tool for the White House to summon bipartisan support, crucial for a comprehensive rebalance policy towards the Asia-Pacific region with an overriding focus on China, currently being viewed as its strategic challenge. Moreover, to restore its credibility among its regional allies, Washington has to step up its assertive position against Beijing.

Such contradictory outlooks have spurred them to take a hostile stance, and Washington seems to run out of its philosophical development by choosing to organise its foreign policy around zero-sum competition instead. On the economic front, building on top of the trade war, Washington has strongly advocated economic decoupling as one of its foreign policy toolkits to counter China's economic heavyweight. Many initiatives such as the Blue Dot Network, Supply Chain Task Force, and Build Back Better World are either unilaterally or collectively established to jolt with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (White House 2021). Washington also imposes technological transfer and export restrictions as well as a sanction on Chinese companies (VoA 2021).

On the security front, both great powers seem to place a high priority on military advancement over non-proliferation. China's continued development of what it called anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) has been perceived by the US, especially among its defence planners, as America's diminished military advantage in the region. The US Secretary of Defence Office's 2020 annual report to Congress stated, "China has already achieved parity with or even exceeded the United States in several military modernisation areas...and the main objective for Chinese People's Liberation Army is to become a world-class military by the end of 2049." Under this perception, Washington has launched a multi-layer tactic. Unilaterally, the US has been working to enhance its military edge and modernising integrated defence capabilities (Garamone 2021). The Pacific Deterrence Initiative is also part and parcel of its wholesale military statecraft, with the main defence perimeter anticipatedly centred around the first Island chain (Moriyasu 2021). Hardly a day goes by without alarming reports of the US's defence and security plans aimed at the region.

Due to the changing balance of power in the region as well as its geographical distance from the Far East, the US would need to be supported by platforms of regional countries that can offer the necessary infrastructure to forcefully project its power. Within this calculus, the US has begun coaxing its core allies and strengthening partnerships not only regionally but also internationally to build a united front to oppose China (Bade 2021). Washington is also enticing and pressuring other countries such as Cambodia, which is, to its wary eyes, seen as moving closer to China.

Minilaterally, the US has exclusively advanced a coalition of like-minded countries to advocate the so-called anti-China narrative. The convening of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) Summit is an illustration of an emerging regional security environment, one that excludes and deter China's increasing influence and dominance in the region. Dangerously, the US has also displayed its geopolitical resolve to deter China by recently forming a trilateral security alliance with the UK and Australia. AUKUS, as the pact is known, mainly aims to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines in order to boost their grouping's competitive edge in maritime power in the region vis-à-vis China's. At the systemic level, Washington's continued condemnation and imposed sanctions on China's alleged violation of human rights in Xinjiang Autonomous Region have added another layer of complexity to their competition.

As the two great powers are competing for power and influence, other regional countries, both middle and small power nations, are struggling to recalibrate their strategic alignment and variably strengthen their defence and deterrence capability. This is somewhat potentially dangerous, since it would heat up the tension as well as bolster an arms race and arms build-up in the region. If Beijing seriously comes to a desperate conclusion that there is no place for its leading role in regional governance, a scenario of an all-out confrontation is likely viable. Regional hotspots such as the South East and East China Seas and Taiwan will be the arenas where threats of conflict are greatest.

For ASEAN, as it geographically sits in the middle of this geostrategic competition, any passive stance will render its centrality and relevance obsolete. Even worse, if great power competition further turns into outright hostility, the region might inevitably be polarised along the line of their competing interests. ASEAN will be ultimately forced to make a binary choice with a possible consequence of division among the members, a nightmare scenario that ASEAN and each individual member state would rather not wish to see. Therefore, it is imperative for ASEAN to remain both at the forefront and centre of regional coordination and actions to assuage and possibly de-escalate the tensions from drifting further.

The Myanmar political crisis is another crucial factor that further complicates ASEAN's situation for two main reasons. To deal with external factors, ASEAN has to first put its house in some sort of order so that it can foster collective regional strength. ASEAN will have to spend its energy to stabilise, if not completely, return to the pre-crisis situation in Myanmar. This means that ASEAN has to convince the Tatmadaw government and its opposing group to soften and reconcile their positions by offering each other some political concessions. Reaching a common ground for both sides is a big challenge. For the Tatmadaw, accepting the conditional demands from the opposition group, such as calling for the release of the elected political leaders as well as restoring the country back to a democratic path, might strongly delegitimise their political measures. From the opposing group, the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, a body of elected lawmakers of the ousted civilian government, has already announced and gradually institutionalised the formation of the new National Unity Government (NUG) to challenge the Tatmadaw (The Irrawaddy 2021).

Moreover, in the context of geostrategic competition, a protracted political crisis in Myanmar would offer an opportunity for interested great powers to infiltrate and establish their foothold in the region. This will further complicate the situation. There is an open question as to who is the legitimate government of Myanmar. There are already voices calling for support and recognition of the so-called NUG based on its democratic appeal (VoA 2021). The bifurcated support made for each political camp will further split Myanmar. Consequently, this would hamper ASEAN's credibility and centrality, as it requires more cohesion and less division to deal with regional challenges. Despite its harsh criticism, ASEAN has already filled out the leadership vacuum to provide good offices in fine-tuning solutions to suit this political condition (ASEAN 2021).

The ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar might be the best possible hope to resolve the crisis and prevent another regional flashpoint of great power competing interests. What remains to be seen is how speedily and effectively ASEAN translates it into actions.

These situations seem to paint a dark picture of the region and that its future is gloomy. Indeed, whether ASEAN will enter an era of more progress and durable peace or derail into decades of uncertainties and turmoil depends on the choices it will make and the trajectories it will take.

CAMBODIA AND ITS ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP: A HOPEFUL FUTURE

Cautious of its past history, Cambodia has crafted a foreign policy of “engaging more actively in the cause of peace and stability” as one of its five main pillars (MFAIC 2018), and the country has not just talked its talk but also walked its walk. Cambodia's peacekeeping forces have been deployed under the UN peacekeeping and humanitarian frameworks to several hotspots globally. At the regional level, despite being a latecomer in ASEAN, Cambodia has relentlessly contributed its share in the pursuit of ASEAN Community building as well as peace and prosperity in the region. Being an ASEAN Chair twice, Cambodia has played a crucial role in setting the agenda for peace and prosperity in the region. A milestone document, namely the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), was signed in Phnom Penh to prevent confrontation among regional countries and to promote peace in the region.

In a similar manner, the framework of the Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea was another landmark document, following the meetings in Bali and Siem Reap (MFAIC 2017). The ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC) was also established in Cambodia to serve as a centre of excellence aiming to collectively address landmines and explosive remnants of war in the region. As a country coordinator of ASEAN's various dialogue partners, Cambodia has actively worked to support the regional peace and stability ecosystem as well as ASEAN's centrality by increasing engagements with external partners. Most importantly, the Kingdom's constant and consistent denial of the allegation of it hosting a foreign military base is a solid manifestation of its coherent commitment to the region.

Cambodia is going to assume the role of ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 amid an uncertain strategic environment in the region. It is both a pressing and up-hilled task because Cambodia has to navigate ASEAN through the great powers' competition and out of the COVID-19 pandemic for regional recovery. However, there are reasons for optimism for Cambodia. If the anti-communist sentiment was the main driver of ASEAN solidarity in the past, anti-great power rivalry sentiment could be the main driver of ASEAN unity in the future.

It would be unthinkable for ASEAN Member States to find an alternative regional forum that can substitute ASEAN. To opt otherwise, its future will be perfectly described by Benjamin Franklin's famous quote: "We must all hang together, or most assuredly, we will all hang separately". Therefore, fostering ASEAN's concerted efforts to deal with the external challenges is highly within reach.

Although ASEAN cannot dictate the agenda of great powers, it can shape their direction. There are some built-in stabiliser conditions for ASEAN and, for that matter, Cambodia. For China, ASEAN's weakness would not be in its interest. Economically, ASEAN is an actual and potential market for China. ASEAN-China trade has already exceeded China's trade with the US and the EU (The Global Times 2021). Geopolitically, ASEAN's backwardness would roll back its efforts to strengthen its Eurasian foothold, especially its Belt and Road Initiative. This would seriously affect China's domestic development and with that the credibility of its Communist Party. Under these circumstances Beijing really needs a peaceful environment in Southeast Asia and, for this reason, it has to refrain as much as possible from a fatal clash with the US. Thus, Beijing is highly in favour of strengthening cooperation with ASEAN.

For the US, the current administration has placed 'diplomacy' at the centre of its foreign policy (White House 2021). Furthermore, Washington also faces a policy dilemma. If it takes too forceful a stance towards China, it would invoke a fear of entanglement among the regional countries. Many regional countries will ask why they have to sacrifice their interests to do the American bidding. If it opts for this approach, Washington will risk creating an image of itself as a war-mongering nation. Contradictorily, choosing a modest and softer approach towards China would mean that Washington implicitly recognises Beijing as the dominant regional power, if not an equal peer. Whatever scenario Washington chooses, it poses risks. Regional countries will try to hedge and look for a feasible peaceful solution because the price of winning would equally mean the destruction of both the victors and the losers in this deeply interconnected world. ASEAN will loom large on their policy radar.

Furthermore, American policy towards the region, particularly China, is mostly channelled through its regional allies, and Japan is the most important of all. How Tokyo reacts towards Beijing would greatly shape the US's policy in the region, and how Washington handles its relations with Beijing would also considerably determine Tokyo's attitude (Brzezinski 2001). Japan's assertive effort to break out from its traditional security pattern is more of an answer to its concern about the US's credibility and commitment towards the region. Surprisingly, Japan has strong trade and investment ties with China (Harris 2021). A scenario of 'cooperative competition' relationship might be seen within a foreseeable time between China and Japan. Japan can possibly play a role as a bridge for ASEAN to help diffuse this tense situation. In this regard, promoting American joint efforts with Japan or perhaps with Australia in supporting ASEAN's projects or initiatives might help ASEAN enlarge its roles.

Cambodia can capitalise on these favourable conditions and, through ASEAN, work to further institutionalise regional cooperation. The stronger the regional cooperation is, the stronger ASEAN is politically and economically. In terms of the political-security domain, shaping regional powers to place more emphasis on diplomacy and rules of acceptable conduct and less on hard power as the cardinal principles in the state-to-state relations should be strongly promoted. Cambodia can leverage ASEAN's existing platforms, such as the EAS, to seek the common ground of acceptable conduct among all powers, reducing risk while promoting crisis management in the region. Although the TAC is a fundamental guiding principle in the relationship between parties, the agreement only governs the TAC parties' relations with the Southeast Asian states but not between the TAC parties outside Southeast Asia (Manyin et al. 2009).

On the economic front, working to improve economic conditions in the region as well as among major powers would assist member states in dealing with the current economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This could produce a spillover effect, since economic prosperity can considerably enhance states' capacity to cope with the security issue. Besides, deepening entanglement of the stakeholders' economic interests could present a high prospect for stability and security. Peace and stability can thus piggyback economic prosperity to the region.

To achieve these aspirations, it would need patience and consume both time and immense efforts from ASEAN and Cambodia as the chair. However, promoting them should be viewed as a priority in this complex circumstance. In this regard, there are a few main priorities for Cambodia as the Chair of ASEAN. In terms of the political-security realm, Cambodia can work to promote ASEAN's solidarity and centrality and strengthen the cooperative spirit in order to further foster peace, security and stability in the region. In so doing, Cambodia can muster up efforts to enhance relevant ASEAN-led security dimensions such as expediting the conclusion of the CoC negotiation, promoting the confidence-building and preventive diplomacy measures, constructively deepening dialogues with external partners, and building synergy and complementarity among various regional initiatives by advocating their functional cooperation to be in line with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

Economically, Cambodia can potentially work to reboot ASEAN's economy from the COVID-19 impacts and build its resilience through the implementation and capitalisation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and the various free trade agreements so as to optimise intra-trade and investment. Assisting and strengthening the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) can also be taken into account as one of the keys in accelerating regional post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

In line with the above priorities, there are some additional thoughts for Cambodia in particular and ASEAN in general, which should be considered a catalyst for a 'peaceful competition', if not 'cooperation', in the region:

- Putting forth an initiative to address the loophole of the TAC's legal frontier and further institutionalise it as one way to promote regional security.
- Fostering a comprehensive strategic dialogue or consultation through ASEAN-led mechanisms with an aim to establish some sort of a region-wide rule of acceptable conduct, governing all powers in the Indo-Pacific. Southeast Asia regional security would be unpredictable and extremely prone to conflicts if there are no guiding rules. It would be incomplete if it does not cover the entire region.
- Building synergy and complementarity of the various Indo-Pacific strategies with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific to deepen their matrix of interests in the region, thus boosting a peaceful regional environment.
- Further promoting and enhancing defence-to-defence channel of communication and extending it to include military-to-military level and the plus-eight countries so as to inculcate trust and understanding and address any emergency situation.
- Promoting maritime cooperation such as coastguard cooperation to mitigate frictions, while enhancing maritime safety and security.
- Further strengthening economic cooperation and integration. In this context, Cambodia should thrust for a resumption of ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement negotiation by capitalising on the recent EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
- Aspiring for a possible formation of an 'inclusive' Indo-Pacific FTA by leveraging on both RCEP and CPTPP. It should be mindful that the US will unlikely enter a major trade deal that is not strongly in line with its new 'foreign policy for the middle class'.
- Further promoting projects and initiatives that will improve ASEAN's institutional capacity building. This is to address the disparity gap between fast-growing decision-making adoption and its actual implementation. This is to mainly avoid misperception that a decision made is equally identical with the solution achieved.

CONCLUSION

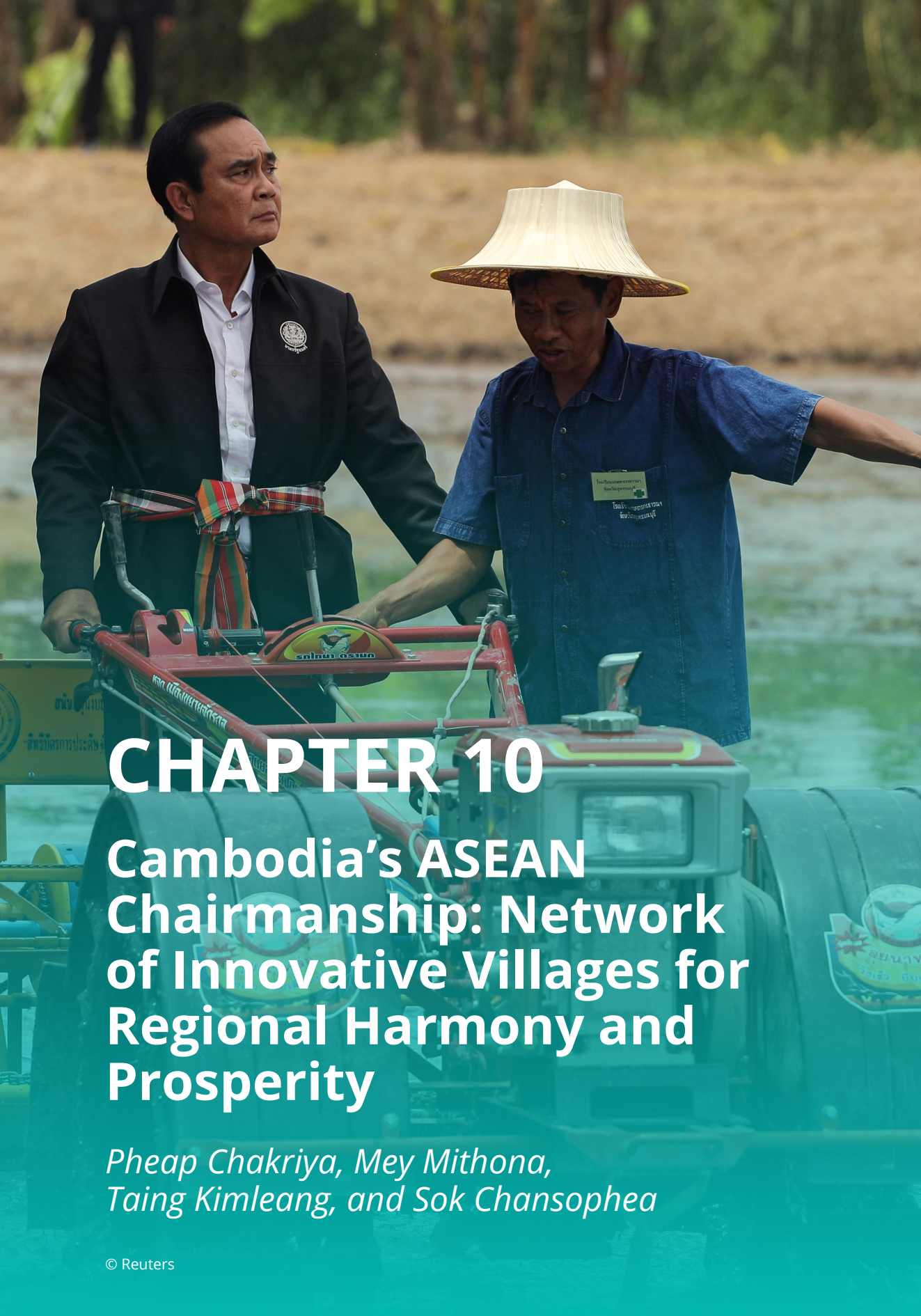
To sum up, since its inception, ASEAN has panoramically made tremendous progress in transforming the region into one of the world's most promising regions. If ASEAN's performance has so far failed the expectations of some, it is not because it has failed to accomplish its milestone projects and programmes but because it has failed to reconcile and balance between the individual national interests and collective interests. This tussle will remain more so since it is an inherent characteristic of institutionalising regionalism.

As the protracted COVID-19 pandemic is socio-economically ravaging the region, both individually and collectively, and as great powers' competition is gradually gaining steam, the region is at risk of losing peace, stability and prosperity. However, these shared challenges will, for the better, reignite a sense of unifying purposes and, therefore, unity. One can remain hopeful that ASEAN can harness its collective strength and make a bigger strike in addressing those challenges. In this regard, Cambodia, as ASEAN's Chair next year, will play crucial roles in promoting a peaceful and prosperous regional environment for all.

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CHAPTER 10

Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship: Network of Innovative Villages for Regional Harmony and Prosperity

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INTRODUCTION

The economic disparity among ASEAN Member States (AMS) remains a key challenge for the ASEAN Community to achieve its common goals. Some members are less developed while others are more advanced in their economic development. Hence, AMS has been categorised into new (CLMV) and old members (ASEAN-6), making bridging the development gap a core task for the leaders for ASEAN integration to position the region to benefit from global economic growth. Accordingly, various approaches and core activities have been initiated, such as the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), a strategic framework to narrow the development divide and enhance ASEAN's competitiveness. It was launched in November 2000. The goal is to primarily support CLMV to narrow the development gap. Many goals of poverty alleviation and increasing regional rural development are articulated in the ASEAN economic integration process (ASEAN Secretariat 2012). At the regional level, various innovative village initiatives and programmes have been developed according to local contexts, with the emphasis on digital transformation and innovation on agriculture, climate change, tourism innovation, etc. However, the key concern is how AMS innovate rural approaches to promote the revitalisation of the roles of rural villages in supporting national development and eventually achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) set out in the ASEAN agenda in November 2015 (ASEAN Secretariat 2015).

This chapter aims at emphasising the importance of rural villages in supporting regional development, highlighting innovative villages of AMS. The focus on innovative villages provides rationales and useful lessons from AMS. The chapter suggests that an innovative approach be established to promote vibrant rural village development across Southeast Asia, contributing to national development and regional integration.

OVERVIEW OF RURAL VILLAGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Southeast Asian region, home to approximately 622 million inhabitants, is rich and diverse in cultural, historical, and natural capitals. Most of the population lives in rural areas, relying largely on agricultural and farming activities, including land, inland fisheries, forestry, and marine resources for livelihoods, subsistence, income generation, and local economic development (World Population Report 2020). Villagers rely on agricultural lands for food production while catching aquatic animals from their paddy fields, ponds, rivers, and natural waterways and/or going to the forests to collect plants, herbs, honey, and other types of non-timber forest products to feed their families. In coastal areas, food is even more abundant (Keo 2020).

¹Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam.

Besides resources supply, to most villagers, social capital in their homelands can be relied upon when shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other extreme events, happen. Amid the pandemic, many migrant workers have returned home after being laid off from their jobs in urban areas. With strong family bonds and community support, villagers can turn to their close relatives or other villagers for support when they need assistance, such as food shortage or a family member falling sick. In many cases, support is granted. In other cases, when support needed goes beyond individual villagers' capacity, village leaders would help mobilise resources from community members at large (Ibid.). This kind of practice is an important social safety net for villagers.

In addition, with necessary skills, resources and social networks in place, returning migrant workers have opportunities to explore potentials for investment in their villages, whether in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry production, and/or relevant fields. Besides, they can stay close to their families. Being able to generate income while staying close to their families is crucial, as it allows them to take care of their old parents and children, who may, otherwise, be left behind. Furthermore, it is very important for the mental health of family members, particularly old parents and young children, who are more vulnerable to shocks. In some cases, young children are forced to drop out of school to reduce family expenses and/or help support family income generation activities, even though they are very young, which eventually lead to inter-generational poverty.

Besides, rural areas offer diverse sources of benefits and services, including land, water, food, raw materials, and other ecosystem services for socio-economic development, urbanisation, fisheries, forestry, animal raising, ecological recreation, tourism and creative industry development, cultural preservation, and biological and environmental protection, among others.

Despite the essential roles of rural areas, there has been a growing trend of migration out of rural areas due to the perception of limited economic viability and the lure of opportunities available in urban areas regarding employment, health services, education for children, and other modern services. Estimated by the United Nations, the trend of population growth in Southeast Asian cities is expected to rise to about 53% in 2030, up from 24% in 2010 (ADB 2014). The decline in rural population has detrimental effects on the rural economy, development activities, social relations and well-being, social viability of the nation, food security, and agricultural productivity, among others.

INNOVATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AMS

Defined by the World Bank, rural development is a strategy to improve the social, economic, and well-being of poor people in rural areas, intended to improve productivity and increase employment and income (The World Bank 1975). The state's intervention approach and policy engagement in developing rural areas, in either underdeveloped or developed countries, are applied and adapted depending on local context, as rural areas differ and the criteria defined are different from one country to another. However, the concepts of rural development have gone through changes, as rural areas have transformed. Thus, innovations of sustainable and inclusive rural development have occurred in response to changing local contexts. During the OECD 8th Conference on Rural Development in Russia in 2012, OECD announced their new rural development approach, which was set out in OECD's 2006 publication, to shift from agrarian by increasing multi-sectoral, place-based strategies that identify and better exploit the development potential of rural areas, for examples, rural tourism, manufacturing, and ICT industry (OECD 2012).

Southeast Asian nations have initiated numerous policies and programmes for the revitalisation of rural villages through innovative approaches for inclusive, sustainable, and competitive local economies, including, but not limited to, (1) Brunei's Food Security and Self-Sufficiency in Brunei Darussalam, (2) TECHO 100-Villages in Cambodia, (3) Innovation for Prominent and Sustainable Village in Indonesia, (4) Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) in Lao PDR, (5) The 21st Century Village Program (21CV) in Malaysia, (6) Local Development Funds (LDFs) in Myanmar, (7) Adaptation and Mitigation Initiatives in Agriculture (AMIA) in the Philippines, (8) The Village Broadband Internet (Net Pracharat) project in Thailand, (9) National Target Programs for New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) in Vietnam, among others. Meanwhile, among the ten member states, Singapore and Brunei are rarely seen to have rural development initiatives, as both countries are famous for their industrialisation. Singapore is fully industrialised with zero percent rural population as of today while Brunei remained about 22.4% in 2018, down from 25% in 2010 (The World Bank 2018). Therefore, we exclude Singapore from our presentation below.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Brunei's Food Security and Self-Sufficiency

The global food crisis in 2007–2008 hit many countries in the region (Ross Simon 2017). With no exception, Brunei Darussalam, well-known as one of the world's richest countries with oil and gas being the strong economic backbone of the country since 1929 was also affected by the global food crisis at that time (Briegel 2012). Since then, all fields related to food security and increased self-sufficiency have been prioritised as key aims of its economic plans, and this concern is also a key part of the national long-term development plan of Brunei 2035 Vision as well as a pillar of the 10th Brunei National Development Plan (10NDP).

Besides being increasingly agricultural self-sufficient, Brunei Darussalam has also been working hard to make the Brunei Halal Brand become globally recognised by establishing the Halal certificate-programme to standardise its Halal food (Asa 2019). The country has significantly developed its domestic production to meet daily consumption with a strong commitment and well planned. Yet, some beverage products were still imported due to limited agricultural labour force, which was only around 0.6% of the total population, and limited land use (Fina Astriana, Agustha Lumban Tobing, Alexander C. Chandra 2017).

To increase agriculture labour force and agricultural production, the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources (MIPR), the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food (DAA), has established various strategies such as:

1. Rice Farmer Field School in 2010 to build capacity for farmers.
2. The Agricultural and Agri-food Incentive Scheme (SIPA) provides 50% subsidies on agricultural inputs such as paddy seeds, fertilisers, food packaging material, and chemical insecticides.
3. SIPA's Paddy Guarantee Price Purchasing Scheme to buy rice from local producers at a set price higher than the market price with the condition of planting recommended rice varieties by the DAA (Fuziah Binti Haji Hamdan, Hajah Aidah Binti Haji Mohd Hanifah, H.M. Thippeswamy 2016).

To broaden the agricultural sector in the longer term, the MIPR has developed irrigation systems, set up cooperation with other countries in agricultural research fields, and planned increasing paddy fields and land for livestock farming. As a result, the gross output value of the agriculture and agri-food sector from 2016 to 2020 increased by 14.1% (B\$412.74 million in 2016 to B\$470.86 million in 2020), which is 57% from the livestock industry, followed by 32% from agri-food industry, and about 11% from crop industry) (MPRT 2021).

CAMBODIA

TECHO 100 Villages Project

According to the World Bank, Cambodia sustained its economic growth at an average rate of 7.7% for over two decades, between 1998–2019, through garment exports and tourism (The World Bank 2021). Furthermore, in 20 years of nation-building after regaining peace and political stability, Cambodia has reached the stage of welcoming and supporting all initiatives that promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the region, which are mutually beneficial and complementary (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Cambodia 2021). The country is also ready to implement its new initiative for village development, the so-called “TECHO 100 Village Project”. Lessons learnt from this initiative will be shared with the Asian region.

According to the concept note of the TECHO 100 Village Project, the Project is a new initiative of village development model, initiated by the Royal Government of Cambodia. The model is to stimulate rural development by “cultivating potential wealth found in the abundant land and growing diamonds from cultural assets of the Kingdom”. This project is tailor-made to suit the development potential of individual villages by using the Place-Based People-Centred (PBPC) rural development approach, utilising culture and the TECHO concepts as the guiding principle for the development model.

PBPC rural development approach refers to the development that mobilisation and utilisation of the potential of local resources, including natural and human capitals, are fundamental, emphasising people interest and development of growth centres (Keo 2020).

The concept of TECHO 100 Village Project consists of 5 pillars, namely (1) Technology, (2) Education, (3) Cooperation, (4) Humanity, and (5) Ownership, abbreviated as “TECHO”. It aims at enhancing rural community development through innovative, integrated grassroots leadership across the 25 provinces in Cambodia under a multi-stakeholder engagement framework and public-private-people partnership (4P) programme. Through its unique formulation of combining culture with economic potentials of each village, the project has the ambition to contribute to the realisation of Cambodia long-term macroeconomic targets to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050, emphasising socio-economic development, inclusiveness, equity, resilience, and sustainability.

The project is strongly supported by the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) as its core ideology. It was officially inscribed in the Seam Reap Declaration at the launch of the Asian Cultural Council in Siem Reap, Kingdom of Cambodia, on 15 January 2019.

On 23 February 2021, the Royal Government of Cambodia established the “Inter-ministerial Committee for Project Coordination and Implementation of TECHO 100 Village Project”, consisting of 22 members.

In addition, the Civil Society Alliance Forum (CASF) of the Council of Ministers is assigned as project secretariat responsible for stakeholder engagement facilitation and administrative arrangements. In addition, the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) is assigned as a project advisor playing leading roles in data collection and management, project formulation, monitoring and evaluation, and stakeholder engagement (The RGC 2021).

INDONESIA

Innovation for Prominent and Sustainable Village (see Pius Sugeng Prasetyo et al. 2017)

For the last few decades, the Indonesian government has implemented several policies and allocated funds for villages in the country to develop and improve the living standard of people in rural areas. All government levels have been working hard on applying the ideas and innovative plans to improve the living condition and welfare of poor villagers. As a result, the government has created innovative governance to establish “Prominent and Sustainable Villages” on a community basis. This innovation has expanded its orientation to wider engagements with actors in the governmental system in providing ideas and initiatives.

This innovation project is based on the development of village communities to produce “Prominent and Sustainable villages” such as sustainable food security, education, health, local businesses, and renewable energy, which have been a huge struggle for people in rural areas. Moreover, it also focuses on technology utilisation to overcome various social problems. The government uses new technology innovations to develop villages with five main orientations: 1). food security and production of food commodities to fulfil people’s needs and provide nutrition adequacy in the village; 2). a democratic engagement which includes the society, needs to ensure the sustainability of development and increase the role of civil society, organisations and others participate; 3). health and welfare to improve people’s health and sanitation and deal with many obstacles in their living, infrastructure, capabilities, and economy for better living standards; 4). the government’s education sector provides free public education with the information and knowledge accessible and digitalisation to all children to improve their skills and ability in the community; and 5). the local business that aims to improve the community’s economic interest and create value-added and competitive goods and services produced by the local community, including the potential of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and family businesses.

Meanwhile, the “Prominent and Sustainable Village” also helps to engage with socio-economic aspects and support the village community’s economic sustainability and production activities, especially in the agricultural sector. For example, Sukalaksana village is suitable for vegetable farming for agricultural economic development activities. Due to the practices of new technology innovation, The Prominent and Sustainable village program has shown a growth in production and economic sustainability.

It leads to an increase in the economic aspects of the village community, while strengthening food security, which is the basic pillar of the innovative goal. In addition, the successful application of agriculture in these villages will continue to expand the innovation to other villages, which will also help increase villagers' income and expand the agriculture quality and quantity of production in the market.

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)²

Lao is a less developed country, but it has made remarkable progress in poverty reduction. The poverty rate of Lao dropped from 46% in 1992 to 23% in 2015 (UNDP 2018). One of the factors contributing to reducing its poverty rate could be a Community-Driven Development (CDD) approach, the so-called Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF). The model was established in 2002 to align it with the Government of the Lao PDR's decentralisation policy and poverty reduction targets, which aim at supporting and establishing sustainable local capacity, procedures, and systems. The PRF 2008–2015 provided support to sub-projects, such as transport access, community electricity supply, healthcare facilities, domestic water system, education, agricultural infrastructure, and public infrastructure. The project was initiated in 2008–2011. Despite its achievement, the government has taken another step to collaborate with the development partners, for example, the World Bank and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), to expand the second phase (2011–2015). In addition, the PRF has transformed from an approach for poverty alleviation. To receive financial support, the community must assess their own community priority needs and organise the proposal.

To achieve its objectives, the PRF transformed itself to be a government institution in 2012 and was involved by many line ministries, such as ministries of finance, planning, and investing, agriculture and forestry, education and sport, public health, labour and social welfare, industry and commerce, and energy and mining. Together with the Lao Front for National Construction, the Lao Women's Union, Lao Youth Executive Committee and Civil Societies, they manage, lead, and evaluate the project.

MALAYSIA

The 21st Century Village Program (21CV) (PEMANDU 2014)

Since Malaysia became independent in 1957, rural development has been the major concern of the government for economic growth, as the rural economy sector depends largely on agriculture (Fatimah Mohd, Arshad, Mad Nasir Shamsudin, and Alias Ramdam 1997).

²See *Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) of Lao 2018*.

However, from 2011 onwards, the country's economy has relied more on industrial and services-oriented sectors than on agriculture, which has caused high rural migration to urban areas. This has caused a decline in the percentage of the agriculture sector's contribution to GDP. To address this rural-urban disparity, the government has taken another step to improve the socio-economic status of the rural community by introducing an initiative of rural development, namely the 21st Century Village (21CV). The 21CV was introduced to the Government Transformation Program (GTP) 2.0 and launched in 2013.

The 21CV was established to create job opportunities and wealth for rural communities. The initiative itself aims to promote people-private partnership (PPP) in implementing its three core programmes. The programmes have been implemented under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development. Youth in rural areas is the main target for the programmes to encourage them to work and start businesses in their villages.

The 21CV concept has been conducted through three major programmes, namely 1). Desa Lestari Programme is a community-based participatory approach that empowers village co-operatives as economic development agencies at the grassroots level; 2) The Large-scale Fruit and Vegetable Farming Programme is to promote self-sufficient agri-food by encouraging the production of six high value non-seasonal tropical fruits and three high-value high-land vegetables; 3) Rural Business Challenge (RBC) is to promote youth to participate in the business competition by proposing viable business plans for either new or existing businesses in rural areas.

Through the initiative programmes, the Delsa Lestari programme has applied various projects such as the production of Madu Kelulut, homestay, and freshwater fish farming in 57 villages. The programme is expected to expand to more villages to implement homestay, mushroom cultivation, and rental farm machinery based on the cooperative model. Regarding the Large-Scale Fruit and Vegetable Farming Programme, three farms were established and operated by the private sector on Papaya and Pineapple by the end of 2014. For the RBC programme, the government has organised the competition, and more than 1,500 participants have participated. Along with that, the government has introduced the competition strategy with a total budget of RM43.3 million to be disbursed to 74 winners so that they could use it to implement their proposals. Besides, to encourage youth to implement their business proposals, Government Linked Companies (GLCs) policy was introduced to provide financial or in-kind assistance to run the RBC programme and guide successful candidates in pursuing their business models.

The 21st Century Village Program (21CV) (PEMANDU 2014)

The New Villages Action Plan was initiated in 2007 under a programme called "Gerakan Daya Wawasan" (Visionary Capability Movement) with a bottom-up approach.

²GTP is an effort of the Malaysian government in transforming the country.

The programme was introduced to help villages design their village development plan, emphasising active involvement and participation of village communities in planning and implementing projects to improve their wellbeing. The programme was officially launched as a new phase of rural planning by the Malaysian prime minister in 2009.

The programme's initiatives involved capacity building of rural leadership such as Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK) in planning, implementing, and managing projects by the Federal Government, Institute for Rural Advancement (INFRA). As for the earlier phase of the training programme, which has been conducted at the INFRA campus for several years, was found to be ineffective due to its too much focus on unrealistic theories and low participation from key participants, among other shortcomings. Thus, the training programme was shifted to a new approach of learning by doing, in which the training programme was conducted at each village where various stakeholders such as JKKK, entrepreneurs, farmers, women, youth, NGOs, and teachers were actively involved.

There are three main partners involved in the initial project collaboration:

1. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), responsible for preparing a module, advice on the procedure for plan-making and facilitating some workshop sessions.
2. Institute for Rural Advancement (INFRA), responsible for organising the meeting, facilitating the workshop sessions, providing logistic support, assisting the workshop process, and preparing the documentation after the workshop.
3. Communities to participate in brainstorming, planning, and implementing the plan. As a result, for the first phase, by the end of 2009, 22 projects arising from the village action plans from 14 villages out of 17 villages had received funding from the federal government with a total amount of US\$746,000 and an averaged amount of US\$3,392 per project.

Experiences from the initial projects for village action plans initiated by the communities themselves have become major milestones toward sustainable development and improvement of the wellbeing of Malaysia's rural communities.

MYANMAR

Local Development Funds (LDFs)

As approximately 70% of the total population need agriculture products, the government, through national strategic plans and policy making, have focused on developing agriculture as the country's main economic sector. However, according to the World Bank report, food insecurity in Myanmar is a problem that accounts for about 25% of households living under the line of official poverty (The World Bank 2019).

In 2011, the government established the Local Development Funds (LDFs) as a community-driven project to promote a more people-centred and bottom-up approach by empowering the community to involve in the project development cycle, such as identifying the needs of its community and project design that aligns with their implementing ability. The projects are supported by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank. They are implemented by the communities with the quality controlled by Village Tract Development Support Committee (VTDSC) and monitored by Township Development Support Committee (TDSC) under the Township Development Implementation Committee (TDIC).

The LDFs in Myanmar can serve as a viable funding vehicle for community development projects and open the way for more major types of fiscal decentralisation and broader devolution of powers if planned and managed effectively. The LDFs have shown to be more interconnected between government and communities in terms of using funds. The LDFs, according to all government officials and MPs, can disburse targeted funds at the community level. Both methods and criteria for project selection, tendering, execution, and monitoring should be specified in the documents (Bart Robertson 2015).

THE PHILIPPINES

Adaptation and Mitigation Initiatives in Agriculture (AMIA)

Climate change remains the key issue for the agricultural sector worldwide, also affecting the fishing nation. Likewise, geographically, the Philippines is known as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world with adverse effects of climate change, making it the 5th ranked in the long-term global Climate Risks Index (CRI) among the ten most-affected countries from 1998 to 2017 (David Eckstein, Marie-Lena Hutfils and Maik Wings 2018).

The Philippines mainly depends on agriculture as a core contribution to its national economy. Aquaculture industry has covered the employment rate of 14% of the country's total population, with the fisheries sector alone employing over 1.6 million people across the country and contributing approximately 1.5% to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Philippines in 2015 (Napoleon Salvador, J. Lamarca 2017).

In response to climate-related risks that have affected the country's economy and threatened the lives of people, the government has mainstreamed Climate Change into policy formulations mandated in the memorandum of the Department of Agriculture (DA)'s programmes, plans, and budgets, in which the Adaptation and Mitigation Innovative in Agriculture (AMIA) was designed as the flagship programme of Climate Change (GOVPH n.d.).

The AMIA programme has four main strategic objectives intended to develop the AMIA village model across the country where all communities are resilient and prosperous in agriculture and fisheries livelihoods. The programme was designed and categorised into 3 phases of implementation frameworks, defined as AMIA Phase 1, AMIA Phase 2 and AMIA Phase 3.

AMIA Phase 1, started in 2014–2015, aimed at capacity building of the DA’s key officials in enabling an environment to mainstream climate change. AMIA Phase 2 is divided into AMIA 2, AMIA 2+ and AMIA 2++. It started in 2016–2018 and focused on building climate-resilient agri-fisheries livelihoods and communities by initiating the Climate Risk Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) and identifying the CRVA areas. AMIA Phase 3 has started since 2018, and it aims at “Out-Scaling and Sustaining Climate Resilient Agriculture and Fisheries communities across the country”.

According to the Department of Agriculture-System Wide Climate Change Office, as of December 2017, 10 AMIA village sites covering 26 barangays out of 10 provinces had been established.

THAILAND

The village broadband internet (Net Pracharat) project (ITU 2019)

The village broadband internet or Net Pracharat Project is the Thai flagship digital infrastructure development project developed by the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) in collaborations with several agencies: Telephone of Thailand Public Company Limited (TOT), Office of The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commissions (NBTC), Metropolitan Electricity Agency (MEA), Provincial Electricity Agency (PEA), Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (NFE), Ministry of Interior (MOI), and National Statistical Office (NSO). The project was established to expand the high-speed internet network to reach all villages in Thailand at an affordable price, bridge the digital divide, and build an inclusive and sustainable connected society. The project target area focuses on rural areas, where access to high-speed internet services is not yet available. There are about 24,700 villages in total.

In 2017, MDES and TOT completed the installation of the fiber cable network to 24,700 target villages. In addition, the government has provided free access to public wi-fi hotspots at the speed of 30/10 Mbps. As a result, in 2019, there were 5.4 million users registered to access the Net Pracharat Wi-Fi, and newly registered users have increased around 20,000–30,000 every month.

To promote the awareness of this new technology, MDES has created a leading group of Net Pracharat trainers to provide training on internet fundamentals (Basic Use of Internet) to officers from the non-formal and informal education sectors, as the leading group will allocate this knowledge to the community leaders. In line with that, the MDES has also generated internet applications for career building and income supplements.

Meanwhile, the project has also organised Net Pracharat Volunteer Network and implemented its application to create a channel for communication between the government and people. The volunteer villagers were recruited from the 24,700 target villages and received training from November 2018 to February 2019.

With the Net Pracharat Project, the citizens can equally access useful information and services such as education, public health, and government services, which could improve quality of life. Besides, it helps increase business opportunities for people through E-Commerce, which will generate employment, provide skills, increase income in local communities, and improve their living standards. As a result, the Net Pracharat Project of Thailand has been presented as a successful showcase at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

VIETNAM

National Target Programs for New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) (The World Bank 2017)

New Rural development implemented under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam plays a crucial role as the primary mechanism for the Vietnamese Government to address development challenges and narrow the disparities between rural and urban areas, focusing on disadvantaged areas with high proportions of ethnic minorities.

Vietnam's government initiated the National Target Programs on New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) in 2010. The programme aims to be implemented across the 63 provinces of Vietnam. The NTP-NRD established 19 development indicators—identified across various sectors and social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects. It aims to improve the well-being across various sectors that each targeted commune should achieve the criteria and not leave even a single indicator. This bottom-up community approach requires each commune to prepare the community needs assessment to reflect 19 development indicators and conduct prior needs development plans for their community to receive financial support.

The NTP-NRD has general objectives to acquire relevant social and economic infrastructure; to achieve agro-industry and services sector which link rural-urban; and to achieve inclusive growth. To achieve its objectives, the NTP-NRD has implemented 11 components in the 63 provinces, including 1) new rural development master plan; 2) social-economic infrastructure development; 3) production development and rural economic structural transformation; 4) social security; 5) development of education in rural areas; 6) development of grass-roots health facilities; 7) improving cultural life; 8) improving rural hygiene and environment; 9) improving quality and roles of political organisations; 10) robust national defence and security, social order and safety in rural areas; and 11) enhancing capacity for NRD implementation and M&E.

During the implementation period of 2011–2015, the programme achieved remarkable progress of upgrading services and infrastructure of rural communities, but not much on the rural income, productivity, and value-added dimensions (The World Bank 2017).

Therefore, with the opportunity to further implement the programme, Vietnam's government collaborated with development partners, IFAD, the World Bank, UNIDO, and other development agencies to expand its second phase (2016–2020). This has made the programme become a rural development rolling plan. As of this second phase, a success of phase I, the NTP-NRD focused on four objectives: 1). 50% of communes to meet NRD standards; 2). communes, on average, to meet 15 out of 19 NRD criteria, and no commune to achieve less than five criteria; 3). basic production and quality of life requirements to be achieved for rural citizens in areas such as transportation, power supply and domestic water, schools, and health stations; and (4) income levels to increase by at least 1.8 times compared with 2015.

ASEAN'S NETWORK OF INNOVATIVE VILLAGES INITIATIVE

For the last few decades, the ASEAN Community has been doing well toward the common interest of the regional bloc. When it comes to rural innovative development initiatives, we found that AMS are working hard to develop their individual countries. Mostly, those initiatives are well established and adopted. Yet, they are generally limited to the national boundary and have not been widely shared at the regional level. Consequently, many opportunities are missed. First, there is limited learning and sharing of experiences from one country to another, in which good lessons can be learnt, while pitfalls can be avoided. Second, there is still a limited opportunity for transferring technology, knowledge, and know-how, which may help address the problems or develop the local economy and local livelihoods in certain villages. Third, meaningful village cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity, one of the key missions of ASEAN Community building, are missed. Finally, collaborations between ASEAN national and sub-national government agencies, villagers, the private sector, academic institutions, donors, and Non-Government Organisations for village development are not maximised.

In response to the concerns, innovative rural development approaches that can be learned from all the AMS should be widely shared. Hence, a platform of ASEAN's Network of Innovative Villages shall be established with clear objectives as the following:

- Create a digital platform for coordinating members and stakeholders of ASEAN's network of innovative villages. This platform will serve as a central point for communication between ASEAN Village Network members, national and sub-national government officers, and stakeholders for exchanging ideas and sharing lessons learnt on innovative village development. This central platform should be supported by national focal points, which can make two-way communications from villagers in native languages to ASEAN members and send messages from ASEAN members to the villagers.

- Conduct annual events for ASEAN village study visits. The purpose of the visit is to provide direct exposure and hands-on practical experiences of good model villages to all the network members. The members can then transfer knowledge and experiences gained for the improvement of their respective village development. In addition, physical interactions during the study visit provide a good opportunity for meaningful village cultural exchanges, building friendship and networking among ASEAN members' villages. The study visits can be rotated among ASEAN countries. The delegates may comprise village leaders, national and sub-national government officers, the private sector, research institutions, and other stakeholders.
- Provide capacity building programmes. This training should be interactive and closely relevant to local development to provide opportunities for villagers to interact and share their experiences and expertise. Youth and women should be encouraged to attend the training. In addition, specific technical skills, including inclusive leadership, investment planning, project formulation and implementation, digital application, drone use, and technological application for village development and handicraft making, among others, should be provided.
- Establish a mechanism for promoting public-private-people and multi-stakeholder partnership. Since state resources are generally inadequate, it is important to promote private investment in village development. The investment may be in, but not limited to, local human resource development, research and development, increased agricultural productivity, smart farming and water conservation technologies, and others. In addition, other stakeholders, namely university and research institutions, donor agencies, and Non-Government Organisations, can work closely with villagers in areas of their interests for added value to the villages.
- Establish a mechanism for research and publication. A mechanism for recording and documenting village profiles, best practices, and pitfalls of the innovative village development should be established. These documents are useful for sharing among ASEAN members and development partners.

As the Chair of ASEAN in 2022, Cambodia is mandated to take an active role in promoting the interest and well-being of people in ASEAN countries. Cambodia needs to maintain peace and stability to sustain regional prosperity and continue to promote global governance to strengthen the multilateral system, combat climate change, and support post-pandemic economic recovery. Meanwhile, promoting the ASEAN's Network of Innovative Villages Initiative should be one of the priorities mentioned above.

CONCLUSION

Rural areas in Southeast Asia are important, as they provide rich and diverse natural resource supplies sustaining livelihoods and creating opportunities for rural social progress. Therefore, mobilising resources and identifying the potentials of rural areas by revitalising the diverse opportunities and potentials are key to reducing rural-urban or transnational migrations, while increasing rural social networks and opportunities for local livelihood and economic development.

Each member of the AMS has made great efforts in initiating innovative development models to revitalise villages for inclusive, sustainable, and competitive local economies. Yet, all those innovative approaches have not been widely shared at the regional level. Consequently, numerous opportunities are missed. First, there is limited learning and sharing of experiences from one country to another, in which good lessons can be learnt, while pitfalls can be avoided. Secondly, there is limited opportunity for transferring technology, knowledge, and know-how, which may help address the problems or develop the local economy and local livelihoods in certain villages. Third, meaningful village cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity, one of the key missions of ASEAN Community building, are missed. Finally, the collaborations between ASEAN national and sub-national government agencies, villagers, private sectors, academic institutions, donors, and Non-Government Organisations for village development are not maximised.

To promote the revitalisation of the roles of rural villages in supporting national development, urban growth, poverty alleviation, employment, food security, cultural conservation and development, tourism development, and social and climate resilience, and to respond to the concept of the ASEAN Connectivity, the establishment of the “ASEAN’s Network of Innovative Villages” should be taken into serious consideration.

The “ASEAN’s Network of Innovative Villages” will serve as various useful platforms. First, it creates a digital platform for learning and sharing of both best practices and pitfalls in rural development. Second, it showcases good models of innovative village development through study visits. Third, it promotes the roles of local people, particularly youth and women, in innovative village development through capacity building. Fourth, it promotes public-private-people partnership and multi-stakeholder engagements for innovative village development. Finally, it provides opportunities for village cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity through physical interactions. The AMS, including Cambodia as the Chair of ASEAN in 2022, should jointly promote the implementation of the above platforms of the ASEAN’s Network of Innovative Villages to achieve more inclusive development and prosperity for people in ASEAN.

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SPECIAL ASEAN SUMMIT ON COVID-19

14 April 2020



CHAPTER 11

ASEAN Digital Transformation

Ouch Richard

INTRODUCTION

Cambodia's 2022 ASEAN Chairmanship takes place during a critical period as the country and its fellow member states continue to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. Cambodia must be ready to capitalise on its position as the Chair to help drive the pandemic out of the region and the region towards recovery and prosperity. Whether 2022 will be a year of recovery or continued fighting against the pandemic is difficult to gauge as individual member states have different experiences and challenges. Nevertheless, a theme shared across the region is how digital transformation has become integral in all facets of governance and society amidst the pandemic.

Traditional avenues of business and governance are going through drastic changes as social distancing measures or lockdowns are being imposed to help combat the virus outbreaks. By using various digital indicators, such as e-commerce and internet usage, one finds that governments, companies, and people are now turning towards digital services and platforms to support their daily needs, from ordering groceries online and assembling key policymakers in online meetings to collaborating on projects using digital platforms. These new trends have resulted in an unprecedented growth of digital transformation across ASEAN.

These trends present both opportunities and challenges for the 2022 ASEAN Chair. One example is the growth of smartphones as a multifaceted tool across all the member states to help support recovery and mitigation efforts, allowing for contact tracing, managing vaccination appointments, location tracking, and periodic check-ins with those in quarantine. However, the usage of smartphones has also brought in questions of privacy and civil rights issues. This is just one of the many challenges governments face, as they are limited by cultural norms, institutional arrangements, and budgets. Moreover, reaching a common agreement on core issues, particularly on freedom of information, will be extremely difficult as each member state must balance its interests and national security. Nevertheless, collaboration should still be promoted despite the difficulty in reaching common ground.

Another opportunity lies within e-commerce where recent trends in the market have blown up and are likely to remain permanent. As a majority of the population is increasingly becoming connected to the internet, they are also increasing their participation in digital platforms, especially as the pandemic is forcing both businesses and customers to go into lockdowns or social distancing. As e-commerce is blossoming in ASEAN, challenges of consumer/company protection, network infrastructure, and the disparity in digital participation among member states will come into play.

This chapter starts with defining digital transformation, drawing from diverse sources of educational and policymaking fields. The second section provides an overview of the current state of digital transformation in ASEAN, highlighting recent trends and their impacts on digital services and adoption in the region, especially in mitigating the ramifications of the pandemic.

It is followed by a section on policy recommendations for the Cambodian Chair. These will include capitalising on the opportunity of mobile data and its usage for combatting the pandemic, using ASEAN as a platform for boosting digital literacy across the member states through education, and enacting frameworks to safeguard the very data used to help combat the pandemic and other crises.

DEFINITION OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The definition of digital transformation is broad yet frequently used on national agendas and in public and private organisations. As described by EDUCAUSE consultants and directors, digital transformation is “a series of deep and coordinated culture, workforce, and technology shifts that enable new educational and operating models and transform an institution’s operations, strategic directions, and value proposition” (Brown et al. 2021).

For this chapter, digital transformation is but the result of a two-step process. The first step is digitisation, where analogue or physical forms are converted to digital. The second is digitalisation, where digital technologies and information are used to transform institutional operations. Therefore, it is vital to focus on digitisation and digitalisation to form a strong foundation for digital transformation (Rizvi 2019). For example, the digitisation process for a public land registry would require essential documents, such as titles, receipts, and proof of ownership, to be converted into a digital format. Then, digitalisation would involve the creation of a database where the digitised versions of the physical documents can be stored and accessed. Lastly, the digital transformation would come through the form of new, digital processes within the operational cycle, such as the development of an online platform to register or manage land or the collaboration between the land registry department and the tax department to connect their databases so that landowners can manage their land through the platform, as well as pay their taxes.

Much of the research for this chapter was gathered from primary sources, such as reports from data aggregates and consultancy/research groups. These groups include Google, Statista, Bain & Company, and We Are Social. Secondary data of analyses by authors of different backgrounds are also used to garner different perspectives on the current state of ASEAN and digital transformation. Finally, the combined analyses and data reports are used to illustrate ASEAN’s current digital landscape and provide suggestions on how Cambodia as the Chair can utilise its position to support regional digital transformation to build a prosperous and resilient region, which can mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, while recovering from it fast and robust.

ASEAN E-COMMERCE LANDSCAPE

Today, the pandemic has jumpstarted the digitisation and digitalisation processes for many ASEAN Member States, exposing many to the online processes of registering for a vaccine appointment, using GPS-based mapping applications on their smartphones to find out which areas of a city are under which level of lockdown, or the influx of customers and businesses who are using delivery-apps to supplement their daily needs and operations. According to a 2020 report by Google, which covers the internet economies of Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, the total number of internet users has risen dramatically in recent years, compared to the pre-COVID growth. For example, from 2019 to 2020, the total number of new users increased by 40 million, compared to 100 million over four years from 2015 to 2019. Currently, it is reported that 70% of the region's population is connected (Google et al. 2020, 12).

Smartphones have continued to be the most accessible and affordable digital device for the region, streamlining digitisation and digitalisation processes in online platforms and allowing consumers to use digital services. A 2021 report on the global digital landscape found South East Asia to be one of the most mobile-connected regions in the world, with a staggering 132% of mobile connections compared to the total population (DataReportal 2021, 192). With such a large user base, it is no surprise that e-commerce, specifically mobile e-commerce, is growing in the region. According to economist Melissa Ho, "E-commerce has become an effective channel for companies, including Hong Kong SMEs and exporters, to reach local consumers or grow their existing footprint in ASEAN markets" (Ho 2021).

This trend is also present in the region's statistics of e-commerce, with one in three new users becoming digital consumers due to distancing and lockdown regulations (Google et al. 2020, 15). A survey conducted by Kantar found that 9 out of 10 of these new consumers were also planning to continue using digital services in the future, reflecting a mindset change among those who had not used digital services before, despite it being available in the past (Google et al. 2020, 18).

In terms of wealth, despite the negative impacts of the pandemic, the e-commerce industry is blossoming as the "value of ASEAN's e-commerce has expanded almost six times in just four [years], increasing from US\$9.5 billion in 2016 to US\$54.2 billion in 2020. Spurred by the rise of digital consumers, the sector is set to grow at an annualised rate of 22% and reach US\$146 billion by 2025" (Ho 2021). However, despite this strong growth, there is still more opportunity to capitalise on for the region to grow further.

EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN ASEAN

These trends signify a movement towards digital platforms and services to meet everyday needs and a growth spurt in digital transformation, as institutions go digital to stay in operation. One area that has been greatly impacted and has seen drastic transformation is education, especially within the ASEAN region. Schools with potentially hundreds to thousands of students can serve as dangerous hotspots for COVID-19 infections, prompting many to shut down altogether. Yet, the shutdowns have provided an opportunity for ASEAN Member States' education systems to jumpstart or develop their digital platforms, enabling many to strengthen and reform their educational systems.

An example can be seen in Cambodia itself, where the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS) established the Centre for Digital and Distance Learning in 2020 (Kanika 2020). With the public-private partnership, the government has cooperated with the private sector and other international organisations such as the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to develop and enhance distance learning. As described by Kimkong Heng:

It has produced hundreds, if not thousands, of video lessons that are being broadcast on TV and social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia, MoEYS recently launched an e-learning app called MoEYS E-Learning, to support online learning during the pandemic. Heng 2021)

Digital transformation occurs within the educational system as distance learning encourages schools to adopt new educational and operating models.

Despite these examples of digital transformation within the educational system, the digital divide remains an ever-present issue as poorer or rural students face difficulty in receiving the same education through distance learning. While mobile connections are on the rise, many are still new to the concept of using digital platforms and online resources as tools for learning. Additionally, there is still a major lack of infrastructure and resources for students to gain digital literacy, defined as the process of a person to understand, utilise, and benefit from new digital technologies. A survey conducted by Marc Voelker for UNICEF asked over 8,000 students across the ASEAN region various questions, including what challenges they faced in gaining digital literacy. The number one challenge was access to digital devices, with 32% of the respondents citing it as an issue. Second, around 25% of the respondents cited a lack of quality and quantity of digital training provided by their schools. Lastly, 14.6% noted that they were not connected online (Voelker 2021, 18). In summary, the students requested for “strengthening their digital literacy at school. [T]hey want more time to practice their digital skills at all grades, better access to technological devices and ICT infrastructure, more qualified teachers, and higher awareness of this issue among parents, teachers, and students” (Voelker 2021, 21).

Furthermore, the 2020 Global Risks Perception Survey (GRPS) found that respondents have “rated ‘digital inequality’ both as a critical threat to the world over the next two years and the seventh most likely long-term risk” (WEF 2021, 30). Thus, tackling the digital divide gives beneficial returns that encompass all aspects of digital transformation, such as improving the user base and participation, building digital services accessible and beneficial, and most importantly, narrowing the economic and social inequality gap.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION DURING RECOVERY AND MITIGATION EFFORTS

To combat the pandemic and prevent drastic outbreaks, control strategies such as lockdowns and social restrictions have been implemented to reduce the disease’s spreading through social contacts. However, they must be balanced to account for social and economic loss. Digital transformation plays an integral role in this process, providing a way for many to continue their lives without the risk of spreading the disease. The main driver of digital transformation in this context is smartphone and mobile connectivity, enabling people to stay connected and use services and entertainment and helping policymakers and researchers combat the pandemic by providing valuable data. The prominence of mobile connectivity further amplifies its significance in the ASEAN region and how human movement is directly related to the spread of infectious diseases. In 2016, a journal article hypothesised that mobile phone data had the potential to “quantify human travel and directly relate these population dynamics to understand infectious diseases” (Wesolowski et al. 2016, S419). Today, the COVID-19 pandemic, among other disease outbreaks, has seen this hypothesis come true as a team of epidemiologists has “previously used aggregated and anonymised geolocation information from passively collected mobile phone data to successfully inform and model the spatial and temporal dynamics of endemic and emerging infectious diseases, including malaria, cholera, measles, dengue, and Ebola” (Grantz et al. 2020, 2).

For the current pandemic, aggregated mobile data is used to help provide data towards key policy decisions in control strategies, specifically when and where to implement them. Data collected and methods include using call data, GPS location, Bluetooth, and Opt-in application data. These datasets are used to assess population mobility, cluster behaviour (where multiple cases follow the same route and location), do contact tracing (whether a smartphone user has been in close contact with an infected person), and predict the spread of an outbreak by projecting disease risk (Grantz et al. 2020, 6). Within the ASEAN region, a shared practice among member states is using applications designed to facilitate contact tracing, vaccine registration, and other related processes. For example, Cambodia has the KhmerVacc system, used to help manage the registration process for vaccines (Ngo 2021); Laos has LaoKYC (“Lao PDR” 2020); Vietnam has Bluezone (Kim 2020); and Thailand has Mor Chana (Hicks 2020). The applications are used for contact tracing purposes, utilising a mix of QR code scans and Bluetooth detection. However, each application has come under similar criticism for privacy issues.

This is also a significant issue for ASEAN, as not all member states are well equipped to deal with the security and privacy challenges while the digital transformation has been advancing so rapidly. The privacy issue, in this context, originates from the sheer amount of personal data that a smartphone can provide:

Various forms of identifiable personal information are generated when using mobile phones, including names, identification numbers, fine spatial and temporal data on where the device was used, other users' identification numbers whose Bluetooth may have detected, and personal details that might be entered into an app. (Grantz et al. 2020, 4)

These same issues are also problematic for those behind the digital divide. Lack of understanding about the data they input into their phones or release to digital platforms may have serious ramifications in the forms of data leaks and exploitation. Those behind them are also sometimes reluctant to participate in these applications in the first place, hindering the effectiveness of contact tracing apps. Additionally, data from phones are susceptible to bias as “children and the elderly are frequently under-represented in mobile phone data, and inferences derived from mobile phone users may not be [generalisable] to these populations” (Ibid.).

POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR CAMBODIA'S CHAIRMANSHIP: SUPPORTING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Capitalising on the growth of digital transformation across the region also requires tackling a plethora of challenges. These challenges include the digital divide within the country and between countries in the region, legislation that can keep up with the breakneck speeds at which digital transformation is growing, and data governance. These issues will no doubt prove to be difficult if the pandemic continues into the coming years.

Fighting the Digital Divide

Though the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 (ADM2025) states that measures to tackle digital inclusion and the digital divide should be “tailored to the national situation, and are—in our view—best designed and applied by national governments and in-country organisations” (ASEAN 2021, 120), ASEAN can still play a role in supporting member states against the digital divide. Digital literacy amongst students is paramount to ensure a solid base for digital transformation to grow sustainably. By partnering with national organisations, ASEAN can set up exchange programmes with teachers or a centralised ICT resource centre/database that can provide teachers, students, and parents with basic digital literacy.

It would be especially helpful for students, who wish to pursue digital literacy but are unable to reach the resources needed, as Heng stated in his recommendations for Cambodia to pursue digital literacy further: “Making video lessons available online or on television offers students the opportunity to engage in self-study and self-directed learning. This is essential for [promoting] learner autonomy and independent learning, especially in the Cambodian context where students remain heavily dependent on their teachers” (Heng 2021).

Studies may also be commissioned to tackle the challenges that ASEAN students and teachers have faced, such as the lack of digital learning and infrastructure training. Any such initiative or study can be done in collaboration with UNICEF, which has agreed to renew its Framework Agreement of Cooperation (FAC) and “agreed in principle to a joint statement which expresses their agreement of working towards the stronger development of digital literacy skills among their youth populations” (Voelker 2021).

Legislation

Legislations and regulations centred around digital transformation are also a key area to focus on. ASEAN Member States have recently formulated and are now enforcing laws centred around areas of consumer protection, such as Cambodia’s ‘Law on Electronic Commerce and Law on Consumer Protection’. With a basic framework of key legislation, the member states should take the opportunity to expand and share best practices and ideas using ASEAN as a platform. Privacy is an increasingly important topic as concerns have been raised about the alleged intrusive nature of contact tracing applications. Privacy regulations, such as the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), may serve as an example to find a balance between privacy and the need to use data to combat the pandemic, as it:

offers exceptions for the use of non-anonymous data that may be needed for other response efforts. For example, opt-in applications for contact tracing may seek [the] consent of the data subject to collect and analyse identifiable data, though the ability to scale opt-in approaches to a wide enough population and to maintain user compliance and participation remains unclear. (Grantz et al. 2020, 4)

Data governance

Lastly, supporting the fight against the digital divide also requires good data. It provides evidence and back hypotheses for policymaking and agreements, especially for the ASEAN Chair. Data homogenisation and collection would benefit all ASEAN states, enabling more streamlined, in-depth analysis to be conducted. However, a major challenge for the ASEAN region is the consolidation and gathering of data. For example, the sources of data used in this chapter are from private companies and research consultancies. The reason is that their methodology is the same throughout all analyses of ASEAN countries, using the same indicators throughout the years and, for Google, which is one of the largest digital conglomerates in the globe, accessing data that countries themselves may not have.

To address this issue, private-public partnerships are encouraged throughout ASEAN to create effective policies and agreements backed by solid data that is locally sourced. Collaborations in meetings and commissioning studies for ASEAN Member States, top digital conglomerates, and other dialogue partners, such as Korea and Japan, will greatly benefit the homogenisation of data and receive special attention from policymakers. Change in data gathering practices for ASEAN and its member states can include more individual surveys and social media monitoring and analyses. Data such as these can be gathered from various local sources, such as popular Facebook pages and their demographic statistics, or whether users have connected on their mobiles or desktops. It is also vitally important that those left behind from the digital divide are properly represented in these same dialogues. Just as how the UNDP “supported a multi-stakeholder dialogue on the national digital transformation agenda that brought together representatives from the national government, local innovation hubs and private sector partners” (Frankenhauser 2021). ASEAN can provide and support a platform for the region to do the same.

Data must be protected just as much as it needs to be regulated. Data leaks and security threats are becoming more of an issue as digital transformation continues to grow worldwide. The ASEAN region has already encountered high-profile cybersecurity breaches, from the data theft of thousands of HIV-positive patients in Singapore, personal detail leakages of over a million university students and alumni in Malaysia, and the unauthorised access of the data of over 900,000 clients of a Philippine financial service provider (Thomas 2021). With personal security in mind and utilising pre-existing frameworks such as the ASEAN Framework on Personal Data Protection and the Framework on Digital Data Governance, the data acquired by contact tracing can be anonymised as well as processed through organisations that ASEAN and its member states can collaborate with, such as the COVID-19 Mobility Network, a network of “infectious disease epidemiologists at universities around the world working with technology companies to use aggregated mobility data to support the COVID-19 response” (COVID-19 Mobility Data Network 2021). This aggregated data, while avoiding tracking individual movements and behaviour, still holds significant value. Providing a map that “examines the impact of social distancing messaging or policies on population mobility patterns, for example, will help county officials understand what kinds of messaging or policies are most effective” (Buckee et al. 2020, 145).

In conclusion, to ensure a successful Chairmanship that fosters recovery and resilience during the global pandemic requires Cambodia to adopt a multidirectional approach, beginning with laying the foundation for ASEAN to capitalise on the opportunities given by the upward trends of digital transformation, such as growing mobile users and engagement in digital platforms. Next, cooperation with key partners and between member states will be vital in establishing solid digital legislation that protects consumers and companies alike, developing infrastructures such as ICT centres and resources to boost digital literacy among students, and streamlining data collection processes and methodologies to support effective pandemic response strategies and frameworks. Going forward, challenges will also have to be addressed, as privacy issues and cybersecurity threats become more relevant as digital transformation grows.

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CHAPTER 12

A People-Oriented and People-Centred ASEAN Community: A Cambodian Youth Perspective

Lim Chhay

ASEAN IN RETROSPECT AND ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

ASEAN's development, in retrospect, can be categorized into four main phases. The first, from 1967 to 1978, was known as the inception and solidarity forming period. The five founding ASEAN states had reached common ground on the initial inception of the regional grouping. The second, from 1977 to 1999, was known as the membership expansion period, which saw the regional grouping grow from five to ten members by 1999. The third, from 1998 to 2007, was the formalization and vision-setting period. During this time, ASEAN established the Bali Concord II and initiated discussion on the creation of the ASEAN Community in 2003, while also adopting its first-ever legal document, known as the ASEAN Charter, in 2007. This document outlined the fundamental principles for member states, legal status, institutional frameworks and other governance structures of ASEAN.

Looking back, despite some internal disputes, ASEAN has achieved a reputation for maintaining regional peace and stability in Southeast Asia for more than five decades. Amitav Acharya for example has labelled ASEAN “a durable regional grouping in the developing world” (Acharya 2013). Such praise is generous but not without reason.

First, ASEAN managed to convince all of its member states to adopt the organization's core principle, the “ASEAN Way”. The ASEAN Way creates a culture of consultation and consensus diplomacy, norms which have enabled ASEAN to solve many problems peacefully over the last five decades. Amitav Acharya defined this type of diplomacy as “a high degree of discreteness, informality, pragmatism, expediency, consensus building, and non-confrontational bargaining styles, which are often contrasted with the adversarial posturing and legalistic decision-making procedures in Western multilateral negotiations” (Acharya 1997).

Second, the sometimes criticized “non-intervention” policy, which ASEAN has embraced for several decades, has also proven to be useful for the region. The West views it as a fragile policy, slowing the regional integration process and downgrading ASEAN's reputation for solving political-security issues. Nonetheless, ASEAN's rejection of such criticism proves that it can maintain peace and prevent its member states from using force to solve regional conflicts (Mahbubani and Severino 2014). In other words, the practice of non-intervention engages ASEAN's method of quiet diplomacy and the ASEAN Troika. Though it has not been completely effective in solving regional conflicts since ASEAN's inception, the chance of war breaking out in the region is lower as a result.

Third, ASEAN has shown its support for multilateral diplomacy and commitment to building a peaceful, rules-based regional order. This can be seen for example in the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for political-security matters in 1994 and the ASEAN Plus Three to engage East Asian powers, namely Japan, China, and South Korea, in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.

These developments were followed by other initiatives, such as the East Asia Summit in 2005 and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) in Hanoi in 2010, just to mention a few. In all of these meetings, ASEAN discussed various topics with major powers, including regional security, economic and trade cooperation, health, and environmental issues (Ibid.). These achievements highlighted ASEAN's effort towards the realization of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, a people-centred and people-oriented regional community that makes the region more politically cohesive, economically prosperous, and socially harmonious.

But ASEAN Community building goes well beyond the achievements mentioned above. Currently, building a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN Community is one of the main priorities for ASEAN. In fact, during its inception period, ASEAN merely resembled a group of allies coming together to contain the spread of communism in the region. However, in the present context, the group's *raison d'être* has shifted away from such a limited initial purpose. With globalization, free trade and greater economic integration becoming dominant forces in the post-Cold War era, the idea of building an "ASEAN Community" first gained attention in the Bali Concord II in 2003. The concord defined the ASEAN Community as a "Community of Opportunities" for all ASEAN peoples, one which is "closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing [to ensure] durable peace, stability, and shared prosperity in their region" (ASEAN Secretariat 2012).

The ASEAN Community comprises of three main pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Social-Cultural Community (ASCC). ASEAN's efforts in building a greater sense of a common identity reflect the member states' shared objective in enhancing the well-being of ASEAN people through promoting socio-economic development, maintaining regional peace and stability, and enhancing the prosperity of respective societies in Southeast Asia.

The ASEAN Charter elaborates the significance of the "inclusiveness of the community", stating that all sectors of ASEAN societies shall put more effort into regional integration and community building (Seksan Anantasirikiat 2021). For several decades, ASEAN has been seen as a top-down intergovernmental organization. The leaders at the top are the main decision makers regarding the realization of the ASEAN Community. Some argued that this so-called top-down approach might not be effective in promoting a "Community for all". The question therefore is whether such a conceptualization of the ASEAN Community is inclusive enough for its citizens? What are the opportunities and challenges facing ASEAN in building a people-oriented and people-centred community? Do ASEAN leaders ever think of youth participation as an important component in developing such a community? Does youth diplomacy have a crucial role to play in the process of ASEAN Community building?

A PEOPLE-ORIENTED AND PEOPLE-CENTRED ASEAN COMMUNITY

“People-centred” and “people-oriented” must be properly conceptualized if we are to understand what is meant by these two terms given that there are multiple possible interpretations. In this context, they focus on the “peoples” of ASEAN, but where exactly is the place of the people in terms of ASEAN’s working mechanisms? To what extent has ASEAN achieved the people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN Community it speaks of creating?

The term “people-centred” was first introduced by the Eminent Person Group (EPG) when drafting the ASEAN Charter in 2007 before it came into force in 2008. Since then, the term has been used in other official documents regarding ASEAN-related meetings. In 2014 for example, Malaysia first used it officially during its ASEAN Chairmanship under the theme “Towards the People-Centred ASEAN Community” (ASEAN Information Center, n.d.). The country also proposed an initiative in 2005 with an interface meeting between selected young ASEAN leaders and ASEAN state leaders. This commitment however led to an internal disagreement in ASEAN over the wording and differing interpretations of “people-centred” and “people-oriented” (ASEAN Information Center, n.d.).

It was argued that the term “people-centred” contradicts ASEAN’s status as an inter-governmental organization with a top-down approach, an identity held since its inception. In other words, decisions were to be made by the governments of member states, not ordinary people. Besides, some experts argued that the term could be wrongly interpreted as “mass-mobilization”, which is strongly prohibited in some ASEAN Member States.

Eventually, the regional grouping reached a consensus and decided to use both “people-oriented” and “people-centred” together to signify that policy inputs should come from all segments of ASEAN society, including civil society organizations, youth, and grass-roots groups (ASEAN Information Center n.d.). This consensus was reflected in the 26th Kuala Lumpur Declaration on “A People-Centred and People-Oriented ASEAN” in 2015, stating that “all people, stakeholders and sectors of society can contribute to and enjoy the benefits from a more integrated and connected Community encompassing enhanced cooperation in the political security, economic and socio-cultural pillars for sustainable, equitable and inclusive development” (ASEAN Secretariat 2015). The statement encourages the regional grouping to welcome involvement from all non-state stakeholders to gather fresh ideas and inputs that may be useful for policy formulation. However, some scholars see the process as potentially challenging, as it remains a question of how successful non-governmental activities can be and how effective they are in building a people-centred and people-oriented community (ASEAN Information Center 2016).

The ASEAN-China UNDP Symposium in 2018 also highlighted the significance of a “people-centred” approach in ASEAN. The term was likened to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of “no one is left behind”. A people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN Community should therefore be one of inclusiveness, tackling regional inequality and adopting innovative working mechanisms to promote the implementation of the 2030 agenda on SDGs in a way that also contributes to the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (UNDP 2018). Furthermore, Vongthep Arthakaivalvatee argued that such a community should emphasize “the desire of the peoples of ASEAN to live in a peaceful, harmonious, inclusive, resilient, and healthy community” (UNDP 2018).

ASEAN’s existing working mechanisms have always included “people-to-people connectivity” as a way to promote closer cooperation among and participation from the peoples of ASEAN. As such, “people-to-people connectivity” is seen as one of the pillars in the Master Plans on ASEAN Connectivity. Meanwhile, the ASEAN Communication Master Plan II (2018–2025) serves as a practical guideline for ASEAN’s awareness-raising campaign developed by the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta (Seksan 2021). Therefore, raising awareness about ASEAN and promoting a sense of belonging to a common community have become key tasks for the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Foundation. The establishment of the ASEAN Foundation in 1997 during Malaysia’s Chairmanship constituted the first step towards “promoting ASEAN awareness through people-to-people interaction and collaboration within ASEAN stakeholders to build a caring, cohesive, equitable, and peaceful ASEAN Community” (ASEAN Foundation n.d.).

Building a people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN Community is an ongoing, collective job that requires closer collaboration between governments and grassroots civil society actors. Since the working mechanisms in ASEAN are non-binding, the extent to which governments support “people-centred” programmes in the region depends largely on the political will of each member state. In addition to adequate political will however, the successful transition to a people centred community will also require greater awareness and engagement from all segments of society, especially the region’s youth population which constitutes 213 million out of the region’s 620 million people (ASEAN Secretariat 2017).

THE ROLE OF YOUTH DIPLOMACY IN ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

Diplomacy was conventionally known as an important political activity involving skilful manoeuvring for the purpose of building closer relationships between states. It is a peaceful instrument that allows states to achieve their foreign policy objectives without the need to use force or propaganda (Berridge 2015). For many years, scholars have debated about the complementary roles of track I and track II diplomacy. Track I diplomacy refers to the official diplomatic activities conducted by official representatives of the state.

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While track II experts have been afforded various roles and responsibilities, youth participation in diplomacy has not yet received adequate attention. Can young people play a role in diplomacy, especially given that youth participation in ASEAN is known to have contributed to the ASEAN Community building project? To what extent can youth diplomacy contribute to the process of community building?

As illustrated, the establishment of the ASEAN Foundation is a signal that ASEAN leaders are starting to consider the role of youth diplomacy in the realization of the ASEAN Community Vision. The ASEAN Foundation is a key tool for promoting youth diplomacy across Southeast Asia. Noticeably, in recent years the AF's campaign and hashtags on their social media channels have emphasized, "Think ASEAN, Feel ASEAN, and Be ASEAN (#ThinkASEAN #FeelASEAN #BeASEAN)". These hashtags try to stimulate young peoples' enthusiasm for ASEAN and thus increase their sense of belonging to the ASEAN Community. Meanwhile, the campaign has also created many initiatives seeking to raise awareness of ASEAN and develop the necessary skills for future career success among the youth population. Those initiatives include a digital internship programme, the Model ASEAN Meeting, ASEAN Data Science Explorer, the Social Journalism Competition, eMpowering Youths Across ASEAN, and the ASEAN Leaders' Program, just to mention a few.

These flagship programmes aim to provide young people with professional platforms to engage in ASEAN affairs, reflecting their participation in all three pillars of the ASEAN Community building project (ASEAN Foundation n.d.).

Besides, the ASEAN Youth Development Index highlighted the work of the ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF), providing a new platform for youth empowerment and engagement to build a people-oriented, people-centred, and youth-driven community (ASEAN Youth Development Index 2017). Furthermore, the AYF's slogan "No youth should be left behind" clearly signals that youth diplomacy programmes will inspire young people to engage actively and meaningfully at both the national and regional levels, without leaving any youth behind. (Ibid.).

I wish to share a few of my own practical experiences highlighting the significance of youth diplomacy in ASEAN. In recent years, I have joined several regional programmes on youth development and ASEAN knowledge advancement.

Firstly, a good example of youth diplomacy would be the Young ASEAN Leaders Policy Initiative (YALPI), organized by the Faculty of Political Science at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. YALPI gathers young people with high potential from across Southeast Asia annually to participate in intensive ASEAN-policy training and equips them with necessary soft skills in public policy. The programme aims to bridge the gap between the experts and students. It supports the youths in providing policy inputs for ASEAN, with any ideas generated being submitted directly to the Royal Thai Government and other relevant ASEAN agencies at the end of the programme. After receiving such intensive training on public policy, YALPI believes that young people's ideas can often be fresh and innovative, which may come from their practical, real world experience with such issues, enabling them to produce a more human-centred policy input.

Secondly, another good example of youth diplomacy would be the Model ASEAN Meeting organized by the ASEAN Foundation and the professional training on ASEAN simulation at the ASEAN Secretariat. Model ASEAN is one of the flagship programmes of the ASEAN Foundation which was supported by the US Mission to ASEAN, attracting significant participation from young people across the member states. The objective of these programmes is to provide young people with a platform to gain an in-depth understanding of ASEAN's working mechanisms and ASEAN regional issues, as well as to offer policy recommendations in response to such issues. More importantly, young people can network, build up their cross-cultural skills, develop a greater mutual understanding and collaborate with one another. ASEAN is a very culturally diverse region. Through these platforms, youth diplomacy plays an increasingly important role in enhancing the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community by fostering people-to-people dialogue, cultural exchange, discussion, and capacity-building activities.

2025 is fast approaching and whether ASEAN can realize its Community Vision depends on its ability to overcome the current challenges it faces. Collective challenges require collective action from all stakeholders. Even though ASEAN is a top-down organization by design, the current pressing issues in the region, like it or not, require both bottom-up and top-down solutions. Therefore, both traditional and modern approaches to diplomacy should play complementary roles in tackling these challenges to ensure a peaceful, stable, and prosperous regional community.

ASEAN needs to prioritize youth diplomacy through regional youth networks. It also needs to equip the younger generation with the necessary skills so that they can become more resilient and innovative in dealing with the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future.

CAMBODIA'S YOUTH DIPLOMACY IN ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

Unlike the wider ASEAN youth population, Cambodia has a very young demographic makeup after decades of civil war. This highlights the significance of young people's role in Cambodia's national development and membership in ASEAN. Aware of the young generation's importance in bringing positive change to society, the Royal Government of Cambodia adopted the National Policy on Youth Development in 2011, committing to the promotion of youth representation in the national, sub-national, and regional levels (Royal Government of Cambodia 2011). The Ministry of Education, Youths, and Sports has been working closely with the relevant institutions to implement the National Youth Policy, aiming to develop physical strength, consciousness, ethics, values, skills, and intellectual capacity among Cambodian youth.

In recent years, Cambodian youth has engaged not only at the national and sub-national levels, but also at regional level by participating in various programmes and conferences in the ASEAN region. There are also a growing number of initiatives created and led by Cambodian youth. For example, the Young SEAkors Cambodia Chapter is the first and only non-profit youth organization working on advancing ASEAN-China relations at the grassroots level. For almost a year since its inception, they have hosted up to ten webinars and discussions highlighting the importance of ASEAN to Cambodian and Southeast Asian youths. Their holistic programme implementation is centred on youth capacity-building, webinars, socio-cultural exchange, and soft-skills training.

Other initiatives include the Cambodia National Model ASEAN Meeting and Khmer Model ASEAN Meeting, both supported by the ASEAN Foundation. They are the only two regional conferences that allow participants to role play as ASEAN diplomats engaging in ASEAN related discussion and offering youth solutions. One more Cambodian youth initiative is the establishment in 2020 of a Phnom Penh based, youth-led think tank called VOHAR Strategic Sight Centre to nurture a culture of policy research on ASEAN affairs among young people in Cambodia.

Cambodian youth engagement at the regional level is on the rise. In 2018, the Cambodian youth delegation in the ASEAN Youth Exchange Programme-YLEAD at Chulalongkorn University represented the largest number of participants compared to delegations from other Southeast Asia countries.

Moreover, Cambodian delegations have participated in the Young ASEAN Leaders Policy Initiatives, Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Programmes (SSEAYP), and the China-ASEAN Youth Summit.

Youths can positively impact the ASEAN Community through creative social and cultural exchange, debate, interaction, networking, and panel discussions. Young Cambodians are happy to build connections and network with their peers across the region. More Cambodian youth engagement at the regional level is essential for promoting greater ASEAN awareness. This is important for Cambodia's contribution to the ASEAN Community building project, especially during Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2022. This is because youth participation helps to promote "people-to-people diplomacy", allowing the region to better achieve a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN Community.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH IN ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

The world is entering an age of digitalization known as the information age which can also be considered the age of opportunities for young people. The reason is very simple. Youths are more adaptive to technological change in terms of their innovative perceptions and basic digital literacy skills. In this context, the ASEAN Community needs to be more adaptive by utilizing smart technology and innovation. With fast-changing technologies, the evolution of Industry 4.0, significant enhancements in artificial intelligence, and the emergence of 5G technology, there is no doubt that ASEAN youths have a more important role to play than ever before as an important agent of change and innovation. The ASEAN Leaders' Vision on Resilient and Innovative ASEAN joint statement highlighted their commitment to embracing technology and taking advantage of the new opportunities brought by the digital revolution. This can be achieved by investing in youth, for the young generation can contribute back to society through their superior technological skills (ASEAN Secretariat 2018).

From a personal perspective, young people are "eager and hungry" to learn, actively engaging in social community projects and capacity building programmes. We are living in a modern world where technological advancement is fast-changing, competition is intense, and new job opportunities require us to possess technological skills fit for the 21st century. Young people should not wait for opportunities to come to them; they need to be ready to unlock their potential, enabling them to effectively take advantage of the opportunities the digital age brings. The Young SEAkers (TYS), the first and only youth-led organization based in Southeast Asia, is advancing the ASEAN Community at the grassroots level. Their vision and mission are to help young people across the region develop their cross-cultural competencies and create a new generation of ASEAN regional youth leaders.

The Young SEAkers Cambodia Chapter has hosted a few webinars focusing on the opportunities for young people to be prepared for the future.

They expressed that youths need to keep themselves updated with the vast quantity of information available from the internet, which could help them to enhance their skills and knowledge. If they are eager to learn, they will be able to exploit opportunities both within the country and in the wider region (TYS Cambodia 2021). Although the global pandemic has taken away the freedom to gather in physical places, it is not a barrier stopping youths from learning and gathering online. Technology gives them full access to e-networking and e-social events. During the pandemic, young people have been able to learn virtually in higher numbers than ever before. Such online opportunities include soft-skills training, video conferences, competitions, webinars, and other cultural exchange programmes. In short, all stakeholders should collaborate to ensure that the process of ASEAN Community building involves youth participation for the betterment of their employment opportunities, education, health, and well-being, the four main domains reflected in the ASEAN Youth Development Index (ASEAN Secretariat 2017).

Opportunities and challenges often come together. According to the survey from the State of Southeast Asia 2021 published by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute based in Singapore, for which most of the respondents were youth groups aged 21 to 35, the top 3 challenges include the global pandemic (76%), unemployment (63%), and income disparity (40.7%). ASEAN people also demonstrated their concern about ASEAN's slow and ineffective work in addressing changing political and economic developments. They were also worried about ASEAN's ineffectiveness in dealing with the global pandemic and the geo-political tension between major powers (ISEAS 2021).

To demonstrate the challenges in the development of young people and their engagement in ASEAN Community building, I wish to highlight a few important points. One of the main challenges for young people is unequal opportunities. The development gap between remote and urban areas remains an obstacle in terms of access to technological equipment and digital infrastructure. Young people from these two areas do not benefit equally from the opportunities of the digital age. At the same time, some of them do not have equitable access to good health care, employment opportunities, and quality education, which in turn makes it difficult for them to compete in the job market.

Second, ASEAN awareness is relatively weak in Southeast Asian countries, especially among the youth. According to a Poll on ASEAN Awareness conducted by the ASEAN Secretariat in 2018, the public has relatively limited knowledge of the ASEAN Community. Only 23% know that it comprises three main pillars (ASEAN Secretariat 2018). ASEAN awareness among young people is important in that it helps them to increase their sense of belonging to the ASEAN Community and allows them to identify as an ASEAN citizen. Moreover, it gives them a sense of responsibility which makes them more likely to contribute back to this community.

Third, the lack of encouragement and financial support for youth diplomacy programmes is an enduring challenge. Based on the author's own practical experience,

young people find it difficult to lead youth initiatives which support ASEAN Community building. Financial constraints and limited official recognition from governments and relevant institutions remain a major concern for young people seeking to carry out self-initiated projects. In 2019 and 2020, a Cambodian student group organized a regional conference on the Model ASEAN Summit. The students role-played ASEAN diplomats discussing and debating regional issues concerning the three pillars of the ASEAN Community. Unfortunately, they faced financial issues in supporting their project. The project still went ahead, but with a reduced scale and a more limited impact.

ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING AT THE CROSSROADS: UPHOLDING CENTRALITY AND UNITY AMIDST GREAT POWER RIVALRY

There is a new great power contest in 21st-century international politics between the US and China. Amid such great power rivalry, ASEAN faces a huge challenge in maintaining its centrality and realizing its goal of ASEAN Community building. The rivalry is not an ideological confrontation. Rather, it involves strategic competition on complex issues, with Southeast Asia set to become a potential battlefield. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the US's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) are both competing for influence in the region (Lim 2020; Seksan 2021). ASEAN is now at a crossroads and seeking to navigate this great power rivalry to safeguard regional peace, stability, and the progress of ASEAN Community building (Le 2013).

To promote a rules-based regional order that is people-oriented and people-centred, ASEAN must take its centrality as a matter of necessity when navigating great power rivalry between the US and China. ASEAN centrality requires the bloc to maintain its own interests in the quest for deeper regional integration, security, stability, and prosperity (Yhome 2020). For more than five decades, ASEAN has successfully brought middle powers and superpowers to the discussion table a wide range of issues, a practice in line with the fundamental principles of the ASEAN Community. While ASEAN has been viewed as a potential hub for regionalism in Southeast Asia and beyond, ASEAN centrality is currently being questioned, especially given its apparent weakness in solving regional security issues such as the ongoing South China Sea Dispute, the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict in 2008–2011, and the current Myanmar political crisis. ASEAN centrality, however, should not be defined only by ASEAN's ability to gather regional and global powers to the discussion table, but also by the effectiveness of its mechanisms in bringing about consensus and coherent strategies to deal with emerging regional issues. (Julio 2021).

One of the major challenges facing the ASEAN Community is divergent interests and foreign policy priorities among its respective member states. This leads to the question of how can ASEAN navigate the great power rivalry while also maintaining unity and centrality? The divergent interests of ASEAN members are a clear signal that they may choose sides

if they are forced. For example, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia all seem to strongly support Beijing's BRI policy in Southeast Asia. In contrast, the other claimant states in the South China Sea appear to be highly suspicious of China. The US-China strategic competition in economic and political domains has caused ASEAN to think carefully about its collective position on sensitive issues such as the South China Sea dispute, the FOIP, the BRI, and the COVID-19 socio-economic recovery (East Asia Forum 2020).

Intensifying US-China competition affects ASEAN unity (Ibid.) and thus poses a challenge to the realization of its Community Vision in 2025. However, ASEAN still has space to manoeuvre using an ASEAN-centric approach by promoting the rules-based regional order and playing the role of "enhancer, legitimiser, socialiser, buffer, hedger, and lever of its role in regional and international affairs" (David 2020). One of the clear examples of ASEAN's manoeuvrability is the adoption of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific rather than following Washington's more assertive FOIP version (Ibid.).

At the crossroads between US and China, ASEAN will find it hard to remain truly neutral unless, as Julio Amador suggested above, it defines the term "centrality" as "not only being able to gather superpowers, but also to effectively solve regional issues". An effective working mechanism still requires multilateral involvement, which ASEAN needs to prioritize swiftly. This includes collaboration among expert groups, think-tanks, youths, civil society organizations, and other grassroots groups. The goal of the Community Vision calls for inclusiveness and greater unity, better allowing ASEAN centrality to be upheld. Therefore, ASEAN will need to continue to engage in multilateral diplomacy to shape the rules-based regional order and promote a more people-oriented and people-centred Community in the future.

CONCLUSION

Building a people-centred and people-oriented community is one of the major requirements for ASEAN to advance regional integration in Southeast Asia. Since the establishment of ASEAN Concord II in 2003, ASEAN has achieved significant progress towards realizing the Community Vision 2025. Such progress centres around promoting a resilient and inclusive community, a competitive and innovative market, and a sustainable society in Southeast Asia (ASEAN Secretariat 2015). However, ASEAN Community building requires more political will and effort. ASEAN is a top-down organization by design. Hence, it is time to re-think the role of bottom-up diplomacy, which has many roles to play and can meaningfully contribute to the community vision. Given that the youth population accounts for 213 million out of 620 million people in Southeast Asia, young people will play a greater role in shaping this community in the future. As such, their active engagement should be recognised and prioritized now.

The youth population represents the new face of ASEAN's digital transformation. They should exploit the opportunities offered by technological advancement and digitalization to achieve greater self-fulfilment and further contribute to regional progress.

Given that Southeast Asia is facing emerging non-traditional security threats, the disruptions of COVID-19, and growing geopolitical tensions between the US and China, ASEAN should recognize the complementary roles of track I and II diplomacy, particularly that of youth diplomacy.

A people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN Community can be achieved through a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches involving stronger collaboration between governments and grassroots institutions. The prospect of youth diplomacy in the ASEAN Community is on youth development. Young people in ASEAN should be empowered and allowed to effectively contribute to the ASEAN Community Vision. One way to enhance cohesion within the ASEAN Community is by promoting youth diplomacy (Alexander 2020). Youth diplomacy has the potential to nurture a culture of people-to-people interaction and a new generation of leaders that will shape better inter-state relations in ASEAN and beyond.

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CHAPTER 13

Cultural Corridor and Tourism Development in Southeast Asia in the Post- COVID-19 Pandemic Era

Nguonphan Pheakdey and Sok Serey

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia is one of the world's most diverse regions with varied population densities, as well as economic, social, cultural, and religious differences. The region has hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures (Baker et al. 1996; King 2008). ASEAN Member States have made efforts in creating a peaceful coexistence and harmony among the different cultures, religions, ethnicities, and languages at both national and regional levels (Takagi 2009). An epistemic culture of local Southeast Asianists have contributed to the construction of Southeast Asia as a socio-cultural unit (Menkhoff et al. 2011). In the last few decades, regional social and cultural development have changed rapidly from a longstanding interest in cultural artefacts and ways of life to cultural groups and societies (Bunnell et al. 2005). Unfortunately, Southeast Asia is associated with numerous threads of history and cultures and common geopolitical concerns (Woetzel et al. 2004). Moreover, the interconnection and associations between national and regional political, economic, and social establishments and norms have shifted Southeast Asia into a contested region (Chheang 2013).

The ten member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) focus on regional economic, political, and cultural integration. In addition, ASEAN members have cooperated in the arts and culture sectors. As a result, the region has promoted its cultural vibrancy and dynamism (Ahmad 2006). At the ASEAN anniversary celebration held in Kuala Lumpur in 1997, the Heads of States of the ten nations adopted the ASEAN Vision 2024 to enhance stability and peace, economic growth, human development, and cultural heritage. Cultural advancement is considered one of the fundamentals of the ASEAN Community's dynamism to establish a harmonious region (ASEAN Secretariat 2020a). With coordination by the Jakarta-based Secretariat, ASEAN member countries have managed significant cultural heritage through national regulations, regional instruments development, media dissemination, ASEAN civilisation studies, and cultural tourism development (ASEAN Secretariat 2009). In mainland Southeast Asia, the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Program pays specific attention to building strategic alliances, in particular with ASEAN and ASEAN+3 (ASEAN, plus China, Japan, and South Korea) (ADB 2018).

Today, cultural corridors have played a significant role for ASEAN countries in enhancing dynamism in the ASEAN Community. The Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts (2016–2025) aims to promote regional identity, culture, and heritage with a strengthened ability to innovate and participate in the global community. One of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) blueprints is to forge solidarity and unity in the ASEAN region by building a common identity (ASEAN Secretariat 2016). Cultural corridors are important bonds that link cultural nodes with human activities. They play an important role in tourism development, cultural heritage conservation, and promotion of a sense of place (Bozic et al. 2016). Hoppert et al. (2018) believe that a cultural corridor is an integrative concept for integrating the conservation of cultural and natural resources.

The ASCC deals with cultures, languages, and religions, emphasising other common values in the spirit of unity in diversity and adjusting them into reality, potentials, and challenges (ASEAN Secretariat 2009).

Researchers have paid great attention to the East-West corridor, a conceptual tool for identifying standard cultural processes across mainland Southeast (Ishii 2009). A principle of the project East-West Cultural Corridor aims to explore the historical dynamics of cultural exchanges in Thailand and medieval land-based communication networks in the Thai-Myanmar trans-border regions, ancient roads connecting with Angkor, and Northeastern Thailand along the Mekong River basin from the Dvaravati to Ayutthaya periods (Shibayama 2017). Moore (2013) has drawn upon his model to study the histories of sites and their continuities with present traditions. The present proposals are to establish cultural corridors and tourism development in Southeast Asia in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. Accordingly, this chapter examines cultural diversity in Southeast Asia by focusing on World Heritage Sites, the importance of cultural values, the impact of COVID-19 on cultural conservation and tourism development, and ASEAN's cultural linkages and tourism development promotion in the post-COVID-19 era.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Since 1976, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has listed World Heritage Sites as cultural importance and outstanding universal values. The listing of World Heritage Sites attracts international attention to preserve and conserve cultural heritage of ancient significance. Southeast Asian countries are culturally rich and diverse, proudly having many locations classified by UNESCO in the World Heritage of Humanity. In 1991, UNESCO's World Heritage inscription started the first World Heritage Sites of Southeast Asia at the 15th Session of the World Heritage Committee. In 2021, UNESCO listed 41 of the world's 1,121 UNESCO World Heritage sites in Southeast Asia and classified them by heritage and natural areas (Table 1). In 2015, Trang An Landscape Complex of Vietnam was the only mixed cultural and natural site listed by UNESCO. The site is located near the southern edge of the Red River Delta and has a remarkable landscape of limestone karst peaks permeated with valleys. The Bagan Archaeological Zone in Myanmar and the Plain of Jars in Laos were listed during the 43rd Session in July 2019 (UNESCO 2021). The World Heritage Sites are the cultural memoir of Southeast Asia and require a joint task to maintain and preserve the legitimacy of those locations (Peleggi 2017). A collection of World Heritage Sites has made heritage tourism in Southeast Asia a huge business. As a result, the number of tourists and infrastructure development are increasing. Angkor Wat is, for example, a major site for tourism development, along with the Malaka of Malaysia and Ayutthaya and Khao Yai of Thailand. The World Heritage Sites consider tourist attractions because they have cultural and natural values and significance.

Table 1. World heritage sites in Southeast Asia listed by UNESCO

Country	Number	Description
Cambodia	3	Cultural (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angkor (1992) • Temple of Preah Vihear (2008) • Temple Zone of Sambor Prei Kuk, Archaeological Site of Ancient Ishanapura (2017)
Indonesia	9	Cultural (5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borobudur Temple Compounds (1991) • Cultural Landscape of Bali Province: the Subak System as a Manifestation of the Tri Hita Karana Philosophy (2012) • Ombilin Coal Mining Heritage of Sawahlunto (2019) • Prambanan Temple Compounds (1991) • Sangiran Early Man Site (1996) Natural (4) • Komodo National Park (1991) • Lorentz National Park (1999) • Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (2004) • Ujung Kulon National Park (1991)
Laos	3	Cultural (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Megalithic Jar Sites in Xiengkhuang–Plain of Jars (2019) • Town of Luang Prabang (1995) • Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape (2001)
Malaysia	4	Cultural (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archaeological Heritage of the Lenggong Valley (2012) • Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca (2008) Natural (2) • Gunung Mulu National Park (2000) • Kinabalu Park (2000)
Myanmar	2	Cultural (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagan (2019) • Pyu Ancient Cities (2014)

The Philippines	6	Cultural (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baroque Churches of the Philippines (1993) • Historic City of Vigan (1999) • Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras (1995) Natural (3) • Mount Hamiguitan Range Wildlife Sanctuary (2014) • Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park (1999) • Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (1993, 2009)
Singapore	1	Cultural (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singapore Botanic Gardens (2015)
Thailand	5	Cultural (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ban Chiang Archaeological Site (1992) • Historic City of Ayutthaya (1991) • Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns (1991) Natural (2) • Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex (2005) • Thungyai-Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuaries (1991)
Vietnam	8	Cultural (5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long in Hanoi (2010) • Citadel of the Ho Dynasty (2011) • The complex of Huế Monuments (1993) • Hoi An Ancient Town (1999) • My Son Sanctuary (1999) Natural (2) • Ha Long Bay (1994, 2000) • Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park (2003, 2015) Mixed (1) • Trang An Landscape Complex (2014)

Source: UNESCO 2021.

UNESCO has documented cultural and historical significance in Southeast Asian countries. The 41 UNESCO World Heritage Sites are of great value to domestic and international tourists who look for exclusive cultural experiences, for no place can better encapsulate a country's past and worldview than its World Heritage Sites. UNESCO also ranked 12 out of 41 sites as the great Heritage Sites. They include (1) City of Temples: Bagan, Myanmar, (2) The Universe in Stone: Angkor Wat, Cambodia, (3) Old Capital Renewed: Luang Prabang, Laos, (4) Two Religions, One Empire: Borobudur and Prambanan, Indonesia, (5) What Fire Couldn't Destroy: Ayutthaya, Thailand, (6) Historic Trading Towns: Melaka and George Town, Malaysia, (7) Stairways to the Sky: Banaue Rice Terraces, the Philippines, (8) Old Greens Made New: Singapore's Botanic Gardens, (9) Centuries of Business: Hoi An and My Son, Vietnam, (10) If it Ain't Baroque: the Philippines' Churches, (11) Forgotten City-States: Pyu Ancient Cities, Myanmar and (2) Tales from the Emperors: Vietnam's Hue Monument (UNESCO 2021).

The UNESCO World Heritage Sites have characterised shared and symbolic significance of cultural relevance for Southeast Asia. The preservation of cultural heritage is generally to generate economic values (Noonan 2003). However, Thannakvaro de Lopez et al. (2006) claim that cultural heritage sites have produced a sufficient budget for preservation and conservation programmes. On the other hand, many heritage sites were in poor condition or deteriorating due to insufficient resources for protection (Tuan and Navrud 2007). International tourism in Southeast Asia is gradually restructuring the relationship between the state and local cultures because culture and ethnicity have played a critical role in regional tourism. At the same time, tourism creates a new relationship among local cultures, as planner of tourist development, marketer of cultural meanings, arbiter of cultural practices displayed to tourists, and an arena for new forms of politics (Wood 1984).

Furthermore, Southeast Asian countries have unique cultural and religious festivals. Table 2. illustrates known cultural festivals in Southeast Asian countries. All those events attract millions of domestic and international tourists. Many festivals in the region happen during the solar new year, with the audiences washing off the bad luck, ill health, and evil spirits from the previous year to start the new year fresh. Other festivals are held to bring people closer together or to celebrate different holidays. The Southeast Asian region has a rich heritage in Hinduism because of its long history as part of the Indianised states. The most common characteristic of the ancient Indianised states was the religious influence of Hinduism and Buddhism brought by Indian traders (ASEAN Secretariat 2020b). For example, water festivals originated from the Hindu festival of Holi, celebrated in many countries of Southeast Asia. But each culture has its traditions and beliefs, so the water festival is celebrated slightly differently. Whether it is the celebration of Songkran in Chiang Mai, Thailand, or Chol Chnam Thmey in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, water festivals in Southeast Asia offer great opportunities for fun to splash water at strangers. The three-to-five-day festival signifies an agricultural society where abundant rainfall is essential to the population's livelihoods. Moreover, the festivals are celebrated under different names Songkran (Thailand), Pi Mai (Laos), Chol Chnam Thmey (Cambodia), Feast of Thingyan (Myanmar), Water splashing festival (Yunnan, China), and Tết (Vietnam) (ASEAN Secretariat 2020b)

Table 2. Known cultural festivals in Southeast Asia

Cultural events	Visitors	Description
Halong tourism week-Vietnam	12 million	The celebration of Halong tourism week started as a celebration for tourism promotion in 2011. This event is held with different activities in the northeastern coastal province of Quang Ninh in late April and early May. Thousands of superstars, dancers, musicians, and students joined this festival.
Boun Pi Mai-Laos	N/A	In Lao, New Year is considered as the most vital annual event, particularly in Luang Prabang, and is celebrated in mid-April. The festival is celebrated with great excitement of water-throwing, street parades, circle dance, traditional Lao display, and folk singing.
Sinulog Festival-Philippine	1 to 2 million	Filipinos in Cebu celebrate the annual Sinulog as a religious and cultural festival on 15 January. This festival is also well-known for its street parties before the day of celebration and during the day of the festival.
Nyepi-Indonesia	4.225 million	The Hindu Day of Silence celebrates the Hindu New Year on the Balinese Saka calendar on 14 March. Nyepi is a day of silence, fasting, and meditation for the Balinese, and it is a public holiday in Indonesia. Balinese Hindus around Indonesia held this festival, and it is the largest celebration in Bali.
River Hongbao, Singapore	1.2 million	Dated back over 3500 years, the Lunar New Year is one of the most favourite festivals in Chinese culture. Singaporeans celebrate this traditional event in various ways on the island. The River Hongbao has been one of the most iconic festive calendars every year since 1987.
Songkran -Thailand	3.09 million	Songkran is Thailand's most famous festival in mid-April, and it is an important event on the Buddhist calendar. Traditional Thai New Year starts with a water festival.
Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda Festival-Myanmar	N/A	Filipinos in Cebu celebrate the annual Sinulog as a religious and cultural festival on 15 January. This festival is also well-known for its street parties before the day of celebration and during the day of the festival.

Gawai Festival-Malaysia	N/A	The Dayak people in Sarawak of Malaysia and West Kalimantan of Indonesia celebrate this annual festival on 1 and 2 June. In Sarawak, Gawai is a public holiday, and it has been both a religious and social occasion registered since 1957.
Chol Chnam Thmey-Cambodia	N/A	The New Year, usually falling on 13 or 14 April, is the traditional celebration of the solar new year, and Cambodians enjoy this 3-day public holiday. This event is organised to celebrate the end of the harvesting season when farmers enjoy their labour crops before the rainy season.

Source: Authors' collection.

IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL VALUES AND TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

Southeast Asia is naturally blessed with diverse cultures and international heritage sites servicing tourists worldwide. Every country within the region entices national and international tourists with even more stunning ethos, architecture, and nature. In recent years, Southeast Asia has been one of the world's most popular tourist destinations because the region has a tropical climate, rich cultures, diverse cuisines, and gorgeous beaches. Moreover, most countries there depend on rich natural resources and affordable prices to appeal to tourists. As a result, the governments of Southeast Asia, have used cultural heritage to promote tourism by promoting cultural elements that are immediate, accessible, distinctive, inspiring, colourful and visible to the tourist gaze, and whose meanings and significance can be constructed, shaped, changed and controlled (Wood 1997). Moreover, the region is opened to international tourists through favourable visa policies because the governments recognise the strategic role of tourism in generating employment and support different sectors (World Economic Forum 2017).

According to ASEANStatsData, international tourists to Southeast Asia gradually increased from 102.2 million in 2013 to 125.7 million in 2017 and 143.5 million in 2019. In 2019, the four countries, including Thailand (27.7%), Malaysia (18.2%), Vietnam (12.6%), and Indonesia (11.2%), contributed 69.7% of the total international arrival in Southeast Asia. The latest report of the Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2019–2023 shows that Vietnam will be leading in the Asia-Pacific destinations in terms of its average annual growth rate over the next five years. The projection also reveals that Vietnam will be followed by Lao PDR, which has averaged annual growth rates below the regional average of 5.5% between 2018 and 2023 (Pusparani 2020). In 2019, the 38th annual meeting of ASEANs' Asian Tourism Forum (ATF) was held in Vietnam to discuss the present and future of tourism in the region. The ATF 2019, under a theme of "The Power of One", highlighted the regional desire to work together as a region to develop and foster tourism responsibly (McGough 2019).

Moreover, *Tourism Destination Market Insights: ASEAN (2021)* reveals that every country in Southeast Asia has huge potentials and advantages for growth in the next three years as intra-ASEAN travel increases and tourists from farther afield seek more adventurous holidays. The development of low-cost airlines and open-sky agreements have also made intra-ASEAN travel more accessible and available. For example, AirAsia is a regional budget carrier, and this company has increased its offerings. As a result, more people in Southeast Asia can travel due to proximity, simpler visa processes, and similar cultures (Research and Market 2021).

Table 3. International tourist arrivals in Southeast Asia by country, 2013–2019

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Brunei	3,279,160	3,885,537	218,213z	218,809	258,955	278,136	333,244
Cambodia	4,210,165	4,502,775	4,775,231	5,011,712	5,602,157	6,201,077	6,610,592
Indonesia	8,802,129	9,435,411	10,406,759	11,519,275	14,039,799	15,810,305	16,106,954
Lao PDR	3,779,490	4,158,719	4,684,429	4,239,047	3,868,838	4,186,432	4,791,065
Malaysia	25,715,500	27,437,315	25,721,251	26,757,392	25,948,459	25,832,354	26,100,784
Myanmar	2,044,307	3,081,413	4,681,020	2,907,207	3,443,133	3,549,428	4,364,101
Philippines	4,681,307	4,833,368	5,360,682	5,967,005	6,620,908	7,127,678	8,260,913
Singapore	15,567,916	15,095,152	15,231,469	16,403,595	17,424,611	18,508,302	19,113,842
Thailand	26,546,725	24,779,768	29,881,091	32,529,588	35,591,978	38,178,194	39,797,406
Viet Nam	7,572,352	7,874,312	7,943,651	10,012,735	12,922,151	15,497,791	18,008,591
ASEAN	102,199,051	105,083,770	108,903,796	115,566,365	125,720,989	135,169,697	143,487,492

Source: ASEAN Secretariat 2019.

Most tourist arrivals are from within the region, with intra-ASEAN tourists representing 36.7% (49.7 million people) in 2018 (Abueg 2019). But all countries in Southeast Asia have attracted a massive surge in the number of Chinese tourists and helped make the tourist sector a boom in this region. In 2019, around 60 million Chinese travellers, or more than 40% of international tourists, visited the ten countries (Pusparani 2020).

There were two main reasons for the high figures of Chinese tourists in the region: (1) the rise of incomes in China as the world's second-largest economy with a substantial size of middle class (2) and budget air travel. For example, in Thailand, Chinese tourists accounted for around one-third of the 35.6 million international tourists, and a similar trend was also observed in other countries in Southeast Asia (Intelligence 2019).

In recent years, the regional tourism sector has speedily improved due to the industry's free-market-oriented economy and foreign exchange earnings capability. International tourists have recognised the attractiveness of tourism experiences in Southeast Asia in terms of rich cultural heritage and natural environment.

Southeast Asian countries recognise that tourism can be part of their development strategies, especially from an economic perspective (Hieu et al. 2019). The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report has annually ranked countries based on policies to enable the sector's sustainable development. The report looks at how convenient it is to conduct business in a country, legal papers on travel and tourism, the existing infrastructure, and cultural and natural resources. In 2020, the report concluded that Singapore was the most tourist-friendly country, followed by Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Brunei, the Philippines, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. The rank is also reflected in their competitiveness in the tourism industry of countries in the region (Figure 1).

According to the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts 2016–2025, the region is promoting an ASEAN mindset and the cultural diversity of ASEAN with an emphasis on the long-lasting cultural threads that bind this region to advance intercultural understanding to counter against violent extremism that may emerge from a lack of knowledge of cultures of each country. Advancing the cultural rights of all the citizens of ASEAN is the catalyst for growth of the region, where people have equivalent access to cultural properties and where culture is comprehensive and supports sustainable development (ASEAN Secretariat 2016). ASEAN needs to enhance its competitiveness as a single tourist destination by developing and adopting tourism standards. The ATM adopted the ASEAN Tourism Standards and their certification process for green hotels, homestays, spa services, public toilets, clean tourist cities, community-based tourism in 2015, and meeting, incentive, convention, and exhibition venues in 2017. Following the adoption of these standards, the ASEAN Tourism Standard Awards Ceremony is organised annually to honour relevant establishments in the region that have fulfilled the requirements of the tourism standards. In January 2018, 47 hotels, 47 MICE venues, and 23 cities received the awards, while 30 homestay establishments, 26 communities-based tourism, 44 spas, and 42 public toilets received the awards in January 2019 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019b).

Figure 1. Travel competitiveness index in Southeast Asia, 2020

Country	Global Rank	Enabling Environment				T&T Policy & Enabling Conditions					Infrastructure			Natural & Cultural Resources	
		Business Environment	Safety & Security	Health & Hygiene	Human Resource & Labor market	ITC Readiness	Privatization & T&T	Int'l Openness	Price Competitiveness	Environmental Sustainability	Airtransport Infrastructure	Ground & Port Infrastructure	Tourist Service Infrastructure	Natural Resources	Cultural Resource & Businesstravel
ASEAN		5.1	6.0	6.1	5.2	5.7	5.1	4.0	5.1	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.8	3.8	3.9
Singapore	17	6.0	6.4	5.0	5.6	6.3	6.2	4.8	5.0	4.3	5.5	6.4	5.0	2.2	2.5
Malaysia	29	5.5	5.5	5.3	5.4	5.4	4.0	4.5	6.1	4.0	4.6	4.5	4.5	3.8	2.8
Thailand	31	4.9	4.8	5.0	5.1	5.2	5.2	3.9	5.9	3.6	4.6	3.9	5.9	4.8	2.8
Indonesia	40	4.7	5.4	4.5	4.9	4.7	5.9	4.9	6.2	3.5	3.9	3.3	3.0	4.5	3.7
Vietnam	63	4.4	5.6	5.0	4.8	4.3	4.1	3.7	5.9	3.8	3.4	3.0	2.8	3.8	2.9
Brunei	72	4.8	6.3	5.5	4.6	5.4	3.4	3.7	6.6	4.1	3.3	3.8	4.0	2.4	1.1
Philippines	75	4.9	3.8	4.0	5.0	4.4	4.9	3.5	5.9	4.0	3.2	2.8	3.6	3.8	1.1
Lao PDR	97	4.4	5.3	4.5	4.6	3.4	4.8	3.0	5.9	3.7	2.4	2.5	3.4	2.9	1.8
Cambodia	98	3.1	5.2	4.0	4.2	3.9	5.0	3.5	5.9	3.4	2.3	2.5	3.2	3.0	1.4

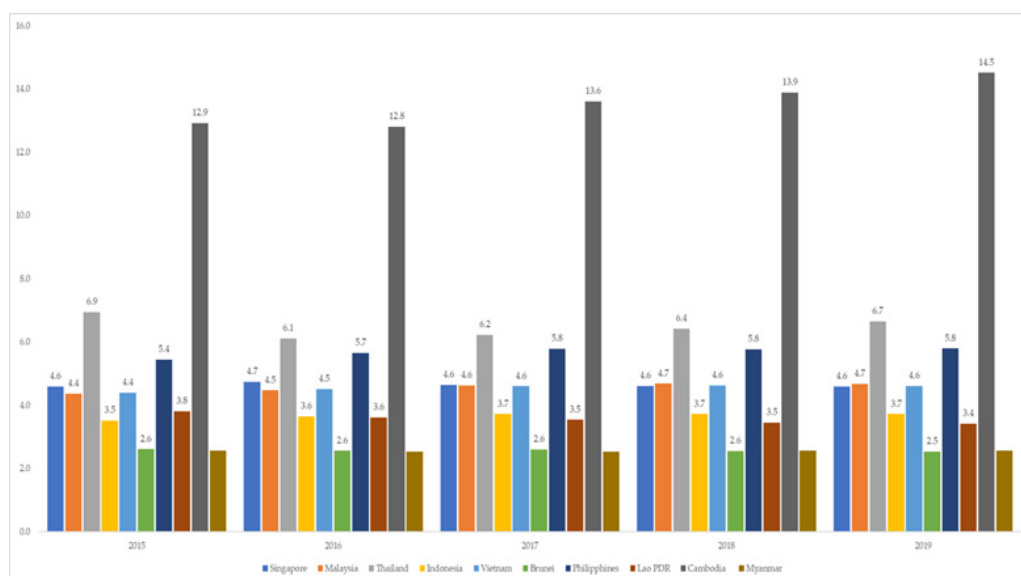
Source: World Economic Forum 2020.



Impact of COVID-19 on Cultural Conservation and Tourism Development in ASEAN Countries

Hitchcock et al. (2009) suggest that tourism has vast social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental implications. Tourism is considered one of the fastest-growing industries to support social development (Shahzad et al. 2017), facilitating economic recovery and growth if the potentials are appropriately managed. Recently, the tourism industry has received attention worldwide because of its contribution to stimulating consumption, endorsing trade, and facilitating international communication (Qian et al. 2018). As a result, tourism growth is making a positive economic impact on the region. In 2018, the sector was estimated to have directly contributed USD 161.5 billion to the ASEAN economy (5.4% of GDP) and created 15.5 million jobs, up from USD 79.3 billion and 10.9 million jobs in 2010 (ASEAN Secretariat 2019). Since 2010, the tourism industry’s employment has steadily increased from 10.9 million in 2010 to around 16 million jobs in 2019 (Statista 2021). Out of the ten countries, Cambodia shared the highest percentage of employment generated by the tourism industry, which gradually increased from 12.9% in 2015 to 13.6% in 2017 (Figure 2). In 2019, 14.5% or 1.3 million jobs in ASEAN nations were generated from tourism. Cambodia has a year-on-year average growth rate of 9.87% between 1995 and 2028. The average growth rate in other countries was 3.76% (Lao PDR), 3.39% (Myanmar), 3.18% (the Philippines), 3.04% (Singapore), 2.11% (Thailand), 1.14% (Vietnam), and 1.3% (Malaysia). In contrast, the projection by the World Bank has estimated a year-on-year average growth rate of Indonesia would be -0.29% for the period from 1995 to 2028.

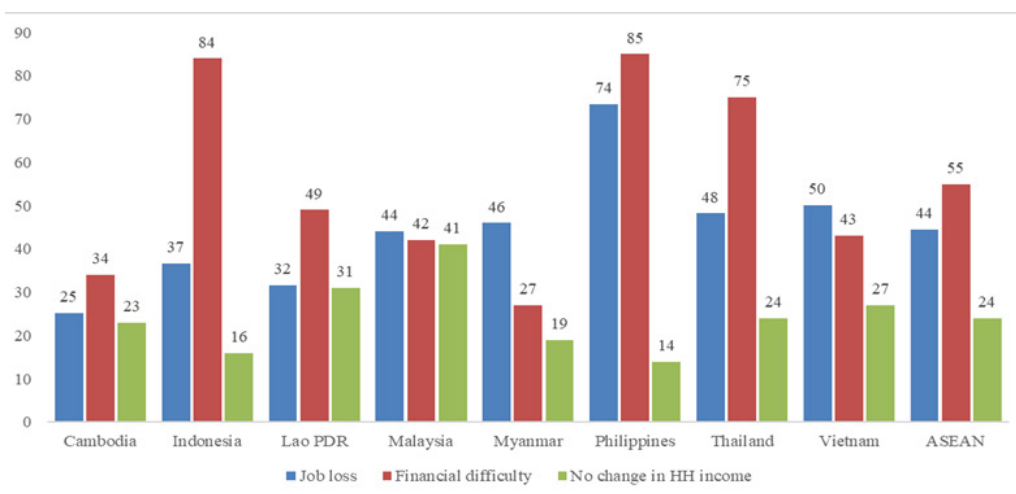
Figure 2. Travel and tourism direct contribution to employment (%)



SOURCE: WORLD BANK 2021.

Southeast Asia is increasingly integrated into the global economy, regarding both international travel and trade. Since international travel halted almost completely in March 2020, the tourism and business travel sectors have experienced an unprecedented contraction. Many small-scale businesses have permanently closed because COVID-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions do not make them survive the economic losses. With each passing month, millions of workers were at risk of descending into poverty, including the middle class. When the pandemic drags on, temporary job losses become permanent, and household incomes have fallen (Parks et al. 2020). Relationships between crises and tourism in Southeast Asia require urgent examination in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The example in Malaysia and its northern Borneo State of Sabah reveals some issues caused by the pandemic, and the responses to a multidimensional crisis. One major factor affecting the region is the collapse of the East Asian market as an increasingly important source of tourists for Southeast Asia. Due attention is paid to the implications of the increasing interdependence of Southeast and East Asia, of which Sabah is a prime example. In this introduction, the complex interactions between crises and tourism addressed the utility of adopting a comparative approach in examining a range of situations, the importance of tourism to the Southeast Asian economies, and some of the overall consequences of the current pandemic for the tourism industry and the responses to them in the Malaysian and Sabah case (Chan et al. 2019).

Figure 3. Impact of COVID on employment, financial difficulty, and HH income



SOURCE: ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK 2020.

The COVID-19 outbreak has diminished prospects of economic recovery from a worldwide slowdown last year. While initial statements projected a brief and limited impact on the global economy, the exponential spread of the outbreak to other regions, for example, Europe, the US, and ASEAN, set off the tapering of growth prospects (ASEAN Secretariat 2020c). A survey conducted in Southeast Asian countries by the Asian Development Bank (2020) shows that more than half of ASEAN residents (55%) faced financial difficulty following 44% of job losses. The same survey reveals that only 24% of ASEAN residents had no change in their household income. Out of the total, the majority of interviewed households in Indonesia (85%), the Philippines (85%), and Thailand (75%) faced financial difficulty. In addition, residents in the Philippines (74%), Vietnam (50%), and Thailand (48%) lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Malaysia, a similar proportion of residents losing their jobs was (44%), had financial difficulty (42%), and had no change in household income (41%). In the Lao PDR, almost half of the residents had financial problems, but only one-third of them lost their jobs (Morgan and Long 2020).

PROMOTING ASEAN CULTURAL LINKAGE AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-COVID-19

ASEAN countries share a common goal of providing a quality tourism destination through delivering a unique, diverse ASEAN experience. In addition, the region has committed to having responsible, sustainable, inclusive, and balanced tourism development to significantly contribute to the socio-economic condition of ASEAN people in 2025 (ASEAN Secretariat 2015).

In particular, tourism is part of the regional integration process, and each country cooperates in regional tourism development. Tourism development has helped create a good environment and pushed ASEAN countries to work together more closely, resulting in other fields of cooperation and integration (Ho 2001). In addition, the Forum of Lanchang-Mekong Tourist Cities Cooperation was organised in Hainan province and signed the Sanya Vision to tap tourism resources. The forum also concluded with the recognition of the importance of establishing a mutual communication mechanism and official policy support, and building an integrated tourism development pattern in the region, which boasts rich natural, historical and cultural resources (China Daily, 31 October 2016).

In 2022, Cambodia will assume the role of ASEAN Chairmanship. It will need to properly balance among and between the three pillars: the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, the ASEAN Political-Security Community, and the ASEAN Economic Community (Sim 2021). In this third ASEAN Chairmanship, Cambodia will play a very important role in promoting peace, regional stability, and tourism development in the post-COVID-19 pandemic. Cambodia used to be a killing field and an insecure place; the country is now a peaceful island and a popular tourism destination in Southeast Asia, attracting millions of tourists every year (Kin 2021). During its ASEAN Chairmanship, Cambodia will apply action-oriented approaches for equal benefits sharing and for promoting openness, honesty, good faith, solidarity, and harmony among ASEAN nations to address common issues and challenges facing the region (Ibid.). In promoting regional cultural corridors and tourism development, Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship should draw regional attention to dialogues and cooperation to restore these sectors after the COVID-19 pandemic.

To strengthen public health cooperation measures to contain the pandemic and protect people, the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) released on 14 April 2020 through the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on an ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework has limited travel to only essential business trips (ASEAN Secretariat 2020d).

Furthermore, the Special Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), held on 29 April 2020, issued a joint statement of the ASEAN Ministers on strengthening cooperation to revitalise ASEAN tourism for pursuing collaboration with ASEAN dialogue partners to shape a resilient and prepared Southeast Asia to effectively implement and manage sustainable and inclusive tourism in the aftermath of the crisis (ASEAN Secretariat 2020e).

Furthermore, a meeting in February 2021 released the Phnom Penh declaration on a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient ASEAN tourism for strengthening regional efforts to revitalise and build a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient ASEAN tourism through the expeditious development of a Post COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism. The meeting also discussed best international practices, local responses and recovery policies, and the lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to better respond to changing global tourism trends (ASEAN Secretariat 2021).

In principle, economic recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not an easy task, but nothing is impossible. In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, ASEAN cultural linkage and tourism development can be promoted into four different stages. First, domestic tourism should be encouraged because of the collapse of international arrivals. Gradual free mobility of residents would probably maintain tourism activities and investment in each country. At the same time, the governments of ASEAN countries may consider subsidising hotels and restaurants to provide affordable prices to attract domestic tourists. Second, ASEAN governments should be ready to provide sufficient incentives, for example, tax exemption or social tax depreciation. However, China is the most significant external trade partner and investor. The US and European Unions are also among ASEAN's largest trade and investment partners. Therefore, the governments of ASEAN countries should seek a good enabling environment for promoting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in tourism in the framework of cultural corridor development.

Third, implementing the ASEAN Readies Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Certificate should be speeding up because the move is an essential step in reviving intra-regional tourism and recovery from the Coronavirus recession. The proposed ASEAN vaccine certificate comes as the European Union finalises plans for a digital green pass that proves a traveller has been vaccinated against the Coronavirus (ASEAN Secretariat 2020f). This implication can be learned for promoting intra-regional tourism instead of being limited to business trips only. Fourth, international tourism beyond ASEAN nations should be permitted when intra-regional mobility is gradually recovered. Cultural corridor establishment in Southeast Asia is highly dependent on the growth of the tourism industry. Effective management and conservation of the World Heritage Sites could happen when tourism is well developed.

CONCLUSION

Based primarily upon our findings above, but with some additional insights from Cambodia's cultural corridor and tourism development, we come to the following conclusions: First, since the first UNESCO's inscriptions in 1991, 41 items, including cultural and natural sites, in Southeast Asia have been inscribed in the World Heritage List. In general, the preservation of cultural heritage is for generating economic values.

The UNESCO World Heritage Sites are shared as necessary for cultural corridor establishment because they share a common and symbolic significance of the cultural relevance of Southeast Asia. Moreover, Southeast Asia has hosted various unique cultural and religious festivals, mainly rooted in the Hindu festival of Holi, for example, the water festival and the new year in the region. Cultural and religious festivals are attracting millions of domestic and international tourists to visit Southeast Asian countries as well. Second, Southeast Asian countries are naturally blessed with diverse cultures and international heritage sites, with approximately 143.5 million tourists from all over the world visiting the region. Four countries, namely Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, contributed 69.7% of the total international arrivals, 36.7% of which were intra-ASEAN tourists.

The Travel Competitiveness Index in Southeast Asia ranked Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand as the most tourist-friendly countries. Third, the tourism industry generated 16 million jobs in Southeast Asia in 2019. Cambodia shared the highest proportion of jobs generated from the tourism industry, increasing from 12.9% in 2015 to 13.6% in 2017. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism and business travel sectors faced unprecedented reductions because Southeast Asia is increasingly integrated into the global economy concerning trade and international travel. According to the Asian Development Bank (2020), more than half of ASEAN residents (55%) faced financial difficulty, and 44% of job losses followed. While residents in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand faced financial hardship, those in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fourth, as ASEAN Chair in 2022, Cambodia will play a significant role in reducing the negative impacts of COVID-19. Various regional ministerial meetings, declarations, and frameworks have been developed. It is a fact that tourism is part of the regional integration process, and each country is cooperating in regional tourism development. The recovery of the tourism industry is key to establishing cultural corridors in the region. In the post-COVID-19 era, the tourism industry can recover through four stages: (1) promotion of domestic tourism, (2) attraction to investment by providing tax exemption or tax depreciation, (3) implementation of the ASEAN Readies Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Certificate, and (4) permission of international tourism after intra-regional mobility recovery.

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The image shows the ASEAN flag (blue with a red circle and a golden emblem) and the Cambodian flag (green, white, and red) flying in front of a modern building with a grid-like facade. The text is overlaid on a teal gradient at the bottom.

CHAPTER 14

Opportunities, Challenges and Preparations for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022

Lim Menghour and Soeung Rithypanha

INTRODUCTION

After joining ASEAN in 1999, Cambodia has prepared the country's foreign policy and agendas to be in line with those of ASEAN's. As a result, for the past 20 years, Cambodia has benefited from the membership and has significantly contributed to promoting the ASEAN Community building.

As a member of ASEAN, Cambodia has hosted the Chairmanship of ASEAN twice in the past, in 2002 and 2012. The Kingdom assumes this role again for the third time in 2022, which could be a moment of both pride and pressure for Cambodia. This chapter discusses the opportunities and challenges that Cambodia may face during its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022. It also provides a key summary of Cambodia's preparation for this milestone event.

CAMBODIA'S ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP: OPPORTUNITIES

Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 will provide the countries with more opportunities to advance its foreign policy agenda, promote dialogues on several regional issues, and advance progress on key areas of mutual interest. Those opportunities will contribute to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and beyond. To be precise, Cambodia could capitalise on its ASEAN Chairmanship next year to (1) promote multilateralism and the rules-based international order, (2) advance its economic diplomacy, (3) mediate the political crisis in Myanmar, and (4) contribute to the ASEAN Community building.

PROMOTING MULTILATERALISM AND THE RULES-BASED INTERNATIONAL ORDER

The world continues to experience increasing complexity and uncertainty due to the persistence and accentuation of regional tensions, great power competition, unilateralism, protectionism, populism, and non-traditional security threats such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. They have posed significant challenges to multilateralism, the rules-based trading system, global peace, stability, and prosperity. However, over the recent decades, multilateralism and the rules-based trading system have proven to be the driving forces for the international community to cooperate in a mutually beneficial manner and address challenges and matters of shared concerns. Indeed, they are key to the post-pandemic recovery plan. Cambodia wholeheartedly subscribes to these principles.

Cambodia believes that multilateralism and the rules-based international order are paramount to maintaining world peace, promoting shared prosperity, and addressing emerging global issues such as climate change, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Khmer Times 2020). No single country can address interconnected and complex global issues alone.

Therefore, international partnerships and collaborations are required. In this regard, Cambodia will enthusiastically push these agendas forward during its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022. As the host of the 13th ASEM Summit in November 2021, Cambodia has promoted these principles as reflected by the Summit's slogan, "Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth". Cambodia has also endeavoured to galvanise the solidarity and mutual support among ASEM Partners to advance COVID-19 vaccine multilateralism and an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient post-pandemic socio-economic recovery.

ADVANCING ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

The Royal Government of Cambodia has identified economic diplomacy as one of the core components of the whole-of-government approach to expand economic opportunities and advance competitiveness. It is an important vehicle enabling Cambodia to realise its development visions as an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. Advancing economic diplomacy will allow the Kingdom to attract more foreign investment and tourists, diversify investment sources, expand export markets for Cambodian products, and promote Cambodian culture on the world stage (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia).

As the ASEAN Chair in 2022, Cambodia will have the opportunity to further advance her economic diplomacy so that the Kingdom can diversify its sources of growth, amplify economic potentials, and obtain advantages from emerging opportunities. In particular, the ASEAN Chairmanship will allow Cambodia to pursue the path of economic liberalisation, open trade and globalisation, and strive to promote multilateral trade and negotiations for free trade agreements with more countries. The country expects that it will turn the external environment into a source of opportunities for its national development, foster greater international engagement between it and other major economies, and elevate its reputation in the world.

MEDIATING THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN MYANMAR

The ongoing political crisis in Myanmar has thus far caused political instability in the region and beyond. ASEAN is expected to perform a key role in mediating the crisis. The crisis has been a headache for ASEAN and Cambodia, particularly when the Kingdom assumes the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022. Being the only country in the Mekong region that has maintained regular elections for more than 20 years, Cambodia possesses a unique qualification and opportunity to mediate the Myanmar crisis. It has practical experiences, particularly related to peace-making and national reunification, achieved in the late 1990s. Taking this potential role, Cambodia would help address the crisis and enhance its image and interest on both regional and international stages.

Due to the absence of a potential and credible mediator, Cambodia has certain advantages to mediate the political crisis in Myanmar, particularly when the Kingdom becomes the ASEAN Chair. It is known as a small country with a big heart. Besides, the Royal Government of Cambodia is a close friend to the disputed parties in Myanmar. Therefore, Cambodia may be welcomed by all parties in Myanmar as a trusted, honest mediator. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Cambodia's mediation role in the Myanmar political crisis is enhanced by its success story of peace-making, national reconciliation, stability, and socio-economic development through the government's "Win-Win Policy", as well as the establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

If Cambodia could successfully shoulder the mediating role for a peaceful resolution in Myanmar, the Kingdom is expected to gain regional and international recognition. As a result, Cambodia can promote its roles, national interest, and image in regional and international arenas. Therefore, Cambodia should take a proactive role in helping address the Myanmar crisis.

CONTRIBUTING TO ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

ASEAN has always been an integral part of Cambodia's foreign policy. Four main factors had pushed Cambodia to join ASEAN in 1999, including the principle of non-interference, the community spirit based on consensus, the positive advantages from ASEAN integration, and the expansion of Cambodia's relations with the ASEAN dialogue partners (Samdech Prime Minister Hun Sen 2016). Despite being a latecomer, Cambodia has proven to be an active and constructive supporter of the ASEAN Community building.

In 2022, Cambodia will promote the goal of the ASEAN Community building by exercising its leadership role responsibly in moderating and mediating all concerned parties to solve regional and international issues. Cambodia aims to realise a "people-centred ASEAN" with an emphasis on narrowing the development gap, linking economic integration with poverty reduction, and creating an environment for the security and safety of ASEAN citizens (Chheang 2012). Cambodia has demonstrated a strong political will and unwavering commitment towards regional integration. Such commitment remains unchanged but even more resolute (Sim 2021).

CAMBODIA'S ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP: CHALLENGES AND PREPARATIONS

While Cambodia will gain opportunities as illustrated above during its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022, the Kingdom could also face many challenges. Four major factors could considerably challenge Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has been disrupting the world since 2020. Although many governments worldwide are becoming more effective in fighting the pandemic and many people have been vaccinated, the impact could potentially extend until Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 or beyond. Moreover, newer pandemic variants continue to appear in different parts of the world and have made existing anti-pandemic mechanisms less effective, if not obsolete (Roberts 2021). In this regard, it is possible that the world will not return to normal in 2022 if this trend continues.

There would be at least two main challenges for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. First, the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic would make it difficult for Cambodia to bring attention and solidarity from all ASEAN members and dialogue partners. Depending on the actual situation of the pandemic in their countries, some ASEAN members or dialogue partners might be focusing more on the urgent fight against the pandemic at home rather than on regional issues. For instance, at the time of writing, a new variant of COVID-19 called the Delta-variant was found in India and has infected more than 200,000 and killed not less than 4,000 Indian people daily (Mehta and Mishra 2021). Prime Minister Modi's plan of exporting millions of COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccines to 190 countries worldwide through the COVAX scheme has been paused (BBC 2021). Instead of prioritising regional issues, Modi's government is spending more energy and resources addressing immediate domestic crises. Similarly, several cities of ASEAN members such as Lao, Thailand, and Cambodia have been under lockdown and curfew due to the pandemic (Reuters 2021a; Bangkok Post 2021; Xinhua 2021). Besides, the prolonging COVID-19 pandemic could cause either a nationalist environment or unfavourable momentum in ASEAN meetings, preventing the regional leaders from concluding meaningful agreements. Comparatively, the pandemic has already undermined regional cooperation in the European Union despite its comprehensive regional integration. The nationalist sentiment, triggered by the pandemic, takes hold in medical nationalism, the domestic politics of EU members, border closures, and racial discrimination, which have undermined the EU's regional cooperation (Bieber 2020, 7–9).

Second, Cambodia would have to host the ASEAN Summit and related meetings virtually if the pandemic remains a serious threat in the region until 2022. Notably, it is already challenging to negotiate physically with ten regional leaders or more with diverse interests for a consensus, let alone do it virtually. Moreover, various aspects such as international organisations' bureaucracy, the complexity of the issue at hand, and actors involved in the negotiation process could potentially undermine any successful negotiation outcome (Meerts 2015, 1–7). In this sense, the online meetings would make it even more challenging for Cambodia as the ASEAN Chair. Each country has a different time zone, internet reliability, information technology expertise, and other qualities which, at any moment, could disrupt the online coordination and negotiation process.

Besides, some ASEAN related meetings, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which involves as many as 27 countries from inside and outside the region, would require extensive coordination and negotiation efforts from the host.

Despite the above challenges, there are some preparations, which Cambodia should consider when it assumes the Chairman of ASEAN. The Cambodian government could learn from the experience of Brunei's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2021. Brunei has hosted the ASEAN Summit and related meetings virtually (Bandial 2020). By observing the upside and downside of Brunei's performance as ASEAN Chair, Cambodia will be more prepared for virtual coordination and negotiations. Besides, the Cambodian government should be fully aware of ASEAN members' and partners' COVID-19 situation. By doing so, Cambodia could put forward agendas of common interests. Finally, Cambodia needs to strategically minimise the nationalistic and unfavourable environments by prioritising agenda items that generate solidarity momentum rather than division. To build solidarity momentum, Cambodia could also consider promoting and enhancing the existing ASEAN's proposed mechanisms in responding to the pandemic, including, but are not limited to, (1) the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, (2) the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), (3) the ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement (TCA) Framework, (4) the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED), and (5) the ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS).

THE ONGOING POLITICAL CRISIS IN MYANMAR

It is unforeseeable whether Myanmar's political crisis would end before Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. Although the political crisis could be an opportunity for Cambodia to showcase its capability in resolving the issue through its role as a mediator, it will be a major challenge for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship and Cambodia's mission to advance the ASEAN Community building and to sustain ASEAN's role as an important hub for global trade, investment, and supply chains, as reaffirmed by the Cambodian prime minister (Khmer Times 2021). Regardless of ASEAN's non-interference principle, the political crisis in Myanmar is a common challenge for the region, which Cambodia would inevitably need to address in 2022. Myanmar's crisis would challenge Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in two ways.

First, if the political crisis remains until Cambodia becomes ASEAN Chair, the legitimacy and validity of any ASEAN agreement involving Myanmar's military government could be contested in the future. As of today, the legitimacy of General Min Aung Hlaing's government is controversial. There are still protests and violence in Myanmar and calls for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the return of her government (Aljazeera 2021; Guardian 2021).

However, despite the contested leadership in the country, General Min Aung Hlaing is keen to lead Myanmar's delegation to attend the ASEAN Summits and other related meetings in 2021 and 2022. ASEAN leaders met him during the ASEAN's Special Meeting on Myanmar (Paddock 2021). In this respect, potential international legal disputes under the principle of *Pacta Sunt Servanda* could arise if the post-crisis government of Myanmar decides not to recognise the agreements made by General Min Aung Hlaing during ASEAN meetings in Cambodia. Consequently, the advancement of ASEAN Community building, at least concerning regional agreements, would be affected.

Second, prolonging Myanmar's domestic conflict could potentially invite great power interference into the politics of the country and Southeast Asia. The region has been prone to great power political competition since the 15th century because of its geographical significance (Shambaugh 2018, 89–95). The involvement of great powers' competition in any country's domestic affairs or any region would complicate the situation and destabilise those places. In some cases, great powers' involvement would make a country become a failed state. Consequently, regional economic development would be disrupted. For example, great power competition in Syria has caused the prolongation of the Syrian political crisis, with the whole country almost being destroyed (Chughtai 2021). Worse, the conflict has resulted in millions of refugees, which put more burden on the region and the international community (Reid 2021). The destruction by war has undermined the Syrian authority to effectively combat regional terrorism and organised crimes (Zulfqar 2018, 138; Steenkamp 2017, 7–10).

Although Myanmar's political problem is domestic, it does not exist in isolation from the region or ASEAN. Without any effective solution to Myanmar's political problem, the country could risk following the same footsteps of Syria. Hence, the extension of Myanmar's political crisis and the possibility of great powers' interference in the country would disturb peace and stability in the region and affect regional trade, investment, and supply chains. In this sense, the political crisis in Myanmar could be a major obstacle preventing Cambodia from fulfilling its mission in ASEAN Community building.

To prepare for such challenges, Cambodia should consider these aspects. As ASEAN Chair, it should continue to support the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus, which ASEAN leaders agreed in Indonesia in April 2021 (Reuters 2021b). The proposal from ASEAN could contribute incrementally to the de-escalation and the ending of Myanmar's political crisis and prevent the internationalisation of the problem. After all, no leaders in the region would want to see great power interference in their domestic politics (Aizawa 2019, 412–415). Furthermore, while Cambodia must observe the Myanmar situation closely, it should also watch and learn how Brunei did perform as ASEAN Chair in 2021. Lastly, although Myanmar's domestic problem could spread into a regional issue, Cambodia has to uphold the ASEAN Way. Therefore, Cambodia could carefully consider the application of quiet diplomacy in combination with sharing its peacebuilding experience with Myanmar during its chairmanship.

CHINA-US STRATEGIC RIVALRY

Also related to the preceding factor, the increasing tension between China and the US is another major factor that would affect Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. The strategic rivalry between great powers is not new in international politics. The famous Peloponnesian War and World War I are just a few examples showing how much instability and destruction great powers could create for a region (Joll 2006; Allison 2015). For Southeast Asia, the competition between China and the US has become more tense since the Trump administration and has continued under Joe Biden's administration (Zengerle and Martina 2021; Kuik 2021, 158–160). Against this backdrop, it would be challenging for Cambodia to negotiate and coordinate all ASEAN members and dialogue partners, including China and the US, to reach a consensus, while preserving ASEAN centrality and unity.

It is important to highlight that, amid the growing strategic rivalry between China and the US, each ASEAN member and dialogue partner has different and complex foreign policies toward the two great powers. For example, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) countries are ASEAN's important dialogue and trading partners. On the other hand, the QUAD members are also important allies of the US. They have revitalised the group to counter the rise of China's influence in the region through various aspects, including regional trade and infrastructure development, COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy, and the Open and Free Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) (Sharma 2021).

ASEAN members have also benefited greatly from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The initiative has spurred Southeast Asia regional economic integration and contributed to the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (Cheok and Chen 2019, 18–20; Bi 2021, 89–97). Similarly, the Philippines and Brunei are more accommodating toward China for domestic interests although they are two of the claimants in the South China Sea disputes. Differently, Vietnam is more hedging toward the US for soft balancing against China (Lawrence 2021; De Castro 2020; De Gurung 2018, 14–6). Thus, such dynamic and complex relationships between ASEAN members and dialogue partners vis-a-vis the rising China-US rivalry could potentially hinder ASEAN from reaching any meaningful decision in 2022.

Considering the experience and recent developments involving China-US strategic rivalry, Cambodia could consider the following aspects. On the one hand, Cambodia could negotiate and coordinate ASEAN related meetings based on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and the ASEAN Way principle. On the other hand, according to its core foreign policy of neutrality stipulated in the 1993 Constitution, Cambodia must avoid forming an alliance of any form against any ASEAN member or dialogue partner during its 2022 chairmanship and beyond. The Singaporean prime minister said in 2020, "Asia-Pacific countries do not want to choose between the United States and China; they want to cultivate good relations with both."

Besides, Cambodia has both customary rules and institutional power under ASEAN Chairmanship, allowing it to set an agenda to avoid causing more tensions in great powers' strategic rivalry (Suzuki 2020, 6–8). Nonetheless, Cambodia needs to remind all ASEAN members and dialogue partners that all the countries need to take collective responsibility for the success and failure of ASEAN meetings. All the members and partners have their parts to play in ASEAN's progress.

HOSPITALITY AND HOLISTIC ARRANGEMENTS

The organisation of ASEAN's meetings is another major factor that would cause challenges to Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. One of the challenges would be about finance if the 2022 ASEAN Summit and related meetings are conducted physically. The pandemic has negatively impacted many countries' economic performance, including Cambodia. At the same time, due to several episodes of COVID-19 lockdown in the country from 2020 to 2021, the government has reduced the national budget to cope with the economic impact derived from the pandemic (Phoung 2020). Besides, the country has already faced the loss of about 15 per cent of domestic income from taxation in early 2021 compared to last year (RFI 2021). The trend will likely continue considering how the new wave of COVID-19 is still infecting Cambodian people. It is important to emphasise that Cambodia is also scheduled to host two other major events, namely the 13th ASEM Summit in November 2021 and the commune elections in 2022. Those two important events would require a significant amount of state budget in addition to the financial burden of Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship. Undoubtedly, Cambodia has the experience of chairing ASEAN twice, in 2002 and 2012. However, ASEAN activities have also grown much bigger than a decade ago. Thus, the financial difficulty could be a real challenge for Cambodia in 2022.

Another challenge is perhaps human resources. Comparatively, human resources are less problematic for Cambodia now than in the past. Compared to Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2002 and 2012, Cambodia's human resources have increased notably. The number of public and private educational institutions in the country is increasing, and more Cambodian students have access to higher education (Rana, Ardichvili, and Taing 2017, 137; MoEYS 2019, 65–71). In addition to graduates from local universities, more Cambodian students have received scholarships to study abroad annually (Boken and White 2020; Phnom Penh Post 2020). As a result, many of them return to work for government's ministries and private institutions such as think tanks, research institutions, and universities. Furthermore, more young people with skills and higher education degrees have been given opportunities to take leadership roles in various government bodies. Therefore, Cambodia will not face severe challenges in terms of human resources like before, as long as the government is willing and able to mobilise the existing human resources to help organise the 2022 ASEAN Summit and related meetings.

Lastly, some may argue that logistic arrangement could be another challenge for Cambodia in 2022. However, Cambodia has enough hard infrastructure necessary to host the ASEAN Summit and related meetings. The government has constructed new buildings with cutting-edge technology. For example, the new buildings of the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, are both capable of hosting international meetings. The government could also utilise the existing buildings such as the Peace Palace, which was used for the ASEAN Summit in 2012. Cambodia also has many luxurious hotels in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and Sihanoukville, which are accessible by roads and planes.

Considering the possible challenges mentioned above, there are some preparations that Cambodia could consider. Cambodia could learn from Vietnam's ASEAN Chairmanship back in 2020. Vietnam had prepared for the chairmanship one year and a half in advance. It established a national organising committee consisting of several sub-committees covering content, protocol, logistics, communication and culture, security and healthcare, and secretariat work (Toan 2019). Besides, Cambodia must closely follow the development of the ASEAN Travel Corridor in 2021 (Syakriah 2020). If phase one of the ASEAN Travel Corridor could be implemented, Cambodia should start mobilising human resources and arranging logistics and venues necessary for conducting physical ASEAN Summit and related meetings in 2022. Although physical meetings demand more spending, it would also reduce online diplomacy, negotiation, and coordination challenges.

Nonetheless, Cambodia could also seek assistance from development partners. For instance, Japan has promised Cambodia financial support for purchasing cars and equipment for ASEM and ASEAN related meetings (Torn 2020). In the same vein, Cambodia could also seek assistance from other key development partners such as Australia, China, South Korea, the US, and the EU. However, the government should be aware that there could be strings attached upon receiving assistance from foreign countries (Chheang 2021, 387–391). Those attached conditions might go against the core interests of Cambodia and ASEAN. Other than that, the Cambodian government needs to seek support from relevant public and private institutions, domestic and international experts, scholars, volunteers, and other stakeholders to effectively prepare for the 2022 ASEAN Chairmanship.

Overall, Cambodia will need to redouble its efforts in coordinating and chairing the ASEAN Summits and other related meetings to demonstrate to the region and beyond that it can act as chair responsibly and constructively. Furthermore, Cambodia will need to be ready and willing to address problems with diplomacy and leadership. However, as the world and the region become more complex and unpredictable, Cambodia should act cautiously in managing differences by considering the motivations and interests of individual member states and partners. However, to accommodate and harmonise all these different interests is a huge challenge for the Cambodian Chairmanship.

CONCLUSION

The chapter has illustrated the opportunities, challenges, and preparations for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022. The conclusion is that Cambodia as the Chair will have the opportunities to promote the principles of multilateralism and a rules-based international order, considered as the Kingdom's core foreign policies. The ASEAN Chairmanship could serve as a platform for Cambodia to advance its economic diplomacy for promoting national economic development. Furthermore, through its ASEAN Chairmanship, Cambodia will have a huge opportunity to contribute to ASEAN Community building, critical for regional integration and connectivity.

Meanwhile, Cambodia would face several challenges for its ASEAN Chairmanship next year. First, the global COVID-19 pandemic will put Cambodia in a difficult position in gathering solidarity from ASEAN member states and other dialogue partners who may focus on fighting against the pandemic at home. Second, the ongoing political crisis in Myanmar will be another headache for ASEAN and Cambodia. However, this could also be an opportunity for Cambodia to take the role of mediator in the Myanmar crisis, thanks to its unique qualification and experience. Finally, the US-China rivalries would be another challenge for Cambodia's role as ASEAN Chair, particularly in preserving ASEAN centrality and serving the bloc's interest. ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 will be a major task for Cambodia. Although the country is expected to use much of its budget for organising big events in 2021 and 2022, the Kingdom has been well prepared to take on this challenge. Cambodia also possesses enough human resources and logistic arrangements necessary to host the ASEAN Summits and other related meetings. Overall, Cambodia will need to redouble its efforts in coordinating and chairing the ASEAN Summits and other related meetings to demonstrate to the region and the world that the Kingdom can act as chair responsibly and constructively.

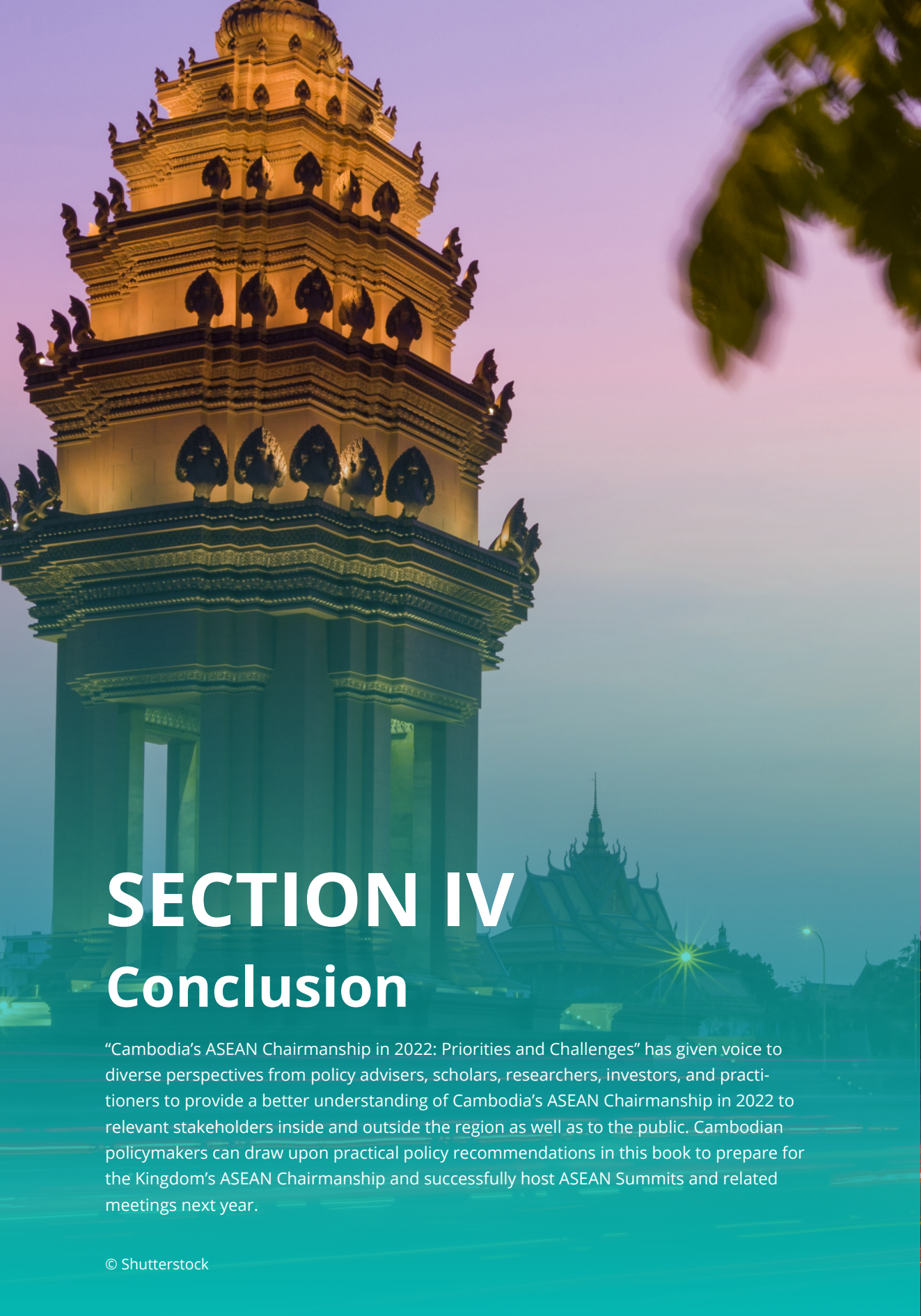
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SECTION IV

Conclusion

“Cambodia’s ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022: Priorities and Challenges” has given voice to diverse perspectives from policy advisers, scholars, researchers, investors, and practitioners to provide a better understanding of Cambodia’s ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 to relevant stakeholders inside and outside the region as well as to the public. Cambodian policymakers can draw upon practical policy recommendations in this book to prepare for the Kingdom’s ASEAN Chairmanship and successfully host ASEAN Summits and related meetings next year.

ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

While proceeding to the post-2025 vision, ASEAN is embarking on a challenging journey to accomplish the goal of the ASEAN Community 2025. In this regard, upholding solidarity, unity, and mutual assistance, and especially maintaining its centrality as well as position pertinent to its strategic interests are the bloc's main priorities. The political and security realm requires this regional grouping to reinforce its centrality as a driving force to advance dialogue processes; build trust for regional peace, security, and stability; and offer more proactive and effective responses to tackle the challenges. Economically, it requires ASEAN to be closely dependent on economic linkages to other sub-regional entities. For the socio-cultural domain, it requires ASEAN to attach great importance to enhancing a people-oriented and people-centred approach so that it can have the citizens of ASEAN at the centre of its agenda. Apart from further raising awareness regarding the ASEAN Community building, ASEAN needs to further develop the ethos of compliance focusing on capacity building and harmonising the legal systems of each member state respectively as well as augmenting not only human but also financial resources necessary for carrying out and coordinating agencies and mechanisms.

While the national politics of member states have decelerated the ASEAN community-building progress, more complex and contested regional environments have further put pressure on those efforts. The fate of ASEAN thus relies on how this regional grouping deals with these challenges in order to revitalise its community-building project. Undoubtedly, greater economic integration within ASEAN, together with further integration with the world's economy, is perceived as the means to realise the full economic potential of ASEAN.

ASEAN AND CHINA

ASEAN and China are committed to upholding an open and inclusive regional architecture, an open and free trade system, inclusive multilateralism, and utilising dialogues and consultation to manage the divergences. In this regard, China has actively supported ASEAN's function by strengthening third-party cooperation in Southeast Asia and working with more partners, specifically those being reluctant to endorse China's mega-project, the BRI. On the other hand, China and parts of ASEAN remain locked in the South China Sea conflict that will undoubtedly play a role during Cambodia's upcoming chairmanship. In more years to come, both sides need to further deepen the spirit of cooperation in tackling common problems and maintaining regional peace and prosperity.

ASEAN AND JAPAN

China and Japan have made huge efforts in bolstering their presence and influence in ASEAN, respectively. ASEAN must find a balance between itself and these powers. Furthermore, as the next Chair of ASEAN, Cambodia will have an opportunity to balance the economic relations between the two countries, thereby enabling ASEAN to narrow its economic differences, while promoting regional connectivity and inclusive growth. Therefore, it may be significant for Cambodia to form minilateral or multilateral platforms to engage these regional powers.

ASEAN AND THE US

Cambodia, as the Chair of ASEAN in 2022, will face a myriad of challenges, including the US-China competition, the political turmoil in Myanmar, COVID-19 and post-pandemic economic recovery, and particularly its strained relations with Washington. The difficult relationship between Cambodia and the US could negatively impact the Kingdom's Chairmanship. The poor relations have been exacerbated by Cambodia's close ties with China, whom the US, under Joe Biden's administration, considers its main rival. Therefore, Cambodia's success in the chairmanship will hinge upon several factors, including the country's ability to advocate for practical dialogues between and among actors from within and outside the region, its balanced and flexible way in addressing the above-mentioned contentious problems, and its inclination to place the country's and the bloc's interests at the core.

ASEAN AND THE EU

The EU and ASEAN have shared and implemented the related international norms and standards. On the security front, the EU has demonstrated its ability to offer an indispensable contribution to non-traditional challenges, such as violent extremism and climate change prevention. The cooperation between the two parties entails coordinated confidence-building measures, capacity building and preventive diplomacy, and multi-layered cooperation and the rules-based international order. It has been noted that a decision to upgrade their relations to Strategic Partners will need both the EU and ASEAN to display constant commitment and enlarged communication and investments. Looking ahead, besides the commitment, both sides will need to enact coherent measures, trade flows, and cooperation that lead to the promotion of sustainable and green growth as well as the dissemination of rules-based multilateralism with the placement of the upgraded status at both regional multilateral cooperation framework.

CAMBODIA'S ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP IN 2022

Promoting regional peace and security

As the Chair, Cambodia, together with the other ASEAN members, will need to invest more resources, both effort and time, in promoting regional peace and security. In particular, the Kingdom should encourage 'peaceful competition', if not 'cooperation' in the region, through several possible measures. First, Cambodia could suggest a proposal to deal with the ambiguity concerning aspects of legal constraint of the TAC and further formalise it to enhance regional security. Second, the EAS mechanism can be utilised to promote dialogues or consultation at a comprehensive strategic level, supportive of forming an acceptable rule of conduct that governs all major actors in the Indo-Pacific. Third, it may be important for the chair to synergise and find the complementarity of different Indo-Pacific strategies with ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific to enhance a peaceful environment in the region. Fourth, reaffirming trust and understanding and tackling emergency incidents require Cambodia to focus more on the promotion and enhancement of defence-to-defence channel of communication and expansion of the scope of cooperation to include military-to-military level. Fifth, Cambodia may have to foster cooperation in the maritime realm, including coastguard cooperation, to minimise discrepancies and promote maritime safety and security. Sixth, Cambodia could attach more importance to economic cooperation and integration. This connection pushes for a resumption of negotiation on the ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement by tapping the opportunity from the newly established EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Seventh, Cambodia may put forward the idea to create an Indo-Pacific FTA which is "inclusive" by capitalising on the related agreements, namely RCEP and CPTPP. Finally, fostering programmes and proposals to substantially enhance the bloc's institutional capacity building should be prioritised to resolve the gap between decision-making approach and its reality.

Promoting ASEAN's network of innovative villages

It is important to consider the formation of the "ASEAN's Network of Innovative Villages" to revitalise the functions of rural villages, which will support national development, urban growth, poverty reduction, employment, food security, cultural conservation and development, and social and climate resilience, and address the notion of ASEAN Connectivity.

Specifically, the "ASEAN's Network of Innovative Villages" will (1) build a digital platform for sharing best experiences and drawbacks about rural development, (2) demonstrate a good model of innovative village development, (3) encourage the grassroots, including youth and women, to participate in innovative village development, (4) advance public-private-people partnership and multi-stakeholder engagement for innovative village development, and (5) offer chances for village cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity through face-to-face dialogue.

Promoting ASEAN digital transformation

Cambodia, as the next Chair of ASEAN, will need to foster regional digital transformation and connectivity. However, handling the advancement of digital transformation region-wide involves addressing many issues, including the digital gap within ASEAN Member States and between their neighbouring countries, laws to catch up with the fast-evolving digital transformation, and data governance. Moreover, the fact that COVID-19 is not subsiding soon will exacerbate the above challenges.

Promoting a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN community

One of the key tasks for ASEAN and Cambodia is to build a people-centred and people-oriented community to accelerate regional integration. This requires more political will and efforts from the member states. Since its inception, ASEAN has been a top-down organisation, which is why it is time to revive the function of bottom-up diplomacy offering a greater role and contribution to the community-vision. Indeed, the two defining factors enabling the realisation of a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN community are the complementary roles between top-down and bottom-up approaches and closer cooperation between state and grassroots institutions. As the bloc is currently encountering multiple emerging non-traditional security challenges, the COVID-19 crisis, and the rapidly evolving US-China geopolitical tension, attaching importance to the complementary roles of different types of diplomacy, namely track I and II mechanisms and especially youth diplomacy, should be a priority.

Promoting the cultural corridor and tourism development in Southeast Asia in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era

Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 will need to focus on building cultural corridors and promoting post-pandemic tourism development, which are one of the key drivers for regional development. Many unique festivals related to cultures and religions have been held in Southeast Asia, thereby attracting millions of local and foreign tourists to come to the region. Moreover, the natural conditions of the member countries encompass not only diversity in cultures but also world heritage spots which have appealed to an influx of regional and international tourists. However, during the pandemic, the tourism and business travel industries encountered extraordinary drops due to the region's deep integration in the global economy, including trade and international movement.

The recovery of the tourism sector aids the formation of a regional cultural corridor. In connection, the industry in the post-pandemic world needs to go through four phases to recover:

(1) promoting domestic tourism, (2) offering incentives like tax exemption or tax depreciation to attract investment, (3) implementing the ASEAN Readies Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Certificate, and (4) re-permitting international tourism after the recovery of mobility within the region.

Opportunities, Challenges and Preparations for Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022

In the capacity of the ASEAN Chair, Cambodia will get the chance to advance the country's core foreign policy principles, such as multilateralism and the rules-based international order. In addition, the 2022 mandate enables the Kingdom to have a platform to bolster its economic diplomacy, thus finally boosting the country's economic development. The third ASEAN Chairmanship will also present a huge opportunity for Cambodia to realise ASEAN Community building. This is imperative for the integration and connectivity in the region.

Despite these opportunities, there will be numerous challenges for Cambodia in handling the upcoming chairmanship. Cambodia will find it hard to garner the bloc's solidarity amidst the global COVID-19 crisis. ASEAN members and dialogue partners will be more occupied with their domestic efforts to battle the pandemic. Although the continuing political crisis in Myanmar constitutes another hurdle for Cambodia and ASEAN, the Chair could grasp the opportunity to become a mediator, since the country has gained unique qualifications and experience in this regard. Another problem pertinent to its chairing-role is the competition between the US and China. Upholding ASEAN centrality and safeguarding the interest of the grouping is important for the Chair.

The China-US rivalry could also generate more complexities and challenges to peaceful resolution on the South China Sea issue. Therefore, as ASEAN Chair, Cambodia will need to advance trust-based cooperation, functional cooperation, and the rules-based regional order among all parties concerned. A success in concluding the CoC will serve as another vital phase to build trust and confidence, prevent conflict, and manage and settle the disputes around the South China Sea.

Lessons learnt from Brunei's ASEAN Chairmanship 2021

To prevent a recurrence of the "Phnom Penh fiasco" in 2012, ASEAN member states must accept the fact that being able to conclude a substandard agreement is better than having no agreement at all. Therefore, Cambodia could take the lessons learnt from Brunei on having a preferential balancing distribution to conclude the related agreement efficiently. In addition, the Kingdom could take notes from Brunei on how to successfully chair ASEAN and host related meetings during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, Cambodia could take advantage of its outstanding performance on containing community outbreaks, encountering a relatively less severe situation when it comes to the Delta variant, and being ranked as the country with the second-best inoculation-rate in ASEAN in a bid to boost the bloc's recovery in the post-COVID-19 period as well as to help other member states that are still struggling with new outbreaks. On another front, Cambodia could learn from Brunei how the then Chair handled the crisis in Myanmar. Indeed, the political situation in Myanmar will offer Cambodia the chance to recover lost momentum in helping the country through its role in mediating intra-ASEAN conflicts, appealing to the Tatmadaw, while engaging with an international community that is growing increasingly intolerant of ASEAN's approach to the Myanmar crisis.

Preparations

Cambodia will shoulder the huge task of the ASEAN Chairmanship next year. Despite huge expense for organising this historic event, Cambodia is well prepared by having ample human resources and logistic arrangements to embark on the journey to convene the ASEAN Summits and other related meetings under its mandate. The Kingdom will double down on efforts to perform its tasks, showcasing Cambodia's responsible and constructive leadership as the ASEAN chair.



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