

ASEAN Focus

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION PROVIDING CONCISE ANALYSES AND PERSPECTIVES ON ASEAN MATTERS

New Southern Policy
from ASEAN and
ROK Perspectives

South Korea's Soft
Power in ASEAN

Viet Nam's ASEAN
Chairmanship 2020

Southeast Asia in
US-China Strategic
Rivalry

Wang Gungwu's
Long View of
ASEAN

Taking Stock of ASEAN-ROK 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 Temasek History Research Centre (THRC) and the Singapore APEC Study Centre.

Editorial Notes

The final two months of 2019 have brought little respite for ASEAN and its member states. Indonesia was rocked by two consecutive bomb attacks in Medan and Jakarta in mid-November and early December, a grim reminder of the worrying trends of radicalisation and violent extremism in the country. Some headwinds have come from outside of the region too, as the International Criminal Court (ICC) recently announced that preliminary investigations into allegations of human rights abuses in the Philippines' drug war will be completed in 2020. Meanwhile, Myanmar took to the stand at The Hague on 10-12 December as hearings into the military's conduct towards the Rohingya commenced at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In another momentous development, the 35th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits on 1-4 November 2019 in Bangkok decided, among others, to conclude the negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) towards its signing in 2020, albeit without India on board. Coupled with India's withdrawal from the RCEP, US President Donald Trump's regrettable decision to skip the summits and downgrade the American delegation ruffled many feathers. On this occasion, Thailand also passed the Chairmanship baton over to Vietnam, which will lead ASEAN in 2020 with the theme "Cohesive and Responsive".

This issue's *Analysis* dives headfirst into the outlook for ASEAN in 2020. We are honoured to feature Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Nguyen Quoc Dzong, as he shares his insights on Vietnam's upcoming ASEAN Chairmanship with the focus on strengthening ASEAN's unity and adaptivity amidst fast-changing regional and global developments, including the burgeoning US-China rivalry. Dr. Zhu Feng and Dr. Patrick Cronin then provide their respective perspectives on how China and America see Southeast Asia in the context of the US-China strategic competition. Against the backdrop of new tectonic shifts and existing faultlines, Dr. Tang Siew Mun discusses the recent setbacks to East Asian open regionalism.

Another highlight of November was the successful convening of the ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) commemorative summit in Busan to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their dialogue relations. This issue shines the *Spotlight* on the multiple facets of ASEAN-ROK relations. Professor Choe Wongi provides a South Korean

perspective of President Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy (NSP), followed by Dr. Hoo Chiew Ping's analysis of the NSP from a Southeast Asian angle. Under the broader framework of the NSP, Dr. Han Intaek zeroes in on the ROK's infrastructural investments in ASEAN, while Dr. Sohn Hyuk-Sang and Dr. Lee Jinyoung provide an overview of the country's development assistance to the region. Back to the vantage point of Southeast Asia, Mr. Shawn Ho and Ms. Samantha Ho explore why South Korea's soft power is so massively popular in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, Ms. Hoang Thi Ha examines ASEAN's role on the Korean Peninsula issue with both hope and caution. *ASEAN in Figures* wraps up the discussion with impressive numbers that underpin ASEAN-ROK economic cooperation and people-to-people relations.

This issue's *Insider Views* pays tribute to Professor Wang Gungwu as he retires from an illustrious 17-year tenure as Chairman of the Board of Trustees, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. Throughout his long and continuing distinguished service to scholarship, academia and community service, Professor Wang embodies the *jūnzǐ* (君子) that many have described him to be – a scholar-gentleman par excellence. We are indebted to him for his leadership of ISEAS and tireless mentorship of everyone at the institute. We are honoured to feature his masterful yet succinct analysis, which illuminates how ASEAN's past might inform the course of its future.

As the new year beckons, *Sights and Sounds* explores the ways in which people in the region celebrate new beginnings through centuries-old traditional rituals. Ms. Anuthida Saelaow Qian surveys the cultural landscape of the region to see how the ASEAN peoples welcome their different New Years. Mr. Glenn Ong follows the trail of lanterns adorning the night sky of Chiang Mai as Buddhists in northern Thailand celebrate the Yee Peng festival.

On a final note, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our distinguished contributors this past year, whose keen insights and expert opinions have allowed *ASEANFocus* to engage with the most pressing issues concerning our region. 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.

From all of us here at the ASEAN Studies Centre, we wish you a happy 2020! 🎉

Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN in a Changing World

H.E. Nguyen Quoc Dzung, Deputy Foreign Minister of Viet Nam, outlines the priorities of Viet Nam's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2020.

Logo

The Logo's Overall Shape:

A blooming lotus, the national flower of Viet Nam, with its three multi-coloured petals representing the three pillars of the ASEAN Community

The Three Multi-Coloured Lotus Petals:

Assembled in the same direction, symbolising ASEAN's strong sense of togetherness, cohesion and collective responsiveness to emerging challenges and opportunities



A Ship Moving Forward:

Carrying the three pillars of the ASEAN Community towards the shore of sustainable growth, enhanced connectivity, deeper integration and shared prosperity

A Flying Bird:

A legendary crane-like bird (**Chim Lạc**) in the Vietnamese culture, with its head held up high towards the sky of peace, hope and happiness

Meaning of Main Colour Components:

Yellow: Prosperity, optimism and joy
Red: Dynamics, energy and determination
Blue: Peace, wisdom and trust

Viet Nam takes over the ASEAN Chairmanship in a rapidly changing regional and global landscape where opportunities are intertwined with challenges. Amidst the prevailing trends of peace, stability and cooperation for development, new uncertainties, disruptions and complexities are arising from the geostrategic, political, economic, societal and technological domains.

After over a decade of recovery and expansion, the world economy is slowing down and global trade volume is shrinking. Protectionism and trade tensions are on the rise while economic integration in many parts of the world is stagnating. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has boosted hopes for higher productivity and greater human progress, but concerns are also growing over its disruptive implications, cyber threats, and socio-economic disparities.

Traditional security issues such as territorial disputes, arms build-up, and setbacks in the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime, have become more serious in both scope and scale. Non-traditional security threats related to food security, natural resources depletion, environmental degradation, climate change, and terrorism, are on the rise. In addition, the unfolding major power competition has expanded from political, military to economic, technological and other fields. As a result, regional countries are under greater pressure to carefully navigate their policies to maintain an environment conducive to peace, stability and economic growth.

ASEAN at 52

ASEAN has come a long way since its inception in 1967. ASEAN's remarkable achievements far exceed what its founding fathers would have imagined. From five original member states, the organisation has doubled in size to become a family of ten living in peace, dialogue and cooperation. From a loose association, ASEAN has evolved towards a full-fledged politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible Community. The implementation of the ASEAN Community Blueprints 2025 has seen positive and tangible progress with 90% of the action lines having been or being addressed.

As ASEAN member states contend with the multifaceted challenges from the changing regional and international geopolitical environment, they are committed to reinforcing ASEAN Centrality and unity, and ensuring ASEAN resilience and adaptability in addressing those challenges, towards realising the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. As an example, the ASEAN Leaders have adopted the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a strong affirmation of ASEAN Centrality and a collective response to the new initiatives and strategies such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The AOIP provides the fundamental principles for ASEAN to engage with those initiatives by the major powers, and a platform for potential cooperation between ASEAN and its partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Today, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is a prime example of how ASEAN is stronger as one. Together, the ten diverse countries make up a dynamic and attractive economic group, becoming an engine of Asia-Pacific's economic growth. With a combined GDP of US\$3 trillion in 2018, as compared to US\$2.5 trillion in 2015, ASEAN is currently the fifth largest economy in the world and is predicted to become the fourth largest in 2030.

However, ASEAN still faces major challenges ahead and much needs to be done to achieve the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, from maintaining ASEAN Centrality and unity amid increasing power rivalries, mitigating negative impacts from trade tensions to forging a sense of well-being and common identity among the ASEAN peoples. In addition, various ASEAN pertinent issues remain to be addressed, such as over-reliance on external resources, lack of efficiency and effectiveness in ASEAN's operations and mechanisms, among others.

Multilateralism in Viet Nam's Foreign Policy

The ASEAN Chairmanship 2020 will be illuminated by Viet Nam's overall foreign policy which attaches great importance to multilateralism at both regional and global levels. Viet Nam's track-record of economic reforms, international integration, and pursuit of developmental goals, is closely associated with our pro-active participation in multilateral institutions in the region and the world. Such multilateral pro-activism is manifested in Viet Nam's successful hosting of major global events, e.g. the APEC Summit (2017), the World Economic Forum-ASEAN (2018) and the 2nd US-DPRK Summit (2019).

2020 holds a significant meaning as Viet Nam will assume both the ASEAN Chairmanship and a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). At the UNSC, Viet Nam will work earnestly with other Council members to preserve regional and international peace and stability and to promote sustainable development goals and inclusive economic growth. It is also our priority to act as a bridge between ASEAN and the UN to realise common goals, particularly in conflict prevention and sustainable peace.

2020 also marks the 25th anniversary of Viet Nam's ASEAN membership. Viet Nam has made great strides over the past 24 years in fulfilling its membership duties, honouring its commitments to ASEAN agreements, and actively contributing to ASEAN's development. For example, Viet Nam is the second ASEAN member state after Singapore to implement all the AEC action lines, and is a pioneer in maintaining peace, stability and security in the region.

The past achievements and experiences will enable Viet Nam to assume the ASEAN Chairmanship with confidence. As the ASEAN Chair, Viet Nam looks forward to promoting bilateral relations with fellow ASEAN member states and external partners. The Chairmanship also provides opportunities for Viet Nam to enhance its international profile, and promote the Vietnamese culture and soft power to the world.





Launch of Vietnam's ASEAN Chairmanship theme in November 2019

Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN

The theme of Viet Nam's ASEAN Chairmanship 2020 – Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN – reflects the spirit of “Think Community, Act Community” in response to the challenges and opportunities ahead. “Cohesive” reflects the need to enhance ASEAN unity and solidarity, economic integration, ASEAN awareness and identity, and work towards a “people-centered” community. “Responsive” underlines the importance of ASEAN pro-activeness, creativity and capacity in grasping opportunities and coping with challenges. These two elements complement and reinforce each other – only a cohesive ASEAN can afford to respond in an effective and timely manner to any challenge that comes its way.

Guided by this overarching theme, Viet Nam will focus on five key priorities during its ASEAN Chairmanship.

Unity and Solidarity: Unity and solidarity form the most important glue that makes a cohesive and responsive community. ASEAN has helped transform Southeast Asia from instability to stability, antagonism to cooperation, poverty to prosperity, a loose association to one of the world's most viable and successful regional organisations. These past records attest to ASEAN unity and solidarity as the key to its success and strength. Viet Nam will work to reinforce ASEAN Centrality and solidarity, forge closer relations and mutual support among the member states, develop ASEAN's collective approach on international and regional issues, and respond to challenges and threats to regional peace and security in an effective and timely manner. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) offers a vivid example of ASEAN's success in forging a collective response to the shifting regional landscape, which overcomes and transcends the differing perspectives of the member states on the Indo-Pacific.

Economic Interests: Common interests lay the foundation for a cohesive community. Viet Nam will look to maximise the convergence of economic interests among ASEAN member states who share the key objective of achieving an ASEAN single market and integrated production base. Other priorities include

strengthening small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the region, increasing intra-ASEAN trade and investment flows, enhancing ASEAN connectivity, narrowing the development gap, and better equipping ASEAN economies and its peoples to adapt to the dynamic changes brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Commonalities: As a cohesive community, ASEAN should forge commonalities through regional events that touch our everyday life. For example, the recent decision for ASEAN member states to launch a joint bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup will help inculcate a strong sense of community among Southeast Asians. As a matter of fact, young people in the region might easily recognise Nike, McDonald or Versace logos, but have little idea about what the ASEAN Emblem looks like and stands for. It is therefore important for Southeast Asians to be aware of ASEAN, to feel that they are part of and benefit from a regional community. Viet Nam will step up efforts in raising ASEAN's profile and visibility in the member states, so that their citizens understand ASEAN's importance at the grassroots level.

Partnership: The past 52 years have shown that ASEAN cannot advance its goals alone. ASEAN community-building requires both intra-regional integration efforts and partnerships with different countries and organisations further afield. Viet Nam will look to reinforce partnerships for peace and sustainable development through deepening and elevating relationship with partners around the world, enhancing ASEAN's role and image in the global community, and contributing to shaping the new regional and global architecture. These endeavours will go beyond the number of partnerships created to focus more on how they could contribute to ASEAN community-building, and to regional peace and prosperity.

Institutional Capacity: A cohesive and responsive community must be anchored in its strong institutional capacity. To stay relevant to new developments, ASEAN-led mechanisms and processes must be effective, efficient, nimble and outcome-driven. Viet Nam will therefore seek to increase ASEAN's operational capacity and efficiency

through institutional reforms and improvement of rules of procedures and processes within ASEAN-led mechanisms.

The Way Ahead

Viet Nam's ASEAN Chairmanship agenda will be a mix of continuity and change. While carrying forward the signature initiatives grounded by the previous Chairs, Viet Nam is in the process of developing new initiatives and proposals across three pillars.

In the political-security pillar, priorities will be given to shaping, sharing and applying norms and rules, strengthening the habit of dialogue and cooperation while promoting confidence building, consolidating the existing political-security instruments and mechanisms, and addressing emerging challenges from a holistic, cross-sector and cross-pillar approach. Among others, we aim to set the new directions in the next stage for ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus), to strengthen their relevance and responsiveness. We also seek to enhance ASEAN's capacity in responding to developments in the region so that ASEAN would be among the first responders in an event of crisis or emergency in a member state. In view of the importance of the maritime domain, maritime cooperation and security continue to be a focus in ASEAN agenda next year, from safeguarding safety and freedom of navigation, upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, to addressing marine pollution, managing marine resources, and ensuring safety and humane treatment to all seafarers, including fishermen.

In the economic pillar, Viet Nam will make efforts to promote intra-regional economic integration, strengthen regional connectivity, promote sustainable development and inclusive growth, and enhance ASEAN's adaptive capacity. A regional conference will be organised to discuss ways and means to boost intra-ASEAN trade and investment. A platform is being considered to share best practices in developing circular economy, and formulating the Digital Integration Index to help monitor the implementation of the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework. Other initiatives linking academia, entrepreneurs and start-ups are under consideration.

In the socio-cultural pillar, a number of initiatives will be rolled out on developing high-quality human capital to meet the demands of the digital economy; delivering social work and services for vulnerable groups; reducing maternal and newborn mortality rates among ethnic minority groups; and setting up cooperation mechanisms to fight against fake news.

Regarding institutional capacity, we plan to conduct a thorough review of ASEAN's organizational structure and its operations since the ASEAN Charter entered into force; further improve ASEAN's operational methods and procedures; enhance cross-sectoral and cross-pillar

Five Priorities of Viet Nam's ASEAN Chairmanship 2020

Priority 1

Strengthening solidarity and unity, contributing to the promotion of peace, security and stability in the region, and effectively addressing emerging challenges.

Priority 2

Enhancing integration and connectivity within and beyond the region towards sustainability and inclusivity, fully tapping the opportunities brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Priority 3

Nurturing a sense of community among ASEAN people, promoting ASEAN identity and its visibility in the region and the world.

Priority 4

Deepening ASEAN's engagement with the global community for peace and sustainability in the region and the world.

Priority 5

Increasing ASEAN's institutional capacity and effectiveness.

coordination; and organise more ASEAN meetings at the ASEAN Secretariat's new building.

Last but not least, we will continue efforts on raising awareness about ASEAN identity, including promoting more frequent and extensive use of the ASEAN Flag and Anthem, encouraging the installation of ASEAN Lanes at ASEAN airports and the display of the ASEAN Logo on the travel documents of ASEAN member states' citizens. As the ASEAN Chair 2020, Viet Nam will spare no effort to keep up the good work of delivering ASEAN's public goods to the people so that ASEAN will be felt and heard in their daily life. Next year's ASEAN Chairmanship will bring the spirit of "Think Community, Act Community" to the hearts and minds of more and more Southeast Asians. 🇻🇳

Amb. Nguyen Quoc Dung is Deputy Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, and Viet Nam's ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) Leader.

Southeast Asia and US-China Rivalry: A View from Washington

Patrick M. Cronin expects Southeast Asia to stand up to its own interests and strategic autonomy in the burgeoning US-China rivalry.

Southeast Asia is no mere chess piece in a new great game between major powers. Although sometimes taken for granted, the region looms large in America's vision for a better world. But the US can and should do more to focus on its positive agenda for ASEAN member states and institutions, even as it competes with a muscular China.

For the US, Southeast Asia remains the vital centre of tomorrow's free and open Indo-Pacific region. The US vision for the broader region largely overlaps with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Assuring the strategic autonomy of sovereign and independent states, expanding opportunities for free and fair trade, building human and physical connectivity, and bolstering the local demands for development are all essential to both the US and ASEAN states.

Yet China's engagement with Southeast Asia is inextricably linked to a desire to dominate it. Indeed, China now *appears* to be an unstoppable force in the South China Sea. Over the next decade, China would like to determine the distribution of all the resources within the nine-dash line area, become the rule-maker and legally transform international waters into internal seas, and hasten a US military withdrawal from the region.

China seems poised to realise its excessive territorial claims and unilateral attempts to erect an order based on Chinese power, not the rule of law and regional norms. At the same time, China increasingly seeks to flip the script, turning criticisms of its behavior into the accusation that the US is the principal rule-breaker and leading destabilising force in the region. "We will not relinquish a single inch of territory passed down from our forefathers", declares Defence Minister Wei Fenghe. Although China seems to miss the point that no one owns the oceans, General Wei casts China's right in response to perceived threats, including "big stick diplomacy" and "long-arm jurisdiction".

An assertive China, issuing a singular message, reinforces the notion of a China ready to gain further control of the region at whatever cost. It is thus understandable why US Indo-Pacific Command chief Admiral Philip Davidson testified in May 2018 that, "China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States."

Some actions are underway to counter the perception that America is retreating to a more isolationist posture. In the South China Sea, the United States is routinising freedom of navigation operations, as well as building local domain awareness and maritime capacity. Through the Blue Dot



Irina Qiwi@Shutterstock

US President Donald Trump's Special Envoy Robert O'Brien at the 7th ASEAN-US Summit in November 2019



Network and other means, the US is also joining others in making transparent China's opaque investments under the rubric of the Belt and Road Initiative. Despite these and other initiatives, Beijing appears well on track to further militarise the South China Sea and expand its influence over Southeast Asia.

Seventy years before Admiral Davidson's judgment on China winning control in all scenarios "short of war", George Kennan, then Director of Policy Planning at the State Department, coined the term "political warfare". For Kennan, the term refers to "the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives."

In a new report, *Total Competition: The China Challenge in the South China Sea*, I argue that China is waging total competition in the region. Beijing's campaign, like George Kennan's concept of "political warfare", involves the use of all tools at the state's disposal short of war. One of Beijing's chief weapons is information, which helps to shape the narrative and prepare the region for Chinese dominance.

When Chinese Foreign Wang Yi calls the US the world's leading troublemaker, he draws attention to Beijing's relentless information warfare campaign. Wang hopes regional audiences will believe the myth that the US is dangerously bent on a new Cold War (despite a new trade deal), and that they will overlook Beijing's internal oppression and external coercion.

The US is determined to compete with China, not to confront it or contain it. As Secretary of Defence Mark Esper recently remarked, "We're not the ones looking for a Cold War." But Americans can no longer ignore the exploitation of open systems and longstanding rules by revisionist powers. Nor can Americans overlook the fact that an increasingly affluent China, rather than trending toward freedom, is bending back towards autocracy.

The US is not looking for Southeast Asian countries to choose sides, but rather to stand up for their interests. Americans do not want to meddle with the internal affairs of other countries. But they do hope for a commitment to anti-corruption and better governance. When our democracy errs, as it often does, Americans shine a

spotlight on problems and rely on the distributed power of our Republic to check and balance our mistakes and make corrections.

For all its attendant risks, a burgeoning US-China rivalry is the necessary means by which to help Southeast Asian states preserve an order that it is free and open. It is and will remain a bounded competition.

To respond to China's campaign, the US needs a two-pronged strategy. The first prong should blunt China's assertiveness while deterring escalation and adapting pluralistic societies to be more competitive and resilient. The second prong should expand on America's appealing engagement with Southeast Asia and strengthening bonds of cooperation.

Pursuing a single prong is likely to fail. The US requires both a firm policy for China and an attractive – and certainly not bullying – policy for Southeast Asia. But it is the sum of constructive activities of the US and its partners that can provide the surest means of offsetting any one country's attempts to dominate the region.

The aim of the US and ASEAN should be to bolster a free, open, and inclusive region. Towards that end, the US seeks to thicken connectivity, expand growth and sustainable development, and strengthen ASEAN member states' resilience and independence so that they may better determine their destinies. These aspirations have everything to do with the salutary change Americans want to bring to the world and, in the case of Southeast Asia, to a dynamic and diverse region whose importance will continue to grow throughout this century. ☞

Dr. Patrick M. Cronin is the Asia-Pacific Security Chair at the Hudson Institute in Washington, D.C. He is the lead author of a new report, "Total Competition: The China Challenge in the South China Sea," published by the Center for a New American Security.

ASEAN-China Relations Amidst Major Power Competition: A View from Beijing

Zhu Feng explains how China sees ASEAN in the context of China-US strategic rivalry.

Southeast Asia has become a crucial topic in China's foreign policy debate in recent years, along with its rising strategic position in Asia and the changing international surroundings. At the core of this debate is the inherent disarray between Beijing's "good neighbourliness and good partnership" offerings to ASEAN and its inflexible handling of the South China Sea (SCS) disputes. Nowadays, China's relationship with Southeast Asia and ASEAN as its primary regional grouping has become even more complicated as it interlaces with the emerging China-US rivalry. Will the rivalry induce greater China's flexibility and recalibration of its policy towards ASEAN, or will it instead reinforce Beijing's power grabs in the region? There are as yet no easy answers.

The deterioration in Beijing-Washington relations is allegedly the imposition of China hawks in the Trump administration, and absolutely not a choice that Beijing favours. China tends to see that turn as a consequence of unchecked American unipolar power. China will therefore continue to keep up its engagement with the US even as both countries are embroiled in strategic rivalry. China's priority in its America policy remains unchanged: to stabilise bilateral relationship and prevent it from further deterioration, pursue strategic cooperation and coordination, and minimise risks of accidental military conflicts. Beijing will seek active communication and negotiation with the American counterparts through

various channels to develop an adequate prescription of President Trump's policy change towards China. The key elements of such prescription are maintaining stability, managing divergences, and ensuring damage control in bilateral relations. "Decoupling", a chilling word set forth by the US' China hawks, is exactly what Beijing seeks to avoid.

China's rise requires a peaceful and stable environment, especially in its neighbourhood. Yet, the expanding interests of a rising China definitely require Beijing to expand influence beyond its boundaries. The US, now determined to rollback China's influence, has labelled it a "revisionist state" and a "formidable threat" to the rules-based order in Asia-Pacific. China is feeling the heat from the Indo-Pacific strategy which provides a platform for the US and its allies to curb China's rise in the region through diplomatic, economic and strategic tools. Among others, US freedom-of-navigation operations (FONOPs) have further complicated the situation in the SCS, and may cause collision and escalation. Such a behavior not only challenges China's sovereignty and security but also disrupts the construction of a peaceful solution framework in the SCS.

In this context, a proper understanding of the role of ASEAN in China-US relations is important. Southeast Asia is a geopolitically significant region where the



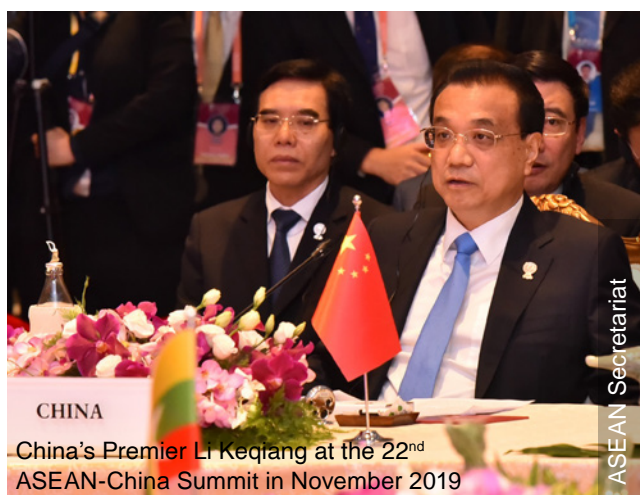
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potential of crisis due to escalating US-China competition juxtaposes with ample opportunities and extensive space for regional cooperation. As an important partner for both China and the US, ASEAN can play a balancing and bridging role in Beijing's US policy. While Southeast Asia can be an arena of major power contestation, ASEAN has also provided the much-needed platforms to construct a cooperative and accommodative regional order. Beijing recognises that competition and cooperation are two sides of "one coin", and has no interest in a regional split. For that purpose, China's regional agenda aims to keep ASEAN somewhere in-between and not to push ASEAN to lean towards either the US or China.

From both economic and security perspectives, Southeast Asia matters more to China. Trade remains one of their most crucial bonds. 2019 saw a dramatic increase in ASEAN-China trade volume and a sharp drop in China-US trade exchange. ASEAN offers a big market with longstanding and extensive commercial links with Chinese business. At the same time, ASEAN values China as an indispensable political and economic partner. Therefore, the fear that ASEAN will turn its back on China may be unfounded. Yet, Beijing is also highly conscious of ASEAN's view of Washington as the counterbalance to a rising China. As Beijing contends with America's *volte-face* in its China policy, it has to politically and economically keep ASEAN within its arms rather than forcing its Southeast Asian neighbours to make a binary choice.

The SCS disputes present a big challenge to such a nuanced relationship: some ASEAN member states will continue tilting towards Washington to earn strategic capital and security assurance in countering Beijing's maritime acts. In the meantime, ASEAN as a whole strives to distance itself from the major power competition pitfall, and avoid taking sides. Against this backdrop, China expects ASEAN member states to exercise rationality and prudence regarding the SCS disputes and avoid embroilment in China-US rivalry. Beijing holds that differences on the SCS could be negotiable and resolvable between the countries concerned, without interference of any third party. The challenge for Beijing is how to earn strategic trust among the regional countries while maintaining its inflexible policy in the SCS.

Some recent public opinion surveys show that the negative views towards China among Southeast Asians have deepened. Unsolved territorial and maritime disputes, China's growing power, and China-US tensions are all contributing factors. The decline of trust on China reflects some limitations of China's policy towards the region. Beijing has paid attention to this problem and made policy adjustments to enhance mutual trust and build the China-ASEAN community of common future. In response to the perceived erosion of trust, Beijing will make more efforts to promote pragmatic cooperation for regional affairs and development. Beijing also encourages peaceful resolution to territorial disputes, based on dialogue and negotiation. Meanwhile, Beijing insists that any party concerned should try to make rational and independent decisions, free from external intervention. A more active,



positive and helpful China can win more trust and amity in Southeast Asia.

Managing the tensions with the US and advancing relations with ASEAN and its member states will be China's priority concern towards Southeast Asia in the near term. However, Beijing and Washington can do more than compete in this region. The two countries need to engage and cooperate with each other, an approach which seats comfortably with Beijing's US policy. A stable China-US relationship is also in the interest of ASEAN and its member states. China's effective and constructive support for ASEAN member states' economic development would earn Beijing more credibility and mileage in this region. In addition, the SCS situation must be stabilised and managed, including through the COC negotiations, to develop better mutual understanding and expand maritime cooperation opportunities between ASEAN and China.

Moving forward to 2020, Beijing's primary goal towards ASEAN is fundamentally unchanged – amplifying economic bonds and building up political trust and security cooperation throughout the region. Enhanced coordination and cooperation for common prosperity and development, and for sustainable peace and stability, will be at the centre of their bilateral relationship. In the face of greater pressure and competition from the US and other major and middle powers, Beijing should take extra care to ensure policy efficiency and relevance, and reduce suspicions from ASEAN so that the US would have little space to manoeuvre in regional politics. As for ASEAN, its message to both contending major powers should be frank and clear: ASEAN will not be made to turn against a rising China, but a rising China should be more amiable and trustworthy to the region. ☸

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The Shifting Ground of East Asian Regionalism

Tang Siew Mun discusses the recent setbacks to East Asian open regionalism.

At the recently concluded 35th ASEAN Summit and related summits, the US' "under-represented" participation without any proper consultation and communication in advance with ASEAN was not well received in the region. Then, India's decision to withdraw from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) came as another shock. The Indo-Pacific discourse suffered a setback as a result, and the region's strategic balance as well as East Asian open regionalism are facing new uncertainties.

Trump's "no show" was a wake-up call to ASEAN that it can no longer expect the US leadership to invest political capital and time to multilateral processes in the region. America's "love affair" with ASEAN during the Obama Administration will remain for the foreseeable future the high watermark of Washington's engagement with ASEAN. This does not mean that the US will disengage from the region, an irrational proposition, given America's deep and extensive economic and security interests in the region – the US has more investments in ASEAN member states than it does in China and Japan combined. ASEAN as a regional grouping however must come to terms with Washington's engagement at a slower pace and intensity. US leadership in regional affairs is no longer a given. This state of affairs also puts the spotlight on the viability of the US-led hub and spokes security system.

If the US is perceived to be less reliable, ASEAN has to seek alternative modalities to maintain the region's strategic balance. The reconfiguration of the

regional security architecture – if at all possible – will fundamentally alter the way we view the US and provide the catalyst for ASEAN to expand and deepen security partnerships with other states. In the short term, America's decreasing regional profile is alarmingly disruptive to regional stability. But in the long run – and assuming that ASEAN can forge new and robust strategic linkages with other partners – the short-term pain will give rise to a more stable strategic balance as the region moves away from its over-dependence on the US. Conversely, the US' downward gear shift is a silver lining for regional major and middle powers such as Japan, India, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Australia to step up their roles in regional leadership.

However, India's withdrawal from the RCEP negotiations casts a shadow over such silver lining. The withdrawal caught the other 15 negotiating parties by surprise, and dealt a blow to the RCEP's ambition to extend regional economic integration beyond the geography of East Asia. The importance of India is best summed up by former Singapore premier Mr Goh Chok Tong's characterisation of ASEAN as the fuselage of an airliner with India and China as the two wings. India's withdrawal deprives the region of a dynamic force that serves as the foundation for regional peace and engine of growth and prosperity. Implicitly, the two wings also function to provide an equal and balanced thrust to prevent the aircraft from veering too far off to one side or the other, and to ensure that the region stays on track.



The 3rd RCEP Summit in November 2019

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and Shinzo Abe of Japan at the 1st RCEP Summit in November 2017



It is unreasonable to pass judgement on India's leadership for putting its national economic well-being ahead of regional imperatives. This point resonates strongly in ASEAN as its member states have to confront with their nationalistic temptations every day of the week. From a strategic perspective, the region would have to consider the point that if India is unable to overcome or even mitigate internal pressures to align closer to the region today, can we realistically expect it to do so in the near future? The central question is whether India sees itself as part of the East Asian region or prefers to engage the region as an external party on an *ad hoc* and *à la carte* basis?

Notwithstanding these nagging concerns, ASEAN strongly welcomes India to be a central and integral part of the regional architecture. Indeed, ASEAN has left the door open for India to reconsider its position on the RCEP. If the sentiments of the RCEP Summit in Bangkok last month is any indication, ASEAN is ever ready to support and facilitate India's deeper strategic, political and economic integration into the region. The proverbial ball is now in India's court.

At the same time, India's withdrawal from the RCEP has generated yet another unexpected problem for the region with reports of Japan mulling the delay of the RCEP signing. Japan sees India as a "natural ally" to counterweigh China in the 16-member trade pact. Without India, Japan is feeling uneasy having to deal with China alone. This instinctive reaction is understandable, but is ultimately the wrong calculation on the part of Japan, which showed that it has not taken the lesson of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to heart. Japan towed the US line of boycotting the China-proposed AIIB, citing reasons of governance issues. Meanwhile, other major economies and close US allies, including the UK and Germany, opted to ensure that these concerns are to be addressed by a policy of active participation from within.

Similarly, if Japan is concerned over China's potential dominance of the RCEP, it should play a leading role within the downsized pact to prevent it from being

controlled by one dominant member. ASEAN, Australia, Korea and New Zealand would interpret Japan's action as abandoning its friends. Japan's disengagement of RCEP would also diminish its strategic influence and cut itself off from future regional economic discussions as the RCEP will likely evolve into the region's primary economic platform. Above all, Japan's move showed it is lacking in confidence to stand up as a regional leader at a time when the US' regional influence appears to be diminishing.

At its core, the regionalism project is facing a crisis of confidence. India's withdrawal puts into focus the harsh reality that when push comes to shove, national interests will always triumph over regional considerations. If India is unable to reconcile these powerful imperatives in the economic domain, can it do so in the more sensitive domain of political-security cooperation? Borrowing Mr Goh's analogy, ASEAN would very much to prefer to fly with two engines rather than one. However, India's inconsistent commitment may force the region to contemplate a future with a less active and engaged India.

Indeed, the ROK may be doing just that in suggesting the revival of the moribund proposal of an East Asia Community (EAC) based on the configuration of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT). The EAC proposal may have had strong merits in the 1990s when it was first mooted. But in today's context, it poses a grave threat to the regionalism project as the EAC proposal will hive off India, Australia and New Zealand from the new configuration. Withdrawal from regional cooperation in a broader context or preference for a smaller grouping will undermine ASEAN's carefully calibrated strategy of creating an open and inclusive brand of regionalism. The choice of such regionalism is not just a matter of functional cooperation – it carries significant strategic weight to keep Southeast Asia deeply engaged with the wider region for both economic prosperity and strategic autonomy. 🇮🇳

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Why South Korea Wants to Tie In with ASEAN

Choe Wongi explains the rationale and aspirations underlying the New Southern Policy.



The New Southern Policy (NSP) is President Moon Jae-in's initiative to deepen the Republic of Korea (ROK)'s engagement with Southeast Asia and beyond. The primary motivation of the new ASEAN policy initiative is closely associated with Seoul's new recognition that given its growing economic and strategic importance, ASEAN on its own right is now a force to be reckoned with in the ROK's diplomatic priorities. While the ROK's engagement with Southeast Asia has spanned many decades, ASEAN has largely remained secondary in Seoul's foreign policies in spite of the reality of its ever-growing importance to the ROK. The NSP is based on this reflection that it is imperative to fill this anachronistic lacuna in Seoul's perception on ASEAN by overcoming its past approaches that have often been criticised as transactional, inconsistent, and commercially-centred. The NSP currently stands for President Moon's signature foreign policy initiative to advance the ROK-ASEAN relations to a whole new level; it encompasses economic, socio-cultural as well as strategic dimensions. The NSP has several discernible core policy elements.

First, the NSP has a strong element of economic diversification. Seoul wants to realign and expand its external economic portfolios with ASEAN member states. Southeast Asia is one of the most dynamic growth engines of the world economy, and ASEAN as a whole now stands as the ROK's second largest trading partner, after only China. Furthermore, there are a lot of economic complementarities and ample potentials for the expansion of mutually beneficial economic ties between both sides. The ROK therefore wants to forge stronger economic partnership with ASEAN, and to work together towards building an East Asian economic community.

The desire for greater economic diversification is also in part related to Seoul's strategic need to reduce external vulnerabilities and dependency stemming from ROK's trade relations that have been too much concentrated on a few partners such as the United States and China. Seoul's bitter experience of China's informal measures of economic coercion right after the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile battery in mid-2016 is a case in point. Many Koreans came to the realisation that heavy economic reliance on China after all turned out to be a source of vulnerability and that economic diversification is an absolute necessity.

Second, the NSP is a diplomatic rebalancing effort with an intent to elevate bilateral ties with ASEAN. In conventional Korean diplomatic orientations, there has always been a bias towards the US, China, Japan and Russia. It is quite understandable that the ROK accords diplomatic priorities to these four major powers, given their predominant influence over the Korean Peninsula and in relation with the North Korea issue. However, it is also true that the ROK's current diplomatic and external economic reality renders the reach of its national interests beyond the Korean Peninsula. ASEAN in this respect is most underappreciated in Seoul's diplomatic overtures, and the ROK hopes to build an active middle-power partnership with ASEAN. Thus, under the people-centred NSP, ASEAN is no longer secondary in Seoul's external relations but regarded as its priority partner on a par with the major powers. That is the diplomatic and strategic baseline aspiration embedded in the NSP.

Third, the NSP is the ROK's newly reinvigorated policy for regional cooperation in the emerging regional architecture

of the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific. This aspect of the NSP is particularly relevant and important in that it signifies Seoul's hedging effort in a regional environment of increasing US-China strategic competition. Seoul is particularly concerned about being pressured or forced to take a side in the ongoing US-Sino rivalry. Given its geopolitical reality, the ROK wishes to minimise this strategic dilemma by working together with like-minded nations in ASEAN, who share similar concerns and interests in this regard, and to create a diplomatic space to hedge against and buffer the pitfalls from the major power rivalry.

For this reason, the ROK's reaction to the US' Indo-Pacific strategy has not been very clear and forthcoming, if not negative. Seoul does not feel entirely comfortable with the strategic nature of this strategy that squarely focuses on countering China. As a security ally of the US for the last 70 years, Seoul is more than willing to cooperate with the Indo-Pacific strategy in areas where it feels comfortable, while making sure to maintain good relations with China on issues like North Korea. That explains why the ROK's stance on the US' Indo-Pacific discourse has been deliberately ambiguous as it does not want to give a wrong signal either to China or the US.

With the NSP as the ROK's new regional initiative, Seoul is open, and willing, to cooperate with any regional initiatives of key countries, be it the US' Indo-Pacific strategy, China's Belt and Road Initiative or India's Act East Policy. In particular, the ROK has genuine interests in the emerging regional architecture to be based on ASEAN-led multilateral mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS). With close collaboration with ASEAN as a like-minded partner, Seoul aspires, and prefers, to have an inclusive regional architecture that promotes multilateral norms and institutions. In this respect, it welcomes the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and is ready to search for the common ground between the NSP and the AOIP.

Engaging North Korea is another important element of the NSP. Pyongyang maintains diplomatic relations with all ASEAN member states and feels most comfortable in its relations with them. Also, some ASEAN members such as Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos are in a position to share their reform and opening-up experiences with North Korea. Seoul therefore expects ASEAN to play a more proactive and constructive role in mediating and helping North Korea engage with the international community.

In retrospect, the NSP is not really 'new' in consideration of the remarkable progress since ASEAN and the ROK initiated their dialogue relations in 1989. What is novel in this initiative is the level of enthusiasm, willingness and commitment that has been put into the NSP. For example, by last September this year, President Moon Jae-in had fulfilled his earlier pledge to pay official visits to all ten ASEAN member states within his five-year tenure. In May this year, the Korean foreign ministry established the brand-new ASEAN Bureau at its headquarters in



Indonesia's President Joko Widodo at the MOU Signing Ceremony on Investment Cooperation with Hyundai Motor Group

Seoul that is dedicated to exclusively dealing with matters related to ASEAN and Southeast Asia.

In addition to this institutional reinforcement, the ROK government recently upgraded and expanded its ASEAN mission in Jakarta. A senior diplomat who was a former vice-foreign minister was appointed as the ROK's ambassador to ASEAN, and the number of diplomatic staff posted to the mission has tripled. The ROK's ASEAN mission is now on a par with its major multilateral missions in New York or Geneva. This kind of activism towards ASEAN is unprecedented in the modern Korean diplomatic history, and is a testament to the importance Seoul is placing on its relations with ASEAN.

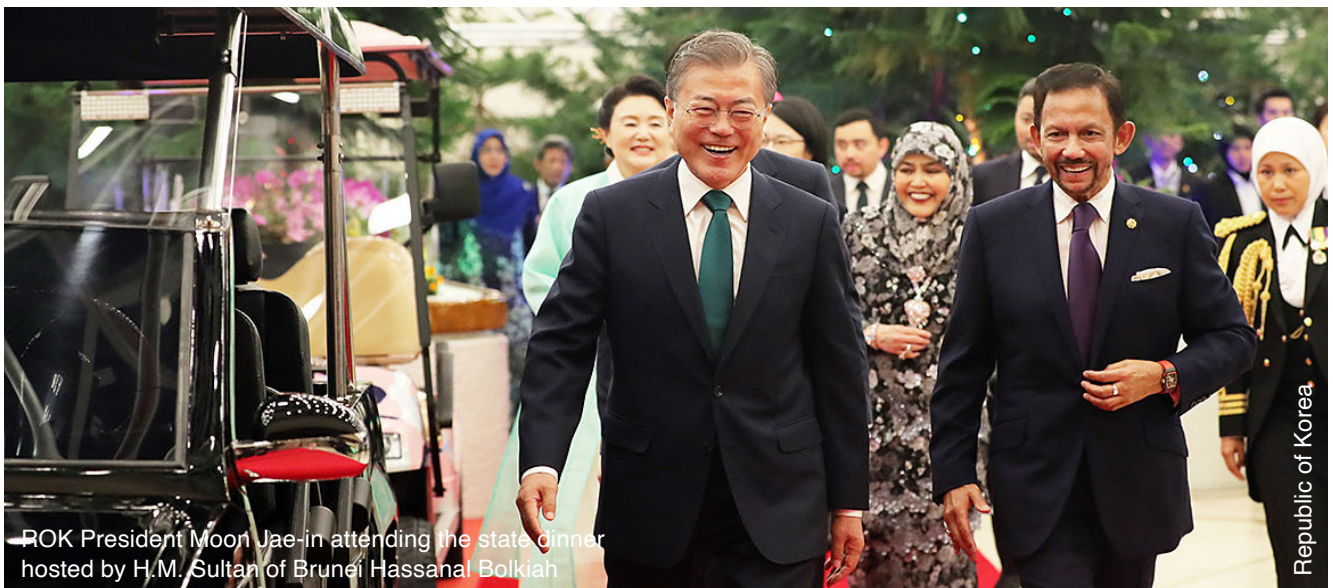
The ROK's aspirations towards ASEAN are further demonstrated by its recent hosting of the Commemorative Summit in November, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the ASEAN-ROK dialogue relations. As clearly detailed in the official documents from the Summit, Seoul wants to solidify relations with ASEAN on all policy fronts and set a new milestone for the future.

However, in order for the aspirations embodied in the NSP to take root, it is absolutely necessary that Seoul sustain the strong forward momentum and continue to invest and build on its policy priorities. The recent reinforcement of diplomatic infrastructure with regard to ASEAN could serve as an effective institutional mechanism to lock in the NSP priorities. Also, Seoul needs to make sure that many pledges made so far under the NSP are matched with real actions along with tangible policy programs and deliverables. Finally, since the ROK is in a unique position as a role model of successful economic development, Seoul needs to make greater efforts in sharing its rich developmental experiences and know-hows so that they can be fully leveraged by ASEAN in its community-building as well as in bridging the intra-ASEAN development gaps. 🏗️

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The New Southern Policy: Catalyst for Deepening ASEAN- ROK Relations

Hoo Chiew-Ping explores new areas of ASEAN-ROK cooperation under the New Southern Policy.



ROK President Moon Jae-in attending the state dinner hosted by H.M. Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah

The Republic of Korea (ROK)'s presence in Southeast Asia represents a case of paradox. It is a leading trade partner for most ASEAN member states and its soft power appeal is manifest in the massive following of the “Korean Wave” culture in the region. Yet, these advantages have not been translated into stronger political-diplomatic relationships between the ROK and Southeast Asia. The New Southern Policy (NSP), introduced by ROK President Moon Jae-in, is meant to forge a greater level of strategic partnership between both sides.

The (NSP) recognises, first, that it is time for the ROK to diversify its foreign policy away from the traditional focus on its northern neighbour the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the surrounding major powers (Japan, China, the United States), and second, to elevate the status of Southeast Asia in the ROK's foreign policy horizon, as the region will become a major geopolitical and economic force in the decades to come. Furthermore, all ten ASEAN member states have diplomatic relations with the DPRK, and could play a constructive role in the Korean peace process, as demonstrated from the two summit meetings between US and DPRK leaders in Singapore (June 2018) and Hanoi (January 2019). These countries, and ASEAN as a major regional organisation, could continue to play a constructive role and a reliable partner for the ROK in the difficult Korean peace process.

Moving forward, how should the NSP serve as a catalyst to deepen ASEAN-ROK bilateral ties?

First of all, ASEAN-ROK cooperation in maritime connectivity could be strengthened, running parallel to the deepening Korea-Mekong cooperation. Countries in the region welcome greater Korean engagement to hedge against uncertainties from the emerging US-China strategic competition. This is because the ROK is a fellow middle power with no hegemonic intentions and designs in Southeast Asia, and also a direct stakeholder in regional maritime security as its energy supplies and goods mainly pass through Southeast Asian waters such as the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. Observers and analysts have mooted many ideas about ASEAN-ROK cooperation in maritime connectivity. These include, among others, strengthening port facilities, improving shipping infrastructure, creating a maritime connectivity platform under the existing ASEAN-ROK mechanism, and enhancing maritime security cooperation. Indonesia, for example, is actively exploring the potential of maritime safety cooperation with the ROK. Other potential areas in non-traditional security, such as search and rescue operations, natural disaster relief, anti-piracy, are also of interest to many maritime Southeast Asian countries.

Secondly, while the ROK plays an important role in bringing capital and technology to Southeast Asia, there is also a need for greater Southeast Asian penetration into the Korean market so that this is not a “one-way street”. Major Korean corporations, and even some small and medium enterprises (SMEs), are members of the business circle of the Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, all of them having an interest in expanding their ventures into Southeast Asia. While this is to be welcomed, more can be done to facilitate Southeast Asian businesses in market access in the ROK. For example, the ROK can leverage its advances in e-business to help Southeast Asian SMEs to increase their exports to the Korean market.

Thirdly, as the world moves towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and as the Prosperity pillar of the NSP focuses on future-oriented economic activities, there is much to be offered by the ROK to ASEAN to achieve technology-driven economic development. The ROK has already supported the ASEAN Smart City Network via the ASEAN Plus Three mechanism. Under the NSP framework, there are also bilateral cooperative endeavours, given the different stages of economic and technological development among the ASEAN member states. The ROK’s high-tech industries, especially in artificial Intelligence, robotics, and information and communications technology (ICT), make it an attractive partner for the ASEAN member states. For example, Korean companies could step up their investment in upgrading the telecommunication infrastructure in ASEAN, providing a credible alternative at a time when many ASEAN member governments are wary of being caught in the US-China technological competition, especially in the 5G adoption.

Finally, ASEAN and the ROK can deepen their cooperation in infrastructure development. Many Korean

corporations have reservations about infrastructure investment in Southeast Asia, given that there are already powerful competitors from China and Japan. Chinese companies have made significant inroads to infrastructure development in Southeast Asia, riding upon Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative, while Japan has a longstanding infrastructure presence and track record in the region, and recently launched the Quality Partnership Infrastructure to compete with China. However, Korean companies have started to carve out their niche areas, especially in bridge-building, subway and highway construction (and modernisation), and shipping industry. Greater Korean infrastructure investment does not necessarily lead to competition with other major powers; in many ways this can be made complementary to the existing infrastructure projects.

The launch of the NSP in 2017 initially generated mixed responses and even scepticism from both within the ROK and Southeast Asia. Questions arose as to how strong and sustained the ROK leadership’s commitment to this engagement would be or whether the ROK would revert back to its traditional focus on the DPRK and major powers as time passes. However, by 2019, there is growing and stronger confidence in the sustainability of the NSP from both sides, which has been reaffirmed in the Busan commemorative summit of 30 years of ASEAN-ROK dialogue partnership in November. The optimism is now high, with the realisation from both sides that there are converging interests, plenty of opportunities for enhancing connectivity, and with complementary outlooks on regional community building to foster collective resilience in the age of high geopolitical uncertainties. ☘

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South Korea's Soft Power in ASEAN: What's Next?

Shawn Ho and **Samantha Ho** explain the warm embrace of the Korean Wave by Southeast Asians and suggest building upon it to sustain ASEAN-Korea people-to-people relations.



Korean children waving the flags of ASEAN member states and the ROK at an ASEAN exhibition in the ROK in October 2019.

Southeast Asians love Korea. In particular, Southeast Asians are enamoured by Korean soft power in the form of Korean dramas, pop music, language, and food – all of which form part of the Korean Wave, commonly known as *Hallyu*. Why has this Korean Wave swept across the ASEAN region and how should ASEAN-Korea people-to-people ties evolve in the post-*Hallyu* era?

Why is the Korean Wave so Popular?

First of all, Southeast Asians share cultural proximity with Koreans due to a common “Asianness” rooted in Confucian values and an emphasis on collectivism. There are many similarities between Southeast Asian cultures and Korean culture, which are deeply felt by Southeast Asian audiences as they watch Korean dramas and listen to Korean pop music (K-pop).

Korean dramas have gained massive popularity in the ASEAN region as Southeast Asians can easily empathise and relate with the emotive elements embedded in them. The common themes in Korean dramas - mostly about love, family, friendship, diligence, sacrifice, determination to overcome hardship and the pursuit of excellence - generate similar emotions in Southeast Asian audiences who share similar Asian and Confucian values. Not only are Southeast Asians able to see aspects of our own lives reflected in Korean drama scenes, we can also identify with the aspirations pursued by the characters in the dramas.

As for K-pop, Korean entertainment companies have succeeded tremendously in defining what it means to be cool for youths particularly for those in Asia. Therefore, many Southeast Asian youths, who yearn to find acceptance and be seen as trendy in their social circles, have eagerly subscribed to these trends.

In addition, Southeast Asian youths, who grow up in an increasingly fast-paced and digitalised Asia, can relate to the aspirations, emotions and challenges portrayed in the songs and music videos released by K-pop artistes of the same generation. Such connections draw the average Southeast Asian youth listener to K-pop. Some Southeast Asians have even successfully entered into the K-pop scene as idols. Examples include Lisa (from Thailand) of Blackpink, Tasha (from Singapore) of SKarf, and Isaac (from Malaysia) of IN2IT.

The second reason for the popularity of the Korean Wave in the ASEAN region is that Southeast Asian societies are inherently multicultural ones which have absorbed foreign cultural influences and blended them with indigenous cultures over millennia. As members of these multicultural societies, Southeast Asians grow up being more receptive and open to embracing elements of foreign cultures such as the learning of other languages and consumption of foreign cuisines.

The increasing number of Southeast Asians learning the Korean language has been a noticeable trend in the region. Southeast Asian youths swept up by the Korean Wave have been eager to learn Korean so as to comprehend the lyrics of their favourite songs and to watch dramas as soon as they are released without having to wait for translated subtitles. Some Southeast Asian adults are also picking up the Korean language for professional reasons in light of the increasing presence of Korean conglomerates and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the ASEAN region.

Korean food has also gained a large following in the ASEAN region. This is because its popularity correlates with the rise in *Hallyu*. Southeast Asians want to have a taste of the cuisine which has been featured so appetisingly in various Korean dramas and movies. Moreover, Korean food is largely centred around rice (which is a common staple across ASEAN). While not all forms of Korean food are well-received across the ASEAN region – for instance, Korean cuisine does not offer many halal options and Korean-styled raw fish is generally unfamiliar to Southeast Asian taste buds – some signature dishes are highly popular in the region, such as the classic *kimchi* (traditional side dish of salted and fermented cabbage), *bibimbap* (white rice topped with sliced vegetables, an egg and red chili pepper paste), *bulgogi* (marinated grilled or stir fried beef slices) and Korean fried chicken.

Mutual ASEAN-Korea Waves into the Future

This year marks the 30th anniversary of relations between ASEAN and Korea which culminated in the recent ASEAN-Korea Commemorative Summit in Busan, Korea. For most Southeast Asian fans of Korea over the past few decades, it is very likely that *Hallyu* was the spark that first ignited our interest in Korea. However, all fads will come to an end someday. In a post-*Hallyu* era, what will then serve as an anchor for ASEAN-Korea people-to-people relations?

We contend that a sustainable long-term relationship between ASEAN and Korea needs to be based on strong mutual understanding and move beyond the current unidirectional overemphasis on *Hallyu*. Therefore, it is important for various stakeholders to push more for an ASEAN Wave in Korea so that Koreans will have more opportunities to develop a better understanding of ASEAN and our diverse cultures.

The ASEAN Culture House that was launched in 2017 in Busan is an excellent initiative to promote the cultures and histories of the ten ASEAN member states to the Korean people. Much more can certainly be done. It is our sincere wish for our Korean friends to develop higher levels of interest for the wide and diverse ASEAN region, as well as become more receptive to elements of foreign cultures besides those of the US, China, Russia and Japan.

Today's youths in ASEAN and Korea have a pivotal role to play in the decades ahead. More youth exchanges can help rev up this ASEAN Wave. For instance, the annual ASEAN-Korea Youth Network Workshop organised



ASEAN-Korea Train Launching Ceremony in 2019 at Seoul Station

Republic of Korea

by the ASEAN-Korea Centre (AKC) is a great initiative. For this year's Workshop, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) partnered with the AKC to host about 80 youths from across the region in Singapore to learn more about Smart Cities.

Within the next 30 years, it is envisioned that both Korean and Southeast Asian peoples would have developed strong mutual understanding of one another's societies and cultures. Besides and beyond an ASEAN Wave in Korea, our next wish is for there to be an ASEAN-Korea Wave by the 60th anniversary of ASEAN-Korea relations. This ASEAN-Korea Wave would be the next leap forward which would involve joint efforts by Southeast Asians and Koreans to create new cultural contents for a global audience.

Food can play a key role too in this ASEAN-Korea Wave. Since everyone loves a good meal, here are some suggestions to ponder on: firstly, fusion ASEAN-Korean food featuring new and innovative dishes such as Nasi Lemak with Korean fried chicken or Korean knife-cut noodles in Vietnamese *phở* broth could be the next hot global cuisine. Secondly, ASEAN and Korea can cooperate to provide a wider variety of halal Korean food products for global markets – Malaysia's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Korea on cooperation in the halal industry is a good example.

Over the next three decades, should an ASEAN Wave and ASEAN-Korea Wave emerge, it would usher in a new era driven jointly by Southeast Asians and Koreans, both of whom truly embrace one another's unique cultures. In this regard, more opportunities abound for both peoples to become even closer and collaborate for mutual benefits in the years ahead. ❧

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Finding a Niche: South Korea's Infrastructure Development in ASEAN

Han Intaek explores how South Korea's niche in smart cities and transport infrastructure can add ballast to its New Southern Policy towards ASEAN.

When it comes to the New Southern Policy (NSP) towards ASEAN, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is putting money where its mouth is. While “infrastructure” has become a foreign economic policy buzzword in the last decade predominantly associated with China and Japan, the ROK's infrastructure blueprint vis-à-vis ASEAN demonstrates that a targeted strategy that focuses on niche areas is no less significant than large-scale projects. Its comparative advantage in smart cities and small-scale transport connectivity has been leveraged to better complement ASEAN's infrastructure needs and benefit from opportunities available in these sectors.

At the first ASEAN-ROK Infrastructure Ministers' Meeting in 2018, ASEAN and ROK ministers agreed to “pursue cooperation in sustainable urbanisation and smart cities, including through the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN), that integrate technological advancements made in transport, green energy, environment, and the information and communications technology (ICT)”. They also pledged to “develop smart infrastructure technologies related to transport and water resources, among others, given the positive impact of such technologies on infrastructure connectivity and the establishment of the ASEAN Community”. Proposed follow-up initiatives include exchanging knowledge and best practices in “spatial planning and land use”,

and exploring “new management methods in these areas with application of national land information to encourage efficient use of land and systematic approach to infrastructure development”.

To facilitate such ambitious partnerships, the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund was doubled from US\$7 million to US\$14 million in 2019, mainly for capacity building and mutual exchange purpose. In addition, a Global Infrastructure Fund of US\$200 million is set to launch by 2022, of which 50% is earmarked for infrastructure development financing in ASEAN and India. Consistent with the joint declaration, the fund will be invested mainly in transport, energy, water resources, and smart infrastructure. The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), also unveiled a plan to increase official development assistance (ODA) for Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines from 87 billion won in 2019 to 180.4 billion won (US\$151 million) by 2023.

The Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF), a fund which finances about 50% of South Korea's bilateral ODA, gives priority to ASEAN countries and their infrastructure development. As of late 2014, 66.7% of the EDCF was invested in Asia, followed by 20.8% in Africa. Among ASEAN countries, Vietnam receives the



lion's share of the EDCF's financing. In terms of sectors, 35.4% of the EDCF was invested in transport, 17.2% in water supply and sanitation, 11.3% in health, and 9.5% in energy. These funding mechanisms demonstrate the clear focus of the Moon administration on infrastructure development in ASEAN.

Apart from government initiatives, South Korean construction firms are highly active in ASEAN member states, concentrating in Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore. The total value of orders that South Korean construction firms have received in ASEAN has increased rapidly. As of October 2018, Korean construction firms had received a total of US\$98.9 billion in orders (or 40.9% of total global orders) in the ASEAN region. ASEAN has thus become the largest origin of orders for Korean construction firms, followed by the Middle East with 35.5% of the total.

It should be noted that Seoul is not using infrastructure initiatives as a medium of competition with China and Japan – two major players that outperform the ROK in terms of the scale and depth of their infrastructure partnerships with ASEAN. China has substantially strengthened its economic and infrastructure engagement in the region under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to finance large-scale BRI projects. Meanwhile, Japan has established a longstanding track-record of infrastructure development in ASEAN member states, and has in recent years strengthened its foothold through the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI). Against this backdrop, the ROK's infrastructural cooperation with ASEAN has focused on its niche areas in smart city development and transport connectivity like automated traffic control systems as well as highways and bridges. Such focus has allowed South Korean firms to make their own inroads in an otherwise crowded field of infrastructure development projects in ASEAN pursued by China and Japan.

The focus and direction of the ROK's infrastructure cooperation with ASEAN suggest that it is neither competing with China in terms of massive infrastructural projects, nor is Seoul pitting itself against Japan's emphasis on quality over scale. Instead, the ROK appears to be transcending the "quality vs. scale" equation to target particular domains in which it possesses comparative advantage. In this way, infrastructure projects pursued under the auspices of the ROK government or South Korean firms are less likely to be trapped in the dichotomous narrative of strategic rivalry. Furthermore, Seoul is less inclined to be seen as using infrastructure financing as a means for asserting geopolitical influence in the region.

In fact, there are more opportunities for collaboration than competition between Seoul and other major players

in ASEAN's infrastructure development. For example, the ROK's limited capacity in large-scale projects is not necessarily a limitation, since infrastructure development is not only about building massive projects but also offering financially-viable and cost-effective solutions to specific needs, hence the importance of symmetry between demand and supply. Thus, while Chinese BRI initiatives pursue grand undertakings, South Korean projects can aim to provide specific solutions to address the targeted problems of partner countries (or even specific cities only) that might be glossed over by the BRI. In another example, Japan's focus on PQI includes criteria like environmental and social impact as well as technical expertise, which are congruent with the ROK's emphasis on sustainable urbanisation. This means that there is potential for South Korean infrastructure initiatives to not only avoid competition with those of China and Japan, but to actually complement them for mutual benefit.

The various infrastructure initiatives under the NSP have been well received by ASEAN and its member states. It shows that a calibrated and targeted role of the ROK even in a small-scale projects is welcome and meaningful as long as they actually meet the needs of ASEAN partners. This does not mean that the NSP is not without its challenges. There are two particular variables that will have a bearing on the continuity and success of the NSP and its infrastructure component.

First, the five-year single-term presidency limit often results in presidential policy initiatives having a five-year shelf life, especially the ones highly promoted by the incumbents. It remains to be seen if the NSP will continue beyond the current administration. Present signs indicate that the NSP will endure into the next administration, but only time will tell. The second major variable is inter-Korean relations. Should a crisis develop on the Korean Peninsula, the ROK would become too distracted and preoccupied with North Korea to engage with ASEAN in a sustained and purposeful manner. Stable inter-Korean relations is therefore a precondition for the ROK's bigger role in ASEAN infrastructure development. However, if inter-Korean relations improve beyond a particular threshold, the ROK might begin directing massive amounts of development financing towards North Korea, leaving fewer resources for Southeast Asia and pushing ASEAN to a lower priority. Therefore, for the ROK to preserve its unique foothold in the region's infrastructure development, it is incumbent on both ASEAN and the ROK to remain focused, and to pursue infrastructure cooperation for their inherent and mutual benefit. ❧

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ASEAN is the Priority in South Korea's Development Assistance

Sohn Hyuk-Sang and **Lee Jinyoung** examine the trends and patterns of Korea's ODA to ASEAN member states.

The New Southern Policy (NSP), which emphasises co-prosperity with ASEAN, is one of the most critical diplomatic strategies of the Moon Jae-in administration. In November 2019, South Korea held the ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Commemorative Summit, and the 1st Mekong-ROK Summit in Busan, Korea. ASEAN-Korea trade total in 2018 was valued at about US\$160 billion, making ASEAN the second largest trading partner of Korea. In another strong demonstration of the Moon administration's commitment to step up engagement with ASEAN under the NSP, it was announced in late November that Korea's ODA to six ASEAN member states (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam) will be doubled to US\$151 million by 2023.

Overview of Korea's ODA

Korea's first foray in providing foreign aid dates back to the 1960s when the country was still receiving aid from the international community. In 1963, Korea implemented a vocational training program for trainees from developing countries, under the financial and technical guidance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In 1965, the Korean government initiated its own invitational training, which was regarded as its first ODA program. Korea then started to dispatch experts in 1967, medical terms in 1968, and launched technical cooperation projects in 1969.

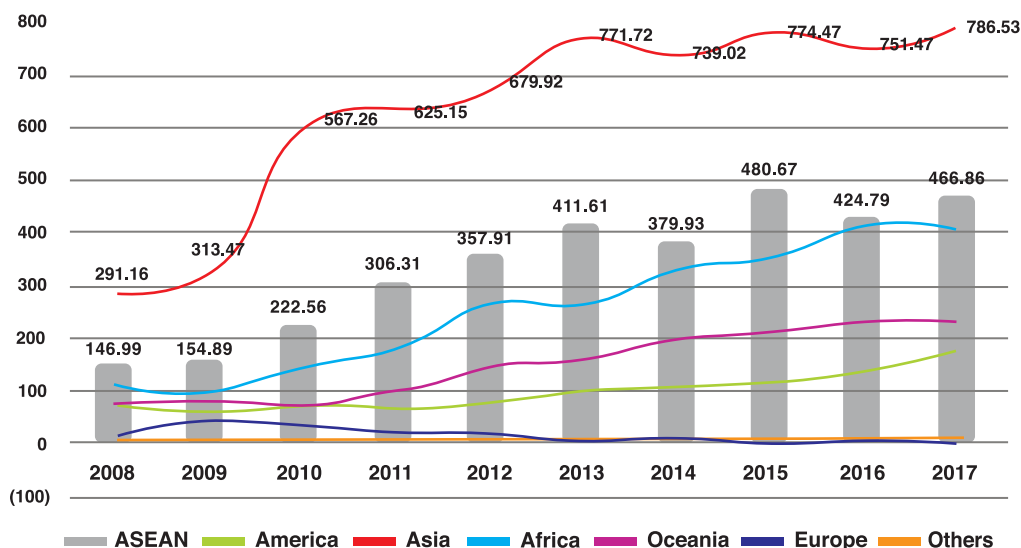
Since becoming a member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in January 2010, Korea has continued year-on-year increase of its ODA from US\$1,174 million in 2010 to US\$2,201 million in 2017. The Korean government has allocated the largest amount of its ODA to Asian countries. In 2017, almost half of its bilateral assistance (approximately 49%) was disbursed in Asia compared to 25% in Africa and 11% in South America.

Notably, Korea has steadily increased its ODA to eight ASEAN member states (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam). Korean ODA to these countries between 2008 and 2017 amounted to US\$3,352 million, accounting for 29% of its total bilateral aid (US\$11,567 million USD) over the same period.

Korea's ODA to the ASEAN region

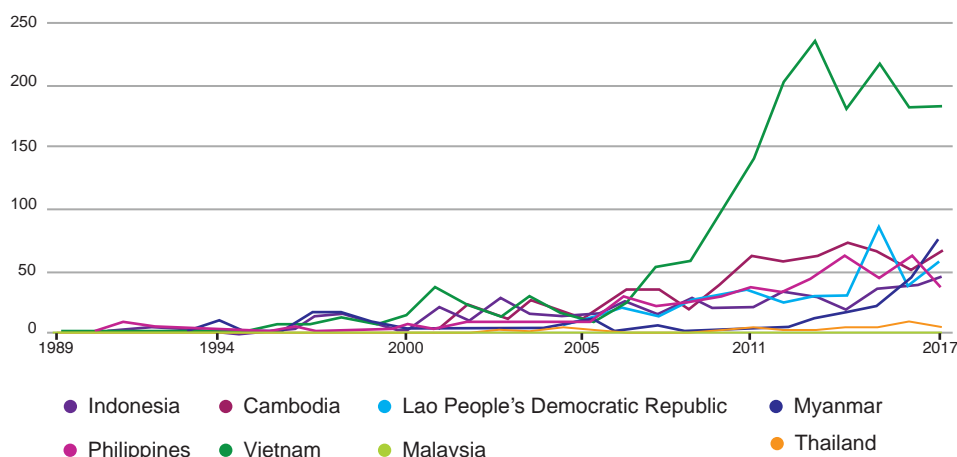
As early as 1987, Korea's ODA started for Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. Korea began to provide aid to Vietnam in 1989, Laos in 1991, and Cambodia in 1993. While ODA to Vietnam and Cambodia started relatively late, it increased sharply compared to other countries. In 1994, overseas offices of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) were established in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, laying the

Figure 1: Korea's ODA Trend by Region (2008-2017, Net volume)



Source: EDCF

Figure 2: Korea's ODA to ASEAN countries (1989-2017)
(current prices, US\$ million)



Source: OECD Statistics

foundation for Korean development cooperation in Southeast Asia.

According to the OECD statistics, Korea's ODA volume to ASEAN member states increased to US\$466.86 million in 2017 from only US\$0.32 million in 1989 – the year Seoul and ASEAN established the Sectoral Dialogue Partnership. During this period, Vietnam was the top recipient totalling US\$1,750.14 million, which is approximately 42% of Korea's total ODA allocation to ASEAN member states. Cambodia was the second largest recipient with US\$648.31 million, while Indonesia received US\$536.68 million. In the case of grants, Vietnam was also the top recipient, followed by Cambodia and the Philippines. For concessional loans, still the most considerable amount went to Vietnam while Cambodia and Laos ranked the second and the third respectively.

The *ODA White Paper* published by the Korean government in 2017 highlighted a number of Korea's representative ODA projects in ASEAN member states. One example is the Health Worker Education and Training Program in Laos, which builds on the Minnesota Project led by the University of Minnesota that helped to develop Korea's medical capacity during the 1960s. Another example is the construction of the Hanoi-Haiphong Expressway Project in Vietnam that commenced in 2009, and all sections of the highway opened in 2015. The six-lane highway and speed limit of 120 km per hour helps Vietnam meet the increasing demand for transport generated in the greater Hanoi-Haiphong area. The third example is the Cambodia Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) project. The Cambodian government has continually endeavoured to establish more TVET centres to train technical workers essential to its industrialisation drive. Similarly, the Myanmar Development Institute (MDI) project, which benchmarks the Korea Development Institute, has conducted various policy studies to contribute to the Myanmar economy.

Like other donor countries, many Korean private enterprises have participated in Korean ODA projects in ASEAN member states as contractors and project

management coordinators (PMC). More private companies are participating in ODA projects in such sectors as health, clean energy, and climate change. Recently, two types of private sector engagement in ODA have emerged: one is Public-Private Partnership (PPP) focusing on corporate social responsibility and 'creating shared values' (csv), and the other is Creative Technology Solution (CTS), in which KOICA provides funds to the projects with innovative technology.

These two models of engagement have created room for improvement in mobilising more development financing and market-friendly innovative technology. For example, POSCO addressed the youth unemployment problem in Cilegon, Indonesia, working to strengthen local community with job creation during 2014-2017. Under this program, 70% of the profits from the operation of social enterprises is reinvested in social activities for job creation such as vocational education and start-up support. In another example, as part of the CTS program, the social venture 4EN developed technologies to use peanut shells for stable fuel sources and provided it to the people of Myanmar in 2018. This helped to prevent indiscriminate logging of wood and to reduce carbon emissions.

Through many projects in various areas of health, education, public administration, rural development, agriculture and forestry, among others, Korea has proven to be a valued partner of ASEAN member states in their efforts to reduce poverty, develop human resources, and work towards sustainable development. Apart from trade, investment and people-to-people exchanges, Korea's ODA has played an essential role in strengthening ASEAN-Korea relations. More than just dollars and cents, it is Korea's development experience that has inspired countries in the region to value the partnership and create their own success stories. 🏡

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ASEAN-ROK Relations: When Idealism Meets Reality

Hoang Thi Ha examines South Korea's New Southern Policy towards ASEAN on the Korean Peninsula issue.



ASEAN Leaders and their spouses joined President Moon in commemorating the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations

Prime Minister's Office, Singapore

The Republic of Korea (ROK) President Moon Jae-in came to power with the earnest desire to establish a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula based on three principles: zero tolerance for war, mutual security guarantee and co-prosperity. His peace agenda is characterised by an emphasis on dialogue and negotiation through active summit diplomacy and economic engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Seoul also offers to facilitate relations between the DPRK and the international community.

International cooperation is identified as one of the five thrusts that underpin the Moon administration's peace process on the Korean Peninsula, and securing ASEAN's support for the peace process is one of the 16 policy tasks of the New Southern Policy (NSP). A signature initiative of the Moon administration's foreign policy, the NSP aims to elevate the ROK's relations with ASEAN on a par with the four major powers, i.e. the US, China, Japan and Russia. The NSP is largely associated with the ROK's pragmatic economic considerations, as shown in the robust implementation of its Prosperity pillar. As far as the Peace pillar is concerned, the priority is to secure ASEAN's support for and active contribution to the peace process on the Korean Peninsula.

While the previous ROK governments also engaged ASEAN and its member states to support Seoul's position

on the Korean Peninsula issue, the emphasis had been focused on ensuring compliance with the sanctions regime and stepping up international pressure against the DPRK over its nuclear programme. President Moon's engagement-oriented approach towards Pyongyang, however, sees the value of ASEAN in a different light. During his state visit to Singapore in July 2018, not long after the historic inaugural US-DPRK summit in the same country, President Moon said that "It is necessary to create opportunities for North Korea to fulfil its role as a responsible member of the international community." He further suggested that the DPRK be invited to ASEAN-led mechanisms and its bilateral exchanges with ASEAN be strengthened should Pyongyang sincerely proceed with denuclearisation.

President Moon's call for ASEAN to be a partner with the ROK "to create a community of peace" was boosted by the fact that the two US-DPRK summits thus far have been held in Singapore (June 2018) and Hanoi (February 2019). At the recent ASEAN-ROK commemorative summit in Busan, ROK, President Moon reiterated his peace initiatives and sought ASEAN's support in this respect. The Joint Vision Statement of the Summit linked peace and stability in Southeast Asia with that of Northeast Asia, including the Korean Peninsula. The statement highlights both sides' commitment to "promote and facilitate dialogue and cooperation, including through ASEAN-

led mechanisms, to support complete denuclearisation and the establishment of permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula”, and “ASEAN’s readiness to continue to play a constructive role in contributing to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.”

Granted, ASEAN possesses prized qualities and facilities that could enable it to play a positive role in promoting peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. These include ASEAN’s peace-oriented values, its perceived impartiality and neutrality in relations with both Koreas and with all major powers, and its reliance on persuasion rather than coercion, engagement rather than confrontation. Especially, ASEAN-led mechanisms, including the ASEAN Regional Forum of which the DPRK is a member, could provide the avenues for a reclusive DPRK to reintegrate into the world. ASEAN member states also hold the potential of blazing their development paths for the DPRK if Pyongyang chooses to open up and reform.

Yet, ASEAN’s leverage on the Korean Peninsula should not be overrated. It remains geographically and geopolitically a marginal player in the Korean Peninsula complex where deterrence and balance of power feature overwhelmingly, if not decisively, in the strategic calculus of all parties concerned. Reality has proven that ASEAN’s peace-oriented virtues and its perceived neutrality are of limited value to wield its influence on this issue. Suggestions of ASEAN’s direct offerings to the DPRK such as admission into ASEAN-led mechanisms or regional trade agreements is pre-mature as the sanctions regime – the DPRK’s principal preoccupation at this stage – remains in place.

This realistic acknowledgement is not meant to discourage ASEAN from actively contributing to the peace process on the Korean Peninsula, but to caution against misplaced expectations or unrealistic calculations. A case in point is President Moon’s decision to invite DPRK leader Kim Jong-un to attend the Busan summit. The invitation was extended without prior consultation with and consent of all ASEAN member states, suggesting a lack of respect for ASEAN and a breach of established procedures in ASEAN-ROK dialogue relations.

Furthermore, there is currently no mechanism for engagement between the ASEAN leaders collectively as a group and the DPRK leader. Given the fact that the United Nations Security Council-sponsored sanctions remain in effect, extensive consultation would be required in advance before ASEAN could reach a consensus on whether and how such engagement could take place. Fortuitously, Kim’s rejection of the invitation saved ASEAN from an awkward situation with potential repercussions. On top of that, if Kim or a special envoy had actually visited Busan, the primary agenda of the commemorative summit to celebrate the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-ROK relations “would fall off the radar of public attention” and be overshadowed by Northeast Asian affairs.

Even without the North Korean leader’s attendance, the invitation had set in motion an unwarranted diplomatic blunder. The DPRK seized this opportunity to attack Seoul’s “reliance on outsiders”, i.e. the US, to settle inter-Korean issues. In its statement on the invitation, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) also implied that ASEAN is peripheral to the power dynamics on the Korean Peninsula. It called out the ROK’s diplomatic naivete in hoping that engagement with ASEAN could be an effective inducement: “It is perplexing that they proposed discussing inter-Korean relations at such an unfitting multilateral venue, even after experiencing failures by relying so much on the United States.” Even the NSP was not spared from Pyongyang’s attack, as the KCNA statement continued: “We will never follow without reason the impure attempt of the South side [...] to insert the North-South issue [into] the corner of the ‘neo-southern policy’ masterminded by it.”

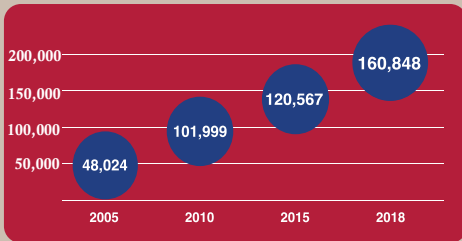
Although it is completely reasonable and indeed expected that President Moon would leverage ASEAN for his peace agenda, using the ASEAN-ROK commemorative summit to revive the currently stalled inter-Korea relations is not grounded in reality and realism. As a result, the laser focus on Southeast Asia and ASEAN – which makes a distinctive and valued feature of the NSP – has been somewhat undermined. Thankfully, the commemorative summit and various bilateral summits between President Moon and his ASEAN counterparts on 25-26 November in Busan helped to correct course with substantive deliverables and extensive media coverage. Yet, the unfortunate prelude to the summit stands as a reminder of the ROK’s geopolitical constraints vis-à-vis its aspiration and capacity to forge an active middle-power diplomacy towards ASEAN. For the NSP to sustain and succeed, Seoul should rise above its pre-occupation with the exigencies on the Korean Peninsula and recognise the importance of ASEAN in its own right. ☞

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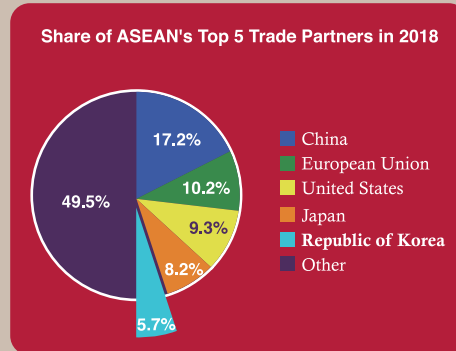


US President Donald Trump and DPRK Leader Kim Jong-un at their second summit in Hanoi in 2019

ASEAN-The Republic of Korea Relations



ASEAN's Total Trade with the ROK in 2005-2018 (in US\$ million).¹



The ROK was the 5th largest trading partner of ASEAN in 2018, accounting for 5.7% of total trade to ASEAN.¹

3.3x

ASEAN's total trade with the ROK reached **US\$161 billion** in 2018, 3.3 times of the total trade value in 2005.¹

US\$200 Billion

Targeted ASEAN and the ROK bilateral trade volume by 2020.²

US\$161 billion: ASEAN was the **second largest** trading partner of the ROK in 2018 after China (US\$270 billion), accounting for **14%** of Korea's total trade with the world.²

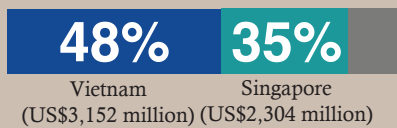


Among ASEAN countries, Vietnam traded the most with the ROK (US\$65.5 billion) in 2018, followed by Singapore (US\$29.9 billion) and Indonesia (US\$19.4 billion).¹

US\$497.02 million

The ROK's disbursed ODA to ASEAN in 2017, accounting for 5% of the total world's ODA to ASEAN.²

Share of Korea's FDI inflows to ASEAN¹



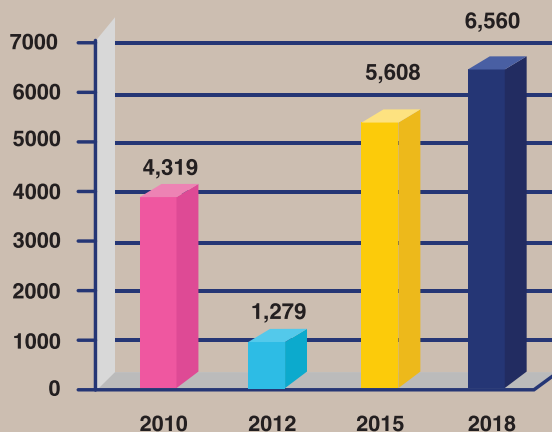
Korean firms operating in Vietnam⁴



1,291

Newly registered Korean enterprises in ASEAN in 2018 with an investment amount of **US\$6.135 billion**, an increase of 52% compared to the number of enterprises registered in 2014.²

FDI inflows from ROK to ASEAN in 2010-2018 (in US\$ million)¹



US\$11.9 billion

Amount of infrastructure construction contracts signed between Korean companies and ASEAN member states as of 2018, accounting for 37.1% of the total amount of Korean companies' overseas contracts.⁶

SAMSUNG

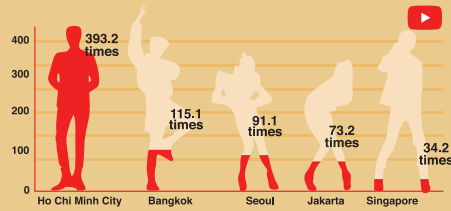
- in Vietnam⁵
- Total investment: US\$17.3 billion
- Share of Vietnam's total export value: 25%
- Job creation: 170,000
- Vietnamese vendors in Samsung's global supply chains: 29



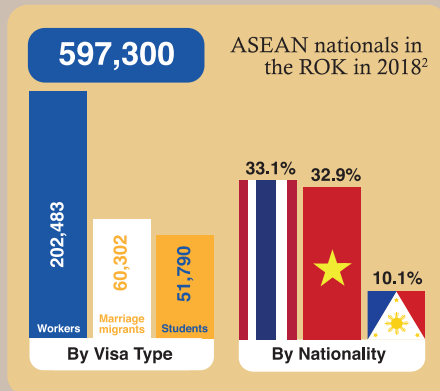
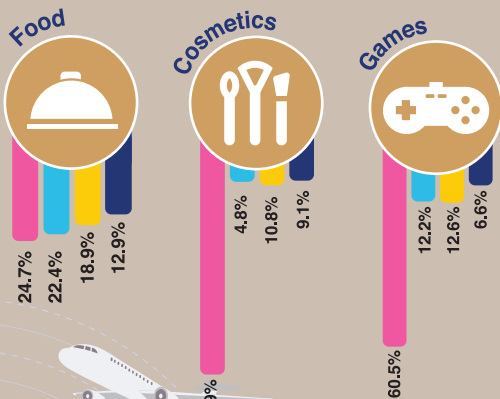
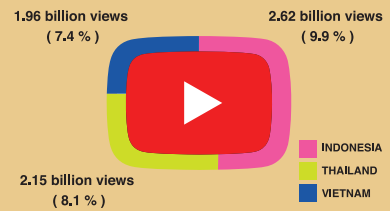
Malaysia and Indonesia are the top two destinations of Korean Halal cosmetics exports to Islamic countries, accounting for 44% and 12% respectively of the total.¹³

ASEAN is one of the top three destinations of Hallyu exports.¹²

The world's highest viewership of K-pop clips on YouTube by city in 2019 (number of times that an average person views the clips):¹¹

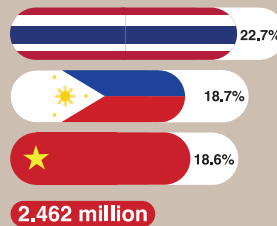
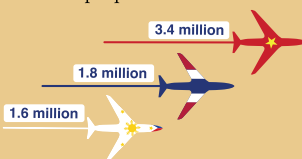


The world's highest viewership of K-pop clips on YouTube by country in 2019:¹¹



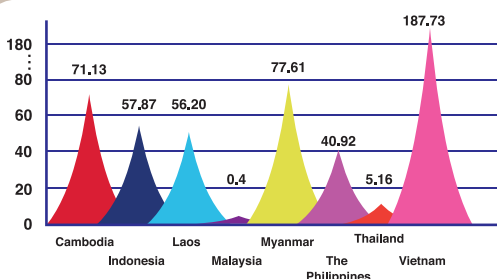
ROK is the first ASEAN's dialogue partner to open the ASEAN Culture House in September 2017 to promote ASEAN's culture and arts to the Korean people.¹⁰

Top three travel destinations in Southeast Asia for ROK people in 2018:²



8.981 million

Visitor arrivals from the ROK to ASEAN in 2018, 3.4 times larger than the number of arrivals in 2005 (2.65 million).²



Korea's ODA to ASEAN in 2017 by country (in US\$ million)²



Allotted investment in ASEAN smart city development projects from the KRW1.5 trillion Korea Smart City Open Network.⁸



An Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) provided by Korea to Myanmar in the sectors of economic development, agriculture, electricity and infrastructure projects.⁷



Lotte Chemical Titan Holding Bhd targets to become a top-tier petrochemical company in Southeast Asia by 2024 by doubling its current capacity of 3.5 million to 7 million tonnes per annum.³

Sources:

1. ASEAN Secretariat, 2. ASEAN-Korea Centre 2019, 3. New Straits Times, 4. Nikkei Asian Review, 2019, 5. Vietnam Economic Times, 2018, 6. International Contractors Association of Korea, 7. Myanmar Times, 2019, 8. The Korea Herald, 2019, 9. ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund, 10. ASEAN Secretariat, 2017, 11. Blip, 2019, 12. Hallyu White Paper 2018, KOFICE, 13. Korea Institute of Halal Industry

With Hindsight and Foresight: Taking the Long View of ASEAN



Professor Wang Gungwu is University Professor of the National University of Singapore and Emeritus Professor of the Australian National University, and served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute from 2002 to October 2019. An eminent historian of China and the overseas Chinese, Professor Wang received his PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1957, and has since authored some 20 books. Born in Indonesia, raised in Malaya, and based in Singapore since 1996, Professor Wang shares his insights on the history and future of ASEAN's quest for its own equilibrium in the face of challenges from within and beyond.

AF: You have noted earlier that Southeast Asia is essentially an artificial construct that took root after World War II. What does it mean for ASEAN's quest for a common regional identity?

Prof. Wang: There was no question over ASEAN's identity in the throes of the Cold War when Southeast Asia was divided along political lines. ASEAN was very much a political construct among those countries that supported one side of the Cold War: the anti-communist side. Yet, these five founding members were aware that such political-security impetus of ASEAN's foundation threatened to preclude potential relationships with other non-ASEAN states in the region. Hence, their attempts to emphasise the economic dimension and play down the political aspect of ASEAN in its first 20 years. Such approach also gave space for ASEAN member states like the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore to reconcile with China, which was on the other side of the Cold War divide. This history of balancing between the underlying political rationale of ASEAN and the economic interests of its member states has endured into ASEAN's present.

The quest for a common ASEAN identity was very tricky because even though its founding members were united in their anti-communist ideology, the political structure of each member state was completely different. One was a monarchy, another was an American-type republic, and others had mixed systems that did not quite fit into any mould. It was their economic identification based on capitalism and free-market principles that helped to bridge these differences.

In the aftermath of the American defeat in the Vietnam War, ASEAN experienced some confusion and was in the doldrums for a few years. However, the Vietnamese victory also enabled ASEAN to look at Vietnam afresh, beyond the Cold War complex, as a newly independent state. But then Hanoi was caught in its Indochina dilemma and the fighting in Cambodia that followed.

The Cambodia issue gave ASEAN a new focus throughout the 1980s – to keep Cambodia out of Vietnamese hands. In fact, the experience over the Cambodia issue was a factor that helped to make mainland and maritime Southeast Asia to become ASEAN today. Particularly for Vietnam, with the resolution of the Cambodia issue, ASEAN gave Hanoi a chance to look elsewhere beyond China, and not to be left alone with its big northern neighbour as it had been for millennia.

This background of the evolving nature of ASEAN should be remembered. Whatever we expect of ASEAN in the future, its history reminds us that we have to be flexible and be willing to think afresh about ASEAN to adapt to the fluid political landscape in the region.

AF: You mentioned that to this day, there are still more differences than similarities among the ten ASEAN member states. How can ASEAN navigate these differences moving forward?

Prof. Wang: ASEAN member states have sought to soften the differences and emphasise the similarities. The formula up to now has been to play up the economic side so as to increase the possibilities of cooperation. It has been very difficult but worthwhile to pursue. The recent agreement to move forward with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), despite India's reluctance to be on board, is a good example. Such open emphasis on economic cooperation has been a major strategic plus for ASEAN despite drags in the socio-cultural and political aspects. It has been ASEAN's tune for the past five decades, and remains a tune to play even as it is increasingly difficult for ASEAN to sing in unison.

AF: Despite all of its intra-differences, ASEAN aspires to forge one common identity. Do you think that it is practical and achievable?

Prof. Wang: It is hard to give a simple answer to that because there are many other variables. Not everything is in the control of the ASEAN member states. The larger picture is shaped by the major powers like the US, China, Japan, and India. Any move they take could make a difference to the equation. No matter how hard the ten ASEAN member states work and even if they have every chance of success, it can still be easily undermined by intervention from outside as a result of major power rivalries. While there is no use to pretend that it is in control and can dictate terms, ASEAN itself must be clear about what is in its interest. I think the ten member states do understand the importance of speaking with one voice, and the risk of failing to do so.

AF: *That brings us to the US-China strategic rivalry which is getting from bad to worse. Can ASEAN really stay neutral against the pressure to take sides?*

Prof. Wang: I naturally hope it doesn't come to that question. ASEAN should try to avoid asking that question, and get both major powers to avoid asking that question. That's ideal. Then, ASEAN has a chance to befriend both sides even though both sides may not be happy because you are not entirely with them. ASEAN must consistently and actively make sure that the balance is perceived to be balanced by both sides. This balance – or the perception of it – will allow ASEAN to gain symbolic centrality, which is aided by the fact that geographically, ASEAN is situated between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This requires hard work, and ASEAN leaders must be actively out there working at it. This is where I have my biggest question mark.

AF: *Who will provide this leadership in ASEAN?*

Prof. Wang: Nobody really wants to be a leader. It's a thankless job with a lot of hard work and not much profit in it. Being a leader means having to deal with incalculable risks and unpredictable factors from both within ASEAN

and without. Perhaps rotating the ASEAN chairmanship each year is the safest way of doing things, and all ASEAN member states must share the responsibility of leadership. In my opinion, Singapore has been thinking hard about ASEAN and trying hard to get ASEAN right. Meanwhile, the bigger member states remain preoccupied with their internal problems and external threats which minimise their capacity and interest to invest in ASEAN.

AF: *It seems that the picture is quite gloomy given the lack of leadership within ASEAN and our internal diversity which is further accentuated by the diverse interests of the major powers in the region. In the medium- to long-term, do you see ASEAN holding itself and becoming relevant or just muddling through?*

Prof. Wang: I remain optimistic about ASEAN's future. Many steps have been taken over the last 52 years that enable understanding and good relations among the ten ASEAN member states. I am very encouraged by the fact that three generations of officials and bureaucrats in the region have met frequently in the ASEAN context, working together and growing up together with ASEAN.

Some remarkable things about ASEAN do stand out. First, ASEAN member states have not had open conflicts with one another since the grouping achieved its current composition of ten members. They have been able to work out compromises and avoid serious conflicts to a degree not seen in other regional organisations. Second, although ASEAN member states are politically different and linguistically diverse, they agree to use English as a common working language. We might take this for granted, but I do not think this is a minor achievement. Even though ASEAN officials might have different degrees of English proficiency, they have talked the same language and grown to understand the meaning of their words with the same connotations. This makes it unlikely for them to misunderstand one another. ASEAN does not have to argue over discrepancies in translations, and this



Professor Wang Gungwu welcoming Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to the ISEAS 50th Anniversary Lecture and Exhibition in 2018



also reduces friction and cost. Third, for around 200 years of Southeast Asia's pre-modern history, most of the native peoples did not fight each other since they were colonised by the European colonial powers who basically fought among themselves.

Southeast Asia and ASEAN have benefited from these advantages and accidents of history, which gives ASEAN a good fighting chance. ASEAN can improve its chances with wise leadership and a clear-minded purpose that ASEAN should be one. ASEAN should also consistently demonstrate that it is in the major powers' interest to work with one ASEAN. Consistency breeds stability: if no external power feels that it can gain anything by breaking ASEAN up, they are more likely to leave ASEAN alone.

AF: Among the major powers, Japan is quite a unique case because it enjoys good relationship with Southeast Asia despite its imperial adventure in the region during World War II. Polls today suggest that Japan is the most trusted partner in ASEAN. What explains this volte-face?

Prof. Wang: Japan's defeat at the end of World War II by the Americans paved the way for the reframing of its constitution and a complete transformation in its foreign policy outlook. For most of its history, Japan had been isolationist, and Tokyo only caught the imperialist bug from the Western powers in the 19th century. In a way, Southeast Asia was "created" by the Japanese, because its invasion of Southeast Asia ejected the Western imperial powers from the region and awakened nationalist sentiments among local populations. Following Japan's defeat, things could never return to the same pre-war colonial settings and Southeast Asians began to strive for genuine independence. Soon after that, the US, Japan and ASEAN member states were tied together, economically and politically, in the context of the Cold War. Since then, Japan has been sincere and proactive in trying to make amends for its actions, and ASEAN members have been forward-looking and receptive to Japan's extensive economic engagement in the region.

AF: How do you see the ongoing tensions in the South China Sea (SCS) disputes?

Prof. Wang: The SCS disputes are not just a quarrel between China and the Southeast Asian claimant states. They are about America's assumption that it – or any country for that matter – has a right to dispatch vessels, including aircraft carriers, off the coast of China. The Americans believe that this right is provided for under international law, but China is opposed to this claim that other countries can sail their vessels into surrounding waters without prior notification to the coastal countries. From the point of view of China's security, they can't accept that.

At its core, America and China differ in their definition of "freedom of navigation". The Chinese support "freedom of navigation" because their economic lifelines are based on maritime trade. To the Chinese, "freedom of navigation" only applies to peaceful navigation, which excludes all military vessels. Conversely, China takes the American interpretation to mean "freedom of hegemony", which is America's freedom to send its aircraft carriers and naval presence anywhere in the world.

China's interpretation is informed by its reading of history – the SCS was where the near-destruction of Chinese civilisation first began when the British navy sailed up its coasts, defeated China, and forced the opening of the treaty ports. For 150 years, the SCS and most of Southeast Asia were in the hands of the same powers that took control of China, whether it was the British, the French, the Japanese, or the Americans. The decolonisation of Southeast Asia was the greatest gift to China after World War II, because it removed most of the Western imperial powers off the coast of China. Indeed, if you look back in time at Admiral Zheng He's expeditions, China did possess formidable naval power. However, because their enemies came mostly overland from the north, the Han Chinese rulers focused their attention on land and neglected the sea. Taken together, the lesson for the

Chinese from the 19th century is to never ignore the sea because enemies can and will come from both sides – the Chinese will never make this mistake again.

AF: The Chinese use the narrative that ancient China never colonised or threatened Southeast Asian countries. They also point to the “century of humiliation” to assuage the international community that China has no imperial or hegemonic ambitions. Can we take China at its words, using its history to understand China today and in the future?

Prof. Wang: The world has changed so much, so I cannot be certain. But I think that if the Chinese are true to their own traditions and heritage, they won't court trouble voluntarily. At the end of the day, the Chinese want to be respected as the Number 1 country. They have a saying, 一视同仁 (*yī shì tóng rén*), which means they will treat every country equally. What it means, of course, is that all countries are equal except China. But it is not the same thing as imperialism. In the old days, the tributary system was designed for other countries to have relationships with China, especially for trading purposes. But the idea of tribute was actually not invented by the Chinese. It was a kind of feudal hierarchical relationship common to many part of the world between smaller rulers and the superior ruler. Ancient China did not have the word “empire” as in the sense of the Roman Empire. The Chinese concept of “天下” (*tiān xià*), or “all under heaven”, is not inherently expansionist. Among all Southeast Asian countries in their relationship with ancient China, Vietnam was an exception and a different story. Vietnam was part of the Chinese state for almost a thousand years before it fought and gained independence in 938. But the Chinese state never quite accepted that. They felt that it was part of China, hence their attempts from time to time to bring Vietnam back in. Over the centuries, the Vietnamese have learnt how to deal with that threat to their independence.

AF: How do you see the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis Southeast Asia and ASEAN?

Prof. Wang: Historically, the Indo-Pacific was always there, albeit in a limited way; the connections between the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean had been a reality for thousands of years. Up to about the 1800s, the two most prosperous economic centres were East Asia with China at the core, and the other side encompassing parts of Persia, the Arab world and the Indian sub-continent, with India as its core. The interactions and activities among the Indians, Persians, Arabs, and Chinese transpired long before the Europeans came. It encompassed trade in goods, the exchange of ideas, and the spread of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Southeast Asia sat at the crossroads of such flows and interactions between east and west. Today, the old Indo-Pacific forms the ocean part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative which also includes the continental part.

When the Americans use the term “Indo-Pacific”, however, they are including the Pacific right across to the Americas. This Indo-Pacific is a recent construct by American strategists. There's nothing wrong with the Americans articulating such a concept from their point of view. For Southeast Asia, however, ASEAN states would have to ask if there is any benefit to be gained. If we take the Pacific to include the whole of North and South America, that would tilt the balance differently. Originally, the US used the term “Asia-Pacific” but it is too continental given that it includes Russia, Central Asia, and also the Islamic world. So, its Indo-Pacific construct today is clearly designed with China in mind and to win India over America's side. India, for its part, is unlikely to simply take America's side. Like China, India favours a multipolar approach in Asia and wants to be a respected player in its own right, and justifiably so, given its population size and potential. ☞



Students waving ASEAN member states flags on the ASEAN Day

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Ringling in the New Year Around Southeast Asia

Anuthida Saelaow Qian follows the celebrations of many New Years across Southeast Asia.

Another year has come and gone, and a new one beckons. As 2019 draws to a close, it presents a timely opportunity for reflection, renewal, and resolution. What better way, then, to ring in the New Year than with some joyous and jubilant festivities? While setting off fireworks, raising toasts, or singing “Auld Lang Syne” with family and friends are ever-popular ways to welcome the New Year, not all New Years are ushered in with countdowns and champagne. In fact, not all New Years even fall on 1 January. Rich and centuries-old traditions, rituals, and customs accompany the many different New Years celebrated all across the ASEAN region, promising a bevy of vibrant and colourful spectacles throughout the year.

Southeast Asia attributes its multitude of New Year’s celebrations to its patchwork of cultures and religions as well as the various calendars observed by the region’s multicultural communities. In addition to the now-standard solar Gregorian calendar based upon the Earth’s orbit around the sun, other lunar and solilunar calendars that track the moon’s phases retain significance in Southeast Asia. The continuing relevance of such time-keeping traditions preserves the region’s heritage, with each festive occasion a celebration of diversity.

On the first day of the year on the lunar calendar, usually between late January and mid-February, ethnic Chinese communities scattered around Southeast Asia celebrate the Lunar New Year. Festivities are grand in

Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia (where it is called *Imlek*), and especially Vietnam (where it is known as *Tết Nguyên Đán*, or *Tết* for short). To welcome this season of self-renewal and family-reunion, people traditionally don new clothes and enjoy reunion meals featuring delicacies associated with luck, longevity, and prosperity: noodles, pineapple tarts, and *yu sheng* (salad comprising sliced raw fish, shredded vegetables, and various condiments) are popular in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, while the Vietnamese tuck in to a feast of *bánh chưng* (glutinous rice filled with mung beans and pork), *dưa hành* (pickled spring onions), *chả lụa* (Vietnamese sausage), and *xôi gấc* (red glutinous rice). Another highlight are the gifts of red packets containing money (*ang pao*) presented to children and unwed youths as a token of good fortune for the coming year. The Chinese also assign an animal zodiac sign for each new year, and 2020 is designated as the Year of the Rat.

There is a palpable air of festive excitement as streets, shops, and homes are decked out in auspicious finery including lanterns, fresh flowers, firecrackers, and intricate paper cuttings to symbolise abundance, happiness, and wealth. Also adding to the lively atmosphere are the boisterous lion and dragon dance performances accompanied by thunderous drums and cymbals, believed to attract prosperity and drive away bad luck. More solemn ceremonies to honour deities and pay homage to ancestors are also a mainstay of the Lunar New Year, with

A Vietnamese family makes *bánh chưng*, a traditional Tết dish.





Melasti Ceremony in Bali, Indonesia



Children playing on the streets of Ubon Ratchathani in Thailand during Songkran

temples becoming a hive of activity as worshippers visit to make offerings and pray for blessings.

In contrast to the animated welcome to the Lunar New Year, the Balinese start their New Year in silence. The Indonesian island employs two calendars that set the dates for the island's most important festivals: The 210-day Pawukon calendar takes its cue from the agricultural cycle of rice cultivation, while the Hindu Saka calendar sets the start of every *sasih* (lunar month) on the day after a new moon. Every *Isakawarsa* (Saka New Year), after the new moon of the spring equinox, Balinese Hindus observe *Nyepi*, the "Day of Silence".

In the days leading up to *Nyepi*, the Balinese partake in ceremonies such as *Melasti*, a purification ritual where sacred objects are carried to the sea, and *Bhuta Yajna*, where giant papier-mâché effigies called *ogoh-ogoh* are paraded through the streets to loud gamelan music before they are burnt to symbolise the ridding of evil spirits. Everything grinds to a halt on *Nyepi*, when Ngurah Rai Airport ceases all operations, streets are empty, shops are closed, and people stay at home. Tourists are also expected to remain indoors and avoid too much noise and light. *Nyepi* is an important day of meditation, introspection, and spiritual cleansing for the Balinese, giving them an opportunity to reflect and reset as they prepare to herald the coming year.

Dates of New Year in Southeast Asia in 2020

New Year (Gregorian Calendar)	1 January
Lunar New Year	25 January
Nyepi	25 March
Songkran (Thailand)	13 April
Chol Chnam Thmey (Cambodia)	14 April
Boun Pi Mai (Laos)	14 April
Thingyan (Myanmar)	13 April
Tamil New Year	14 April
Muharram (Islamic New Year)	20 August

In mid-April, predominantly Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia celebrate their versions of the New Year. Cambodia's *Chol Chnam Thmey*, Laos' *Boun Pi Mai*, Myanmar's *Thingyan*, and Thailand's *Songkran* take place around the same time every year according to the Buddhist calendar. As family plays an important role in the transition to a New Year, those who have moved to major cities typically return to their hometowns to reunite with their loved ones. The New Year also marks the start of the rainy season, with water playing a central role in New Year festivities and serving as a tool of purification in cleansing rituals where scented water is poured over Buddha statues as well as the palms of monks and elders. Such traditions are a form of merit-making and paying respect, believed to bring about blessings and wash away misfortune.

More famously, these water sprinkling practices escalate into extraordinary water fights that are a lively departure from the sacred acts of religious devotion. Streets and squares are transformed into giant playgrounds for revellers who douse one another fervently with buckets of water, hoses, and water guns. Besides providing a welcome respite from the heat, it is believed that being drenched represents a fresh start for the New Year. It might seem all fun and games, but there is a deeper meaning to such watery celebrations for these agriculturally dependent economies as they also act as prayers for ample rainfall and bountiful crops during the harvest season.

Owing to the large-scale migration of Indians to Southeast Asia, the region enjoys different Indian New Years observed by various Indian ethnic groups, especially in countries with large Indian communities like Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. There is *Puthandu* for the Tamils, *Vaisakhi* for the Sikhs, *Vishu* for the Malayalees, *Chetri Chand* for the Sindhis, and *Ugadi* for the Telugus, just to name a few. As with the majority of major festivals celebrated by Hindu communities, most of these holidays are determined in accordance with the *Panchanga* (Hindu calendar). Several variants of the *Panchanga* are observed, with festivals based on the solar calendar – such as *Puthandu*, *Vaisakhi*, and *Vishu* – typically occurring on the same Gregorian date each year, and those following the lunar cycle – such as *Ugadi* and *Chetri Chand* – varying from year to year.

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In preparation of the New Year, families tidy up their homes and decorate the entrances to their houses with *kolams* or *rangolis*, beautiful and ornate floor drawings made with rice flour to usher in good luck. Households also assemble various offerings such as fruit, flowers, and even money as they seek blessings and offer prayers to deities. As no New Year is complete without a feast, families usually seek the opportunity to get together to cook up a storm and enjoy their meals together. Outside of the home, local governments and associations often organise events and festivals filled with traditional snacks, live performances, and fun activities for Indian communities to celebrate their heritage and spread cultural awareness to other attendees.

Muslims make up a significant portion of the Southeast Asian population, especially in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore. According to the *Hijri* (Islamic) calendar, Islamic New Year falls on the first day of the month of Muharram. Islamic New Year it is a period of peaceful prayer and fasting as they reflect on *Hijrah*, Prophet Mohammed's journey from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. To commemorate this significant moment in history, Islamic New Year celebrations also consist of processions where participants recite prayers as they march down streets carrying torches. With these parades attracting up to several thousand people, it is truly an impressive sight to behold.

These diverse New Year's celebrations are a testament to the peaceful coexistence between many different ethnic and religious communities that call the region home. As we stand at the gates of 2020, at the dawn of a new decade, we can look forward to many fresh starts, possibilities, and a slew of New Year's festivities all throughout the year. Every festivity is a cheerful embrace of heritage, a return to traditional beliefs and customs, and a sense of homecoming among one's family and community. Together, they culminate in a joyous and colourful celebration of cultural vibrancy in Southeast Asia. 🕌

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Bathing a Buddha statue for the beginning of Songkran in Bangkok, Thailand

Dailytravelphotos.com



Children carry lit torches to celebrate the Islamic New Year in Indonesia

Sudanto Ponco Sularso@
Wikimedia Commons



River Hongbao celebrations in Singapore

Erwin, Soo@Flickr

Yee Peng Festival: Lighting Up the Darkness

Glenn Ong follows the trail of floating lanterns adorning Chiang Mai's sky at the Yee Peng Festival.



Monks release floating lanterns at Phan Tao Temple

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The modern political entity of Thailand was once home to numerous, independent (and often rivalling) ancient kingdoms. One state that has had a profound impact on the cultural landscape of modern Thailand is the Lanna Kingdom, a Theravada Buddhist polity which dates back to the mid-13th century. Besides establishing Chiang Mai as its last capital city in 1292, Lanna is also known for another enduring legacy: its Buddhist beliefs and rituals have contributed to the modern floating lantern festival known as Yee Peng.

Yee (or Yi) means “two”, while Peng translates to “full moon”. Together, the name refers to the day of the full moon on the second month of the Lanna calendar, where Buddhists all over northern Thailand reflect, give thanks, and make merit by releasing lanterns into the cool evening sky. Because of its adherence to the lunar calendar, the festival takes place on different days each year in October or November, with celebrations lasting for two to three days. This year, the event was held on Monday, 11 November 2019. Many northern Thai Buddhists believe that the act of lighting and releasing lanterns pays respects to the Buddha and ushers in good fortune. The prominence of light in this festival probably owes much to the infusion of Theravada Buddhism and Indian customs

into the cultural constellations of northern Thailand. The ritual is also a symbolic gesture which represents freeing oneself of misgivings and resentment. If your lantern remains lit until it disappears from sight, it is taken as an auspicious sign that your wishes will be realised.

At the centre of this vibrant festival is the vivid assortment of lanterns to be released to the night sky, paraded by pedestrians, or affixed onto prominent landmarks. In Chiang Mai, Yee Peng lanterns – or *khom loy* – are usually made from rice paper and held together by bamboo or wooden frames. A lit candle or fuel cell generates just enough heat for the lantern to float skywards in a graceful and gentle fashion – because of how the lanterns bob up into the sky as the glowing rice paper flaps in the wind, the spectacle has been likened to a swarm of luminescent jellyfish.

There are other exciting opportunities to be immersed in the lantern festival. Local temples and households will adorn their entrances with flowers, coconut leaves and intricately decorated lanterns. Even small alleyways are lit up with candles. The architectural icons of Chiang Mai – like the Three Kings Monument and Tha Pae Gate – will be decked out in flashy *khom khwaen* (hanging lanterns)



Releasing a *Khom Loy* (hot air lantern)

John Shedrick@Flickr



Waiting to join the candle-lit procession in Sansai, Thailand

John Shedrick@Flickr

as locals soak in the atmosphere with their *khom thue* (lanterns carried on a stick). The Three Kings Monument also hosts traditional Lanna dance performances with hundreds of dancers of all ages and booths displaying Lanna handicraft. The city's streets will likewise be peppered with food vendors peddling delicious treats like *krathong thong* (crispy flour pastry with minced pork and vegetables), *kai-parm* (omelette in banana leaves), and *khao tom mat* (coconut sticky rice with banana filling), which will make even a simple visit to the city a glorious feast for the senses.

From the Saphan Nawarat Bridge, visitors can view glamorous processions and fireworks to soak in the festive mood. Among these, the Yee Peng Parade is a spectacle to behold. Proceeding around the Old City gates and down Tha Phae Road, the Parade boasts brightly lit and ornately decorated floats that stand out as works of art in their own right. On top of the floats are parade performers in beautiful traditional costumes who keep waving at the audience with beaming smiles. On occasion, a boat race will be held on the Ping River, which is sure to add another touch of excitement to the jovial atmosphere. For those who prefer a quieter and less hectic experience, Wat Chai Mongkhon along the Ping River and Wat Phan Tao in Old

Town would offer some respite from the crowds while still providing visitors with the opportunity to light lanterns with the aid of the temple's hospitable monks.

It is also in Chiang Mai that the Yee Peng festival is celebrated in tandem with the *Loy Krathong* – another widely celebrated light festival where candle-lit lotus-shaped rafts adorned with incense and flowers (*krathongs*) are set afloat on the river to honour the Goddess of Water. A magical sense of wonder and serenity comes over as one looks up the deep blue sky illuminated with floating lanterns while the waters sparkle with *krathongs* in a full moon night. It is the moment where the light transcends the darkness, hope prevails over despair, and one quietly wishes for their prayers to be answered, as in the words of Thai poet Nawarat Phongphaibun:

*Bright candle lights up heart in the water
Represents many thoughts and wishes
Glowing in the floating Krathong
Reflecting heart in the flowing water. ☸*

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Setting candle-lit *krathongs* in the Ping River during *Loy Krathong*

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Ornate lanterns in a procession at an Yee Peng celebration event

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Thai monks releasing a *khom loy* during Yee Peng Festival

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A family lighting a *krathong*

John Shedrick@Flickr



Each year, thousands of lanterns are released in Chiang Mai during the Yee Peng Festival

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Year In Review



JANUARY

Thailand assumes the ASEAN Chairmanship under the theme “Advancing Partnership for Sustainability”.

The 22nd Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers in Ha Long City, Vietnam, focuses on wellness tourism and culture & heritage tourism as the regional thematic experiences for 2019.

The 22nd ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Brussels agreed in principle to upgrade EU-ASEAN relations to Strategic Partnership, subject to details and timing to be worked out.



FEBRUARY



The 12th Meeting of the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrants Workers (ACMW) in Chiang Rai, Thailand, discusses challenges arising from labour mobility and the 4th Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0).

The First Consultative Meeting with Think-tanks at the ASEAN Secretariat exchanges views and ideas on achieving the objectives of the ASEAN Vision 2025 and raising ASEAN awareness.

MARCH



The 35th High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration in Bangkok discusses ASEAN’s priority economic deliverables in 2019 and Industry 4.0, among others.

The ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT) and ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) conduct preliminary needs assessment for repatriation in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

APRIL



ASEAN Finance Ministers sign the 8th Protocol to Implement Financial Services Liberalisation under the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services at the 23rd ASEAN Finance Ministers Meeting in Chiang Rai.

ASEAN Economic Ministers sign the ASEAN Trade in Services Agreement and the 4th Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement at the 25th ASEAN Economic Ministers’ (AEM) Retreat in Phuket, Thailand.

150 participants from youth, civil society, women, business and professional associations attend the 3rd Forum of Entities Associated with ASEAN in Jakarta to discuss how to achieve a more integrated and people-focused ASEAN.

MAY



The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council supports Thailand’s Chairmanship priorities which emphasises future-oriented actions for human security, people-to-people connectivity, and socio-cultural sustainability.

ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors adopt the “Strategic Directions of ASEAN+3 Finance Process” to explore new potential areas for regional economic growth and integration.

The Agreement on Technical Cooperation between ASEAN and Japan is signed as the legal framework for Japan to provide direct assistance to ASEAN.

ASEAN and the Myanmar government agreed to commence practical measures to support the repatriation process in Rakhine State following the 2nd High-Level Strategic Coordination Meeting.

JUNE



ASEAN publishes the Framework of Action on Marine Debris to further collaboration within ASEAN and with external partners in combating marine debris.

Peru accedes to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and becomes a Development Partner of ASEAN.

At the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, the Leaders adopt the Vision Statement on Partnership for Sustainability, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific which emphasises ASEAN centrality in an open, inclusive and rules-based regional order.

The 8th ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) Meeting in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, promotes ASEAN Cultural Year 2019.





JULY

Thailand hosts the 52nd ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) and Related Meetings, including the 26th ASEAN Regional Forum.

The 11th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth in Vientiane discusses the role of youth in sustainable development and encourages youth participation in policy discourse and volunteerism.

The 13th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) in Bangkok signs the Joint Declaration on Sustainable Security, and adopts, among others, the Terms of Reference for the ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative.

Brunei Darussalam and Cambodia join the ASEAN Single Window Live Operation.



SEPTEMBER

The 51st ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting (AEM) in Bangkok adopts documents related to industrial transformation and skill labour/professional services development in response to Industry 4.0, and digitalisation of ASEAN micro enterprises.

The Non-Tariff Measures (NTM) Database for ASEAN is launched, covering 28,947 measures, 6,699 regulations, and 11,347 product lines.

ASEAN and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) sign Practical Arrangements to promote cooperation in nuclear safety, security and safeguards.

ASEAN reaffirms its commitment to support global efforts to address climate change at the United Nations Climate Change Action Summit in New York.

The inaugural ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise (AUMX) is conducted in international waters in Southeast Asia.



NOVEMBER

The 35th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits are held in Bangkok. ASEAN and Australia, China, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK) and New Zealand agree to sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2020 without India on board.

The 6th ADMM-Plus in Bangkok issues the Joint Statement on Advancing Partnership for Sustainable Security.

ASEAN signs a MOU with FIFA to foster sports development in the region as ASEAN member states will jointly bid to host the World Cup in 2034.

The ASEAN Centre for Active Ageing and Innovation (ACAI) is launched by the ASEAN Leaders in Bangkok.

Bahrain accedes to the TAC, bringing the total number of High Contracting Parties to the TAC to 39.

The ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit, under the theme "Partnership for Peace, Prosperity for People", and the 1st Mekong-ROK are held in Busan, ROK.

AUGUST



The 2nd ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) Meeting in Bangkok adopts its Terms of Reference and discusses its monitoring and evaluation framework and modalities for engagement with external partners.

The 21st Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in Brunei Darussalam discusses haze preventive efforts to minimise occurrence of transboundary smoke haze.

ASEAN inaugurates the new ASEAN Secretariat building on the 52nd anniversary of ASEAN in Jakarta.



OCTOBER

The 41st ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) Meeting adopts the ASEAN Guidelines for Detecting and Preventing Wildlife Trafficking and ASEAN Voluntary Code of Conduct on Imports for Forest and Timber Companies.

The ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue (ACSDSD) is established as a deliverable of Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship.

The 19th ASEAN Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers Meeting (TELMIN) in Vientiane adopts a declaration on smart connectivity for ASEAN digital transformation and the ASEAN guidelines for strengthening resilience and repair of submarine cables.



DECEMBER

The 7th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Minerals is held in Bangkok.

The 4th ASEAN Economic Integration Forum 2019 in Bangkok features proposals to promote a holistic and bottom-up approach that goes beyond economic imperatives and highlights the importance of social forces in promoting the ASEAN Community.

Inaugural Meeting of the Network of ASEAN Associations of ASEAN Member States on 2 December 2019 in Bangkok.

140 delegates participate in the ASEAN Conference for Young Scientists (ACYS) 2019 in Hanoi.

Malayan Sun Bear

Helarctos malayanus

Numbers remaining in the wild: Unknown but decreasing

Status: Vulnerable

Found in Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam

The Malayan Sun Bear is the smallest and one of the rarest bear species, with a weight of up to 80kg and a length of 120-150cm. Its name derives from the white or yellow crescent-like chest patch that resembles the rising sun. The Malayan Sun Bear, however, is a nocturnal species. They subsist on a diet of fruits, berries, insects, small rodents, and birds. They are also known to enjoy extracting honey from beehives using their exceptionally long tongues of up to 25cm, hence their nickname "honey bear". Unfortunately, the species' population is estimated to have declined by more than 30% over the last 30 years owing to deforestation and poaching. It is classified as Vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species and protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

(Sources: IUCN, WWF)

