

Title	Cooperation and competition : the dynamics of regional order in Southeast Asia
Sub Title	
Author	山本, 信人(Yamamoto, Nobuto)
Publisher	慶應義塾大学法学研究会
Publication year	2022
Jtitle	法學研究 : 法律・政治・社会 (Journal of law, politics, and sociology). Vol.95, No.5 (2022. 5) ,p.79 (28)- 106 (1)
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	論説
Genre	Journal Article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00224504-20220528-0079

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Cooperation and Competition: The Dynamics of Regional Order in Southeast Asia¹⁾

YAMAMOTO Nobuto

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Introduction

In a 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, then young American journalist Nicholas D. Kristof contributed an essay entitled “The Rise of China” (Kristof 1993). This was one of the earliest essays that focused on and explained the so-called rise of China. In his essay, Kristof points out that the “only group that is paying serious attention to China’s long-term prospects is the business community.” He goes on to warn that “the international community is not given adequate consideration to the colossal implication – economic, political, environmental and even military – of the rise of powerful China” (Kristof 1993: 59, 60). The international community, according to Kristof, held a doubtful view of whether China’s economy could take off smoothly. The essay suggests hope, speculation, and anxiety about China’s developing economy in the early 1990s. A decade later, the

1) This article is a revised version of my conference paper entitled “The Dynamics of Regional Cooperation Games: Perspectives from Southeast Asia.” It was originally prepared for the JAIR/KAIS Co-Hosted Panel, “Constructing Regional Architecture: Middle Powers in the Asia-Pacific” at the 2021 Annual Convention of the Japan Association of International Relations on 30 October 2021 (online session).

rise of China became a given fact; no one doubted the growing power of China in global and regional affairs. Some argue that China is a challenger to the US or the US-made regional order in Southeast Asia (Shambaugh 2005; Goh 2005a), while others are concerned if China is attempting to establish a Sino-centric regional order in the Asia-Pacific region (Callahan 2016).

The Asia-Pacific region is increasingly the world's political and economic center of gravity (Mack and Raenhill 1995; Beeson 2008). Since the 2010s, the Sino-US competition has been accelerated in the region. It has grown out of two factors: the "rise of China" since the 2000s and America's "rebalance" policy since 2011 (Connelly 2017; Lin and Gertner 2015). For the latter, the US relocated its military power to the Asia-Pacific and tried to strengthen the region's institutional architecture to reinforce a rules-based order (Sutter, Brown and Adamson 2013). The competition between the two powers in the region revolves around a range of issues from geopolitical and geostrategic to socioeconomic interests.²⁾ It has also stimulated new arrangements and policy initiatives for regional cooperation such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from 2013 and the US's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy from 2017. Therefore, one might say that China and the US have been playing regional cooperation and competitive games in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

The core arena of the games lies in Southeast Asia (Emmerson 2020; Egbrink and van der Putten 2011). The region has sea lanes whose strategic meaning has grown more consequential. Geopolitically, in the pre-COVID-19 pandemic era, the sea lanes in Southeast Asia provided thoroughfare for half of the world's mercantile capacity, while one-third of global maritime traffic journeys from the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean to the economic powerhouses of Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. In particular, the South China Sea catches observers' eyes, because geopolitically it functions as "the *throat* of the Western Pacific and Indian oceans" (Kaplan 2014: 9).³⁾ The largest amount of oil in the globe is

2) Geopolitical, geostrategic, and socioeconomic perspectives derive from realist theories that stress competitive and conflictual aspects of international relations (Dalby 2013; Scholvin and Wigell 2018).

3) *Italic* is the original text.

transported through the Malacca Strait from the Indian Ocean to East Asia and it passes through the South China Sea. Northeast Asian countries – Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China – heavily rely on their energy supplies coming through the South China Sea. Three other major straits that go through Indonesian territory – Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar straits – are crucial sea routes to the South China Sea.

The South China Sea also has critical geostrategic importance (Buszynski and Hai 2021). It is the troubled water that is under territorial disputes among concerned states: China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. China's claim of its historic line that covers most parts of the South China Sea and its effort in constructing and enlarging artificial islands in the disputed parts has stirred international concern. In response to China's assertive, if not aggressive, attitude, concerned states including the US, Japan, and others regard the South China Sea as the international water where freedom of the seas is guaranteed. This is a principle in international law and sea that stresses freedom to navigate the oceans. Therefore, these countries attempt to convince China to follow such internationally shared norms.

Despite Sino-US competition over the years, the Southeast Asian regional order looks stable. Southeast Asia consists of 11 small- and medium-sized countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. Except for Timor-Leste, all other 10 countries form the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN started with 5 states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines) in 1967 and expanded its member states to 10 by 2000. The member states have different political systems – from democracy to quasi-authoritarianism to authoritarianism – while their economic performances vary from advanced economy to middle-income countries to underdeveloped countries. External powers also have established various kinds of relations with Southeast Asian states. Both external great powers such as China and the US, and external middle powers like Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia, deeply commit to and are concerned about the region's political and economic affairs. Since the 1990s, ASEAN has made great efforts to reach out to external powers and international organizations and even provided the basis for

multinational institutions such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) for a free trade framework and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for multilateral security dialogue. Although there are some inter-ASEAN disagreements over certain issues, and external powers have consistently interfered in the regional affairs, the Southeast Asian regional order has generally remained calm. This decades-long regional order has caught some scholarly attention (Acharya and Stubbs 2009; Yates 2019). Amitav Acharya wonders if we are witnessing “ASEAN’s long peace” (Acharya 2021: 1-29).

How is the stable and resilient regional order possible in Southeast Asia? This article illustrates how the Southeast Asian regional order has been achieved and transformed over the years. It employs and slightly modifies Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi’s argument for Asian regionalism, that the US-led twin regional systems – security and economic systems – have provided “some collective goods” for the stakeholders which required both formal and informal international arrangements and cooperation (Katzenstein and Shiraishi 1997).⁴⁾ In the 21st century, however, this article maintains that the twin systems, although remain operating, have been altered due to a new power dynamism between the US and China over the region that facilitates the formation of new regional arrangements with the stakeholders.

Southeast Asian Cold War

From the 1950s until 1998 the regional order in Southeast Asia was rather simple. It was a combination of economic and security regionalism, in which the US provided peace and security using its military power, while Japan offered economic cooperation by way of its technological dominance. During the Asian Cold War period,⁵⁾ Southeast Asian nations in the US bloc needed to conform largely with the intentions of the US and Japan, and the diplomatic game was

4) Katzenstein contends that Asian regionalism “centered on a convergence of interests in the provision of some collective goods” (Katzenstein and Shiraishi 1997: 23).

5) Not only had the Asian Cold War its own characteristics and structures which were different from global Cold War, but also its period did not match with the global one.

relatively uncomplicated. Since the 1990s, after the Cold War, the regional international relations and diplomatic games in Southeast Asia have gone through alterations. Whereas in the Cold War period the US-Sino and Sino-Soviet relations cast shadows on the regional affairs, in the post-Cold War period the regional order in Southeast Asia has been composed by the triangular relation between US-Japan-China.

The security and economic twin systems grew out of the context of the Asian Cold War structure. It constrained and provided the opportunity for post-World War II Asian regionalism. The conventional wisdom is that the Asian Cold War was the Sino-US rivalry relations; it started in late 1949 as the People's Republic of China was established on 1 October 1949 and ended in 1972 when Sino-US rapprochement was reached. During this period, the US engaged in regional affairs to contain Communism in Asia.⁶⁾ Katzenstein argues that Asian and European regionalism is linked to "American imperium" and to core regional states; Japan and Germany (Katzenstein 2005).

In the context of Southeast Asia, the Asian Cold War was slightly different from the conventional view. In terms of time frame, it has two phases. The first phase stretched from 1948 to 1975. In 1948 the British colonial government declared a state of emergency in the whole territory of British Malaya to contain Communist activities.⁷⁾ The infant Indonesian military forces put an end to the communist uprising in Madiun, a city in East Java (the so-called Madiun Affairs), while the Philippine government had a hard time containing the Hukbalahap Rebellion. In other words, Southeast Asian countries had a

6) Wen-Qing Ngoei argues that after World War II, US and British policymakers perceived Southeast Asian insecurity through both the prism of Japanese imperialism during the war period and their fears of the relationship between China and Southeast Asia's Chinese diaspora. This mindset, he maintains, underpinned US policy toward Southeast Asia until the 1970s (Ngoei 2014). As for detailed case studies of the Western intelligence and special operations in the first two decades of the Cold War in Asia, see Aldrich, Rawnsley, and Rawnsley (2000).

7) The British government considered the beginning of the Cold War in British Malaya in early 1948 (Hack 2009). By declaring the Emergency, the British colonial government banned the Malaya Communist Party and contained communist-related labor movements in the colony.

domestic prelude to the Cold War in the early days of independence. After these local developments, the US policy circle made the first comprehensive policy toward Southeast Asia in early 1949.⁸⁾

From the 1950s through the 1980s, Southeast Asian nations concentrated on postcolonial national consolidation and nation-building. Except for Thailand, which was never formally colonized by any European power, Southeast nations gained their independence from colonial rules. Their paths to independence varied; Indonesia and Vietnam fought a war of independence against the Dutch and the French respectively, while in the Philippines and Malaya (later Malaysia) the transfer of power from the US and Britain went smoothly. Burma was tossed by Britain, the US, and two Chinas (Foley 2010). Except for North Vietnam, newly independent nations faced a serious and common political issue, that is, the domestic communist movement. A kind of domestic Cold War was embedded in each country.

Toward the end of the first phase of the regional Cold War, the original five members of ASEAN came to be ruled by authoritarian and/or anti-communist regimes. The timing of the establishment of ASEAN in 1967 was important. Thailand was run by a military dictator, Thanom Kittikachorn. Malaysia's Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had introduced the Internal Security Act 1960 that allowed preventive detention in Malaysia. President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines was in his first term, marked with increased industrialization and the creation of solid infrastructures nationwide. The year 1967 was two years after Singapore, under the leadership of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, gained independence from Malaysia. In Indonesia President Soeharto, a former Major General, had assumed full and formal control since March 1967 after the alleged Communist-led coup d'état in 1965.

Southeast Asia was undergoing a serious integration into the Cold War structure. The year 1967 was in the middle of the US's Operation of Rolling

8) The State Department issued a classified document called PPS (Policy Planning Staff Paper) 51 on 29 March 1949. It described a region remarkable for its undeveloped natural wealth, convulsed by nationalism and the "target of a coordinated offensive plainly directed by the Kremlin." This paper was subsequently circulated for the information of the National Security Council as document NSC 51 on 1 July 1949 (US State Department 1949).

Thunder (1965-1968), which was an aerial bombardment campaign. Thailand and the Philippines hosted US military bases respectively. Among other nations, Indonesia received special treatment from the stakeholders. Indonesia started to receive foreign aid through the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI). The IGGI was established and led by the US and Japan as an international consortium of official donors to coordinate the provision of foreign assistance to Indonesia. Its observers included the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The IGGI was the first international supporting group for a particular country. Thus, the original ASEAN member states heavily relied on the US and its system. It was not surprising that ASEAN was widely considered an anti-Communist organization.

The first phase ended in 1975 when Vietnam was united after the Vietnam War (aka the Second Indochina War). The Second Indochina War was officially fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam; the former was supported by the Soviet Union and China, while the latter by the US, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia. The second phase covers the period of 1978 to 1991 when the Cambodian-Vietnamese War (the Third Indochina War) took place. It was an armed conflict between Democratic Kampuchea, controlled by the Khmer Rouge, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. On 25 December 1978, Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Kampuchea, and subsequently occupied the country, removed the government of the Communist Party of Kampuchea from power, and installed on 8 January 1979 the pro-Vietnam People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in Phnom Penh, marking the beginning of a ten-year Vietnamese occupation of the country.

The second phase of the Cold War in Southeast Asia eventually ended in October 1991 when the Cambodian Peace Agreement of Paris was reached among the stakeholders. It was considered a successful diplomatic effort by Indonesia, Australia, and Japan along with France and Cambodia's four factions (Ratner 1993). It was arguably the first major multilateral peace accord after the end of the Global Cold War. The literal end of the Cold War in Southeast Asia paved the way to a new chapter for the region and individual

countries, while ASEAN expanded its engagement in the fields of security and economy within the region as well as with external powers and stakeholders.

Security System

The security system, one of the twin systems in the region, was conceived and developed by the US. In the post-World War II period, the US-organized security system has maintained its importance against the influences of the Soviet Union and China. It is the system of “hub and spokes,” which was bilateral security agreements, including provisions concerning military base and facility, such as between US-Japan, US-South Korea, US-Philippines, and US-Singapore. Here the US is the hub and the Asian nations spoke from the US strategic perspective. Southeast Asian nations expected the US to provide the regional security order, while the latter maintained its commitment to regional stability (Weatherbee and Emmers 2005; Katzenstein 2005; Beeson 2001).

This was the story of Southeast Asian countries that chose to be US allies; such countries enjoyed US-provided security and economic order. There is another version of the story in the region that was excluded from such regional order. When World War II ended, Indochina continued to be a battlefield. North Vietnam and South Vietnam were unified in 1975 following the Indochina War (1949-1954) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975) (Turley 2021). In 1979 Vietnam fought China for a month. The civil war in Laos ended in 1975. Cambodia had experienced civil wars since the 1970 coup by Lon Nol and the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979). For decades, tensions had continued at borders between Thailand and Laos, between Thailand and Cambodia, and between Vietnam and China (Path 2020).

Due to the continuous instability in Indochina, the US needed to install its military bases in the region. During the Cold War, the US had military bases in the Philippines and Thailand, which had to do with the development of US bases involved in the Vietnam War. When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, US troops withdrew from Thailand, while in 1991 the Clark Air Force Base and 1992 the Subic Naval Base in the Philippines were returned respectively. Still, the US continues to maintain its military hard power in Southeast Asia into the

twenty-first century. In recent years, it has strengthened military cooperation in response to China's policies and actions regarding Southeast Asia. The first is bilateral military cooperation with the US military. Since the 2000s, the US has been engaged in military cooperation with Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam, as well as the Philippines and Thailand, which are allied with the US. With the US-Singapore Strategic Framework in 2005, the US-Malaysia Mutual Provision of Goods and Services Agreement, the US-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership Agreement in 2010, and the US-Japan Defense Policy Dialogue, the US has been expanding its network of bilateral military cooperation.

The second is a multilateral military exercise. Amid such changes, since 1982, the US and Thai forces have been conducting multilateral joint military training called the "Cobra Gold." It was originally aimed at preventing the spread of communist power on the Indochina Peninsula but was transformed into a peacekeeping means after the Cold War. The representative characteristic is the annual multilateral military exercise Cobra Gold, the largest in Southeast Asia. In recent years, the US military has made clear its strategic intention to protect freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and stabilize the Indo-Pacific in response to China's Belt and Road initiative. The 20-year Cobra Gold took place from 25 February to 6 March 2020. A total of about 10,000 people from 29 countries participated in military training in various parts of Thailand. Not only Thailand, but also Indonesian, Malaysian, Singapore, and Philippine troops participated, even the Vietnamese troops joined from 2019. About 240 people from the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and others participated.

The end of the Cold War changed the security system in Southeast Asia. The concept of security has been broadened, not only mere military security, but security including the economy, and multilateral cooperation have become a demand for the times. It was the rise of the liberal political and economic systems. Symbolically, APEC was established in 1989, and the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in 1991 and the Cambodian peacebuilding process began. It was ASEAN that had played an active role in this process. In the 1990s, against the backdrop of strong economic growth, ASEAN increased its presence in international politics, promoting cooperation with Europe, the US, and Japan, as well as dialogue and cooperation between countries in the region. The

principles of consensus, non-interference in domestic affairs, informalism, etc., came to be known as the ASEAN Way, which has also been shared with countries outside the region.

On the security front, ASEAN established the ARF in 1993 through the regional security dialogue mechanism. It involved the US, EU, Japan, China, and Australia. What is noteworthy about ARF is China's participation as a dialogue partner. For the first time in its history, China began to adopt multilateralism as a security policy. Needless to say, ASEAN played a significant role in socializing China as a regional political and economic power (Ba 2006).

Thus in the twenty-first century, a new regional environment emerged. China was now seen as a regional power and an emerging global player. The rise of China changed power relations within and outside the region and has led to the emergence of new frameworks for security-related dialogue and cooperation. In particular, alarmed by China's growing economic and military influences in Asia and beyond, the US pushed for further engagement in Asia and established two security dialogue and cooperation frameworks: the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and most recently a trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS). The QUAD was originally initiated in 2007 and was reestablished in November 2017, whereas the AUKUS was announced in September 2021. Both frameworks are designed for the Indo-Pacific security dialogue.

Both the QUAD and the AUKUS do not officially include ASEAN, even though ASEAN has played the role of the driving force behind regional cooperation in Asia. Do the new security dialogue and cooperation frameworks leave ASEAN or Southeast Asia behind? It is not that simple for a geopolitical reason. This is because, although the QUAD and the AUKUS are wary of China's military modernization and military deployment, the areas where China makes concrete military inroads are the South China Sea and the East China Sea. The South China Sea is in the center of Southeast Asia and is also a vital sea area connecting India and East Asia. Moreover, the Strait of Malacca is an international sea area that runs from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea. From a geopolitical perspective, neither the QUAD nor the AUKUS can specifically confront China without involving the Southeast Asian region,

namely ASEAN and its member countries.

Economic System

The economic system in and around Southeast Asia was also tied to the US-planned project of post-World War II Asia. ASEAN and its member states turned regional stability into economic dynamism. ASEAN's form of regional cooperation was based on informality, unanimous consensus building, and non-confrontational negotiations. In the decade leading up to 1976, the ASEAN agenda was dominated by matters related to the political and security spheres. As peace and stability were gradually fostered, trust among nations was established and the focus shifted to the promotion of economic cooperation. This shift was engineered by external economic giants, namely the US and Japan.⁹⁾

In the 1970s and 1980s, political and social order and economic development became the two major themes in Southeast Asia. The five ASEAN member countries all became development-oriented authoritarian regimes, with policies and institutions designed to induce foreign capital by maintaining domestic order. This was an attempt to establish a market economy through cooperation between ASEAN countries and to make close trade and economic ties with countries outside the region. In other words, it was a political project in which the state protected the market and made it work. This was an irony because even after the Sino-US rapprochement was realized, regional cooperation in Asia was made to be limited to the economic and social fields, such as trade liberalization and development cooperation, whereas the security and political fields tended to be avoided. Policymakers in each country recognized that it would be unwise to overstimulate China by putting forward security and political cooperation. This however did not mean that economic and social cooperation had no political intention. While ASEAN ostensibly promoted cooperation in the economic and social spheres, the actual cooperation was

9) Suehiro Akira describes how Japan re-engaged in the Asian economy in the 1950s and 1960s (Suehiro 1999).

political.

The Declaration of ASEAN Concord, adopted in 1976, was the beginning of a full-scale ASEAN economic cooperation. The ASEAN Concord launched efforts for three projects: the Preferential Tariff Arrangement (TAP), ASEAN Industrial Projects (AIP), and ASEAN Industrial Complementarity (AIC). However, after a series of meetings at the practitioner's level, from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, economic cooperation projects in ASEAN failed to produce desirable results. The bureaucracy of the ASEAN member governments and the ASEAN Chambers of Commerce and Industry Council (ASEAN-CCI) was pointed out as factors for the malfunction of economic cooperation. This led to a shift in the direction of promoting new economic cooperation by transferring authority to the private sector in the late 1980s. The Plaza Accord in September 1985 was the turning point. It paved the way for the Japanese small- and middle-size businesses to pour into Southeast Asia. This was in line with the deregulation and privatization drive initiated by the IMF and the World Bank in the mid-1980s and marked ASEAN's turn toward neoliberal policies. As a result, from the 1970s to the 1980s, ASEAN countries entered a period of rapid economic growth, acclaimed by the World Bank in 1993 as "the East Asian Miracle" (World Bank 1993).

In this context, Katzenstein and Shiraishi's edited volumes, *Network Power* (1997), *Beyond Japan* (2006), and *Sinicization and the Rise of China* (2012) deserve a revisit.¹⁰⁾ They attempt to explain how *de facto* Asian regionalism structured, functioned, and transformed over the years. Katzenstein emphasizes that Asian regionalism has grown out of markets rather than through formal regional institutions (Katzenstein 1997: 1-44). *Network Power* takes a new approach to regionalism. Unlike the conventional wisdom of regionalism being based on the *de jure*, state-driven nature of regionalism in (Western) Europe, it pays little attention to formal regional institutions. It instead emphasizes region-wide informal and/or business networks; it attributes the creation of East Asia to the activities of non-governmental agencies. The book explains the "inclusive character of Asia's market-driven network-style integration in contrast to the exclusive character of Europe's emphasis on formal institutions" (Katzenstein 1997: 3). It describes how the production networks of Japanese companies

penetrated and expanded in the region, as well as how overseas Chinese made efforts to utilize their commercial connections across the region. It thus demonstrates that bottom-up economic integration shaped East Asian regionalism.

In the latter half of the 1980s, Southeast Asia also transformed its economic reality. A geopolitical change began to shape new regional arrangements. In August 1988, soon after taking office as prime minister of Thailand, Chatichai Choonhavan, as the country's first elected leader since 1976, started publicly talking about improving general relations with Indochina and exploring economic opportunities there. He advocated "the conversion of Indochina from battlefields into marketplaces," which became the slogan of the new government (Szalontai 2011). The decade-long Cambodian conflict had not been officially resolved yet, but diplomatic efforts for peace talks appeared to see a pathway to the end. The idea of a larger regional economic forum became a trendy one, with the Japanese and the Australians pushing their suggestions at ministerial levels. Chatichai's statement led to the opening of a new chapter not only in Indochina or mainland Southeast Asia but in Southeast Asia in general. The era of politics was over and the era of the economy had arrived; it was the era of market economy in the region.

Socialist countries in Southeast Asia were ready for such political and

10) Unlike conventional studies on regionalism, Katzenstein and Shiraishi edited three volumes explaining the changing socio-cultural aspect in Southeast Asia. They reveal the importance of economic and social activities in the region. Such activities strengthen, Katzenstein argues, networking and interdependence relationship among citizens in the region. Cultures and values from the US and Japan were welcomed in the region and contributed to creating hybrid cultures and forming regionally shared social foundations. Katzenstein calls them Americanization and Japanization. Since the middle of the 1990s when Southeast Asian countries opened their market to China, the economic, social, and political status of local ethnic Chinese became significant and in return, China's cultural influence began to penetrate the region. Katzenstein names it Sinicization. Hence, he concludes, Americanization, Japanization, and Sinicization have all contributed to form a hybrid regionalism. With these changes in mind, Sinicization and the so-called Rise of China details the Sinicization process and social transformation that attribute to Asian regionalism (Katzenstein 2005; Katzenstein 2012).

economic changes. In the 1980s they began to change their economic policies. In 1986, Vietnam mandated the *Doi Moi* (Open Door or Renovation) policy and began its all-around diplomacy and started a market-oriented economic policy, while Laos declared *Chintanakan Mai* (New Thinking). These policies shifted from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one. In 1988 Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) abandoned reclusive Burmese socialism that ran from 1962 under the Burma Socialist Programme Party. In addition, Cambodia furthered its market economy after the general election in 1993 under the surveillance of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Countries in Indochina gradually integrated into ASEAN's economic framework. From the middle of the 1990s, these four countries began to join ASEAN; Vietnam in July 1995, Laos and Myanmar¹¹⁾ in July 1997, and Cambodia in April 1999.¹²⁾

As ASEAN expanded its member states, it sought to establish a free trade area in the region. In early 1993 ASEAN began to form the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). In January 1992 the 4th ASEAN Summit signed the Agreement on the Common Effective Preferential Tariff Scheme for the ASEAN Free Trade Area (CEPT). It was the starting point for the creation of AFTA. The 5th ASEAN Summit in December 1995 decided to launch an initiative for the establishment of an investment liberalization area. At the 30th ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting in October 1998, the Framework Agreement on the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA Agreement) was signed that allowed the establishment of the AIA Council.

In the Asian Cold War structure, ASEAN focused on regional trade liberalization from the middle of the 1970s, because its member states did not have to worry about territorial conflicts with one another, nor any direct military interventions by external powers. In the middle of the 1980s, Vietnam and Laos changed their economic policies to the market economy and opened their economy to neighboring countries. Their policy change happened when the

11) In 1989, the military government officially changed the country name from Burma to Myanmar.

12) The four countries are often referred as CLMV taken from the first letters of them.

Cambodian conflict subsided. The end of the Cambodian conflict brought a new economic opportunity to ASEAN member states as well as to countries outside the region.

ASEAN and China

Since the early 2000s, ASEAN and China have kept close coordination and cooperation on international and regional issues. China firmly acknowledges ASEAN centrality¹³⁾ in regional cooperation and supports ASEAN in playing a bigger role in developing an open and inclusive regional architecture. Both sides have jointly dedicated themselves to promoting the sound development of cooperation in East Asia and have been coping with existing and potential challenges within the region. The two sides have also maintained good communication and collaboration within the cooperation mechanisms which include ASEAN Plus China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN Plus Three), East Asia Summit, ARF, Asia Cooperation Dialogue, APEC, etc.

The US-Sino rapprochement in 1972 changed diplomatic relations between ASEAN member states and China. In May 1974 Malaysia formalized its diplomatic relation with China, followed by the Philippines in June 1975 and Thailand in July of the same year. Indonesia and Singapore continued to close their door to China. Although three ASEAN nations had official diplomatic relations with China, the volume of trade was limited in the 1970s mainly due to China's protectionism under the socialist economic policy. ASEAN states used Hong Kong as an entrepôt to bridge their trades with China. ASEAN states' trades with China started to grow in the mid-1980s. Although ASEAN states still used Hong Kong as an entrepôt for export to China, they started to import goods directly from China. The 1990s opened a new chapter for ASEAN-China relations. In August 1990 Indonesia normalized its diplomatic tie with China, followed by Singapore in October the same year. Indonesia's decision changed

13) ASEAN centrality has many meanings, but generally refers to ASEAN as the "leader," "driver," "architect," "institutional hub," "vanguard," "nucleus," and "fulcrum" of regional processes and institutional designs in the Asia-Pacific region (Acharya 2017: 273).

fundamentally the relationship between ASEAN and China. Since then, the economic relationship between ASEAN and China has rapidly grown through official diplomatic channels and business exchanges. The former is bilateral diplomacy and the diplomatic relations between China and ASEAN as an organization that began in earnest in the early 1990s. Ethnic Chinese business communities in Southeast Asia played significant roles in investing in China.

Up until the late 1990s, China and ASEAN were fundamentally rivals in terms of investment and trade, and therefore hardly supplement mutually in the field of economy. In 1992, however, ASEAN agreed upon the formation of AFTA with aims at strengthening its members' competitive edge. In 1998, ASEAN agreed to promote direct investment from outside its border and to form ASEAN Investment Area to promote direct investment from an advanced country in the region for the underdeveloped country in the region. China was built into the regional production formed in East Asia and the network of circulation in the 1990s. An industrial cluster existing in various parts of China is gradually becoming the hub. This way, China became embedded in the regional industrial structure.

Once embedded into the regional industrial structure and network, China began to conduct various kinds of dialogues with ASEAN. In 1993, China became a Consultative Partner of ASEAN and in 1996 became a full dialogue partner. The monetary and financial crisis in 1997 brought a sea-change to the relationship between ASEAN and China. The monetary and financial crisis that kicked off in Thailand in 1997 before proceeding to the rest of Southeast Asia and South Korea had consequentially damaged the international perception of the East Asian economy from "miracle" to "meltdown" (Bird and Milne 1999). The crisis continued in 1998 and set off political effects such as the collapse of the Soeharto government in Indonesia. The dire situation left a strong impression on the affected governments as to the depth of economic interdependence of East Asia. Also, it triggered a chain reaction in terms of economic cooperation among East Asian nations.

China changed its passive posture to a more aggressive one. Becoming a member state of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on 11 December 2001 is one example of the new posture. China aimed at strengthening economic

relations with Southeast Asia and aggressively proposed the free trade agreement (FTA) with members of ASEAN. In November 2002, ASEAN and China signed the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation, kicking off the process of building the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA). In January 2010, ACFTA was fully completed. In June 2003, China was admitted to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC),¹⁴⁾ and in October of the same year, ASEAN and China agreed to build a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity. China was the first extra-regional power to gain such status with ASEAN. With the agreement of strategic partnership, ASEAN and China held several Special Summits, including the Special ASEAN-China Leaders Meeting on SARS in 2003 and the Commemorative Summit marking the 15th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations in 2006. In November 2011, the ASEAN-China Centre (ACC) was established.

In the 2000s, China's economic presence became undeniable in Southeast Asia, and its strategic approach to the Indochina region is quite clear. By the 2000s, China has taken over the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) development project, which began in 1992 under the leadership of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The GMS consists of 6 countries in the Mekong River basin, and China initially sent the Yunnan provincial government as its official representative. The Beijing government was not represented until the first GMS summit in Manila in November 2002; since the second GSM summit in Kunming in 2005, in addition to the Yunnan provincial government and the Beijing central government, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Government also became an official member. The purpose of China's participation in the GMS was not merely to invest in GMS development projects; there was a national goal of using the regional cooperation framework of the GMS to achieve China's expansion into Southeast Asia and the development of the

14) The TAC is a peace treaty signed in 1976 among ASEAN members to establish a set of guidelines to govern interstate relations in the region, promote perpetual peace and cooperation among signatories. In 2003, China and India were the first countries outside of ASEAN to accede to the treaty, followed by Japan and South Korea in 2004, Australia and New Zealand in 2005, and the US and EU in 2009.

country's inland (Suehiro 2014). China uses its geoeconomic power for the GMS development project (Soong 2016).

In the 2010s, China's economic assertiveness turned into building its initiated free trade agreement in East Asia. In November 2020, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was signed and officially started in January 2022. It is a free trade agreement (FTA) between ten member states of ASEAN and its six FTA partners (Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea). In other words, ASEAN Plus Six played a central role in pushing forward RCEP. However, since the official process was set out in November 2012, China dominated the negotiation process by taking advantage of ASEAN's FTA network. Since President Donald Trump took office in 2017 in the US, China expedited the negotiation process. China emphasized the importance of free trade in the face of US protectionism and cast itself as the standard-bearer of free trade. It is no doubt that RCEP is a China-led agreement. It carries two significant facts: it becomes the first free trade agreement between China, Japan, and South Korea, and it excludes the US from the RCEP framework. Eventually, RCEP demonstrates the importance of ASEAN centrality in East Asian economic integration (Kimura 2021).

China is now an indispensable trading partner for Southeast Asian countries. In the latter half of the 20th century, many Southeast Asian countries were highly dependent on trade relations with the US and Japan. From a geoeconomic perspective, the fact that trade relations with China have become more important for Southeast Asian countries means that economically the US and Japan have become comparatively less important, and therefore China has an advantageous environment to Southeast Asian countries as well as to the US and Japan. Moreover, from China's geopolitical point of view, Southeast Asia is an integral part of the BRI strategy that China has been developing since 2013. It has benefited both ASEAN countries and China in terms of increased trade flow among these countries (Foo, Lean, and Salim 2020). Economic interdependence between ASEAN countries and China thus has deepened and expanded in the 21st century and cannot break so easily.

A New Security Network

The economic system helped China to integrate into the Asian economy since the 1990s when ASEAN member states were ready to engage with China. The security system maintains a cautious approach to the Chinese militaristic power and position; up until 2010, even formal ASEAN-centric security dialogue excluded China. But in the 2010s, the security network arrangement has altered and expanded. It is the various layers of networks for non-traditional security issue areas. This move reflected growing concerns in emerging or non-traditional security threats. Non-traditional security threats constitute the security agenda and policy priorities of many states. They pose threats to national sovereignty and territorial integrity of states as well as to the well-being of their respective societies (Cook and Nair 2020).

In 2010, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) was launched as an expanded version of the ADMM. The ADMM-Plus aims to “provide a platform for ASEAN and its eight dialogue partners to strengthen security and defense cooperation for peace, stability and development in the region” (ASEAN 2017). Its constituents are the ten ASEAN member countries and the eight ASEAN dialogue partners – Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, and the US. Initially, the ADMM-Plus was supposed to be held every three years, then every two years, and now it is held annually. It is to be noted that this is the first time for China to be included as a member country for a defense dialogue in the ASEAN hosted framework.

A major difference between the ADMM-Plus and the traditional multilateral security dialogue framework is the Expert Working Group (EWG) system consisting of sub-meetings of the seven non-traditional security areas: humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, military medicine, maritime security, counterterrorism, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian mine action, and cyber security. This emphasis on non-traditional security issues reflects the fact that those areas have been securitized and become crucial security matters for ASEAN as a regional organization as well as its member states since the late 1990s (Cook and Nair 2020; Caballero-Anthony and Gong 2021). To tackle various non-traditional security matters, ASEAN member states need capacity-building

for each area, that is, bureaucratic, technical, methodological, and financial assistance from external states. The ADMM-Plus utilizes co-chaired system for the EWG; each EWG is co-chaired by a pair of ASEAN members and a dialogue country. The EWGs are oriented towards specific cooperation in the seven areas and are engaged in joint exercise and the development of common standard operating procedures (SOPs). The EWG system has been functioning; many meetings, seminars, and exercises have been held in various non-traditional areas. The EWG system has become a forum for capacity-building support to ASEAN countries by non-regional countries.

However, the ADMM-Plus has sometimes failed to make much progress in confidence-building and somewhat confrontational situations, especially among non-regional countries; this is noticeable against the backdrop of the intensifying confrontation between the US and China. For example, at the third ADMM-Plus in 2015, the US attempted to insert language on the South China Sea issue into the Joint Declaration, but China strongly opposed it. As a result, the discussion led to nowhere, and the ADMM-Plus failed to issue a joint declaration (Tan 2017b).

The 8th and most recent ADMM Plus revealed again the current Sino-US conflict.¹⁵⁾ It was held online on 16 June 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of the meeting, it issued the ADMM-Plus Joint Declaration. It was a short statement lacking concrete content that leads to a consensus among member countries. The declaration does not use the term “South China Sea,” but refers abstractly to “the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, prosperity, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight as well as the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation, and pursue peaceful resolution of disputes, without coercion, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea” (ASEAN 2021).

It also continues from the previous declaration to use the unfamiliar phrase

15) Sino-US conflict cast a shadow in the declaration since the 7th ADMM-Plus meeting held online on 9-10 December 2020.

“the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions” to describe the region encompassing the ADMM-Plus member countries. This phrase is a compromise between the concept of a “free and open Indo-Pacific initiative” promoted by Japan, the US, Australia, and India, and the continued use of “the Asia-Pacific” by China, which rejects the idea of “Indo-Pacific.” The phrase “Asia-Pacific and India Ocean regions” revealed conflicts of opinion among the member countries. That said, however, the declaration puts the phrase “Indo-Pacific” in the context of reaffirming the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) (ASEAN 2019). It includes “the principles of strengthening ASEAN Centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, good governance, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, complementarity with existing cooperation frameworks, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit, and respect for international law where the AOIP is intended to enhance ASEAN’s Community-building process and not aimed at creating new mechanisms or replacing existing ones.” It is to be noted that the AOIP was initiated by Indonesia. It sets an agenda in regards to Indo-Pacific cooperation, which reflects Indonesia’s ambition to be a maritime power in the region – to make Indonesia a Global Maritime Fulcrum (Anwar 2020).

This kind of confrontation and rivalry between countries in the region has a positive side for ASEAN (Beeson 2016; Stubbs 2019; Rivera 2018). The US, China, and other external powers could promote stronger cooperation with ASEAN, and as a result, capacity-building support for ASEAN countries in the EWG system will advance. Non-traditional security arrangements need multiple layers and sustainable cooperation among concerned countries. Therefore, competition among extraterritorial countries has increased the strategic importance of ASEAN and helped maintain its centrality. The 8th Declaration of ADMM-Plus Meeting underscores “the ADMM-Plus as the main multilateral mechanism for defence cooperation within the ASEAN-centred regional architecture to advance the cause of peace, stability, and prosperity in the region based on the principles of ASEAN unity, solidarity, centrality, and upholding of international law” (ASEAN 2021). Ironically, the Sino-US conflict has in effect boosted ASEAN’s position as the center of regional architecture. It proves that ASEAN’s way of diplomacy can serve as a basis for such Asian

regionalism, even when there are various kinds of regional and national pressures.¹⁶⁾

Conclusion

Thanks to the US-made twin regional systems, the Southeast Asian regional order has kept its stability over the last seven decades. Both security systems and economic systems have evolved over the years, and ASEAN member states and ASEAN have played constructive engagement, hedging, and balancing with external powers (Goh 2005b). ASEAN member states have demonstrated that diplomatic attitudes of small- and middle-powers are not always coherent and they may change depending on issue areas as well as their domestic factors. Such diplomatic attitudes have become normal among small- and middle powers in the region. There are times when ASEAN member states disagree on certain matters; there are times when external powers approach particular member states for security and economic reasons. Over the last several decades, ASEAN has been successful in building its networks with external powers, while its member states have made use of their engagement with ASEAN to maximize their national interests and minimize their international threats.

Some Southeast Asian states facilitated China's economic rise since the 1980s. The ethnic Chinese business community played a significant role in it. After Indonesia normalized its diplomatic relation with China, ASEAN opened the door to China. China in return made use of its relationship with ASEAN and its member states. ASEAN socialized China and China became dominant economically. And now their economic relationship is closely tied. After the Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998, ASEAN expanded its external relations from ASEAN Plus Three in 1997 to ASEAN Plus Six in 2005. ASEAN's effort to reach out to and engage with external powers transformed regional security and economic systems. ADMM Plus started in 2010, while RCEP officially started

16) Since the 2010s, ASEAN centrality has been questioned about its effectiveness due to Sino-US power games (Kraft 2017; Tan 2017a; Mueller 2020). As for the recent development of ASEAN's contribution to regional order, see Acharya (2021).

in January 2022. All these new cooperation arrangements and frameworks came out from stakeholders' demands. Despite internal disputes and disagreements, advancing multitiered and comprehensive dialogues expedite regional cooperation. It is secure to say that the twin regional systems remain functioning and provide "some collective goods" for the stakeholders.

Having said that, the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022 may have changed diplomatic practice. During one and half years when the pandemic hit globally, both ASEAN and ASEAN-related mega-regional meetings were held online. Digital diplomacy has come to be established as a new format of diplomacy.¹⁷⁾ It favors small- and middle-powers because it gives them more opportunities to be heard (DiploFoundation 2021). At the same time, unlike onsite meetings, it is challenging to secure backdoor deals with the online format. In the latter half of 2021, international meetings have started to return to normal, occasionally operating in a hybrid format of onsite and online settings. Under these current circumstances, the diplomatic customs that ASEAN has built in the region may undergo some changes that will affect regional cooperation games in the post-COVID-19 era. The dynamics of regional cooperation and competition will continue.

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17) Digital technology has been redefining public diplomacy and diplomatic practice in the 21st century (Sandre 2015; Bjola and Holmes 2015).

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