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The ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: What's in a Name?

*Hoang Thi Ha**



The ASEAN-China CSP was formally launched at the Commemorative Summit to celebrate the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-China dialogue relations, with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in attendance. In this picture, Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah (C) takes part in the ASEAN-China Summit on the sidelines of the 2021 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summits held online in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, on 26 October 2021. Photo: Hakim S. Hayat, AFP.

**Hoang Thi Ha is Fellow and Lead Researcher (Political-Security) at the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC) and Co-coordinator of the Regional Strategic and Political Studies Programme (RSPS), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- China's proposal to 'upgrade' its relations with ASEAN to 'comprehensive strategic partnership' (CSP) is part of Beijing's active neighbourhood diplomacy, which is given added emphasis and urgency by Sino-US tensions and China's estrangement from the West.
- The CSP proposal signals a calibrated and invested Chinese strategy to actively reshape its relations with ASEAN in China's own image, promoting China's status as *primus inter pares* among ASEAN Dialogue Partners and consolidating the centrality of Chinese leadership and influence in the regional order.
- ASEAN does not view its CSP with China as signifying an elevated status compared to other dialogue relations. Its decision to establish CSP with both China and Australia demonstrates the grouping's desire to maintain a state of equilibrium in its relations with all major powers and foster an inclusive multi-polar regional order.
- Since ASEAN-China relations are defined not by its label but by its content which has both positive and contentious aspects, its future depends on both sides' ability to bridge the dichotomy between the robust expansion of their economic-functional cooperation and the continuing lack of mutual trust.

INTRODUCTION

The 24th ASEAN-China summit in October 2021 announced the establishment of the ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), adding a new nomenclature but not necessarily a new category in ASEAN's dialogue relations.¹ The ASEAN-China CSP was formally launched at the Commemorative Summit to celebrate the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-China dialogue relations, with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in attendance.² Before the CSP, both sides had maintained a strategic partnership since 2003 – the most longstanding strategic partnership among all ASEAN Dialogue Partners. Does the CSP mean anything new for ASEAN-China relations and does it mean the same thing for both sides? This article unpacks the term 'CSP' and examines the perspectives of China and ASEAN in the establishment of an ASEAN-China CSP.

THE ASEAN-CHINA COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – WHAT'S IN A NAME?

'CSP' is a recent nomenclature in modern international relations. It is often associated with China's partnership diplomacy which is defined as entailing "closer ties between states" and adhering to "a goal-driven rationale of alignment ... without targeting any third party".³ Through this global network of partnerships, China differentiates itself from and competes with the US' alliance system (even though Washington has also increasingly leveraged partnership diplomacy with its non-allied partners).⁴ Unlike the US' treaty-based, threat-driven and security-centric alliance system, China's partnership diplomacy places greater emphasis on cultivating political relationships and promoting economic cooperation. It is essentially an exercise of Chinese statecraft, with ample room for diplomatic manoeuvring and semantic innovation. According to Georg Strüver, the "strong emphasis placed on partnership diplomacy in recent official discourse is unprecedented and leads to the assumption that partnerships might play an even bigger role in the structuring of China's external relations in the years to come."⁵

There are different levels in China's partnership system, corresponding to the importance that Beijing attaches to each partner, the substance of China's relations with that country/organisation and other contextual peculiarities. 'CSP' is considered the second-highest level of bilateral ties, above 'strategic partnership' and below 'comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership'.⁶ However, one should not read these terms in a strictly hierarchical order. As shown in Table 1, there are various titles describing China's relations with the ten ASEAN member states, but they do not necessarily connote a hierarchy of importance or substance. For example, China's "all-round cooperative partnership" with Singapore does not necessarily rank lower than its "strategic cooperative partnership" with Brunei or "comprehensive strategic cooperation" with The Philippines.

Table 1: China’s bilateral partnerships with ASEAN member states⁷

| Title of China’s bilateral ties with... | ASEAN member states |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Strategic cooperative partnership | Brunei |
| Comprehensive strategic partnership | Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia |
| Comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation | Vietnam, Laos |
| Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership | Myanmar, Thailand |
| All-round cooperative partnership | Singapore |
| Comprehensive strategic cooperation | The Philippines |

A speech by then-Premier Wen Jiabao on the EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership in 2004 provides a reference for China’s broad understanding of CSP: “comprehensive” means all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered cooperation; “strategic” means long-term and stable relations that transcend differences in ideology and social system, bearing the large picture of the overall relationship; and “partnership” means equal-footed, mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation.⁸ These general characteristics are, however, hard to measure and open to highly subjective application. China also does not set clear criteria for the dozens of CSP that it has established with various foreign partners. What ‘CSP’ stands for is not always clear in China’s relationship with a particular country, and it becomes even more elusive when analysed comparatively with other relations. According to a research paper on China’s partnership diplomacy, “the practice of strategic partnerships has escaped tight criteria or definitions.”⁹

Generally speaking, ‘CSP’ signifies a high level of maturity in the relationship as reflected in the breadth and depth of cooperation, shared normative frameworks and institutionalised cooperative mechanisms, and high-level political commitment and priority that both sides attach to each other. All these elements can be found in China’s relations with ASEAN as well as with its ten member states. The breadth and depth of their cooperation and exchanges at multi-levels – governmental, business and people-to-people, bilateral and multilateral – are not merely a function of geography but also the outcome of decades of diplomatic and economic relationship building, through regular high-level visits, dialogue and cooperation mechanisms in various sectors, extensive free trade agreements and deep participation in the regional production networks driven by the global supply chains.

China’s Perspective on CSP with ASEAN

China’s push to ‘upgrade’ its strategic partnership with ASEAN to CSP is part of Beijing’s active neighbourhood diplomacy, which is further emphasised during Xi Jinping’s leadership. In a foreign policy address in 2014, Xi said “we should promote neighbourhood diplomacy, turn China’s neighbourhood areas into a community of common destiny” and “conduct diplomacy with a salient Chinese feature and a Chinese vision.”¹⁰ This activism in periphery diplomacy – befitting China’s newfound confidence as a great power and leveraging its economic gravity in the region – seeks to reshape the power relationships and renegotiate the normative content of the regional order towards a more China-centric one.

China's neighbourhood diplomacy is gaining even more prominence and urgency with the rise of Sino-US strategic tensions and China's increased estrangement from the West.

According high priority to ASEAN in its neighbourhood diplomacy, China has been calibrating a holistic and invested strategy for the long-term development of ASEAN-China relations that fits into the Chinese vision of the regional order.¹¹ China's proposal of a CSP with ASEAN is but the latest manifestation of this strategy, signalling "higher priority in foreign affairs and more extensive cooperation across multiple sectors".¹² Speaking at an event commemorating the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-China relations in October 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed the importance to "draw up a new blueprint and set a new benchmark for the long-term development of bilateral relations".¹³ A CSP with ASEAN would signal such a new benchmark and set the stage for a new blueprint for the relations.

During his speech, Wang Yi proposed five points as the key thrusts of ASEAN-China CSP: (i) upholding good neighbourliness and enhancing mutual strategic trust; (ii) deepening Covid-19 response cooperation; (iii) focusing on development and fostering new growth drivers; (iv) safeguarding peace and stability, bearing in mind the larger picture; and (v) upholding solidarity and coordination in the UN system and defending justice and fairness in the global governance. Put together, they demonstrate China's deliberate approach to not only deepen but also actively reshape relations with ASEAN and its member states in China's own image, from a position of strength and confidence. Notably, for example, point (v) seeks to position ASEAN and its member states on the same side with Beijing in the regional and international multilateral systems.

Another underlying factor of China's push for CSP with ASEAN is its keen attention to *form* and *status*, especially in relations with neighbouring countries over whom China's sense of hierarchy and entitlement is more pronounced. By proposing the CSP, China was aiming to score another "first" in its relations with ASEAN – after being the first Dialogue Partner to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (2003), the first to establish a strategic partnership and launch FTA negotiations with ASEAN, and the first and only nuclear weapon state willing to sign on to the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ) with no reservations. The establishment of the CSP would further consolidate China's status as the most advanced, most committed and most substantial Dialogue Partner in all ASEAN's dialogue relations.

Before the CSP proposal, China since 2013 had invested its diplomatic capital in promoting the ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny (CCD) proposal. While China has successfully socialised the CCD concept with some mainland Southeast Asian countries, the response of ASEAN as a whole has been lukewarm because the concept is ill-defined and has deterministic and exclusionary connotations.¹⁴ Similar to the CCD, the CSP proposal seeks to enhance China's image as *primus inter pares* compared to other ASEAN Dialogue Partners and consolidate China's stature as the predominant power in its Southeast Asian periphery.

The push for CSP with ASEAN can also be seen as part of China's efforts to strengthen its discourse power. According to a report by the Atlantic Council in 2020, one of the designated narratives for Chinese government institutions to promote China's discourse power is "the country's leadership prospect among developing countries" and one of the means towards this end is through "popular proposals for multilateral and bilateral cooperation".¹⁵ A CSP with ASEAN would serve as a propaganda instrument to amplify the positive narrative about China, especially its development and connectivity-focused diplomacy with the developing countries. The imperative for Beijing to foster this positive narrative has intensified as China's international image in the developed world has taken sharp downturns following the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, according to many public polls worldwide.¹⁶

ASEAN's Perspective on CSP with China

ASEAN had had extensive internal debate throughout 2021 before consensus was reached on establishing CSP with China. The debate focused on two key questions.

First, what are the parameters to set CSP apart as a new nomenclature in ASEAN's dialogue relations system? If it is meant as an upgrade from the existing ASEAN-China strategic partnership, what would be the new offerings and/or substantive concessions that China would bring to the table? Only unveiled at the last minute by Xi Jinping at the Commemorative Summit, China's pledged support was substantial indeed, including an additional donation of 150m Covid-19 vaccine doses, additional US\$5 million contribution to the Covid-19 ASEAN Response Fund, vaccine joint production and technology transfer, US\$1.5 billion development assistance in the next three years and purchase of US\$150 billion of agricultural products from ASEAN in the next five years.¹⁷ These offerings are very much attuned to the top priorities of all ASEAN member states at the moment, namely effective pandemic control and accelerated post-pandemic economic rebound.

There was also a motion within ASEAN to link CSP establishment with China's express support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).¹⁸ This may not be straightforward given China's steadfast opposition to anything 'Indo-Pacific' which Beijing associates with a strategy by Washington and its allies/partners to counter and contain China. However, the launch of the ASEAN-China CSP saw China overcome its visceral aversion to the term 'Indo-Pacific' and embrace the AOIP in the most explicit manner. The Joint Statement of the Commemorative Summit reaffirmed "the principles of the AOIP while recognising that it is ASEAN's independent initiative" and agreed to "advance cooperation in the relevant areas identified in the AOIP to develop enhanced strategic trust and win-win cooperation". In his speech, Xi Jinping spoke of a "prosperous home together" that includes cooperation between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the AOIP.¹⁹ By embracing the AOIP, China has exercised a pragmatic flexibility that both pleases ASEAN and serves China's enlightened self-interest. The Outlook indeed offers the most inclusive and China-friendly vision of the Indo-Pacific. It also contains practical pathways for economic-functional cooperation which are amenable to China's development-based approach.²⁰

Second, how is ASEAN to situate the ASEAN-China CSP in the larger picture of its external relations with other Dialogue Partners, with an eye on keeping a state of equilibrium among them? There is no denial of the fact that China is among if not the most substantive and substantial partner of ASEAN, leading the pack in many measures. ASEAN's dialogue relations with China span across around 50 sectoral cooperation mechanisms, compared to about 20 with the US.²¹ China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner since 2009 and ASEAN became China's top trading partner in 2020.²² China is viewed by the majority of Southeast Asian foreign policy elites as the most influential power in the region in both political-strategic and economic terms, according to the State of Southeast Asia survey from 2019 to 2021.²³ It is exactly because of China's growing and predominant regional influence that ASEAN has been prudent to avoid any designation that may lend the *primus inter pares* quality to its relations with China.

China has scored first-mover advantage in various foreign policy initiatives towards ASEAN, including establishing strategic partnership, negotiating the FTA, and signing the TAC. But ASEAN also has a track record of proliferating these initiatives to other Dialogue Partners. For example, the club of ASEAN's "strategic partners" started first with China in 2003, followed by Japan (2005), the ROK (2010), India (2012), Australia (2014), New Zealand and the US (2015), Russia (2018) and most recently the EU (2020). Save for Canada (and the UK who just became the 11th ASEAN Dialogue Partner in August 2021), 'strategic partnership' has been applied to all Dialogue Partners despite the different degrees of their regional engagement and cooperation with ASEAN. Once proliferated, the term started to lose its special shine.

Keeping to this inclusive nature of ASEAN's external relations – and considering the merits of Australia's engagement with the region – ASEAN also agreed to establish CSP with Australia at the first annual ASEAN-Australia Summit in October 2021. The ASEAN-Australia CSP has the same characteristics – "meaningful, substantive and mutually beneficial" – as with China. It is also noteworthy that despite concerns expressed by some ASEAN states on the recent Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) trilateral security pact, ASEAN's decision to establish the CSP with Australia appeared to be more straightforward and less contentious than the CSP with China.²⁴ Canberra's swoop for the same designation has somewhat stolen the limelight of the ASEAN-China CSP, triggering a commentary on Global Times that berated Australia's initiative as "geopolitical backbiting" and belittled the AU\$154 million package that Canberra brought to its new ASEAN initiatives.²⁵

The decision to *establish* [emphasis added] the CSP with both Australia and China – even as Beijing-Canberra relations have hit new lows this year due to a range of political, strategic and trade tensions – is an ASEAN masterstroke of hedging and soft balancing among the major powers. It is an act of embracing and defying the gravity of Chinese influence at the same time. By doing so, ASEAN continues to follow the pathways of "omni-enmeshment of major powers and complex balance of influence".²⁶ ASEAN intentionally did not use the words "elevate" or "upgrade" so as to avoid giving the impression that its relationship with China and Australia by virtue of the CSP now stands above those with other Dialogue Partners. This calibrated response indicates that ASEAN member states have

conscientiously exercised their agency by leveraging this diplomatic tug-of-war among the contending partners in the ASEAN setting for their own benefit.

CONCLUSION

With the ASEAN-China CSP, China can now claim another title in its partnership system and a new achievement in its active neighbourhood diplomacy. Yet, the significance of the CSP should be put in perspective. ASEAN has adopted this new and open-ended nomenclature without giving it an elevated status compared to other Dialogue Partners. China's CSP initiative and ASEAN's nuanced response unveil their different visions of the regional order. ASEAN remains faithful to an inclusive multi-polar order where all major powers co-exist and compete so that regional states can diversify their options and maximise their autonomy. For Beijing, it should be an exclusionary and hierarchical order where China's centrality in regional leadership is restored and external powers' influence relegated to the margins. Intriguingly, in his speech, Xi Jinping spoke highly of "inclusiveness" and "open regionalism" as common values of both ASEAN and China.²⁷ Xi's emphasis on "inclusiveness" and "open regionalism" can be interpreted in two ways. First, these values – which Xi said "draw[ing] wisdom from East Asian civilisation" – are framed in the narrower context of ASEAN-China relations. Second, this could be China's tacit criticism of the more exclusionary minilateral groupings led by Washington, especially the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and the recent security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the US (AUKUS).

The future of the ASEAN-China partnership is defined not by its label but by its content and how both sides are going to shape it. At this, it is important to acknowledge both positive and problematic aspects of the relations. China tends to amplify only the positive elements, especially in economic cooperation and "new growth drivers" such as digital and green technologies, connectivity and pandemic response, which are much welcomed and embraced by ASEAN member states. However, emphasis on the positive content alone will not remove contentious security issues that continue to undermine mutual trust.²⁸ These include, among others, the territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea where China's assertive behaviour continues unabated regardless of its push towards early conclusion of a code of conduct in the SCS, threatening the maritime rights and interests of other Southeast Asian claimant states.²⁹ Going forward, a key measure of maturity in ASEAN-China relationship is the ability to bridge the emerging dichotomy between the persistent trust deficit driven by this security dilemma and the robust expansion of bilateral economic-functional cooperation.

- ¹ Chairman's Statement of the 24th ASEAN-China Summit, 26 October 2021, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/63.-Final-Chairmans-Statement-of-the-24th-ASEAN-China-Summit.pdf>.
- ² Joint Statement of the ASEAN-China Special Summit to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace, Security, Prosperity and Sustainable Development, 22 November 2021, <https://asean.org/joint-statement-of-the-asean-china-special-summit-to-commemorate-the-30th-anniversary-of-asean-china-dialogue-relations-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-for-peace-security-prosperity-and-sustain/>.
- ³ Georg Strüver, "International Alignment between Interests and Ideology: The Case of China's Partnership Diplomacy", *German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)*, March 2016.
- ⁴ See "Full Text of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's Speech on China's Diplomacy in 2014", *China Daily*, 26 December 2014. Wang Yi said: "[W]hat makes such a partnership different from a military alliance is that it does not have any hypothetical enemy nor is it targeted at any third party, thus keeping relations between countries unaffected by military factors. It aims to handle state-to-state relations with a cooperative rather than confrontational, and a win-win rather than zero-sum approach." At the Commemorative Summit on 22 November 2021, Xi Jinping also said: "We need to pursue dialogue instead of confrontation, build partnerships instead of alliances, and make concerted efforts to address the various negative factors that might threaten or undermine peace."
- ⁵ Georg Strüver, op. cit.
- ⁶ SCMP Reporter, "Quick guide to China's diplomatic levels", *South China Morning Post*, 20 January 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1903455/quick-guide-chinas-diplomatic-levels>.
- ⁷ Author's compilation based on public sources.
- ⁸ Speech by H.E. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China: "Vigorously Promoting Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between China and the European Union, 6 May 2004, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:pwWRUXFH_AIJ:www.chinamission.be/eng/zt/t101949.htm+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=sg.
- ⁹ Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, "China's Strategic Partnership Diplomacy", ESPO Working Paper No. 8, 29 Jun 2014, *China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)*, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2459948.
- ¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was held in Beijing", 29 November 2014, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.
- ¹¹ Hoang Thi Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny and ASEAN's Ambivalent Response", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41, No. 2 (2019), pp. 223–54.
- ¹² Farah Nadine Seth and Sharon Seah, "The ASEAN-China Partnership: Balancing Merits and Demerits", *ISEAS Perspective* 2021/120, 10 September 2021, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-120-the-asean-china-partnership-balancing-merits-and-demerits-by-farah-nadine-seth-and-sharon-seah/>.
- ¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi Attends and Addresses the Opening Ceremony of the Conference on Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations", 28 July 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1895951.shtml.
- ¹⁴ Hoang Thi Ha, op. cit.
- ¹⁵ "China's Shift Toward Discourse Power", *Atlantic Council*, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep27615.5.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A23faf56c9eccc120d7f1ace956848960>.

- ¹⁶ See: Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries”, *Pew Research Centre*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>; Laura Silver, China’s international image remains broadly negative as views of the U.S. rebound, *Pew Research Centre*, 30 June 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/06/30/chinas-international-image-remains-broadly-negative-as-views-of-the-u-s-rebound/>; Richard Q. Turcsányi, Matej Šimalčík, Kristína Kironská, Renáta Sedláková, et al., European Public Opinion on China in the Age of COVID-19, *Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) and partners*, https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COMP-poll-report_3.pdf; Lowy Institute Poll 2020, China, *The Lowy Institute*, <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/themes/china/>.
- ¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, For a Shared Future and Our Common Home, Speech by Xi Jinping at the Special Summit to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of China-ASEAN Dialogue Relations, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1919473.shtml.
- ¹⁸ Author’s interviews with ASEAN member states’ officials.
- ¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, op. cit.
- ²⁰ Hoang Thi Ha, “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific: Old Wine in New Bottle?”, *ISEAS Perspective 2019 No. 51*, 25 June 2019, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_51.pdf.
- ²¹ Author’s estimation, based on the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-U.S. Strategic Partnership. (2021-2025), <https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/15.-ASEAN-US-Plan-of-Action-2021-2025-Final.pdf>; and the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2021 – 2025), <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ASEAN-China-POA-2021-2025.pdf>.
- ²² Chairman’s Statement of the 24th ASEAN-China Summit, op. cit.
- ²³ State of Southeast Asia Survey Reports, *ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute*, 2019-2021, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/category/articles-commentaries/state-of-southeast-asia-survey/>.
- ²⁴ Author’s interviews with ASEAN member states’ officials.
- ²⁵ “GT Voice: Australia’s empty gestures won’t hinder China-ASEAN ties”, *Global Times*, 28 October 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1237565.shtml>.
- ²⁶ Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies”, *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter 2007/08), pp. 113-157.
- ²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, op. cit.
- ²⁸ Hoang Thi Ha, “Southeast Asians’ Declining Trust in China”, *ISEAS Perspective 2021/15*, 18 February 2021, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/iseas-perspective-2021-15-southeast-asians-declining-trust-in-china-by-hoang-thi-ha/>.
- ²⁹ See “Beijing rattles oil companies in South China Sea off Vietnam”, *Energy Voice*, 13 August 2020, <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/asia/258490/beijing-oil-china-vietnam/>; Samir Puri, “What the Whitsun Reef incident tells us about China’s future operations at sea”, *IISS*, 9 April 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2021/04/whitsun-reef-incident-china>; Aristyo Rizka Darmawan, “China’s Recent Foray into the North Natuna Sea is Problematic”, *Fulcrum*, 22 September 2021, <https://fulcrum.sg/chinas-recent-foray-into-the-north-natuna-sea-is-problematic/>; Amy Chew, “China harasses Malaysian oil and gas vessels on a ‘daily’ basis, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative says”, *SCMP*, 25 October 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3153648/china-harassing-malaysian-oil-and-gas-vessels-daily-basis-asia>.

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