

ASEAN Focus

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION PROVIDING CONCISE ANALYSES AND PERSPECTIVES ON ASEAN MATTERS

ASEAN Braces for
a Risen China

ASEAN-China
Dialogue Relations:
Young but Mature

ASEAN Amidst
the US-China
Rivalry

Building Blocks
Towards Resilient &
Innovative ASEAN

Batik: The Wax that
Never Wanes



Assessing
ASEAN-China
Relations

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ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) is an autonomous organisation established in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are grouped under Regional Economic Studies (RES), Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS) and Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS). The Institute is also home to the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC), the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) and the Singapore APEC Study Centre.

Editorial Notes

As 2018 is approaching to an end, a *brave new world* is emerging. US-China relations – a defining relationship for the world and Southeast Asia in particular – are heading towards strategic contestation. A new Washington consensus that puts competition at the forefront and the age of “innocent engagement” behind is arising. The US-China trade war is shaking global markets and regional supply chains. Despite the truce on their trade war in mid-December, US-China strategic competition, especially on the technological front, is deep and deepening.

ASEAN and its member states are searching for ways to weather through these uncertainties and disruptions. The 33rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in November in Singapore conveyed ASEAN’s strong message on engagement and openness, not insulation and isolation. Silver linings are also found in ASEAN and its member states’ efforts to work with like-minded partners to sustain the open and rules-based multilateral trading system: The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) will come into effect on 30 December 2018 while next year will see intensified efforts to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations.

ASEAN further seeks to strengthen its relations with all Dialogue Partners on the basis of mutual benefits and in pursuit of an open and inclusive regional order. It is in this spirit that the ASEAN leaders recently adopted Vision 2030 for ASEAN-China strategic partnership with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. But even as ASEAN and China begin the next chapter of their partnership, a question still requires soul-searching from both sides: What does a risen China mean for ASEAN and its member states, and for the regional order in Southeast Asia and beyond?

This issue features a series of articles that seek to digest this question through different angles. Dato’ Steven Wong argues that assessing China’s rise through binary lens – a benign or domineering hegemon – is both simplistic and unrealistic. Dr. Dewi Anwar Fortuna also argues against making a binary choice as ASEAN navigates the intensifying US-China strategic rivalry. Assoc. Prof. Herman Kraft highlights the challenges that remain in this blossoming partnership. Prof. Zha Daojong and Dr. Dong Ting see how far ASEAN-China relations have come, and yet how important it is for both sides to continue reassuring each other of their strategic intentions. Hoang Thi Ha unpacks China’s proposal for and ASEAN’s response to an “ASEAN-China community of common destiny”. We supplement these insights with statistics in *ASEAN in Figures* about the expansion and deepening of ASEAN-China relations over the past three decades.

When Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong took over the ASEAN gavel from Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in November last year, the theme he unveiled for Singapore’s ASEAN Chairmanship in 2018 was simple but significant: “Resilience and Innovation”. Throughout 2018 and across the whole spectrum of ASEAN cooperation, the theme has been translated into concrete and meaningful deliverables to stand ASEAN in good stead to embrace the uncertain future ahead: from the ASEAN Leaders’ Vision for a Resilient and Innovative ASEAN which articulates “ASEAN’s strategic position and intent in the context of a shifting geopolitical and economic landscape”, to various frameworks for ASEAN to be both digital-ready and digital-resilient, especially the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, the ASEAN Agreement on E-Commerce, the ASEAN Framework on Digital Data Governance, and a sharper focus on cybersecurity and cyber-terrorism.

We are therefore honoured to have Singapore Senior Minister of State, Dr. Maliki Osman for *Insider Views* in this year-end issue. He shares with us his insights and experiences from Singapore’s ASEAN Chairmanship 2018. We complement this with the *Year in Review* section which looks back at the highlights of ASEAN throughout 2018 in both captivating images and key timelines.

For *Sights and Sounds*, Ms. Hayley Wincombe takes us through the fascinating journey of batik – a wax-resistant dyeing craft – that found its home in Southeast Asia with the finest and most celebrated expressions. Ms. Nur Aziemah Aziz introduces us to the Manila-based University of Santo Tomas which has defied the passage of time to be the oldest operational university in Asia.

From all of us here at the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, we wish you the warmest greetings of this season, and a happy 2019 ahead! We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to our distinguished list of contributors whose insights and expert opinions give substance and quality to ASEANFocus. We are equally grateful to our stakeholders, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, C+C Communication Designs, Markono Printers and our loyal readership for their year-round support and good cheer. Last but not least, we thank Ms. Nur Aziemah Aziz, former Assistant Production Editor of ASEANFocus and one of the “Three Musketeers” Research Officers at ASC for her invaluable contributions to the publication and to the Centre. Her creative impulse and energy, as well as her keen “on the ground” insights are irreplaceable and will be missed. We wish her all the best in her future endeavours. 🍷

ASEAN Braces For a Risen China

Steven Wong posits that recalibration of ASEAN-China relations is needed but not towards disengagement.

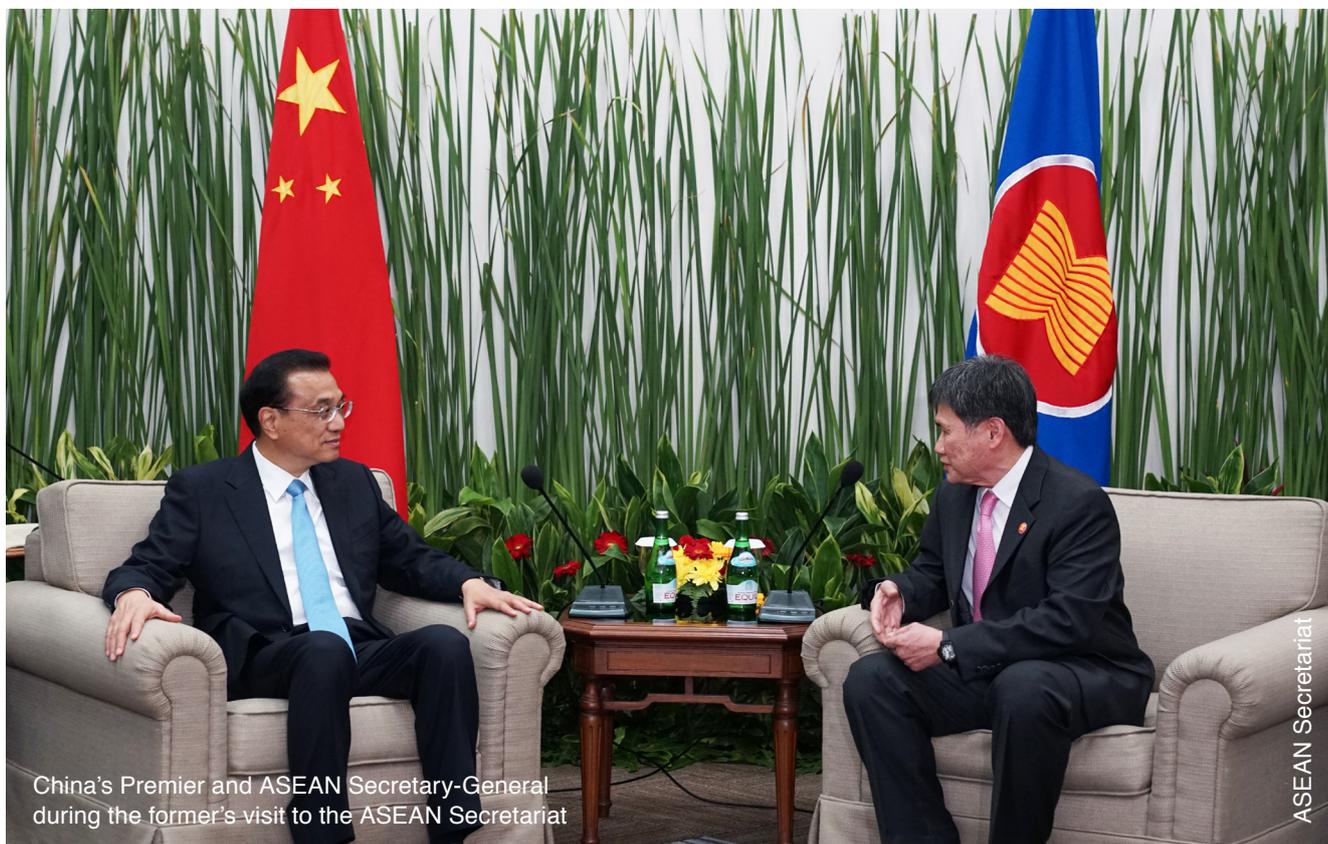
Does China today pose a historic opportunity or a menacing threat? Is it a status quo or revisionist power? Are its aims and intentions peaceful or predatory? Will it be an aggressively domineering or benignly cooperative (and compliant) hegemon? These are some of the either-or questions that have been asked and answered numerous times since China began its rise on the world stage. Five hundred years of world history, however, show that such binary choices are not just simplistic but wrong and outright deceiving. Rising powers have consistently acted in their national interests, often with unjust consequences and occasionally great human toll. Moral virtue, much less altruism, has rarely ever been a feature of international relations.

In evaluating a rising power like China, the right grammatical connector should be a multifaceted “and” rather than a dualistic “or”. China’s rise in the world is, indeed, challenging the US- and West-led world security order and will continue to do so in decades to come. China will use its increasing power to protect its security and advance its national interests just as other major powers

have done and are still doing today. Expectations that China will surrender or curtail its sovereign rights of self-determination despite its greater capabilities probably says more about the unrealistic hopes of its competitors rather than the state itself.

If, as some scholars predict, China fails in its ambitions to become a global power then status quo powers have little to worry about apart from possible negative spill-over into the international arena. If, as others predict, China becomes, and as the US and the West want, a “responsible” (i.e., compliant) partner in a cooperative multipolar world, there is even less of an issue. Recent foreign policy, defence and trade policies and actions by the US and some of its allies, however, make it clear that China is considered an existential security threat to them. While this does not make a modern-day Thucydides Trap inevitable, it does heighten the potential for, and risks of, major confrontation and conflicts.

To be sure, China has not been entirely supportive of US actions in the world’s major conflict zones nor against the



China's Premier and ASEAN Secretary-General during the former's visit to the ASEAN Secretariat

ASEAN Secretariat

latter's declared foes. Closer to home, its island-building and militarisation of the South China Sea, which it perceives as essential for security, has built it little trust and won it few friends from within and outside the region. On the medium to longer-term horizon, China's rapidly advancing military capabilities in Northeast, Southeast and Central Asia, while its increasing mastery of dual-use technological capabilities in artificial intelligence and robotics, information technology, nanotechnology, genetics and quantum computing are seen by many strategic thinkers as changing the global balance of power.

China's Chairman Mao Zedong is famously quoted as saying that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" but as any good Marxist knows, guns can only grow out of the economic base that makes them, among other things. China's successes and capabilities in the past two decades stem almost entirely from its ability to establish a strong economic and commercial sub-structure, albeit with ample but often stumbling and wasted state support. Mr. Deng Xiaoping, the instigator of reforms and opening-up, turned the classical theory of the material forces of production inside out by advocating pragmatism, such that China is today the biggest defender of the multilateral trading system, free trade and globalisation.

"In evaluating a rising power like China, the right grammatical connector should be a multifaceted "and" rather than a dualistic "or". China's rise in the world is, indeed, challenging the US- and West-led world security order and will continue to do so in decades to come."

China's globalised economy is its one true asset from which its sophisticated political, military and scientific superstructure springs and flourishes. It is also clear that this asset will have to be carefully managed if it is not also to be its Achilles' Heel. Behaving in a purely predatory and self-interested manner, something that China realises, will almost certainly guarantee the economy's long-term decline. Since its 2001 accession to the World Trade Organisation, China has been the global game changer in merchandise trade, albeit with some misgivings by its partners in the form of record trade deficits. In order to help better balance out resource flows, it has encouraged imports of services (mainly tourism) and net investment.

With its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, China has added potent infrastructure development and financing to this mix. This started out as another channel to recycle its balance of payments surpluses, but the geopolitical and security consequences were quickly realised and capitalised on at the 19th Communist Party Congress in 2017. The West has since tried to tar-and-feather the BRI as debt-trap and loan-to-own diplomacy, with the US, Japan and Australia presenting their own alternative in the form of the Indo-Pacific concept. This ignores the



fact that many countries are being offered development opportunities and thrown financial lifelines that no other country is offering or capable of offering.

In the greater game of global geopolitics and security, ASEAN member states are not significant players, either individually or even collectively. ASEAN does have a stake in ensuring regional stability so that its members can develop and prosper. China's fast rising trade and trade surpluses vis-à-vis ASEAN, especially in 2017 when net resource flows were around US\$43.4 billion, has resulted in concerns among members, notably, loss of competitiveness, over-dependence, debt and limited local participation but these have generally not been at the front-and-centre of their relationships. These have not stopped them from agreeing to a Strategic Plan for ASEAN-China Transport Cooperation in 2016 and launching the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership Vision 2030 in 2018.

ASEAN countries are sometimes described as cautious and ambivalent about their relations with China. This, however, lacks considerable precision. ASEAN's only real binary choices are engagement or disengagement. China does need to calibrate its relationship better, building more trust and giving more benefit to the region, but this can only happen in the context of an established and growing relationship. Whatever tests and challenges the ASEAN-China relationship face, little is to be practically gained from a distancing from each other, much less as bandwagoning rivals. ❧

Dato' Steven CM Wong is Deputy Chief Executive of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia.

ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations: Young but Mature

Zha Daojong and **Dong Ting** explain why ASEAN is important to China's economy and diplomacy.

ASEAN is important to China. This is a statement of fact, not out of courtesy or preference. Back in 2016, commemoration of the 25th anniversary of ASEAN-China dialogue relations was so low-key that it barely registered in the media on either side. In 2018, upon the 15th anniversary of the ASEAN-China strategic partnership, joint announcement of a vision for partnership towards 2030 represents efforts by the diplomatic establishments to inject new momentum.

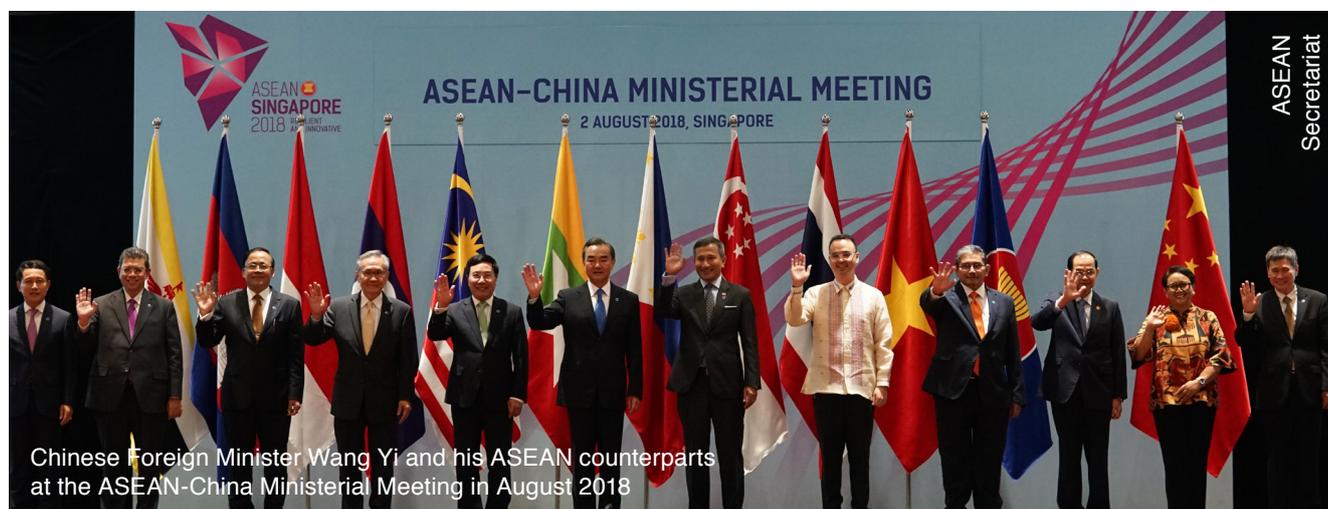
It is useful to recall that China only started to interact with ASEAN – as an entity parallel to its member states – roughly a quarter century after the grouping was formed. As a matter of fact, when then Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen joined a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers in July 1991, he was ostensibly a special guest of the Malaysian government. If that first step was of a tentative nature, gaining the Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN five years later was a milestone for China. After all, in the early 1990s Chinese official characterisation of its geographical neighbourhood changed from *surrounding* (周圍) to *neighbouring* (周边), signaling its desire for acceptance as a partner.

Still in the early 1990s, a focus on economics was the best hope for China to deal with the overall diplomatic-political isolation it was going through in the world. By coincidence, when ASEAN member states launched the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992, senior Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping recommitted his country to “learn from the

“As China and ASEAN have a fairly short history of formalised inter-governmental interactions with each other, it is natural for both sides to experience occasional hiccups in their expansive ties. It is, therefore, incumbent upon ASEAN and China to continually reassure each other about their benign geostrategic calculations over traditional security issues.”

capitalist world” through embarking on his legendary tour to the southern Chinese province of Guangdong. Two years before that, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand had agreed to receive private tourists from China. Such was no mundane measure for China's growth trajectory then, as it takes everyday interaction by average economic men and women to put the learning into practice.

ASEAN's importance to China's foreign economic relations was again manifested in the conclusion of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) in 2002. Although China acceded to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) a year prior, the global trading system was already showing its strains as seen in the collapse of 1999 WTO negotiations in Seattle. It is worth



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his ASEAN counterparts at the ASEAN-China Ministerial Meeting in August 2018

noting that the basic methodology of ACFTA is a carbon copy of that in the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) among ASEAN member economies.

Equally noteworthy is that the two sides have since entered into a series of arrangements to update their trade and investment linkages. In the area of investment protection, in particular, China benefits greatly through negotiating with ASEAN and then apply the agreed articles to all ASEAN member economies regardless of their different previous levels of institutional arrangements with China.

In the realm of political diplomacy, ASEAN is an inter-governmental grouping that neither makes pretense of exercising authority over its member states, nor disciplines a member state's pursuit of ties with a non-member state. Measured against standard definitions of power and diplomacy in the Western world, such operating principles often lead to its designation as a "talking shop". But for China, it is precisely ASEAN's adherence to the non-interference principle that begets a comfort level in managing political relationships in Southeast Asia. In operational terms, ASEAN-China routine diplomacy offers the necessary and convenient cover for maintaining a minimal level of bilateral contacts with an ASEAN member state in times of difficulty or temporary impasse.

Another unique feature ASEAN has developed is the Country Coordinatorship – member states to take turn in coordinating ASEAN's relationship with each of its ten Dialogue Partners every three years. ASEAN member governments therefore rotate among themselves in serving as the coordinator of ASEAN's ties with China. This arrangement provides an opportunity for Chinese government agencies and research institutions to understand and grasp the internal dynamics within the grouping. It also makes it easier for the Chinese side to appreciate ASEAN's efforts to speak with one voice while touching base with all sides concerned.

A notable recent case of difficulty in political diplomacy between ASEAN and China came in 2012 when, for the first time in its history, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting ended without a joint communiqué, the sole cause of disagreement being over the wording of positions on matters pertaining to the South China Sea. Specific circumstances that led to such an outcome are beyond the scope of inquiry here. But it was and to some degree still is a puzzle to many Chinese observers: If it is ASEAN's tradition to refrain from taking positions on territorial disputes among its members, on what ground does the group claim solidarity over territorial disputes between China and some of ASEAN members states?

The structural nature of the above-mentioned episode is ASEAN centrality. In the sphere of rules for trade and investment, when ASEAN moves in unison, the net result is a plus for China. When it comes to management of regional geopolitical dynamics, however, the plus side is that ASEAN's omni-directional platforms like the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus and East Asia Summit are conducive to

Chinese desire to be at the table of regional diplomacy. Participation brings China assurance of means for protecting its interests and cultivating its image.

But, it does work against China's interest for ASEAN centrality to be promoted as a means for either hedging against alleged Chinese expansionism through intra-group solidarity or inviting an external force to counter China. On the one hand, such reasoning is innate in geo-strategic thinking about the choice that a group of geographically small states should have, in any region of the world, for dealing with a large neighbour. On the other hand, practices of centrality so justified can invite nervous reactions from China, thus creating a vicious cycle of distrust.

In sum, as China and ASEAN have a fairly short history of formalised inter-governmental interactions with each other, it is natural for both sides to experience occasional hiccups in their expansive ties. It is, therefore, incumbent upon ASEAN and China to continually reassure each other about their benign geostrategic calculations over traditional security issues. In the marine and maritime spheres, for example, ASEAN and China may find it useful to build on successful tutelage on marine and maritime cooperation anchored by the United Nations. As geographical neighbours, China and ASEAN member states have learned to cope with the ebb and flow of history to thrive in their nation-building and develop their bilateral ties. ASEAN-China partnership therefore must build on such resilience to ensure regional stability and prosperity against the shifting global dynamics. 🇺🇳

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Did you know?

Xiamen University Malaysia in Bandar Serenia, Sepang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, is the first overseas campus in Southeast Asia set up by Xiamen University. (*Xiamen University 2017*)

Xiamen University Malaysia



ASEAN Amidst the US-China Rivalry

Dewi Fortuna Anwar emphasises the imperative for ASEAN to preserve the region's strategic autonomy amidst heightened US-China rivalry.

China's steady rise as a comprehensive power to rival the US, and what it may portend for the international order in general and for regional security in particular, has preoccupied the attention of both scholars and policy-makers in the past decade. Debates about the possible trajectory of US-China relations, whether these two super powers will be able to develop a working relationship with each other or whether their interests will inevitably collide, particularly in the East Asian region, have fed both hopes and anxieties.

Graham T. Allison in his book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* describes that out of 16 cases of rising powers challenging the established powers throughout history, 12 had resulted in wars. He thus cautions that a violent clash between China and the US is a distinct possibility unless both sides take the necessary steps to avert it. While scholars have debated Allison's findings and the extent to which the conclusions drawn from various historical events can be extrapolated to predict future relations between the two nuclear-weapon states in the era of complex economic interdependence, there is little doubt that the current bilateral relations between Washington and Beijing are increasingly marked by strategic rivalry reminiscent of the Cold War. The trade war launched by President Donald Trump against China and President Xi Jinping's tit-for-tat response have heightened concerns about the increasingly acrimonious relations between Beijing and Washington.

In Southeast Asia, there are growing anxieties that ASEAN and its ten member states may be forced to choose between China and the US. Even more worrying are pressures from these two major powers, quietly or

publicly, to the effect that other countries will have to pick side in the unfolding competition for power and influence between them. Will Southeast Asian countries then again become pawns and suffer the misfortune of being used as a theatre for proxy wars in this new Cold War? It was not that long ago that Southeast Asia was divided ideologically between the anti-communist and pro-communist camps, while internally many Southeast Asian countries battled over different ideologies and external alignments that dominated the Cold War. One should not forget that the conflation of internal political polarisations with super powers' rivalry in Southeast Asia during the earlier Cold War manifested in a long drawn-out hot war in Vietnam and brought to power the violent Khmer Rouge regime that triggered a terrible human tragedy in Cambodia.

Given the great diversity among ASEAN member states and within each country, taking side in the US-China rivalry carries the real risks of not only dividing ASEAN but also of exacerbating the internal divisions that still exist within some of the member states. Such a scenario would clearly undo much of the progress that these countries and ASEAN as an organisation have achieved in underpinning the relative peace, stability and prosperity in the region in the decades since the end of the Cold War.

Despite its many undoubted shortcomings, ASEAN has been lauded for its important role in maintaining regional harmony among its member states, and increasingly for its ability to act as the primary convenor of wider regional engagements with major external powers, including the US and China. While not designed to resolve conflicts, ASEAN-centric regional mechanisms have had considerable success in confidence-building measures and





ASEAN leaders and US Vice President Mike Pence at the ASEAN-US Summit in November 2018, Singapore

preventive diplomacy, thus contributing to the general milieu of regional peace and stability. This achievement can be contrasted favourably with many other conflict-prone regions where competing major powers' interests also intrude, such as the Middle East. ASEAN's effectiveness in carrying out its many expected functions, internal and external, is predicated upon its continuing cohesiveness and ability to engage with all powers equally without fear or favour.

Ensuring and preserving the strategic autonomy of the Southeast Asian region has been the primary objective of ASEAN since its establishment at the height of the Cold War in 1967, even when all of the five founding members belonged to the non-communist/anti-China camp. Despite, or because of, the significant differences between the members that were non-aligned and those that were firmly part of the western alliances, as early as 1971 ASEAN agreed upon a vision of Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). The responsibility of achieving ZOPFAN primarily lies with the ASEAN member states themselves, both through their ability to overcome their respective internal weaknesses and achieving national resilience, and through the development of regional resilience by forging ever closer regional cooperation as enunciated in the 1976 Bali Concord. With the development of national and regional resilience, ASEAN member states can overcome their historical fragility and vulnerability to external subversions, and together they would be able to foster the necessary confidence and ability to engage with major external powers on more equal terms.

The enlargement of ASEAN to include countries that had belonged to the opposite camp during the Cold War has undoubtedly made it harder for ASEAN to reach consensus on important strategic issues. But the doctrines, principles and objectives of ASEAN have now been codified in the ASEAN Charter that all of the member states signed in 2007 and ratified in 2008. Strengthening the ASEAN consensus on the need to maintain ASEAN's strategic autonomy and realising the ideals of ZOPFAN have become even more imperative now in the face of the US-China strategic rivalry.

While different ASEAN member states for reasons of history may tend to tilt towards either China or the US, each country must take pains to ensure that its national preference does not weaken or undermine the unity and viability of ASEAN. The well-known warning that if Southeast Asian countries do not hang together, they would be hung separately, given as main the reason for founding ASEAN, remains highly relevant to this day. This means that ASEAN as an institution and its member states must avoid getting directly entangled in the strategic competition between the US and China or aligning with one power against another.

During the Cold War, each of the power blocs tried to draw other countries to its camp or prevent them from joining the enemy camp. As we have seen in Southeast Asia, this policy had led to regional divisions, protracted wars and violent domestic conflicts with large numbers of casualties suffered by all involved parties equally. In the current geo-political and geo-economic reality, it is not in the interest of either China or the US to try to force ASEAN or individual ASEAN member states to take side in their competition. Undermining ASEAN with its inclusive and open regionalism approach, and jeopardising the dynamic development of this region of more than 650 million people with its fast-growing middle class and appetites for both American and Chinese goods and services, will prove to be equally costly to both China and the US.

For ASEAN as an institution and its constituent members, maintaining strategic autonomy is not a luxury, it is a necessary strategy of survival for a region with highly diverse and relatively weak member states in the midst of major powers' competition. ASEAN can take inspiration from the familiar Southeast Asian fable of the wily "Kancil" or mousedeer that often outwits much bigger animals, the moral of the story being that those who are weaker must be more cunning and clever. 🦌

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ASEAN Centrality in Testing Times

Herman Kraft ponders what it means for ASEAN centrality as ASEAN becomes more dependent on China economically.

The most significant structural development in the international relations of the Asia-Pacific – and some would say that this is equally true globally – is arguably the emergence of China as a regionally dominant player. Its “peaceful rise” from the late 1990s to the first decade of the 2000s has brought about a transformation in the region’s political economy, and consequently to the region’s power dynamics. ASEAN and its member states have, from very early on, made the decision to engage China with the hope to tap on its economic potentials and at the same time socialise China into the structure of international relations in the region built around multilateral institutions, dialogue and cooperation. All ASEAN members now have China as one of their most important trade and investment partners. As ASEAN rides on China’s economic express train, especially through the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), what does ASEAN-China “common development and prosperity” – as China would like to put it – mean for the future of ASEAN centrality?

Over the recent years, ASEAN member states have intensively involved in China’s economic programmes under the BRI and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – an opportunistic bent that is only rational in the hypercompetitive environment created by liberal economic norms. At the ASEAN level, participation in the BRI fits into the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC). When it was adopted on 28

October 2010, the MPAC was intended to enhance the region’s physical infrastructure, institutions, and people-to-people relations. Beyond these expected outcomes was the idea that it will bring the region closer and more integrated, eventually contributing to an ASEAN that is stronger politically and strategically – one that is more capable of sustaining the centrality of ASEAN amidst the changing international environment. Structural and financial constraints in ASEAN, however, have led to difficulties in the implementation of the MPAC. These include poor institutional arrangements and unevenness in technical capacity to implement projects, and the consequent lack of investors that could help realise the infrastructural aspect of the Master Plan.

In this context, the announcement of the BRI in 2013 at first seemed to be a perfect fit for the MPAC. The BRI envisions an economic corridor that goes from China to Europe, through Central Asia, and another from China’s coast through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean into the Mediterranean. It has a comprehensive coverage that focuses on connectivity, deep economic ties, and people-to-people exchanges that would promote mutual understanding, peace, and friendship. As far as the MPAC is concerned, the BRI is expected to complement the different aspects of ASEAN connectivity, and provide the possible source of financing to push the MPAC forward. Chinese scholars have made it a point to stress that the BRI will help the ASEAN member economies link up with regional production networks. This will eventually contribute to narrowing the development divide within ASEAN. It will also deepen China-ASEAN economic relations as it promotes “common development and prosperity” between China and Southeast Asia.

However, it is precisely the comprehensive and extensive nature of the BRI that is key to the concern it brings to the region. Subsequent events both within Southeast Asia and beyond have shown the unforeseen consequences of uncritically hitching one’s wagon to the dragon’s tail.

In July 2017, the Sri Lankan government signed a US\$1.1 billion agreement with China to lease the port of Hambantota for 99 years (the same length of time that Hong Kong and other treaty ports were leased by China to European powers and Japan during the 19th century in what the Chinese had decried as unfair treaties). This was



The Vientiane-Boten Railway project financed by China is under construction.



Southern Transport Corridor Pavilion at the 15th China-ASEAN Expo in September 2018

the result of a negotiation intended to alleviate Sri Lanka's total debt (more than US\$25 billion), a significant part of which was contracted with China (approximately US\$6 billion). The port straddles the main shipping route from Asia to Europe in the Indian Ocean and seems to play an important role in the BRI. The negotiation has been mired in controversy as the state-run China Merchants Port Holdings, which built the port for US\$1.5 billion, was initially granted an 80% stake in the port. The case of Sri Lanka has been held up as an example of a potential debt trap that awaited ASEAN member states that became too dependent on Chinese loans to push forward their own infrastructure and connectivity projects. While it is presented by both the Sri Lankan and Chinese governments as a straightforward business deal, critics have pointed to the threat it poses to the security of the states involved in similar dealings with China.

The MPAC relies on national projects to see its vision through. And many ASEAN member states see an opportunity in China's openness with financing to push their respective projects forward. Some states, however, need China for more basic reasons. Cambodia and Laos have largely been dependent on Chinese economic assistance to keep their respective economies afloat. Others have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by Chinese capital to push their own domestic political agenda. Malaysia has US\$34 billion worth of infrastructure projects involving China that was negotiated by the previous government of Najib Razak. According to current Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, these deals favored Chinese investors to the detriment of the Malaysian economy. Very little of this amount was used to generate local employment as the Chinese-funded projects used Chinese labor and equipment. Similar issues have been raised with the open arms with which the Duterte Administration in the Philippines has welcomed Chinese investments and loans. According to President Rodrigo Duterte, the pledge of huge amounts of Chinese capital that would be invested in its "Build, Build, Build" economic program (with an initial estimated cost of US\$180 billion) has made China a key component of the domestic policies of the Administration.

The largesse from the Chinese economic linkage has been beneficial to the different ASEAN countries. As economists like to say, however, there is no such thing as a free lunch. China's demands can be heavy-handed (as Manila learned in 2012 when China imposed restrictions on banana imports from the Philippines), and diplomatically costly (Cambodia continues to feel the fallout from ASEAN's failure to come out with a Joint Communiqué during its Chairmanship in 2012). Both experiences were brought about by China's insistence on acceptance of its own interpretation of the situation in the South China Sea. Dependence on Chinese economic resources has allowed China to constrain ASEAN's collective capacity of strategic decision-making among its members.

The China factor has become all the more complicated for ASEAN as it entwines with the intensifying US-China strategic competition. China's rise has made it a natural challenger to the pre-eminence of the United States in both the Asia-Pacific region, or, as some would now put it, the Indo-Pacific region, and in global politics. This relationship between China and the US has increasingly framed regional dynamics into a competitive context reminiscent of balance of power politics.

A key consideration here is the effect of this competitive power dynamic on ASEAN and its central role in managing regional relations. Some fear that the role that ASEAN has played for a few decades in managing the power dynamic in Southeast Asia will only increasingly be diminished. Some tend to see ASEAN and its members as bystanders powerless in the face of the intensifying competition between the world's two largest economies and the region's most important strategic rivals. Others would argue that ASEAN and its members are not mere victims of these developments as they have been very active and, in more ways than one, willing participants. Whichever holds true, in these testing times for ASEAN centrality, the region must chart out and stand for its own narrative. ❧

Mr. Herman Joseph S. Kraft is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines, Diliman.

ASEAN's Ambivalence Towards a "Common Destiny" with China

Hoang Thi Ha explains why ASEAN is cautious towards China's proposal for an ASEAN-China community of common destiny.



The launch of the 15th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership in 2018

“Community of common destiny (CCD) for mankind” is a new refrain in China’s foreign policy discourse in recent years. Full of lofty principles such as equality among nations, joint contribution and shared benefits, harmony and inclusiveness, the CCD promises to herald a new type of international relations that transcend power politics. However, it remains ill-defined in substance and geographical scope. Understanding the CCD requires references to other initiatives that signify China’s greater activism in regional and global governance such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the new Asian Security Concept. The CCD has thus far found its clearer expression in China’s peripheral diplomacy, especially towards Southeast Asia and ASEAN.

China’s push for closely-knit ties with ASEAN

President Xi Jinping first announced China’s vision of an ASEAN-China CCD in his speech at the Indonesian Parliament on 2 October 2013, saying that “A more closely knit China-ASEAN community of common destiny conforms to the trend of the time.” He emphasised three key factors that bind ASEAN into China in the past, at present and into the future: (a) geographical proximity (China and ASEAN countries are as close as lips and teeth [...] and are linked by common mountains and rivers), (b) historical bond (China and ASEAN stick together through thick and thin), and (c) China’s economic gravity (enable ASEAN countries to benefit more from China’s development).

The ASEAN-China CCD proposal exudes China’s confidence in the inevitability of the convergence of interests and fates between China and Southeast Asia.

Such confidence is grounded in the ever deepening economic integration and social-cultural bonds between China and ASEAN countries as well as under the ASEAN-China framework. Despite being a latecomer – China became ASEAN’s full Dialogue Partner only in 1996 – ASEAN-China relationship is now the most advanced and comprehensive with 47 mechanisms. China is ASEAN’s largest trading partner, accounting for 17.2% of the grouping’s total trade. Chinese FDI flows to ASEAN increased almost 75 times from US\$104 million in 1996 to US\$11.3 billion in 2017. China is also the largest source of tourist arrivals to ASEAN, growing from 1.28 million in 1996 to 20.3 million in 2016.

It is equally noteworthy that China has made sustained investments, with new initiatives and attendant resources, to enhance the *form* in keeping with the *substance* of its partnership with ASEAN. The point is to keep reinvigorating ASEAN-China relations and present China as the *first among equals* vis-à-vis other nine Dialogue Partners. The ASEAN-China CCD proposition therefore seeks to project ASEAN-China strategic partnership as the most advanced one, and lock in the “specialness” of China in ASEAN’s external relations. To Beijing’s credit, China has been a pioneer in many respects: the first Dialogue Partner to sign the free trade agreement with ASEAN (ACFTA) in 2002, establish strategic partnership and accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in 2003; and the first and only nuclear weapon state willing to sign the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treaty with no reservations.

The ASEAN-China CCD proposal has been around since 2013 and concretised through the 2+7 framework (two-point consensus – promoting political-security cooperation and economic development in parallel, and seven priority areas – political, business, connectivity, finance, maritime cooperation, security and people-to-people contacts). It was updated in late 2017 under the “3+X Cooperation Framework” (three broad pillars of political-security, economy-trade and people-to-people exchanges plus “X” – the flexibility to embrace new areas of cooperation as the relationship evolves).

The 15th anniversary of ASEAN-China strategic partnership aside, China sees that the time to reassert its historical centrality in the region has come; and the

window of opportunity is more wide-open in view of the US' disinterest in global leadership and retreat from multilateralism under the Trump Administration's "America First" brand.

ASEAN's selective and practical response

ASEAN has maintained a cautious response towards the CCD. The ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership Vision 2030, recently adopted at the ASEAN-China Summit in November 2018, just "notes [it] with appreciation". The Vision itself is a reconciliation between China's ambitious agenda for a more closely-knit ASEAN-China community and ASEAN's selective and pragmatic approach that adopt those initiatives offering economic, financial and practical benefits while cautiously guarding ASEAN centrality and the open and inclusive regional order.

Various China-proposed economic initiatives under the ASEAN-China CCD banner have been implemented with tangible results. For example, all ASEAN countries are among 57 founding members of the AIIB when it was established in 2015. Indonesia has been a big beneficiary, obtaining US\$940 million from the bank for its five approved projects. Individual ASEAN countries, albeit with varied degrees of expectations and/or reservations, have officially supported the BRI in a hope to secure financing for their infrastructure needs. Another example is the signing of the Upgrade Protocol on 22 November 2015 to improve the ACFTA. Upon its implementation in 2019, the upgraded ACFTA is expected to help increase ASEAN businesses' access to the Chinese market and ease the concern over ASEAN's swelling trade deficits with China which stood at US\$67.5 billion in 2017.

ASEAN however has quietly rejected China's proposal for a good neighbourliness and friendship treaty with the reason that it may duplicate and undermine the TAC to which China and other major powers have also acceded. The deeper concern is the prospect of an exclusive political alliance with China to which ASEAN is unwilling and unable to commit itself. In other China's security initiatives that ASEAN goes along with, the door is also open to other major powers to keep the region open and inclusive. For example, ASEAN Defence Ministers have annual informal meetings with not only their Chinese counterpart but also with the US Secretary of Defence and Japan's Defence Minister. As ASEAN conducted a highly publicised maritime drill with the Chinese navy this year, a decision has been made that an ASEAN-US maritime exercise would follow next year. Commitment to uphold the open and inclusive regional architecture is also emphasised in Vision 2030.

The message is that as ASEAN draws closer to China, it will still preserve the region's "open door" policy and inclusive engagement with one and all. There is a subtle difference in the choice of words by Chinese and ASEAN leaders in prescribing their relationship. China prizes *common-ness* – "common ideals, common prosperity and common responsibility" while ASEAN emphasises *mutual-ness* – "mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual benefit". The former evokes the exclusivity of an

ASEAN-China shared cosmos vis-à-vis the other powers. The latter places importance on reciprocity that guards against subsuming one's identity and autonomy in the relationship with a more powerful partner.

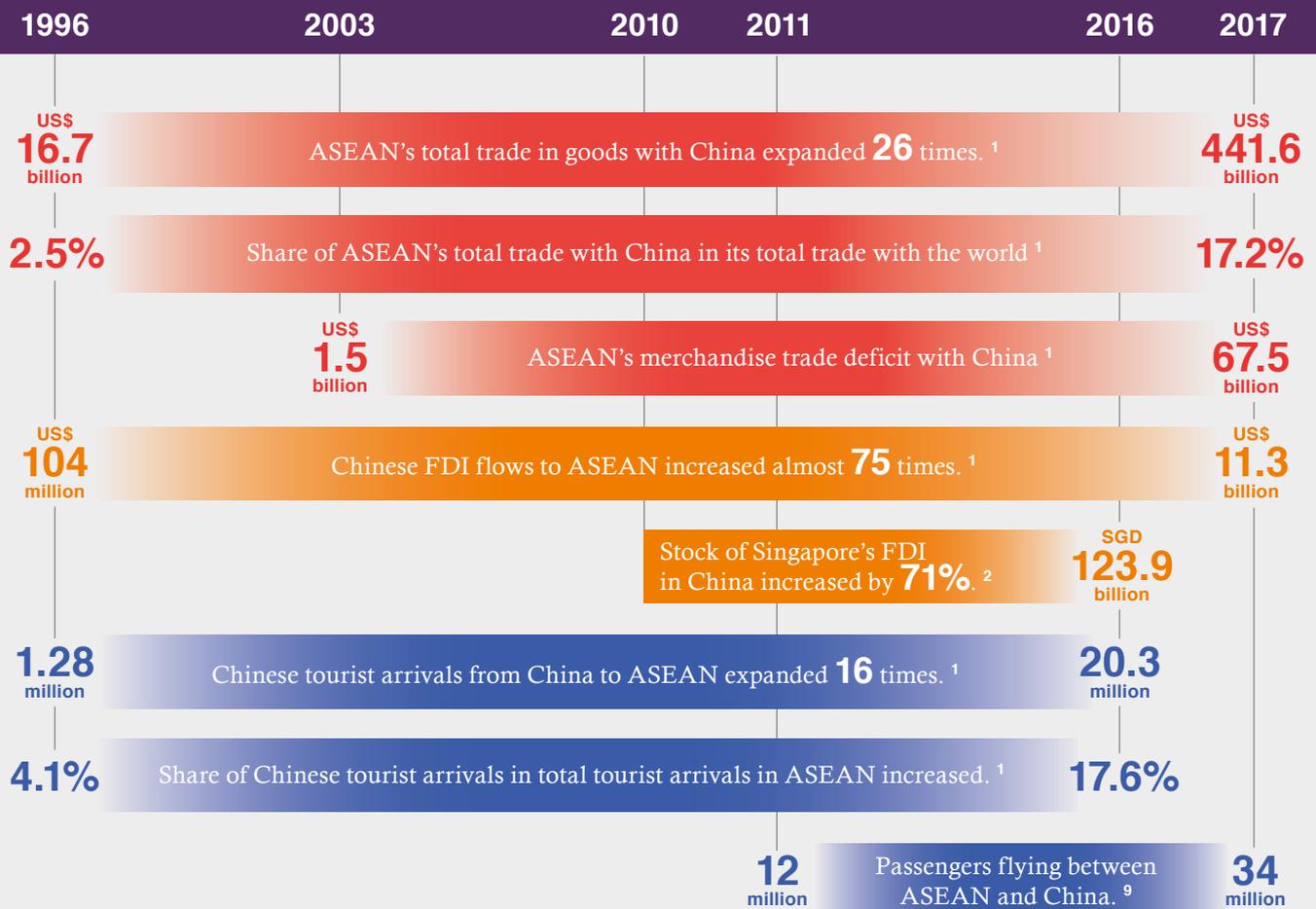
As China rises, it is natural that it seeks to renegotiate the norms and hierarchy of the regional order to reflect its new power and status. Some fear that this renegotiation under the ASEAN-China CCD brand might bring Southeast Asia back to the traditional Sino-centric hierarchical order in which China saw itself as the benign and benevolent leader while other regional countries reciprocated with deference and respect. Although a return to the tributary system is out of the question in the Westphalian world of sovereign equality, China's demand for such "deference and respect" has indeed grown more adamant as it rises; its economic statecraft in offering rewards to those ASEAN members that toe Beijing's line, and exerting punishments to those that do not, has become more salient. On the part of ASEAN countries, however, their historical experiences and geographical proximity with China are seen in different lights from Beijing, coloured as they are by the reality of power asymmetry and the constant fear of vulnerability, over-dependence, and loss of autonomy.

Even with China's biggest attraction in terms of economic engagement, the realities on the ground are complicated, as seen in the recent push-back against some BRI projects in Malaysia due to concerns over the debt-trap and compromise of sovereignty. President Xi' saying "When the big river is full of water, the smaller ones will never run dry" sounds comforting but the reality may not be as rosy, especially in the Mekong region where the Lancang-Mekong framework promises development opportunities but also creates deep ecological, economic and strategic concerns in the downstream countries. Even with good intentions, the sheer scale and boldness of many Chinese projects have been proven too overwhelming and disruptive to the local communities' environment and social fabric in some ASEAN countries.

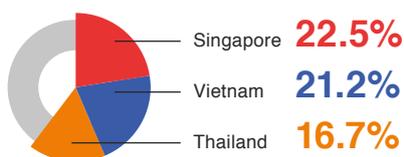
In conclusion, the three factors that China believe would anchor the ASEAN-China community in firm ground – history, geography and economic gravity – could also be burdens in the relationship. Because these factors can work both ways, they must be handled with sensitivity and empathy to avoid the situation where "asymmetry adds the frustration of the larger side that its power does not simply prevail, and the outrage of the smaller that it cannot negotiate on equal terms", as described by scholar Brantly Womack from the University of Virginia. Even as China's attraction is irresistible and its investment in enhancing relations with ASEAN must be recognised, what ASEAN pursues in the present and future regional order is a resilient and robust highway with multiple entrance and exit points that keeps it connected to the outside world, not necessarily paving roads that originate from and lead to Beijing alone. ❧

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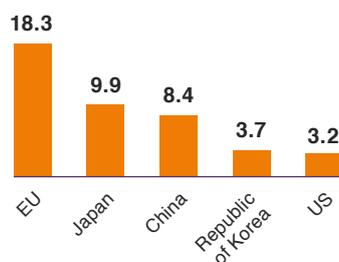
ASEAN-China Relations: Then and Now



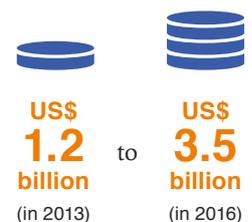
Largest share of ASEAN's total trade with China in 2017¹



Share of top five external source of FDI in ASEAN in 2017¹



China's FDI flows into ASEAN's manufacturing sector rose from³



China was ASEAN's largest trading partner in 2017, accounting for almost **17.2%** of ASEAN's total merchandise trade.¹



Apart from Singapore and Laos, **all ASEAN countries** had trade deficits with China in 2017.¹

Largest share of Chinese FDI flows in 2017 among ASEAN member states (AMS): ¹



China was ASEAN's **3rd** largest external source of Foreign Direct Investment, accounting for **8.4%** of total FDI inflows to ASEAN in 2017. ¹

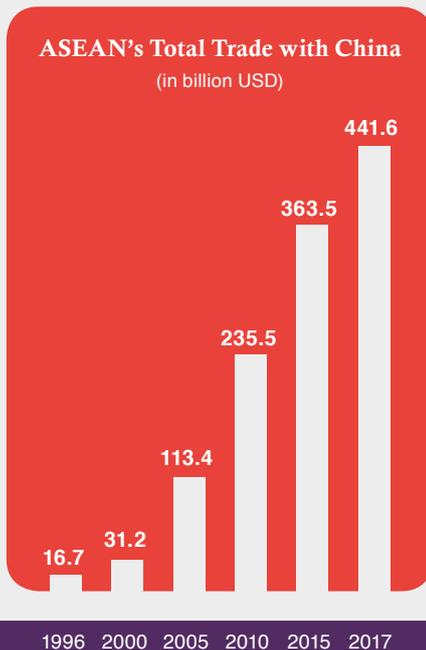
Main sectors of Chinese FDI in ASEAN ⁴



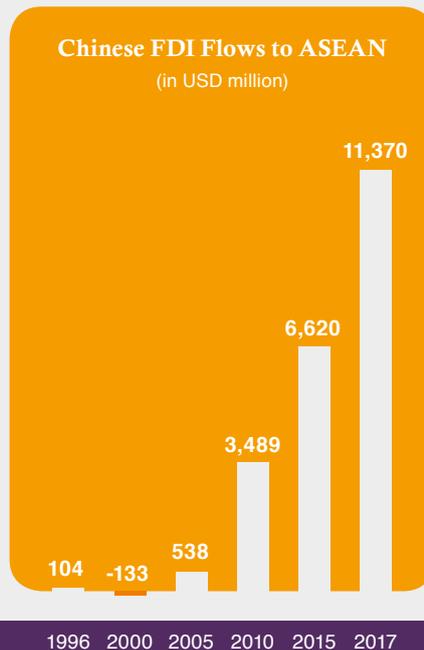
In 2017, the deal value of Chinese mergers and acquisitions (M&As) in ASEAN surged to **US\$ 34.1**

billion, rising by **268%** and representing a quarter of total value of disclosed Chinese M&As. ⁵

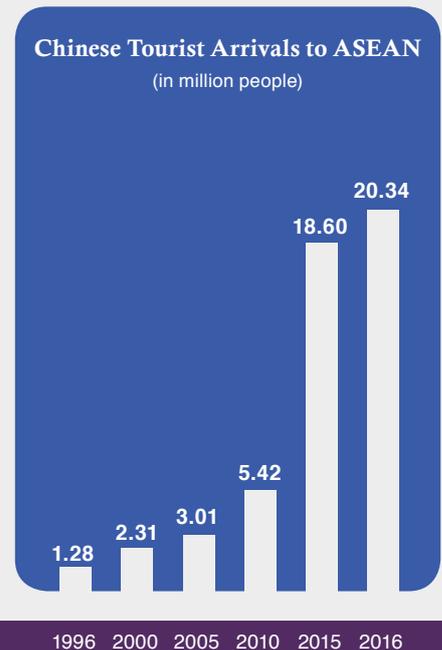
ASEAN's Total Trade with China (in billion USD)



Chinese FDI Flows to ASEAN (in USD million)



Chinese Tourist Arrivals to ASEAN (in million people)



China is the largest external source of tourists for ASEAN, accounting for **17.6%** of the total tourist arrivals to the region in 2016. ¹



Among the 10 ASEAN countries, **nine** (except the Philippines) offer visa-free or visa-on-arrival policies for Chinese tourists. ⁷

The number of flights every week between China and ASEAN countries increased from ^{6,7}



About **80,000** students from Southeast Asia enrolled in Chinese universities in 2016, a **15%** increase from 2014. The largest group of foreign students studying in China's higher education institutes came from the ASEAN region. ⁸

¹ ASEAN Secretariat. ² Yearbook of Statistics Singapore, 2018. ³ The Business Times 2018. ⁴ ASEAN Investment Report 2017. ⁵ Ernst & Young 2018. ⁶ ASEAN-China Centre 2013. ⁷ ChinaDaily/Xinhua 2017. ⁸ China University and College Admission System 2018. ⁹ Ministry of Transport, Singapore.

Building Blocks Towards a Resilient and Innovative ASEAN



Dr. Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman shares with us his insights and experiences from Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship 2018.

AF: What are some of the most notable ASEAN achievements in 2018?

MALIKI: I think we have achieved more than we expected to over the course of one year, and this was only possible as fellow ASEAN Member States (AMS) and key external partners shared our vision of a “Resilient” and “Innovative” ASEAN.

To address security threats and forge a peaceful and rules-based regional order, we established the “Resilience, Response, Recovery” framework to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation, adopted the world’s first multilateral air guidelines aimed at managing unintentional encounters between military aircraft, and also agreed to subscribe to the cyber norms of state behaviour recommended by the 2015 United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on ICTs Security to build a safer and more inclusive cyberspace.

ASEAN also redoubled our economic integration efforts, and demonstrated clearly our commitment to uphold a free, open and rules-based multilateral order. Within ASEAN, we signed the ASEAN Agreement on E-Commerce and introduced the ASEAN-wide Self Certification scheme to facilitate cross-border online transactions. I am also pleased that the Regional Comprehensive Partnership (RCEP) negotiations had made substantial progress – we are now in the final stage of negotiations, and it is important to leverage on positive momentum generated this year to conclude the RCEP negotiations in 2019.

We also brought our cities and peoples closer together. This year, we launched the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, which will leverage on technology and each other’s experiences to create innovative urban solutions that will bring tangible improvements to our peoples’ lives. I am heartened that our external partners are equally committed to this cause and have worked with ASEAN cities on several mutually beneficial projects.

We also launched the ASEAN Youth Fellowship and renewed the Singapore-ASEAN Youth Fund. Events such

as eSports and music festivals help promote camaraderie amongst our youths, and are worthy investments because our youths hold the key to ASEAN’s future.

AF: How do you think Singapore’s Chairmanship this year has contributed to the discourse on ASEAN’s resilience?

MALIKI: Our Chairmanship narrative includes reinforcing the fact that we are facing uncertainties in the external environment – digital disruptions, rise of protectionism and a retreat from multilateralism, major power rivalry, and growing non-traditional and transnational security threats – and hence there is an urgent need for ASEAN to stay resilient. But it is not all bad news, as this still represents a time of immense opportunity for ASEAN given our economic and demographic potential. During the year, we focused on what ASEAN needs to do in order to stay united and relevant. This would include pressing ahead with strengthening the open and rules-based multilateral trading system, better preparing ASEAN to navigate a more uncertain environment through initiatives such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN), and strengthening our linkages with key external partners.

AF: Could you tell us how the ASEAN Smart Cities Network initiative will be sustained beyond 2018?

MALIKI: The ASCN is a multi-year initiative, and we are very pleased to note that Thailand has shared its intention to carry on the ASCN. While we will no longer be Chair next year, we will still contribute constructively to ASEAN’s agenda, and will take on the role of ASCN ‘Shepherd’ next year as we have been asked to. Through this role, we will work closely with successive Chairs to take the ASCN beyond 2018, including by increasing the quality and quantity of smart city projects and partnerships.

AF: In your view, what do AMS need the most in their toolkit to embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)?

MALIKI: The 4IR has brought about rapid and unprecedented changes that bring along opportunities and challenges, not just to the ASEAN region but globally. A key dimension of the 4IR is the emergence of new technologies such as big data analytics, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, augmented reality, and the Internet of Things – all of which have the potential to significantly improve or disrupt lives.

Being cognisant of this fact, ASEAN has adopted the core values on Digital Literacy. We recognise that a crucial component of the “toolkit” would be for AMS to remain open to adopting new technologies and processes that are relevant to their particular economic situations, rather than to shy away from them. In that regard, we rolled out initiatives such as the ASCN to keep the region and its people relevant. We hope that through this, businesses and cities would learn to embrace the 4IR, which will then allow us to harness the opportunities arising from the 4IR and help mitigate some of its challenges.

AF: The general public perception is that the more active ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) is eclipsing the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Could you share your views on this?

MALIKI: The ARF and the ADMM-Plus have distinct value propositions, and should be seen as complementary bodies in the ASEAN-centric regional architecture. Established in 1993, the ARF was a response to deal with an uncertain security situation in the post-Cold War era by creating a framework within which confidence-building and preventive diplomacy among countries in the region could be pursued. Today, the ARF has emerged as the largest and most diverse ASEAN-led forum in terms of membership, and serves as an important platform for its 27 Participants to exchange views on political and security issues, as well as undertake practical cooperation under the Inter-sessional Meetings (ISMs) on Maritime Security, Disaster Relief, Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, and Security of and in the Use of Information Communications Technologies. The ARF defence officials also exchange views on issues of common interest at the annual ARF Defence Officials’ Dialogue (DOD) and ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC).

The ADMM-Plus, on the other hand, was formed more recently in 2010, amidst a new set of non-traditional and transnational security challenges. The ADMM-Plus’ main focus has been to engender practical cooperation among its 18 defence establishments in the seven key areas of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, military medicine, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian mine action and cybersecurity. Such cooperation helps to build trust, confidence and inter-operability amongst the militaries, and enhance the region’s capacity in responding to security challenges. Both the ARF and ADMM-Plus have unique roles to play in the multiple overlapping frameworks of our ASEAN-centric regional architecture.

AF: Cybersecurity features high in ASEAN’s agenda this year. How would Singapore add-value to ASEAN’s efforts in coping with cybersecurity challenges?

MALIKI: Singapore has a keen interest in contributing to regional efforts to cope with cybersecurity challenges. As the pace of digitalisation in Southeast Asia increases, it becomes increasingly important to secure our systems in cyberspace. This year, the 32nd ASEAN Summit in April

adopted the ASEAN Leaders’ Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation, tasking relevant Ministers from all AMS to recommend feasible options of coordinating cybersecurity policy, diplomacy, cooperation, technical and capacity building efforts among ASEAN’s three pillars, and to make progress on identifying a concrete list of voluntary, practical norms of responsible State behaviour in cyberspace.

To follow up on the Statement, the ASEAN Network Security Action Council (ANSAC) would surface a proposal on possible options for a formal ASEAN cybersecurity mechanism. The 3rd ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity (AMCC), which Singapore hosted and chaired in September 2018, also agreed to subscribe in-principle to the 11 voluntary cyber norms recommended in the 2015 Report of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (UNGGE). I believe ASEAN is the first regional grouping to make such a strong and open statement in support of the UNGGE norms.

Singapore will also launch the ASEAN-Singapore Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence in 2019, an extension of the ASEAN Cyber Capacity Programme that has contributed to improving ASEAN’s cybersecurity capabilities. The Centre of Excellence will complement existing initiatives such as the ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity Building Centre in Thailand, and will focus on strengthening AMS’ cyber strategy development, legislation and research capabilities, increasing technical expertise and incident response skills of national Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) in the region, and promoting CERT-to-CERT open-source information sharing.

In addition, we look forward to working closely with all AMS towards greater inter-regional dialogue between ASEAN and other regional groupings. Such dialogue will allow us to build consensus around the issues of cyber norms, confidence building measures and the applicability of international law to cyberspace.

AF: ASEAN has been criticised for its perceived silence on the Rohingya crisis. Could you share with us how this delicate matter is being handled within ASEAN?

MALIKI: The situation in Rakhine State is of concern to both ASEAN and Singapore. ASEAN has discussed this issue, most recently at the 33rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in November 2018. The ASEAN Leaders discussed how ASEAN can support the efforts by Myanmar and Bangladesh for the safe and voluntary return of refugees. ASEAN agreed to Myanmar’s invitation to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management to despatch a needs assessment team to Rakhine State to facilitate the repatriation process. ASEAN also welcomed Myanmar’s commitment to ensure the safety and security of all communities in the Rakhine State and conveyed its readiness to support efforts by all parties to address the root causes of the situation in the Rakhine. AMS have also provided humanitarian

assistance to the affected communities. That said, we have to recognise that this is a complex issue. It is ultimately the responsibility of the Myanmar government and the respective stakeholders to reach a viable and durable political solution. There are no quick fixes.

AF: Could you share with us the discussions within ASEAN on how ASEAN should respond to the Indo-Pacific concept?

MALIKI: Various concepts and formulations for the Indo-Pacific region have been proposed. ASEAN has and will continue to study the various proposals closely. Within ASEAN, the Leaders discussed the initiative to develop ASEAN's collective cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Fundamentally, any proposal should support ASEAN unity and centrality; articulate a coherent economic engagement strategy with our region; espouse a rules-based world order anchored upon international law; and support an open, transparent and inclusive regional architecture. These proposals should also demonstrate concrete mutual benefits and complement ASEAN's own initiatives.

AF: As the country-coordinator for the ASEAN-EU dialogue relations, what are the priorities that Singapore will focus in the next three years?

MALIKI: The EU has been a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN since 1977, and our broad-based cooperation spans across many areas, including cybersecurity, climate change, education, and smart cities development. ASEAN's relations with the EU are substantive and longstanding, and there is much that both sides can do together. As country coordinator, we hope to focus on three key areas.

First, strengthening connectivity. We hope to conclude an ambitious and forward-looking ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA), which will be the first substantive aviation agreement between two regional groupings, and a ground-breaking, standard-setting agreement. We have also encouraged the EU to participate actively in the ASEAN Smart Cities Network. Second, to continue enhancing our economic ties. In 2017, the EU was ASEAN's second largest trade partner and largest source of foreign direct investment, and is consistently among ASEAN's top three trade partners. In this regard, we are exploring the resumption of negotiations for an ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement, which businesses are very keen on. Third, we aim to further our security cooperation to boost our resilience, including cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and transnational crime.

AF: What can ASEAN do better to manage the effects the US-China trade war?

MALIKI: Regional stability and growth depend on good relations between the major powers, including the US and China. It is therefore in everyone's interest that they remain positive and constructive. Sino-US relations continue to be the Asia-Pacific's defining relationship. Many countries, including Singapore, are therefore concerned about the escalating cycle of expanding tariff measures announced and implemented by both sides.

We should work to maintain the open, rules-based international order and multilateral trading system that we have all benefitted from. This is the best way in which we can foster prosperity in the long term for all countries. For ASEAN, our response has been to reaffirm our commitment to the free, open and rules-based multilateral trading system; strengthen regional economic integration within ASEAN; and put in place measures to ensure that the benefits percolate to our people and businesses. For example, we finalised agreements on the ASEAN Single Window, ASEAN-wide Self-Certification scheme and ASEAN E-Commerce, which would facilitate cross-border flows of goods and services within ASEAN. Consumers can now look forward to more robust consumer protection for e-Commerce transactions. Businesses based in the region will also benefit from the expected increase in intra-ASEAN trade.

AF: What are the opportunities lost if the RCEP negotiations are prolonged indefinitely?

MALIKI: At the 2nd RCEP Summit, the RCEP Leaders expressed concerns over a global rise in protectionist sentiments. There are challenges and sensitivities given the diversity of countries involved, and that the RCEP is the first FTA for a number of RCEP Participating Countries (RPCs). Nonetheless, all RPCs were determined to achieve a good outcome. Prolonging negotiations indefinitely would be a missed opportunity, especially given that the RCEP covers about 30% of global GDP and 40% of global trade flows. In this vein, our RCEP Leaders recognised substantial progress achieved this year, and expressed strong political commitment to conclude negotiations in 2019.

AF: Lastly, what is your personal reflection on the single most important takeaway of Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship?

MALIKI: For me, an important takeaway was in charting the path forward for ASEAN, amidst today's fast-changing and unpredictable world. The Leaders' Vision Statement, issued in April 2018, was a way for us to assess ASEAN's operating environment for the next 50 years, both geopolitically and economically, and to undertake measures to prepare ASEAN for that future. I am happy that we achieved key deliverables such as the ASCN; I think it is safe to conclude that we have taken considerable strides towards a more united, resilient and innovative ASEAN, but we can never be done building an even better ASEAN Community for ourselves and future generations. ☒

Dr. Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman is Senior Minister of State for the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore. He is also the Mayor of Singapore's South East District. Prior to this, Dr. Maliki served as Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports, Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Health, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of National Development, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, and Minister of State for Defence and National Development.

Batik: The Wax that Never Wanes

Through batik, **Hayley Winchcombe** takes a journey back in time when local ingenuity breathed new life to cultural influences that reached the shores of Southeast Asia.



The smell of warm wax mingles with the scent of indigo leaves fermenting in lime and molasses sugar in a small, open workshop in Kerek, a district in eastern Java, Indonesia. Women sit on low stools in corners of the hut, hands clasped around pen-like *canting* tools with which they deftly trace the wax into intricate patterns onto expanses of homespun cotton carefully draped over thin bamboo frames.

The name for this wax-resistant dyeing is batik, possibly derived from the Javanese words *amba* (to write) and *titik* (dots), which tells of the beautiful patterns and symbols that distinguish it from other textiles. Dye-resist techniques have been used in cultures around the world, from Egypt and the Middle East over 1500 years ago to India, China, Japan and West Africa. Eventually around the 7th century, the technique found its niche in Java. Over the course of decorating thousands of beautiful handcrafted *sarongs* for women, and *kain panjang* for men throughout many hundreds of years, batik developed into the celebrated, intricately patterned art form we know today.

The thousands of patterns and symbols chosen reveal the imprint of traditional culture. Traditional motifs

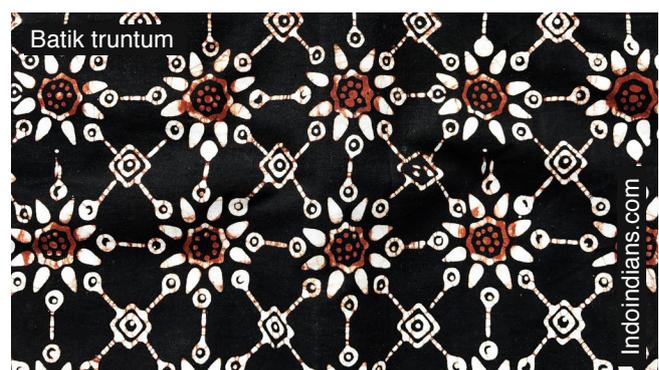


reflect everyday life flowers, nature, animals, folklore and people. Two examples are *Kawung*, evoking the palm tree that can be found across Southeast Asia, and the map-like *Sekar jagad*, which depicts the diversity of the world's flowers. In Yogyakarta and Surakarta, the use of the traditional colours of indigo, *soga* brown and white evoke the three major Hindu gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Socially, Javanese batik holds deep ritual significance in one's life, from the time when one is nestled in a luck-porting blue and white batik sling as a baby, to the dark batiks used to shroud the dead and ease their return to the afterlife. Obin Komara, a famous batik manufacturer of Indonesia, once said: "We Indonesians are born with batik, we literally breathe and smell and feel batik since birth and we love and respect it." In Javanese wedding ceremonies, the bride and groom's parents usually wear batik with *truntum* motif as an expression of hope for love to guide their children's marriage. Legend has it that the *truntum* that looks like stars in the sky was created by a Queen whose longing for unconditional and everlasting love was finally returned by her King.

"Batik embodies the essence of Southeast Asian heritage, featuring local traditions alongside a myriad of cultural influences."

Javanese batik also expresses group identity and social status. In the Sultan's palaces in Yogyakarta and Surakarta, *Larangan* designs included motifs exclusively reserved for royalty. Slanting parallel rows of daggers, known as the *Parang* design, were worn by the Kings and princes to bring victory in war, protection and healing of the sick.





Floral motif in Malaysian batik

Mohd Hairul Fiza
Musa©129RF.com



Butterfly motif is also very popular in Malaysian batik.

Malaysianmeanders.blogspot



Batik Cirebon Hokokai with Japanese influence

Anerdgallery.com



Batik Cirebon

northcoastjavanesebatik.com



European design (*buketan*) adopted by Peranakan Chinese batik makers

northcoastjavanesebatik.com

With the passage of time and kingdoms, there has been a fluid dispersion of people, languages and ideas across the archipelago. Culture across the region has thus been influenced by interwoven patterns of trade, migration and exchanges. Being part of this flow, batik entered the culture of Sumatra, Bali, coastal areas of what is now known as peninsula Malaysia and spread as far as Koh Samui in southern Thailand. Batik has been treasured by local communities for its symbolic, ritualistic and practical uses.

Despite sharing certain similarities, there are subtle regional variations in terms of designs and even methods. Even across the Indonesian archipelago, the diversity of batik is such that the Bandung Fe Institute developed an app-accessible map that covers the full spectrum of Indonesian batik rich heritage. In West Sumatra, the batik technique *tanah liak* uses clay for the colouring process instead of wax. In terms of designs, difference can be seen in Malaysian batik that are mostly floral motifs with larger proportion and more vibrant colours while Javanese batik motifs are more intricate and smaller with deep, subdued colours.

The development of batik also embodies the intermingling of cultures from outside the region, having been inextricably linked with waves of Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese and Islamic influences. In the heyday of Java's oceanic trade links with the world, foreign motifs especially from China and Japan came to be adopted into batik designs. Then, smooth, finely-woven cloth imported from India in the 1800s and later from Europe from 1815 allowed batik to flourish into its most elaborate and intricate manifestations. Distinctive styles emerged according to regional variations in the dyes and stimulus that were readily available. Bold phoenixes and symbols for good luck and fertility were adapted from Chinese and Buddhist mythology into the repertoire of coastal batik artists. European bouquets also found their expression in batik, showing an etching of cultural and historical influences through time. Particularly in Sumatra, Islamic influences underpinned a focus on geometric patterns and calligraphy.

Patience and community were essential to batik making. Traditionally a team would work over many weeks spinning and weaving the fabric, boiling it to make it smooth, tracing the design, preparing the dyes, and undertaking numerous cycles of waxing and submerging in dyes to achieve the desired patterns and hues. The process was made faster and more economical by the advent of the red copper *cap* or stamp (for block printing, a technique originating from China) in the 19th century under pressure from avid batik fans amongst the Dutch colonisers. *Batik cap* textiles were produced by men, and the technique was prevalent in Malaysian batik, whereas *batik tulis*, using a *canting*, continued to be made by women.

After a lull in momentum, the 1970s and 80s saw a revival in the status and popularity of batik not only in the region but also far and wide across the globe, led by celebrated

designers and artists such as Iwan Tirta. Among his clients was Nelson Mandela, who was one of batik's biggest proponents as the style came to represent an alternative to western fashion. For ASEAN, it is a prominent cultural symbol as a smart casual dress code for ASEAN officials, ministers and leaders, especially in retreat settings. Another meaningful development came on 2 October 2009 when UNESCO recognised Indonesian Batik as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. 2 October has since become the Batik Day in Indonesia when a visitor to the country would be dazzled by a rich assemblage of designs, colours and motifs that have behind it centuries of craftsmanship finetuning and cultural intermingling.

In Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, batik is recognised as formal wear that will suit almost all official engagements. Malaysia and Indonesia especially promote batik wear in their respective Batik Thursday and Batik Friday traditions. Apart from official wear, the timeless traditional designs have inspired top designers in the region to adopt batik in reimagined urban couture looks. Malaysia Airlines and Singapore Airlines have literally taken batik to the skies as their stewardess' kebaya dress features unique batik designs. Batik motifs have also permeated every other form of contemporary design, from bags and hats to pencil and laptop cases. Meanwhile, the traditional artisanal process continues to stay true to batik's essence as a centuries-old painstaking craft even though the art form has evolved dynamically.

Loved by tourists as well as locals, batik embodies the essence of Southeast Asian heritage, featuring local traditions alongside a myriad of cultural influences. To do your part to preserve this unique Southeast Asian cultural heritage, why not buy some batik today or take part in a batik workshop to try the art for yourself? In the words



Children learning to make batik in Malaysia

mybatik.org.my



Batik cloth production at Kanjaeng Suwarno's batik workshop

Stephen Kennedy, Flickr

of Tom Abang Saufi, a prominent fashion designer in Malaysia, "we have to be proud of our heritage and wear our traditional clothes ... it is a tiny bit of history that we get to carry around with us." 🇲🇾

Ms. Hayley Winchcombe was an intern at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. She is the first recipient of the New Colombo Plan ASEAN Fellowship.



Malaysian batik featuring flowers and plants with vibrant colours

Malajiadventure.com

University of Santo Tomas: Timeless and Forever Timely

Nur Aziemah Aziz takes a learning tour at Asia's oldest university.

In the heart of the ever bustling city of Manila, the freshmen of Asia's oldest university marched their way in under the historic Arch of the Centuries to mark the beginning of their university life. The Thomasian Welcome Walk, formerly known as The Rites of Passage, is one of the many traditions that students of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) partake in. An established education institution with a long and rich history, most of the events here are rooted in tradition of yesteryears that imbue new generations of scholars with a strong sense of service, community, humility and morality. As the crowd of students excitedly make their way towards the iconic UST Main Building, they are surrounded by lush gardens and time-honoured architectures.

Since its establishment on 28 April 1611, the University of Santo Tomas has been up and running for more than 400 years. The oldest operational university in Asia is also the largest Catholic university in a single campus in terms of student population, besides standing tall as a National Historical Landmark of the Philippines. Its humble beginnings were built on the grounds of Intramuros, the Walled City of Manila led by Bishop Miguel de Benavides O.P., the third Archbishop of Manila. UST campus back then could be seen as the size of a mustard seed compared to its current size of 21.5 hectares. Bishop Miguel de Benavides donated 1,500 pesos and his personal collection

of books to set up a seminary college to prepare young boys for priesthood. In 1619, Colegio de Nuestra Señora del Santisimo Rosario saw its growth to further spread Catholicism after it was authorised by Pope Paul V to offer academic degrees in Theology and Philosophy to all Dominican colleges in the world. It was later renamed to Colegio de Santo Tomas to commemorate the university's patron saint, St Thomas Aquinas, the highly revered Dominican Theologian in 1625.

A visit by Pope Innocent X to Colegio de Santo Tomas in 1645 raised its status from college to university. This was just the beginning of the institution's collection of highly deserved titles and accolades. UST is formally called *The Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas*, and *Catholic University of the Philippines*. The "royal" term was given during the Spanish rule by King Charles III in 1875 to acknowledge the institution's role in volunteering four companies of 400 students and professors to defend Manila when it was invaded by the British from 1762 to 1764. UST's status was later elevated to the title of "Pontifical University" by Pope Leo XIII on 17 September 1902, and the title of "Catholic University of the Philippines" by Pope Pius XIII in 1947. UST is the second university after Rome's Gregorian University to be awarded with the title "Pontifical University". The university's close links with the church stands testament



to its role in introducing western education to the Philippines, a phenomenon that is not entirely unfamiliar across Southeast Asia.

As the student numbers continuously increased, UST had to shift its campus from Intramuros to its current location in the Sampaloc district in Manila. Another reason for the big move had to do with a dark chapter in Manila's history when the city was lost to the Japanese in January 1942 during World War II. The Intramuros campus was then used by the Japanese as an internment camp that housed mostly American and British civilians. The university building also suffered destruction during the Japanese invasion.

All is not lost however. Parts of the old campus as well as majestic architectures from UST early days have seamlessly become part of the current site. Many Thomasians are proud to share with the world that some structures of the university campus have been declared "National Cultural Treasures" by the National Museum of Philippines. These include the Main Building, which, in the words of Father De la Rosa – former Rector and President of UST, "has become the face of UST" and "signifies the classic character of the University." The Main Building itself houses the UST Museum of Arts and Sciences – the oldest existing museum in the Philippines. The Arch of the Centuries where new Thomasians walk through is also a National Treasure of the Philippines. There are still many other reasons for Thomasians to be proud: The university press produced the first printed book in the Philippines; and Jose Rizal, one of the greatest heroes of the Philippines, was among many of its revered alumni. Very few universities have the distinction of listing nine saints among its distinguished alumni roster as UST does.

UST glorious past is carried forward to present pride as the university with nearly 50,000 students stands tall among the Big Four – top four universities of the Philippines that also include the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University and De La Salle University. It is the proud intellectual nursery for generations of Philippine Presidents, Chief Justices of the Supreme Court, Secretaries, Senators and other famous artists and dignitaries. The learning and thinking environment for every of these Thomasians is steeped in three core values of Competence, Compassion and Commitment. As recalled fondly by F Sionil Jose, a Thomasian-turned-renowned Filipino writer, UST "is elitist not in the social sense, but in the way it develop humanist attitudes, the probity that comes with superior education. What distinguishes Santo Tomas from the other elite schools ... is its democratic spirit, the mingling of social classes and ethnic groups which, though reared in the unique Thomasian cosmos, endures long after the students leave the university."

Standing tall through the test of time, through countless natural disasters, wars and upheavals, the University of Santo Tomas continues to wow its present and future students. As Father De la Rosa finely put it, the university is timeless, and yet forever timely. There will be newer



UST rises in the aftermath of tropical storm Ondoy!

Ashley D. Cristal



Medical students passing Main Building at the 2009 UST Freshmen Welcome Walk

Ashley D. Cristal

and modern fixtures and additions to its campus ground to catch up with fast changing educational technologies. Still, for many Thomasians, every little turn in the campus reminds them of the rich and deep history of a learning institution committed to pursue truth while guided by reason and inspired by faith and compassion. Its motto, *Veritas in Caritate* (truth in charity) which is found in Ephesians 4:15, sums up the university's unique centuries old mission of nurturing individuals to the fullest of their intellectual capacities and to lead a life of compassion and love.

The same conviction and passionate instruction, albeit upgraded with 21st century teaching tools and technology, is delivered to more than 40,000 proud Thomasians across the university's five faculties, nine colleges, two institutes, a conservatory and graduate school. Freshmen from all walks of life can find here a home to intellectually prepare themselves for the future ahead, while UST alumni across all social strata proudly and warmly embrace "Once a Thomasian, always a Thomasian." ❧

Ms. Nur Aziemah Aziz was Research Officer at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, and is currently in public service in Singapore.

Images and Insights



The ASEAN Single Window (ASW) was launched during the 42nd Meeting of Technical Working Group on ASW on 20-23 February 2018, Surabaya, Indonesia.



Counter-terrorism and practical maritime cooperation are on top of ASEAN defence agenda this year.



External partners signed five Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) to support the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) at its Inaugural Meeting.



The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) now has Iran and Argentina in its fold.



The 13th East Asia Summit in Singapore welcomed for the first time Russian President Vladimir Putin.



ASEAN dispatched emergency humanitarian assistance for Palu earthquake/tsunami survivors.



ASEAN and Chinese participants received a brief during their maritime exercise in Zhanjiang, China, October 2018.



The 2nd Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit committed to conclude the RCEP by 2019.



More businesses go regional digitally with ASEAN's first e-commerce agreement.



The inaugural ASEAN Prize goes to Ms. Erlinda Uy Koe from the Philippines, a regional advocate for persons with autism.



40 young ASEAN leaders gathered in Singapore for the inaugural ASEAN Youth Fellowship programme.

ASEAN Highlights in 2018

JANUARY

Singapore assumes the ASEAN Chairmanship under the theme “Resilient and Innovative”.

Dato Lim Jock Hoi from Brunei Darussalam assumes duties as the 14th Secretary-General of ASEAN.

The ASEAN Single Window (ASW) kicks off with Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The 21st ASEAN Tourism Meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, adopts the ASEAN Declaration on Cruise Tourism to boost cruise tourism.

ASEAN Leaders meet with India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi at the Commemorative Summit celebrating the 25th anniversary of ASEAN-India dialogue relations.

FEBRUARY

ASEAN Foreign Ministers meet at a retreat in Singapore to elaborate on ASEAN priorities in 2018 and exchange views on regional and international issues.

Singapore hosts the annual retreat of the ASEAN Defence Ministers (ADMM) to set the priorities for ASEAN defence agenda, including practical confidence-building measures and a new strategic framework for counter-terrorism.

ASEAN Leaders meet informally in Bali, Indonesia, to discuss sustainable development in ASEAN and reaffirm their strong commitment to the open and rules-based multilateral trading system.

The 10th ASEAN Law Ministers Meeting (ALAWMM) in Vientiane endorses the model ASEAN extradition treaty, and agrees to commence work on an ASEAN Extradition Treaty as a next step.

The ASEAN-China maritime field-training exercise is held in China, focusing on search and rescue and operationalisation of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES).

The 12th ADMM in Singapore adopts the world’s first Guidelines for Air Military Encounters. ASEAN Defence Ministers also meet with their counterparts at the 5th ADMM-Plus which issues the Joint Statement on Practical Confidence Building Measures aimed at ensuring safety and security of the sea and air lanes.

The 12th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) is held in Singapore, focusing on three persistent security threats: terrorism, cyber crime, and illicit drugs.

ASEAN Foreign Ministers meet in New York for their annual informal meeting on the sidelines of UN General Assembly.

The 3rd ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity (AMCC) in Singapore agrees on the need for a formal ASEAN cybersecurity mechanism to coordinate cyber policy among the member states.

The inaugural ASEAN Prize is launched to recognise the contributions of individuals/organisations that “foster the ASEAN identity, promote the ASEAN spirit, and champion the ASEAN way”.

SEPTEMBER

The 33rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits are held in Singapore. Key deliverables include the ASEAN Smart Cities Framework, the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership Vision 2030, the Joint Statement to Commemorate the 45th Anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, the ASEAN-US Leaders’ Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation, and the Memorandum of Understanding between ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Commission on Economic Cooperation.

The 2nd Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit in Singapore welcomes the substantial

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

ASEAN Leaders meet with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council discuss the priority areas of 2018 in line with the Resilient and Innovative theme, including youth, environment, information and smart city.

The Singapore-ASEAN Youth Fund, which was first launched under Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2007, is renewed with a fresh injection of funds to support projects on ASEAN youth.

The Handbook on ASEAN Consumer Protection Laws and Regulations is launched in Manila.

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

At the 32nd ASEAN Summit in Singapore, the ASEAN Leaders adopt their Vision for a Resilient and Innovative ASEAN to articulate "ASEAN's strategic position and intent in a shifting geopolitical and economic landscape", and establish the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) with 26 pilot cities.

The 4th ASEAN Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting (AFMGM) in Singapore discusses measures to enhance ASEAN financial integration, financial stability and financial inclusion.

ASEAN-China senior officials agree on the Single Draft Negotiating Text of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) as the basis for further substantive negotiations.

Singapore hosts the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) and Related Meetings, including the ASEAN Regional Forum which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

Iran and Argentina accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), bringing the total number of High Contracting Parties to the TAC to 37.

The ASEAN Youth Community is launched in

Singapore to boost exchanges between ASEAN youth.

At their 50th annual meeting in Singapore, ASEAN Economic Ministers endorse the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework, and sign the First Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) to allow for the operationalisation of the ASEAN-wide Self Certification (AWSC), and the Protocol to Implement the 10th ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS).

During the Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Climate Action (SAMCA) and the Expanded-SAMCA including Plus Three counterparts in Singapore, a Climate Action Package is launched to build ASEAN's capacity to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change.

The 10th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth (AMMY) in Jakarta launches the first ASEAN Youth Development Index (YDI) Report between 2011 and 2015.

AUGUST

JULY

progress made in RCEP negotiations in 2018, and is committed to concluding the RCEP in 2019.

ASEAN Economic Ministers sign the ASEAN Agreement on Electronic Commerce to facilitate cross-border e-commerce transactions and promote confidence in the use of e-commerce in the region.

The ASEAN Transport Ministers sign an agreement which provides ASEAN carriers with the flexibility to serve two or more points in another ASEAN member state on the same routing, which shall only be available as part of an international journey.

The 25th ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting in Kuala Lumpur adopts the action plan (2018-2025) to implement the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

The 18th ASEAN Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers Meeting (TELMIN) in Bali endorse the ASEAN Framework on Digital Data Governance to strengthen the data ecosystem, alignment of data regulations and governance frameworks and foster data-driven innovation across the member states.

DECEMBER

Hawksbill Turtle

Eretmochelys imbricate

Estimated adult nesting
females in the wild:
Over 8000

Found in the Indian
Ocean, Atlantic Ocean
and Pacific Ocean

The Hawksbill Sea Turtles are among the smallest species of the sea turtle family, with the weight of around 40-60kg and length up to 1m. Although the turtles are found in the vast oceans, they prefer to make shallow waters with reefs rich in sponges, marine algae, crustaceans and sea urchins as their natural habitat. These turtles have distinctive features such as striking amber-coloured and patterned shell, narrow head and sharp, bird-like beak, hence its name. Their population has decreased significantly by more than 80% over the past century. These critically endangered turtles face the loss of nesting and feeding habitats, eggs collection, exploitation by humans for its flesh and shells used for jewellery, and accidental capture in fishing nets. (WWF, 2017)

