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Research Report on ASEAN-China Cooperation in the Fight against COVID-19

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Background and Significance

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It is no doubt that the COVID-19 has changed the world from globalization to localization. Travel restrictions, shutting down the industries and closing of border gates has been taken place since the outbreak for the safety of its own citizens and country. The post COVID-19 agenda might led to major turning points in international and regional political and economic arenas. The liberal perspective of cooperation is becoming a major concern in the context of realist assumption on the protection of vital national interests. In this situation, ASEAN and China need to understand and solve the challenges with a spirit of a friendly neighbourhood and liberal norms of cooperation is important in post COVID-19 as global and regional order seems to be uncertain. It is noteworthy to see the outcome of the 37th ASEAN Summit held online on 15-16 November 2020 with the signing of Agreement on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This cooperative mechanism might play an important role in the region's post-COVID-19 economic recovery process. This report on "ASEAN-China Cooperation in the Fight for COVID-19" is worth reading for three reasons.

Firstly, the outbreak of COVID-19 can be a test for China's neighbourhood diplomacy. Major power countries including China may take this outbreak as an opportunity to extend their public diplomacy by using the word "mask diplomacy, corona diplomacy, COVID-19 diplomacy, health diplomacy etc." Whatever the terminology is coined for diplomacy, it is necessary to consider how effective is the practice of neighbourhood diplomacy on ASEAN. Successive leaderships of China practice neighbourhood diplomacy based on in service of economic development, politics and security. Tracing back to Neighborhood Diplomacy Forum held in Beijing on 24th October 2013, President Xi stressed,

"Neighborhood diplomacy should be advanced in striving for a good surrounding environment, allowing our national development to benefit more of the neighboring nations and achieve collective development."

To prove as a good neighbour, China has been assisting to improve the socio-economic development of the developing countries in the region. One notable example is the initiation of Lancang Mekong Cooperation in 2016. Under LMC mechanism, China emphasis on poverty eradication which can be in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Early

harvest projects that can meet the needs of poverty eradication are provided to Mekong member countries under Mekong special fund. China's neighbourhood diplomacy cannot be neglected in the outbreak of COVID-19. When Corona virus outbroke in Wuhan of China and spread to the world, international community are of great concern on this horrific pandemic. In the midst of battling the infectious disease, China has been providing medical aid supplies and medical teams to some ASEAN countries. Its commitment to support can also be explored in the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summits declarations.

Secondly, it is interesting to explore how China will accelerate the BRI to be a healthy silk road rather than a bumpy road. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been on attempt by establishing corridors connecting from China to Asia and Europe. The Chinese aspiration of BRI led to some countries concern by recalling the geopolitical concept of Mackinder's Heartland and Spykman's Rimland theories. Although government-to-government level has agreed to implement the BRI projects, the local people, media and civil societies has been eyeing on China's corona diplomacy. Their concern is that the corona diplomacy might be string attached for pressuring BRI projects that can fall into country's debt trap. However, looking back to China's awareness on sustainable development, China took a leading role in forums on "Green Belt and Green Road" to be in line with UN SDGs when BRI is paid special attention by the world. The main idea of these forums is to facilitate cooperation among countries along the Silk Road with regard to sustainable aspects such as green industrial development. In this regard, the report highlights ways and means for ASEAN-China cooperation to be a healthy silk road.

Thirdly, it will be the test of ASEAN centrality in tackling the corona virus. ASEAN-China plays important role in building a cooperative environment in tackling the pandemic as it has led to devastating social, economic and political consequences. To address these consequences, ASEAN has been tackling with the spirit of cohesiveness since April 2020 by convening Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19 via video conference. The Declaration was issued with special emphasis on future public health emergencies by enhancing ASEAN Networks. There have been four online Summits in 2020; Special ASEAN Summit and Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit and 36th and 37th ASEAN Summit. These Summits paid special attention on post COVID-19 agenda to address the impact on socio-economic development of people. As the COVID-19 crisis is different from the disputes on South China Sea, ASEAN centrality really matters and it is hoped

that the liberal concept of cooperation between ASEAN and China will keep momentum in the fight for COVID-19 pandemic.

In this ***Research Report on ASEAN-China Cooperation in the fight for COVID-19***, ten authors from eight countries (Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam) will provide a comprehensive analysis and highlight their perspective on ASEAN-China cooperation in the fight for COVID-19 and it is expected that the report can contribute to ways and means to overcome the challenges of the impact of COVID-19.

The *Research Report* is a fruitful result from the 4th NACAI International Symposium titled “ASEAN-China Cooperation in the fight for COVID-19”, a virtual platform discussion held on 21st November 2020, hosted by University of Yangon. It is an honour for University of Yangon to host such kind of symposium in light of University’s centenary.

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The Indo-Pacific Regional Order in Post COVID-19: The significant trends

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Introduction

The regional order has been shifting in the Indo Pacific region. As the Corona virus hit across the globe, the debate around the consequences of the virus for the region's strategic and foreign policy environment have been heightened. The rivalry between the two major powers in the region has deepened because of the pandemic. Firstly, both US and China mutually accused each other upon the origin of the spread of the virus and raging a battle on who should take the responsibility based on their respective narratives. The US side has alleged that the p4 laboratory in Wuhan leaked the virus while Beijing's narrative suggests that the virus was brought by the US army to Wuhan in October 2019. Moreover, since the start of 2020 the Chinese assertiveness on its claim over south China sea has been intensified the U.S. Department of State issued a press statement which stated that most of the China claims in the South China Sea are unlawful and valid. In addition, both countries effort to aid the ASEAN countries bring many to consider whether there is the strategic COVID 19 aid competition going on in the region. The regional actors have been obviously informed and alerted by the change brought by the pandemic and concern upon the regional stability ahead. In this back drop, this article will discuss the important trends in the shifting regional order and their likely prospects in the post COVID 19.

1. The decline of US leading role in the Indo-Pacific region

Many calculates the US's material capabilities such as the military muscle and economic clout have a limited role. According to World Bank US shares roughly one fourth of the world's GDP and defence expenditure which means US is not all predominant in the 21st century. Joseph Nye argued 'even if the US remains the largest power, it cannot achieve many of its international goals acting alone because of the information revolution and globalization'. When the COVID 19 broke out, this view is reinforced that American leadership role in the fight against the virus has the limited role. Firstly, Trump's administration decided to freeze the funding to WHO in the midst of the COVID 19. As the top WHO financial contributor, the US not only neglected the work of WHO but also undermined the prospect for multilateral

solution. Secondly, when President Trump considered the virus as a serious threat he thinks merely in terms of the USA (America first) but not in terms of globe as a whole. US designated to aid Southeast Asian countries worth \$87millions and this action could be assumed to counter China's mask diplomacy in the region. In addition, the US respond to the virus even for the domestic was a chaotic one. Some criticized that US failed to prepare for the virus for several weeks and the US has been now the country with the highest number with the confirmed cases.

The US power projection in Asia and the Indo- Pacific region is diminishing in compare to China. Its hub and spoke alliance system in the region is becoming weak. Some expects that the military readiness in the Indo-Pacific will be deteriorated because of the pandemic. During this year many joint U.S.- allied exercises have been canceled such as the US and South Korea regular joint exercise, US- the Philippines annual Balikatan exercise in May and US- Australia-Korea-Japan multilateral Pitch-Black exercises. These cancellations are questionable for the regional actors for the future US's security commitments in the region. Its alliances and alliance solidarity in the region need to be strengthened in order to deal with the regional issues effectively. However, it is not easy to create that solidarity for many reasons and alliance management has not always been an easy task. The domestic factor plays a great role in this. The US hegemony in the region will be likely to diminish in the future.

2. The increased influence of China in the region

China has increased its global image through its mask diplomacy in the midst of COVID19. China has committed \$ 30 million to the World Health Organization one week after President Trump halted U.S. funding to WHO. Much of the earlier movements of the COVID 19 aid have been done by China through with its mask diplomacy in which Beijing supported face masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). China particularly focused Southeast Asia for its COVID 19 aid program. Jack Ma foundation and Alibaba foundation made a massive contribution to ASEAN member countries. In April 2020, Beijing donated the medical supplies to ASEAN secretariat including 75,000 surgical masks, 300 bottles of hand sanitizers (500ml) and 35 infrared thermometers. Beijing assistance came in the form of medical supplies and teams of Chinese doctors and medics in the respective ASEAN countries.

In terms of defense spending, it has been increasing every year, reaching \$ 261billion in 2019 and the economic consequences of the pandemic does not disturb the defence spending in 2020. Economically, it is expected that China will evolve more confident in the post pandemic. According to IMF estimation, China will be the only major economy to move back very slowly to the positive trend by a GDP growth of 1.9% for all of 2020. In the post pandemic period, the weaker countries such as Southeast Asian countries' economic dependence on

China will deepen. Countries like Laos and Cambodia are already inclined to rely heavily on China for infrastructure and development needs. Other ASEAN countries might move in that direction too.

Indeed, Beijing doesn't seem to make alliance system like the US does and it aims to take the role for the regional architecture by reshaping the system which displays both Chinese interests and value. However, China will have many obstacles to create Beijing led regional security network. Firstly, the trust level of its Asian partners upon China as a security guarantor is very low. Secondly, China cannot break the institutional resilience of the region such as US alliances and the ASEAN and lastly the Beijing is not popular on its assertiveness in the territorial claims in south China sea and the adverse reactions are heightened. If China becomes the regional leader, it would be perceived as 'a state that is considered itself as a great power, but lack of recognition by others.' This will make Beijing to have 'a hard time creating and sustaining an order'.

3. The increased importance of the role of middle powers

As the China rise is growing and the US power has limited role, the importance of the role of middle powers in the region as the strategic balancer is eminent to be a new collective force in ensuring regional peace and stability. Regional powers such as India and Japan play major role in this. Involve in the regional security partnership (Quad) along with US and Australia, recently they have adopted the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. This strategy mainly focuses on the freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region countering the China's Belt and Road strategy.

Japan

Functioning as a key pillar and a stabilizer in US San Francisco system of alliances, Japan's regional outlook is based on the rule based regional order in which US is central. Japan quickly adopted its Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy when the US pushed its one. At the same time, under the American first template, Japan has been facing the great challenge of hedging against the American abandonment and managing the alliance. This influences Tokyo to reorient its China's policy and when Japan portrays its FOIP, it is relatively more cooperative rather than pure confrontation to China as regards economic issue.

Among the middle powers, Japan is highly expected to assume the comprehensive leadership role in the region. The Southeast Asian countries and Japan has the multilayered relationship in culture, economic and security. By promoting infrastructure development and economic prosperity of the Southeast Asian countries, Japan ensure its regional vision. Japan's infrastructure investment in Southeast Asia worth US\$367bn in June 2019 which outstripped

China's one which worth US\$ 255bn. Moreover, recent survey on the ranking of Southeast Asian trust level on major powers, Japan came out top as the most trusted major power followed by US and China respectively. Japan's assistance to Southeast Asia to combat Covid-19, however, has been slower compared to that of US and China. According to World Economic Forum, the pandemic is tremendously damaging the Japan economy. It is expected that Japan would post a position to support the economic recovery effort and rebuilding weaker health care system in the region if Tokyo's economy emerges without damaging from COVID 19.

India

Over the last decade India has steadily evolved as a rising power with its economic and naval capabilities, supporting maritime capacity-building efforts in Southeast Asia. Since Washington is facing with power erosion, India was one of the major actors for realizing Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy in order to help manage China's rise. However, India aims larger goal of becoming a leading power rather than a balancer. India's Indo-Pacific vision focus on free and open Indo-Pacific based on rule of law, trade liberalization and inclusive and balanced one. India also stressed to anchor ASEAN unity in realizing its strategy. In September India reached its peaked in COVID 19 cases and the death toll is the third largest after the US and Brazil. The economy is struggling since the earlier draconian lockdown in March and it is expected that the economic contraction would continue and India might face the recession. Moreover, the pandemic exacerbated the country's unemployment issue. It is expected that India's growing role in the Indo-Pacific may be delayed in post-pandemic period.

As the pandemic intensify the Quad countries added non-Quad countries including New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam as Quad plus dialogue. The countries not only discussed remedies for the virus but also the ways for the revival of their economies once the virus become less intense. As a result of COVID 19, the importance of their role as the strategic balancers is expected to increase. However, it is largely dependend on their economic condition and how effectively they can help managed the impact of COVID 19 in the region.

4. The challenged ASEAN centrality

ASEAN centrality has been the major debate among the scholars and policy makers in the era of shifting regional order. Maintaining the ASEAN's centrality and proactive role in its relations and cooperation with the external partner is one of the main purposes of ASEAN. ASEAN centrality based on its growing leadership role and through this ASEAN connects multiple stakeholders. Indeed, ASEAN has served as the driver that no major or medium Asian power has been able to. As a result, ASEAN led multilateral frameworks and cooperative

platforms involving the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus (ADDM Plus), ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and East Asia Summit (EAS) have been evolved.

In the heightened of COVID 19, ASEAN Centrality is really matter and urgently needed. In order to contain the spread of the virus, ASEAN has organized collective actions involving a special meeting of ASEAN Coordinating Council on COVID 19 and joint statements have been made by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, Economic Ministers, Health Ministers, Defence Ministers and ASEAN plus three Health Ministers. Moreover, the initiative for the cooperation with European and US have been conducted and special summit on COVID 19 was also convened on April 14. These are the starting point for further collaboration. Some hopes these ASEAN led collaboration could pull the major powers (US and China) to ease their intensifying rivalry in the region. On the other hand, others assert that this will never be the case. Although the US and China has aided in the region mainly focused on Southeast Asian countries, there is no sign of cooperation between the two powers in fight against pandemic. In fact, they believe that the major powers occasionally find ASEAN useful because it does not have enough weight to stymie or block their vital interest. Therefore, it will never be the case for the issues of political sensitivity.

ASEAN Centrality has been facing a number of challenges. In 2012, there was ASEAN's first-time disagreement over the issuing of joint statement over South China Sea. This shows that the 'intra ASEAN cohesion' is very weak. Moreover, it is claimed that ASEAN centrality is most stable under US hegemon. Since the US led liberal world order is declining in the region and the stability of ASEAN centrality is challenged. In addition, as the US China rivalry intensified, there are concerns about whether ASEAN countries could hold the non-aligned position which is central to the ASEAN centrality. Although, US, India and Japan's Indo-Pacific discourse put ASEAN centrality as the key anchor, Trump's administration has not prioritized the ASEAN- centred multilateral frameworks. Indeed, ASEAN centrality is created by the external players and, therefore it depends on the acceptance of the major powers upon the legitimacy of ASEAN's role as Asia's regional architecture. With or without the centrality, ASEAN will still continue to exist.

5. Conclusion

The above trends show that the regional order in the Indo-Pacific region is shifting and this process is intensified by the COVID 19 pandemic. While the US regional leadership role is declining, China's influence has increased in the region. The importance role of regional

middle powers 5s expected to be enhanced and ASEAN led multilateralism is facing challenges and its centrality is likely to weak in the post pandemic era.

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Mitigating the Geopolitical Fallout in ASEAN-China Cooperation in Overcoming COVID-19 Crises

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Abstract

ASEAN needs to develop stronger collaborative governance to face transnational challenges like COVID-19 pandemic; in the post-COVID 19 pandemic, states hold moral justifications stronger than ever in the past to conduct drastic measures of control over the society, at the same time the society are less tolerant to ineffectiveness in governance of public affairs; In this respect, ASEAN-China cooperation must decrease its veer away from geopolitics towards building cross-regional collaboration for the preparedness and response of Southeast Asian countries and China against the next pandemic.

1. Introduction

Cooperation between ASEAN and China is one of the keys in preventing and overcoming the risk of a pandemic. First, the combined economic growth of ASEAN-China region covers a significant portion of the world economy. Secondly, the ASEAN-China region is composed of countries with very diverse strengths and capabilities; China is the strongest country in the region and naturally seeks to dominate political and economic influence in the region, but other powers have also been traditionally been part of this struggle for power and influence. This build-up of capacity and its regional inter-connectedness is best facilitated by cooperative co-existence of regional powers rather than competitive geopolitical environment. Third, the history of ASEAN-China relations has been marked by a cooperation in the field of non-traditional security which provides a very suitable platform for more substantive cooperation in the field of public health. However, health securitization has the potential to limit this cooperation to the interests of national security and diplomacy rather than fulfilment of public health.

This article asks to what extent the ASEAN-China cooperation has been able to create regional public health resilience against the dangers of an epidemic? It finds that ASEAN has been continually building regional resilience against outbreaks since the SARS epidemic in 2003. Secondly, the limit to ASEAN-China cooperation in the pursuit of a regional public health is the nature of response that both ASEAN and China implement towards the problem of contagious diseases outbreaks. Both ASEAN and China – as well as the World Health Organization (WHO) in this respect – respond to contagious disease outbreaks as a problem

that should be contained by sovereign states within their boundaries irrespective of their public health governance capacities. While boosting the capacity and capability of sovereign states in controlling outbreaks remain prominent, the nature of contagious disease problem remains the same: it has no regard to national borders. This means that there needs to be a balance between sovereignty and consideration of public health as a human security problem. In this respect, states that lack resources to ramp up their public health capacities have no choice but to rely on multiple opportunities of cooperation and utilize ASEAN as a multilateral instrument that provides conducive environment for cooperation with extra-regional partners including China.

Nevertheless, ASEAN-China cooperation in preventing outbreaks is critical due to the geographical proximity of the two entities. The failure of communication between ASEAN and China to communicate risks of communicable disease outbreaks. As a center of global economic activities, ASEAN and China's failure to communicate risks of contagious disease might spell an outbreak to the rest of the world. ASEAN-China cooperation plays an important role in building a cooperative environment that is conducive to the exchange of ideas and information, technology transfer and medical resources. Pandemic geopolitics - geopolitical competition that has an impact on overcoming inhabitants cannot be avoided, but its impacts should be mitigated because until all levels of society are free from COVID-19, all of us cannot be safe.

2. ASEAN and Health Security Threats

Tracing back the responses of ASEAN towards outbreaks, one would find the SARS epidemic in 2003 to be one of the starting points. Since then, ASEAN has been developing collaborations formed at that time revolved only around the exchange of information about containing infectious diseases and restrictions on human mobility. Another significant concern was identifying foreign nationals who are suspected of carrying SARS. Moreover, the SARS epidemic actually started the construction of an online system that allows local health facilities to determine the presence of the SARS virus in patients by interconnecting their health facilities with ASEAN-Disease Surveillance.net, a website set up in April 2003 to facilitate regional cooperation in Southeast Asia and provide timely dissemination of information on disease outbreaks. This website was established with financial and technical support from the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit 2 (NAMRU-2) and is maintained by the Indonesian Ministry of Health. In December 2004 ASEAN established the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Task Force, in which Indonesia was to harmonize vaccination and culling procedures; Malaysia was to draft action plans to contain the disease, boost emergency preparedness and establish

disease-free zones within the region; the Philippines was to increase public awareness about the problem; Singapore was to establish an information- sharing system and Thailand was to create surveillance systems to detect the disease and to ensure the rapid exchange and analysis of virus samples. This plan was reinforced in October 2005 with the establishment of a regional fund for avian flu and a three-year action plan.

The ASEAN-China summit meeting to overcome the SARS pandemic was held to provide an opportunity for China to provide assurance of cooperation to ASEAN countries to face SARS. In this meeting, in particular China offered a contribution of \$ 1.2 million. On the other hand, ASEAN countries succeeded in creating a meeting with China that did not turn into a "finger-pointing" session and gave Beijing an opportunity to improve the situation contributed by its failure.

Before Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the WHO, ASEAN had issued a joint statement titled "Chairman's Statement on ASEAN Collective Response to the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019" on February 14, 2020 acknowledging the WHO's declaration that the COVID-19 situation was public health emergency of international concern. Coordination with China was also carried out by ASEAN without putting forward a blame game. At a special meeting of the foreign ministers of ASEAN and China in Vientiane, Laos, on February 20, 2020, the outbreak of the Covid-19 outbreak has become the focus of discussion. In the meeting, Indonesia proposed the establishment of a hotline between ASEAN-China to exchange the latest information, and to strengthen the ASEAN-China mechanism in dealing with endemic epidemic crises such as Covid-19. Since the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in early January 2020, the ASEAN health sector has activated various health cooperation mechanisms at the regional level to respond to Covid-19. To date, there are at least twenty-seven existing and newly developed ASEAN mechanisms in handling Covid-19.

ASEAN also upheld periodic reporting of Risk Assessment for International Dissemination of Covid-19 ASEAN Region through the ASEAN Bio Diaspora Virtual Center and risk communication efforts through the ASEAN Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Center. The ASEAN Emergency Operation Center Network for public health emergencies hosted by Malaysia, provides each ASEAN country with daily developments related to the situation and technical changes of Covid-19 handling. The ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Center (ABVC), hosted by the Philippines, uses Big Data to generate risk assessments and surveillance reports for Covid-19 disease. The first report was published on 20 January 2020 and followed by subsequent reports three times a week. Meanwhile, the Thailand-led

Regional Public Health Laboratories Network (RPHL) allows each ASEAN member to access laboratory readiness, technical and material support, and laboratory experience and supervision.

The ASEAN Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Center (ARARC) conducts investigations into fake news and hoaxes related to Covid-19 and finds ways to effectively reach out and provide credible and timely information to the public. There are also various implementation strategies of a number of new initiatives. New initiatives that have been agreed upon and in preparation for development include ASEAN Portal for Public Health Emergency, establishment of the ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases, ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS), ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. Furthermore, there is also an establishment of the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies (RRMS) and the ASEAN Covid-19 Response Fund to ensure the availability of essential medical devices and funds in emergency situations as well as the preparation of a Standard Operating Procedure for Public Health Emergencies.

On March 10, 2020, ASEAN economic ministers issued a joint statement regarding strengthening economic resilience in response to Covid-19. The priority for economic recovery is a step that is more prominent in ASEAN's response to COVID-19. The special Summit on Covid-19 on April 14, 2020, under the leadership of Vietnam as Chair of ASEAN agreed on a commitment to take joint action and coordinated policies to mitigate economic and social impacts; assigning ASEAN economic ministers to ensure a connected supply chain so that trade in the region continues; and supporting the reallocation of an ASEAN trust fund to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

In short, ASEAN's efforts to tackle the pandemic and the effects of the pandemic have never put forward the search for responsible actors, even though the international narrative says otherwise. Both the SARS epidemic in 2003 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 gave rise to narratives that emphasize the slow response and announcement by China and the WHO which resulted in uncontrolled transmission of the virus and casualties. There is currently still pressure on China to be more transparent and to allow international investigations to investigate the causes of the epidemic and assume greater responsibility in dealing with the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether this will take place is yet to be certain.

One important matter that is central as a regional solution to dealing with epidemics in the Southeast Asia region is the construction of a center for disease control (CDC) as a regional framework of rapid response to outbreaks of infectious diseases the trend toward adopting a region-wide surveillance mechanism for monitoring infectious diseases. In this regard,

ASEAN's plan to build a regional disease surveillance mechanism is a significant development in global disease control. In addition, ASEAN should also ramp up procurement and provision of PPE to member countries and allow member countries to apply for direct grants to help them recover.

3. China's Role in Regional Recovery

The burning question for ASEAN states is how will China help in establishing resilience against pandemics in the future? In the past, China's regional involvement with ASEAN's fight against pandemics have been post-disaster in nature instead of establishing resilience and preventive mechanisms. This is understandable as China's intention in providing public health aid to other countries might be to change the narrative of the pandemic from a tardiness in the initial stages of its response to the pandemic and less developed domestic institutions to provision of help and a model of how to effectively combat the pandemic. While such intention is not in itself problematic for ASEAN, and the latter has in the past facilitated a forum for China to play a constructive role in post-pandemic recovery, it will not help in establishing regional resilience in the long run.

To some extent, the proximity and dependence of some members of ASEAN to China may become problematic when it creates a lack of transparency in data of cases of COVID-19. The problem of underreporting of some members of ASEAN such as Laos and Cambodia have been a concern of observers who perceive it as a way to appease China by playing down COVID-19 concerns. For example, Cambodia is largely silent on the reports of COVID-19 transmission and the measures that it should have undertaken to address the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and, with its relatively much lower number of infected cases. Considering Cambodia is a regional tourism hotspot for mainland Chinese tourists in Southeast Asia and hosting tens of thousands of mainland Chinese migrant workers, and having a relatively weak healthcare system, the perceived underreporting of the transmission rate of COVID-19 in the country has been raised. While not projecting a "blame-game" has been ASEAN's tradition in dealing with transnational issues, deep influence of geopolitics in public health will engender failure at risk mitigation in the future.

Despite, the negative effect of geopolitics, China can utilize the COVID-19 pandemic to gain trust as a responsible global leader from ASEAN states, and to a large extent it has acted accordingly. Within the ASEAN+3 (APT) cooperation framework, China agreed to substantially contribute to ASEAN's ability to manage the pandemic and its consequences, by setting-up an APT medical supply stockpile and, crucially, committing to contribute to the joint

ASEAN Response Fund. On 21 April 2020, China donated masks, sanitizers, and thermometers to the ASEAN Secretariat to ensure their continued operations and will provide 100 million face masks, 10 million pieces of protective gear and urgently needed medical supplies to individual member states.

4. Beyond Public Health Response

Gaining trust of all Southeast Asia states would require China to work together with the region in ending the pandemic with affordable vaccines and coping with the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. China should not take ASEAN's uncritical attitude towards its handling of Coronavirus for granted. Although Southeast Asian states did not openly criticize China on its initial handling of COVID-19, this was the ASEAN way of displaying neighbourly solidarity rather than a vote of endorsement. China's subsequent success in containing the pandemic – in contrast to the Trump Administration's poor performance – and its mask diplomacy have improved China's image regionally.

China-backed Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank (AIIB) has also served as ASEAN member states' lenders as each of the members launches stimulus packages to keep their economies afloat. As of July 27, all ten AMS have authorized approximately USD350 billion in stimulus packages, equivalent to 3.74% of ASEAN's total GDP. Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam have borrowed a total of USD 6.7 billion from the World Bank, ADB, and AIIB to complement their national packages.

However, this goodwill does not necessarily translate into ASEAN's wholesome trust towards China. On the other hand, the US' growing confrontational approach towards China, while welcomed by states that are determined to push back Beijing's assertiveness, is not perceived positively by others that want to focus on rebuilding their economies and tackling more pressing domestic challenges.

5. Closing Remark

At the end of the day, ASEAN's public health resilience should ideally be pursued through ASEAN-centered mechanisms to maintain the region's ownership. ASEAN members must work together with their partners to transform the ASEAN-led mechanisms into centers of innovation for all the member states to implement at their own pace. In addition, ASEAN needs to widen the inclusiveness of its arrangements, for example by inviting the EU and Canada into the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus. Meanwhile, to make sure that innovative ideas and the drive for bold institutional reforms alive ASEAN-minus multilateral platforms can be developed alongside the existing ASEAN-plus institutions.

ASEAN must cultivate multiple layers of concerted cooperation, while avoiding regional polarization amid growing major power rivalry.

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Forecasting Trend of China's Southeast Asian Policy in the post COVID-19 Pandemic

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect views of the author's affiliation institution nor the official policy or position of any agency of the Vietnamese government.

1. China's Southeast Asian policy before the COVID-19 pandemic

More than a decade after the reforms, in 1991 China began a dialogue process with ASEAN. In 1996, China became ASEAN's comprehensive dialogue partner. Since then to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has implemented the following Southeast Asian policies:

1.1. Proactively proposed many initiatives, participated in many cooperation mechanisms with Southeast Asian countries

In order to accomplish the above-mentioned goal, in the early 2000s, initially accumulated resources after a period of reform, China began to implement an outward strategy. For Southeast Asia, China actively launched initiatives to promote bilateral cooperation and participated in many cooperation mechanisms with partners inside and outside the region.

First, in 2006, the Guangxi Autonomous government launched: "One Axis & Two Wings" initiative in order to connect and promote cooperation with Southeast Asian countries on land, at sea and in the Mekong sub-region. After a period of propaganda, entice ASEAN countries to implement the idea in order to help China implement the global strategy. At the end of 2013, China launched the "Belt and Road" initiative, which also aims to connect China with countries in the region. At the same time, also in October 2013, China called on ASEAN countries to join hands in building the "China - ASEAN Community of Shared Destiny". In November 2014, China again proposed to build a cooperation mechanism for Lancang - Mekong dialogue.

Second, in recent years, China has also made a number of statements on its vision and cooperation plan with ASEAN in future, e.g. "2030 Vision for ASEAN - China Strategic Partnership"; "Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on ASEAN - China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2016-2020)"; Joint Statement on the Connectivity between the Belt and Road Initiative (hereinafter referred to as BRI) and "Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity 2025"; smart city cooperation and media exchange, etc..

Third, China actively participates in many bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms between China and all member of ASEAN, between ASEAN and outside - region countries such as ASEAN + 3, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asian Cooperation Dialogue, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. At the ministerial level, China has established more than 10 ministerial conference mechanisms with ASEAN.

1.2. Promoting economic cooperation, and cultural and education exchange

China has signed and negotiated many economic cooperation agreements with ASEAN, notably the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (November 2002), and started to build a China - ASEAN Free Trade Area, the negotiation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), etc. All these have made China the top economic partner of ASEAN.

At the same time, China has also signed agreements on educational exchange and cooperation with the 10 ASEAN countries. Since 2010, China committed to grant ASEAN countries 10,000 scholarships each year, making a total of 100,000 scholarships in 10 years, from 2010 to 2020. In order to further expand its cultural influence in Southeast Asia, as of November 2019, China has established 38 Confucius Institutes in 10 ASEAN countries. To promote people-to-people exchange between the two sides, prior to COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, the number of people traveling between China and ASEAN was 60 million.

1.3. Implementing different policy towards different Southeast Asian countries

Despite no any specific policy to individual Southeast Asian state mentioned in the official documents of the Party and Government of China, we observe that Southeast Asian countries are located in the China's overall neighboring and foreign policy. This means that, over the past years, in order to fulfill its goals, China has tried to maintain and consolidate the peaceful, stable neighboring environment in favor for China to focus on its economic development and to accumulate resources to realize the "China Dream". At the same time, China took advantage to gather forces around the world, including manipulating each ASEAN state into the China's side in order to weaken the US strategic connection in this region to prevent the risk of alliance to form a bloc against China in future. However, due to different levels of relations and interests, China has different policies for individual Southeast Asian country like enticing and manipulating. As results, after the Permanent Arbitration Court (PCA) in The Hague ruled in favor of the Philippines and denied China's claim of 9-dash line on the South China Sea on July 12, 2016, at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting on July 24, 2016, The Philippines and Vietnam expect ASEAN Foreign Ministers to jointly mention the arbitral tribunal's ruling in the joint statement after the meeting. However, Cambodia, the

China's arguably closest partner in ASEAN, has blocked any mention an international court ruling against Beijing in their statement. This proves that China's individual Southeast Asian country policy created divisions and broke the unity of Southeast Asia countries in the South China Sea issue.

Another example shows the different policy for individual Southeast Asian country. According to Sufian Jusoh, the implementation of infrastructure investment projects under the BRI framework, China invested in 6 out of 10 ASEAN countries from 2013 to 2018, but mainly concentrated in Cambodia (5 projects), Indonesia (5 projects), Laos (3 projects) and Malaysia (3 projects), and Brunei and Thailand each with 01 project. Although these projects cannot fully summarize the level of Chinese policy priorities for individual ASEAN countries, they partly explain the degree of primacy in relations between China and individual ASEAN countries and obstacle levels in the implementation of China's policies towards individual ASEAN countries.

1.4. Promoting aggressive control in the East Sea (South China Sea), rejecting outside-region countries' involvement

In many forums and conference, China regularly declares to rejecting external forces participating in the regional issues, including the South China Sea issue. At a meeting with US President Barack Obama in Washington on March 31, 2016, Xi Jinping protested against countries, actually implying the United States, which used the pretext of freedom of navigation and overflight in order to interfere in the South China Sea issue. In addition, China also asked the US not to choose side in the sovereignty dispute in the South China Sea:

2. Trends of China's Southeast Asian policy in the post Covid-19 Pandemic

After the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in China and spread around the world starting from the beginning of 2020, the situation of the world, the region, and of each country has changed rapidly and is forecasted to be increasingly complicated and unpredictable. There are also identified and undefined factors that affecting status quo of the world, the region and individual country.

The identified factors include: (i) Strategic competition, ideological competition, development model competition and geopolitical competition among major countries will increase under the new world context; (ii) Countries will rebuild global supply chains that have been being formed and effective in the past 30 years, thereby causing a major impact on the global and regional economies; (iii) The relationship between the state and the market, the state and the society will have corresponding adjustments, the concept of value will change greatly,

the State's intervention in the market will increase; (iv) Public health will become a national security issue, and will become an important topic in public policy making in future.

The undefined factors include: (i) in which direction does the global order go? This happening must be observed carefully. In which the US or China will prevail in strategic competition on a global and regional scale? (ii) How is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy? Whether there is a systemic global financial and monetary risk? How long is the stamina of the world economy? And how is its production impacts? (iii) Whether will there be another epidemic in the world? And how will it be contained?

From the China's policy towards Southeast Asia in practice, and from the identified and undefined factors that would impact the region and the world as discussed above as bases for a forecast, a prediction of Chinese policy trends towards the Southeast Asia in the long run is not easy. Therefore, in this paper we only focus on forecasting trend of China's Southeast Asian policy during the time prior to the 20th Congress of the China's Communist Party. Thus, we predict the China's Southeast Asia policy in next two years in the 3 following scenarios.

2.1. Scenario No. 1: China continues to implement the same policy as before the COVID-19 pandemic

This scenario is set out with the assumption that there are no major changes in the world and regional situation, the internal situation of China is also free of changes, the leadership of Mr. Xi Jinping is still strengthened. China continues to maintain a policy of promoting economic cooperation, restoring and building new supply chains with Southeast Asian countries, promoting cultural exchanges and education with Southeast Asian countries, continue to implement different policies for individual Southeast Asian country, enticing each Southeast Asian country, gather forces that benefit China, etc. In addition, China continues to compete, reject the involvement of the US and other allied countries, partners of the US in Southeast Asia. However, this competitive landscape between the US and China has yet to confirm who would have the decisive voice in all global and regional issues.

Because there is a forecast that it is impossible to confirm that after the end of the epidemic, everything would return to normal as before, so we think that this scenario is unlikely to happen. In the tension between the US and China as happened in recent times, China also did not dare to take reckless actions or do anything unexpected in the South China Sea in the next one to two years.

2.2. Scenario No. 2: China changes its foreign policy: softer in foreign policy but still rigid in the South China Sea issue

This scenario is set out with the assumption that the situation around China is unstable, and the US continues to increase economic tension against China, imposing embargo against many Chinese companies those participated in building artificial islands in the South China Sea. The US would gather many supporting countries to against China; and inner the US would continue to support President Donald Trump's tough stance against China, whether Trump would win the 2020 election or not, the US Government's stance on China would rarely change, but continue to restraint and isolate China. Thus, China's hard and soft power would continue to be heavily negatively impacted; the economy would fall into difficult situation; the national prestige would decline; inner China would be divided; and criticisms of domestic and foreign policies by president Xi Jinping would increase; many hot spots in China would be emerged, lashes at the border with India would again happen. In Southeast Asia, the insular ASEAN countries continue to sue China over the acts of aggression in the South China Sea, while pivoting to gradually reducing economic dependence on China, and would incline more to building relations with the US and its allies in economy, defense and national security.

If there will be this context, in order to counterbalance the US, to reduce the domestic pressure on Xi Jinping, China would adjust its foreign policy to be softer. This also means that, the more China needs to maintain its influence on Southeast Asia to compete with and to reduce US influence in the region. Therefore, China would: (i) On the one hand, to promote deeper and broader economic cooperation, to expand cultural influence, to promote educational cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges with countries in Southeast Asia; (ii) On the other hand, China continues to maintain its presence and rigid in the East Sea.

This scenario is more likely to happen, because in the current context, the next one to two - year trend, the US factor affects China is still huge with the US's China-restraining policy, the US action in the Indo-Pacific region would have become more and more drastic, especially in terms of security issues, including the East Sea (South China Sea) issue.

2.3. Scenario No. 3: China becomes more rigid both on foreign affairs and in the South China Sea

This scenario is assumed that, China would dominates after the COVID-19 pandemic, China would be more confident in its position and power. China would reconnect the global production chain, and its international reputation would be increasing. China's national aggregate power would increase, including military strength, and increasing voice in many international and regional affairs while the US, Japan, India, Australia and other major countries in the world would be heavily damaged by the COVID -19 epidemic, so the economic

recovery would be slow and fall into a recession. So the US would adjust to become more temporarily at peace with China. This would give China more opportunity to deal with international issues in China's favor.

In this happens, we believe that China would: (i) be firm in relations with its surrounding countries in general and Southeast Asian countries in particular, China would resort to economic measures to entice countries to gather forces that are beneficial to China, but would be tough to impose economic sanctions against countries that have conflicts in political and security interests with China; (ii) China would take advantage of its own opportunities and strengths to increase its tough actions to infringe sovereignty in the South China Sea.

However, this scenario is less likely to happen than the above two, because in a short time it would be difficult for China to regain its international reputation as it has before the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, in the current context, the US and its allies and partners would have all realized the nature of China's rise in recent years, so it would continue to contain China no matter what.

3. Concluding remarks

In short, it can be said that trend of China's policy towards Southeast Asia in the coming time would continue to fulfill its targets defined by generations of China's leaders, despite regional and the world context as well as force relations between the parties in the past years and at present have been changing. Although China's current power and position are much stronger now than before, China still faces huge restraint by the US, its allies and partners in the region and the world.

This implies that, even if trend of China's policy towards Southeast Asia would occur as any of three scenarios discussed above, Southeast Asia is always the region where China deploys its competition policy to gain influence and exclude outside-region countries out of the region. In general, China would still deploy its economic relations, cooperation promotion in culture, education and people-to-people exchange within a multilateral and bilateral framework with countries in Southeast Asia, making countries in this region continuing to depend economically on China, thereby being dominated and influenced by China in decision-making over the region's issues.

What unpredictable here is how China would continue to implement its East Sea (South China Sea) policy. We completely agree with many predictions and studies holding that the China's goal of occupying majority part of the East Sea never change, but China may change

measures it would take by implementing soft and/or hard policy to gain control over the issue. In the three scenarios mentioned above, no matter which one would take place or each scenario takes place partially in the next one to two years, the trend that China always takes aggressive action to gain control in the East Sea is unchanged.

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China's Contributions in the Control and Continuing Containment of Covid-19 in the Philippines

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1. Introduction

The year 2020 witnessed the havoc brought about by the ruthless COVID-19 to many countries, severely threatening humanity and global public health security. Facing this common challenge, China and the Philippines have been supporting and helping each other, demonstrating the long-standing profound friendship. At the height of China's battle with COVID-19, the Philippine government has provided valuable support and assistance to China. In return, the latter has reciprocated the former's generosity. China has initiated the mask diplomacy, sending medical teams, distribution of friendship bags and many more as well as the promise of vaccine once available.

The first case in the Philippines was identified on January 30, 2020 and involved a 38-year-old Chinese woman who was confined at San Lazaro Hospital. On February 1, a posthumous test result from a 44-year-old Chinese man turned out positive, making the Philippines as the first country outside China to record a confirmed Covid-19 related fatality.

As of November 3, there have been 387,161 confirmed cases of the disease in the country. Out of these cases, 348,967 recoveries and 7,318 deaths were recorded. It has the 2nd highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia and ranks 7th in Asia and 23rd in the world.

2. China's Contribution in Controlling and Containing Covid-19

The Philippines for the past nine months has been struggling to control and contain the pandemic using its available resources and with the help of various countries and international organizations in financing the mechanisms to contain the virus. Some of these are:

Mask Diplomacy. Despite its own difficulty, China has promptly provided well-needed medical supplies to the Philippines within the best of its ability amid the pandemic outbreak. At the early stage of the outbreak here, the Chinese Embassy in cooperation with the China Mammoth Foundation, donated 2,000 test kits to the Philippine Government. The Chinese government then donated three batches of medical supplies to the Philippines, including 252,000 test kits, 130 ventilators, and 1,870,000 surgical masks.

In May 2020, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense decided to donate a batch of emergency medical supplies to the Philippine side. These include over 80,000 pieces of

surgical masks, protective suits and protective goggles. China provided utmost facilitation for the flight and transportation permits of Philippine military aircraft. Aside from state to state cooperation, it is also interesting to point out the role of the non-state actors/private sectors to assist the Filipinos during the pandemic.

Foremost is the State Grid Corporation of China that handed over 500,000 medical masks to the Philippine Red Cross in May 2020. Nearly 3 million medical items consisting of 2.65 million medical masks and 250,000 pieces of other medical supplies such as protective suits, gloves, and goggles, along with daily necessities and cash worth nearly 10 million pesos, have been donated.

Moreover, the Chinese businesses include SGCC, Bank of China, Panhua Group, China Information Communication Technology Group, Power Construction Corporation of China, China Road and Bridge Corporation, China Railway Design Corporation, China Geo-Engineering Corporation, China State Construction Engineering Corporation, China Energy Engineering Corporation, and Qingjian Group. Moreover, the National Grid Corporation donated 1 billion pesos to the Philippine government. Dito Telecommunity, co-owned by China Telecom, donated 375,000 kg of rice to the local governments. Zhejiang Dahua Technology donated thermal temperature monitoring solution to the Philippines. Huawei provided technical support for diagnosis and treatment system using remote CT scans in Baguio General Hospital Medical Center. Chinese multinationals have also joined this donation such as Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation of more than 100,000 test kits and 500,000 medical masks. TikTok donated 1 million US dollars to the Philippine General Hospital Medical Foundation. 51talk donated medical supplies with a total value of 5.25 million pesos to the Philippines. On 14 August, the Chinese Embassy donated 1 million pesos in cash and some PPEs to the Philippine medical front liners as a token of appreciation.

Sending of Medical Teams. Upon the request of the Philippine government, the Anti-epidemic Medical Expert Team dispatched by the Chinese government arrived at Manila on April 5 to assist the Philippines in its fight against the COVID-19 epidemic. This team is among the first three teams sent by the Chinese government to fight the COVID-19 epidemic by meeting officials of Department of Health, staff of the Incident Command System and the officers of WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific to exchange experience and practice; visiting more than ten front-line medical agencies; and held a number of video lectures on epidemic prevention and personal protection to 50,000 people not only in Luzon but also Visayas and Mindanao.

Distribution of Friendship Bags. On 4 June 2020, the Chinese Embassy in partnership with FFCCCII has prepared 20,000 “Friendship Bag” containing rice and canned sardines. The Chinese Embassy, together with its Consulates General in Cebu, Davao and Laoag, also donated supplies of daily necessities with a combined value of about 17.5 million pesos. Moreover, 3.075 million kilograms of rice were also donated to over 500,000 Filipino families.

On June 2020, the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines donated “Friendship Bags” to Concordia Children’s Services, Inc. containing daily necessities such as rice and canned food. The embassy also presented panda dolls and Zongzi to the children.

3. Future Cooperation as part of Health Silk Road

Vaccine. Philippine Ambassador to China advised the Philippine government to be ready with storage facilities for coronavirus vaccines from China. He said three to four vaccines “are now being tried in China.” One vaccine is near completion of Phase 3 trial “and so far the results have been fairly good.” Another Chinese vaccine is on Phase 3 trial and on “international experiment” in Brazil and the United Arab Emirates. It is hoped that the vaccines will arrive soon and will serve as strong bond of friendship between China and the Philippines.

Financing/ Operationalization of Chiang Mai Initiatives Multilateralization/AIIB. It is estimated that 1.8 trillion US dollars have been spent by Asia’s developing economies in combating the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. On average they are spending the equivalent of 27 per cent of GDP, about the same as Asia’s developed economies when you add up government spending, tax cuts and central bank initiatives.

Thus, there is a need for continuous financing of countries especially those developing economies. There is a need for the operationalization of the US\$240 billion regional alternative -the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization. It is also important to see the important role of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in the financing of the measures to contain Covid-19 and future pandemic.

SEA-China Industrialization Region – pharma and medical equipment. Health Silk Road may also justify certain Chinese-owned medical equipment manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies to relocate or expand out of China, in search of greater market access and lower costs in a *China-Southeast Asia industrial region*. This is also possible with the strengthening of the China-BIMP EAGA cooperation to include health agenda. For middle-income ASEAN countries such as Philippines is ideal for receiving nearshoring, relocation or investment of medical production companies from China, given the better logistic networks, well-educated workforce, huge population/market and greater international business linkages

of these countries. In addition, China may consider investing in the health-service sector (e.g. hospital chain) in the country. It can also leverage on their affordable but well-regarded medical care for advertising medical tourism to China, especially targeting the middle- upper consumer group.

Strengthening cooperation in Medicine Institutes and Genome Centers through information sharing and training of medical staff to address future pandemics. Digital technology and data diplomacy can also be employed on this.

Complementing Health Silk Road with Digital Silk Road. Health Silk Road could be complemented with the Digital Silk Road for the sake of health monitoring. Digital tools to monitor contact tracing and quarantine enforcement have been deployed around the world to combat COVID-19, from Singapore and South Korea to Israel and India. China, for its part, has required some citizens to download an app that shares health, location, and travel data with local authorities. Healthcare codes are accessed through Alipay and WeChat, and Ant Financial and Tencent have partnered with local governments to roll out the systems across the country. With a long track record of Chinese companies sending digital surveillance technologies, Beijing is able to export its digital tools to other countries to monitor quarantines and sort populations in an effort to safely restart local economies. This will greatly contribute to the capability of the Philippines to address the public health concerns now and in the near future.

4. Conclusion

China has been a generous partner in the war against Covid-19. It has extended assistance to the Philippines in many fronts ranging from masks, to PPEs, sending of medical teams, to friendship bags and others. Beyond these, there are more to expect from these relations during the time of the pandemic and in future health crisis such as financing schemes, digital collaboration, pharmaceutical companies' expansion, mobility of health professionals and of course vaccine distribution among others as part of the Health Silk Road – a dimension of the relation that will last forever.

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China's diplomacy toward ASEAN states in the fight against COVID-19

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Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, China's diplomatic efforts vis-à-vis ASEAN states have evolved with the changing domestic and international circumstances. This memo breaks down the developments into roughly three stages: the “outbreak” stage, the “giving back” stage, and the “new normal” stage. As an unexpected, systemic “shock”, the COVID-19 pandemic lays bare the value of and continued need for closer ASEAN-China ties.

1. The “outbreak” stage

The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in China caught the whole country off guard. With the lockdown in Wuhan on 23 January 2020, China had shifted to “emergency” mode and concentrated almost all of its resources on containing the epidemic. Accordingly, China's diplomatic efforts aimed primarily at creating a supportive and understanding international environment. As Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted during an internal meeting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) should “actively make its voice heard... nurturing a favorable external environment for epidemic prevention and control at home.”

Via bilateral and multilateral channels, China actively reached out to government officials and civil society members in Southeast Asia, including holding the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on COVID-19 on 20 February. The main message China sought to convey was threefold. First, China was capable of curtailing the spread of the virus, and negative effects of the epidemic on China's socio-economic development would be temporary and limited. Second, China had been closely communicating with the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as ASEAN regarding the epidemic to ensure information transparency. Third, China called for international collaboration and solidarity in fighting the epidemic.

Upon the outbreak in China, the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN states had been showcasing support for China's combat against the epidemic. Southeast Asian leaders made calls to their Chinese counterparts, sent in letters of support, and even visited China in person. Both governments and civil society members in the region donated money and protective equipment to China. Issued on 15 February, the “Chairman's Statement on ASEAN Collective

Response to the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019” expressed ASEAN states’ “solidarity and heartfelt support for the Government and people of the People’s Republic of China... in their tremendous endeavours to address the outbreak of the COVID-19.”

2. The “giving back” stage

Entering into March 2020, the number of new cases in China had been continuously dropping, and significant improvements were achieved in Wuhan and Hubei, the epicenter of the epidemic. Meanwhile, on 11 March, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic, and many Southeast Asian countries had been struggling to combat the virus. With the improved situation at home, China had the wherewithal to give back to Southeast Asia.

China provided both “hard” and “soft” assistance to ASEAN states and the ASEAN Secretariat. China not only donated medical equipment and dispatched medical teams to Southeast Asia, but also provided a unique public good – sharing China’s experiences in fighting the virus. Bilateral and multilateral conferences and seminars had been held to discuss concrete measures China had taken in combating COVID-19.

China’s assistance to Southeast Asia was reflective of the deep ties between China and ASEAN states at all levels. Both the central government and provincial governments in China coordinated to provide assistance. Through military-to-military channels, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) of China donated medical equipment to and shared expertise with its Southeast Asian counterparts. The organizations of the Communist Party of China (CPC) offered medical donations and held seminars sharing China’s experiences through inter-party mechanisms. Chinese firms, social organizations, and individuals were also an important contributing force.

Moreover, China had been actively engaged in multilateral institutions to further joint efforts against COVID-19. Notably, on 14 April 2020, the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit reaffirmed the region’s shared commitment to not only fighting but also recovering from the pandemic.

3. The “new normal” stage

In mid-April, as its domestic situation had been generally under control, China’s focus shifted to resuming normal life and work while ensuring control over COVID-19. The “new normal” stage of China’s diplomacy toward ASEAN states is thus two-pronged: fighting the pandemic and rebooting socio-economic development.

First, with COVID-19 still plaguing the region, China has continued to offer needed assistance to Southeast Asia. In the short-to-medium term, as Chinese vaccine developers are among the front-runners to develop effective COVID-19 vaccines, China has promised to

ASEAN states that their needs would be prioritized once Chinese vaccines are available. What's more, over the long run, together with ASEAN states, China seeks to strengthen and develop institutions dedicated to tackling public health challenges. At the China-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 9 September 2020, Wang Yi noted that "China is willing to provide financial support for the ASEAN anti-epidemic fund, jointly build the ASEAN reserve pool of emergency medical supplies, establish the China-ASEAN emergency liaison mechanism, advance the China-ASEAN Human Resources Training Program of Health Silk Road, and explore building more platforms for cooperation."

Second, China has been working with ASEAN states to resume and boost economic activities across the region. In light of the restrictions in place because of COVID-19 on the movement of people and goods, China and a number of ASEAN states have set up or agreed to set up bilateral "fast lanes" and "green channels" to facilitate the resumption of work and production. At the multilateral level, through ASEAN-China and ASEAN Plus Three platforms, ASEAN and China have reaffirmed their commitment to not only promoting regional economic recovery, but also improving economic institutions and mechanisms, including signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement within 2020.

In spite of the challenges and disruptions to economic activities brought about by COVID-19, ASEAN has now become China's largest trading partner. In the first three quarters of 2020, China's trade with ASEAN has scored a 7.7% increase and accounts for 14.6% of China's foreign trade. This is reflective of the resilience and potential of China-ASEAN economic relations.

4. Concluding remarks

This memo has combed through the three stages of China's diplomacy toward ASEAN amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As China's domestic situation goes through different stages, its interactions with ASEAN states have evolved accordingly. The origin of the virus, while a highly political and contentious issue, remains a scientific question. Amid the pandemic, ASEAN countries and their people have chosen not to play the "blame game"; instead, close cooperation has taken place both between China and individual ASEAN states and through ASEAN-China mechanisms.

Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI) recently released the results of a survey of public opinion toward ASEAN-China relations in ASEAN states. 72% of the respondents are at least "somewhat satisfied" with ASEAN-China cooperation in fighting COVID-19, while 79% are at least "somewhat confident" that China supports ASEAN efforts regarding COVID-

19. The overall positive responses are a partial testament to Southeast Asian people's goodwill toward ASEAN-China engagement in the face of the pandemic.

Whether or not the COVID-19 pandemic will have transformational effects on the world remains to be seen. Yet, the pandemic has already revealed many deep-seated problems and shortcomings in global, regional and domestic governance. The COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be overcome by the global community, while there might be new pandemics plaguing the increasingly inter-connected world in the future. At the minimum, the "shock" is a reminder of the need for deeper and broader cooperation between ASEAN and China, in areas that include but go beyond fighting a pandemic.

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COVID-19, Belt and Road Initiative and the Health Silk Road: Implications for Southeast Asia

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1. Introduction: Belt and Road Initiative and Health Silk Road

Since 2013, a main mission of Chinese diplomacy has been to promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Under Xi Jinping, the BRI was written into the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party that signals that the BRI will be China's long-term commitment. Although the BRI faces criticism of Western countries, China will not be deterred in its pursuit of the BRI vision. The agenda of the "BRI 2.0," manifested in the Second BRI Forum in Beijing, May 2019, aimed to promote high-quality, sustainable, "cleaner and greener" BRI projects. In the early 2015, Chinese health authorities proposed the policies to enhance international health cooperation under the "people-to-people exchanges" component of the BRI. Xi Jinping first mentioned the concept of the Health Silk Road (HSR) in a speech in 2016. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic negatively affecting so many economies. Hence, China is likely to redirect the HSR as a mainstay of the BRI, emphasizing the healthcare infrastructure foundation of the BRI countries, together with the already prominent "Digital Silk Road," in the coming years.

2. What is the Health Silk Road?

Almost all central government ministries of China have a role to play in the activities of the BRI. International health cooperation was thus conceptualized an important aspect of the "people-to-people exchange" of the BRI. In 2015, Chinese health authorities unveiled a document titled "A Three-Year Implementation Plan for Advancing BRI Health Cooperation (2015–2017)," which is a comprehensive policy document for international health cooperation and became the basis concept of the 2016 HSR.

The document laid out a three-stage strategy to promote the BRI from the healthcare sector, namely the immediate term (2015–2017), the medium term (2017–2020/2022) and the long-term (five to ten years, or 2020–2030). The document also listed such eight priority areas of BRI health cooperation as (1) securing political support for health cooperation; (2) the construction of mechanisms to control infectious diseases, especially with the mainland Southeast Asian countries, (3) capacity building and talent training; (4) joint exercises in public

health crises among BRI countries; (5) harnessing the potentials of traditional medicine; (6) cooperation and mutual learning over a wide range of issues related to healthcare system and policies with other countries; (7) China institutionalize medical aid to BRI countries, especially among the poor countries; and (8) healthcare industry collaboration along the BRI countries.

While these ideas would provide the basic foundation of the HSR, in which Xi emphasized health cooperation as an important cooperative agenda of the BRI. In August 2017, Beijing convened the first “Belt and Road High-Level Meeting for Health Cooperation.” A “Beijing Communiqué” on the HSR, signed by China, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and thirty other countries, put forward eight cooperative measures such as maternal, child and reproductive health projects, and an explicit support for cooperation between the BRI and international organizations such as the WHO and UNAIDS.

The 2015 document and the 2017 Communiqué, therefore, together constitute the major authoritative documents on the HSR. The BRI, the characteristics of flexibility and elasticity will be similarly applied to the case of the HSR. The documents are not a fixed blueprint and the scope of activities of the HSR can expand depending on the circumstances. The concrete projects will also depend on actual consultation and discussion between China and partnering countries.

Health China 2030 and the Health Silk Road

Another Chinese government initiative that is pertaining to the HSR is *Health China 2030*, unveiled in 2016 that aims to elevate overall health standards of the Chinese citizens. There are more than twenty policy measures covered by the initiative, including health education, publicity campaigns for healthy lifestyle, public healthcare facilities, laws and regulations, and international health cooperation. Under the chapter of “international health cooperation” of the 2016 *Health China 2030* document, it is stated that China would embark on a global health strategy, and comprehensively promote international health cooperation. In many ways, *Health China 2030* complements the HSR.

Health Silk Road and China’s Long-Running Health Diplomacy

Many developments attributed to the HSR are similar to the concept of the BRI. Before the BRI and the HSR, China’s health assistance to Africa is especially noteworthy. Chinese data on health aid are difficult to come by. Another two components of Chinese international health engagement are health security and health governance. Conscious of the increased risks of the spread of infectious diseases, China and the US cooperated to help build the African Centres for Disease and Control. China is a member of the Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance

Network, established in 2001. In terms of health governance, China advanced several regional health forums as principal platforms to increase China's influences, namely China–ASEAN Health Cooperation Forum, the China–Central and Eastern European Countries Health Ministers Forum and the China–Arab Health Cooperation Forum. In Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), China has also been an active participant to push for stronger health cooperation among the countries. Sometimes an existing program may be expanded by adding the name of "HSR" on it. For instance, China's 2015 program titled "China–ASEAN Talent Training in Public Health (2015–2017)" that initiated to train 100 public health professionals for ASEAN, was expanded into a "China–ASEAN Human Resources Training Program of Health Silk Road," aiming to train more than 1000 ASEAN healthcare professionals by 2022.

Health Silk Road and Healthcare Industry

In recent years, there was a marked increase of foreign investment by Chinese companies in the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors. Chinese foreign investment in health industry reached 4.2 billion US dollars in 2017, compared to 130 million US dollars in 2014. Meanwhile, China also welcomed foreign investment into Chinese health sector. From 2012 to 2016, China received a total of 12.35 billion US dollars foreign investment in Chinese healthcare sector. These investments significantly enhanced the upgrading of Chinese capabilities in high-tech medical devices manufacturing and pharmaceutical production. These investments were likely strategic corporate behavior. In addition, *Made in China 2025*, a strategic industrial policy initiative announced in 2015, which includes "biotechnology and high-end medical devices" as one of the ten areas. *Made in China 2025* has generated much ongoing concerns of Chinese violations of the intellectual properties of Western companies. Nevertheless, the overall conceptualization of the HSR is one of international health cooperation and not strategic manufacturing. The two initiatives have different goals and objectives.

3. COVID-19 and the Health Silk Road

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the significant weaknesses of public health infrastructure of countries. China supplied almost 50 per cent of the protective equipment products in the world market pre-COVID-19, and the continued ability by China to export these supplies will be crucial for poor countries, to battle the pandemic and other potential diseases.

While China has faced intense international scrutiny for its initial inadequate handling of COVID-19, it has been now actively exercising "medical diplomacy." China has shipped out billions of masks and millions of protective equipment, though mostly actually to developed

countries such as the US, Italy and Japan while it sent health expert teams to developing friendly countries. In the early stage of Chinese medical aid, a pattern of “a province for a country” emerged where a resource-rich province would be responsible for providing both material medical assistance (masks and protective gears) and health experts to a paired country. This evolved from the unique “a province for a city” within China in their own early efforts to contain the virus. Although “a province for a country” is never officially announced as a policy, the capabilities of the central government to utilize provincial resources and expertise are unique. While one can view these activities as part of the HSR, the HSR is a much broader, long-term adventure. China has been criticized by a few Western countries for using medical assistance as a trade-off to sell China’s COVID-19 handling narrative to the world. China is therefore more interested to explore the HSR idea with developing countries. On 19 June, Beijing held a teleconference with the foreign ministers of 27 countries where a “Joint Statement of the High-level Video Conference on Belt and Road International Cooperation: Combating COVID-19 with Solidarity” was issued. The statement called for the implementation of the Health Silk Road and states that the countries support mutual efforts in combating the COVID-19.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the HSR is likely to feature in China’s diplomacy and foreign economic policy in such several ways as (1) the creation of the new China International Development Cooperation Agency in 2018 to address the institutional weaknesses of China’s foreign aid; (2) packaging its participation in regional and global health governance as an illustration of how the HSR is contributing to the betterment of humanity; (3) reinforcing BRI with importance public health infrastructure; and (4) enlarging its role in global medical supply chain and investment.

4. Prospects of the Health Silk Road and ASEAN

During the pandemic, many Southeast Asian countries are recipients of China’s medical assistance in the form of basic protective equipment and medical advisory team, and they do see such assistance as comprehensive, helpful and timely. However, the HSR will be long term and with implications perhaps beyond health.

Political/Regional Dimension

Between China and Southeast Asia, the HSR will be pursued more on the bilateral basis. As in the case of the BRI, almost all projects were negotiated bilaterally. Governments can choose to leverage on China’s HSR to build up their public health system, increase its resilience and efficiency, and address its weaknesses, while for China, the HSR can help promote its health equipment and medical standards. At the think tank level, China’s official think tanks will be active in engaging with their counterparts in Southeast Asia to forge a

positive commitment to the HSR. At the multilateral level, an institutionalized mechanism already exists in the form of China–ASEAN Health Cooperation Forum. During the pandemic, on 20 February, a special session on health cooperation in facing the pandemic was held in Lao between the Foreign Ministers of China and ASEAN countries. On 15 April, a web-based special ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit on COVID-19 was held where Premier Li Keqiang made proposals at APT level for both health cooperation and a COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund. Sub-regionally, after COVID-19, China will likely reprioritize the Lancang–Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism to include health agenda. Moreover, the outbreak of COVID-19 suggests that health cooperation is likely to feature in the future of China–BIMP-EAGA cooperation agenda. The HSR will considerably increase China’s prestige and leadership in Southeast Asia. However, the deterioration of US–China relations indicates that even in international health cooperation, China’s role will not be left uncontested. On 22 April, the US State Department launched the three pillars of the US–ASEAN Health Futures initiative, including the research pillar, the pillar of building up health system capacity, and the human capital development pillar.

Economic Dimension

With the intensification of US–China rivalry, Southeast Asia is ideal for nearshoring of manufacturing industries of medical equipment from China. Least developed countries in Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Lao PDR and Cambodia) are actually well-positioned to receive Chinese health-sector investment, as they would also boost the local manufacturing capacity in basic medical equipment. For middle-income ASEAN countries (Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines), they are also ideal for receiving nearshoring, investment of medical production companies from China, given the better logistic networks, well-educated workforce, huge population/market and greater international business linkages of these countries. Finally, the only high-income country in ASEAN, Singapore, will have a different role. High-tech and the service sector will feature more prominently in Singapore’s engagement with the HSR. And it will be a bidirectional process where not only China’s healthcare companies will come to invest in Singapore, but Singapore’s healthcare companies will also invest in China, and bringing in Singapore’s excellent management expertise to cater to the high-end consumers of healthcare service in China.

5. Conclusion

HSR is a broad idea with no fixed blueprint. Despite this, it will become a mainstay of China’s BRI, public diplomacy and foreign engagement in the coming years. Besides the already important Digital Silk Road, the health/biotechnology component will therefore also

gain importance, especially in Southeast Asia. The troubling relationships between China and Western countries also suggest that China will want to foster even stronger relationship with Southeast Asian countries. It will increase by anticipated ratification of RCEP by the end of 2020.

The mixture of poor, middle-income and advanced economies within the region also allows China to comprehensively engage with the region with different aspects of the HSR. Leveraging on the HSR, poorer countries can ask for greater assistance in the construction of basic public health infrastructure and capacity training. Scientific exchange and cooperation can also benefit the health professionals and scientists from both sides. The integration of digital and healthcare also allows healthcare systems to be much more efficient and will help China to promote its digital, health and biotechnological standards. While national interests need to be carefully protected, there is no reason why Southeast Asian countries cannot benefit from working with China on the HSR if the terms of cooperation are well negotiated and the projects are well managed.

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China-ASEAN Public Health Cooperation: Progress and Prospect

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1. Introduction

It was not that long ago when war, disease, and poverty ravaged Southeast Asia. Yet today the region is best known for its steady economic expansion and serves as one of the world's growth engines. Nonetheless, Southeast Asian nations continue to experience an uneven distribution in healthcare resources and capacity. While wealthy nations like Singapore and Brunei maintain a robust, modern healthcare system covering the whole of its population, poorer states like Cambodia and Laos find it difficult to provide much needed healthcare to most of their citizenry without external assistance.

The rise of China opened up new opportunities for Southeast Asia as the region's northern neighbor embarked on projects designed to augment China's economic clout and build up China's stature as a global leader. Beijing's original "Go Out" strategy has been vastly expanded with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), along which we have seen greater Chinese engagement in measures to improve its public image, especially in Southeast Asia, a key investment destination for Chinese corporations. These public diplomacy ventures range from offering promising Southeast Asian candidates scholarships to study in China, to establishing Confucius Institutes to promote Chinese language and culture.

2. China's medical diplomacy

Medical diplomacy is an important component of China's public diplomacy strategy. China's medical diplomacy have been especially active in Southeast Asia since the turn of the century, and have received renewed state attention since the BRI's initiation. It is the goal of this paper to investigate this matter and asks the following questions regarding China's "medical diplomacy." What is medical diplomacy and what are its main components? Why is China expanding medical diplomacy in Southeast Asia? How are matters progressing and what are the results? I argue that medical diplomacy is a form of public diplomacy practiced by China and a number of countries to build goodwill with political elites and the general population in countries that lack the necessary healthcare resource and infrastructure to meet demands of its citizenry. Besides donating medicine, medical devices, and improving local healthcare infrastructure, China actively send trained medical personnel abroad to serve as distinct mediums of medical diplomacy. Currently, China stations its medical teams mostly in impoverished Southeast Asian states where healthcare capacity is limited.

In sum, the availability of Chinese medical aid largely depends on the level of bilateral relations, China's long-term interest in the country, and the host nation's degree of openness to Chinese aid. So far, Chinese medical diplomacy consists of short and long-term medical team presence, building local medical capacity, donating medicine and equipment, offering scholarship to local candidates to study public health in China, and providing medical service amid disaster rescue missions.

In Southeast Asia, the presence of Chinese medical teams can be categorized as long-term medical teams that normally operate in a particular region offering free consultation, training local doctors and nurses to operate Chinese donated equipment. The Chinese side is responsible for providing the pre-tour training, paying salary and related expenses, while the host nation provides medical facilities, medicine, medical equipment, housing, and security for the medical team. Having said that, Chinese medical teams would bring their own medicine and equipment in many cases when operating in countries lacking medical resources. Besides long-term efforts, there are short-term medical team presence such as the Tour of Light, which are month-long trips to treat cataract, offer vision check-ups, and donate optometry equipment. With little time and financial investments, Tour of Light can achieve enormous goodwill. In 2018, the Tour of Loving Hearts began, with the goal to provide free check-ups and heart surgeries to patients in neighboring Southeast Asian countries, especially school age children.

The Chinese Ministry of Health designs the strategy of public health cooperation. Actual implementation is delegated to specific provincial governments that would mobilize public health resources to complete the task. Provinces sharing land borders with Southeast Asia, such as Yunnan and Guangxi, are particularly active in such engagements. Public and private hospitals organize personnel to conduct these long and short-term tours. Funding comes from the government and government-linked foundations.

Besides civilian actors, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is also active in Southeast Asia. The Train of Peace, a PLA initiative first started in 2017 was an initiative to supply medical aid to Laos and showcase China's military medicine capability to Lao counterparts. Likewise, the Peace Ark is a PLA Navy venture that targeted nations in the Pacific and Pacific Rim with PLA doctors providing free consultation and donating medicine and equipment. Other than mainland Southeast Asian countries, the Peace Ark hospital ship paid a visit to Timor-Leste in 2017, where Chinese medical teams are already operating on the ground.

The goal of medical diplomacy is to increase goodwill and better China's image, which it currently lacks among Southeast Asian countries in comparison to competitors such as Japan

and the US. Even in countries where the leadership is considered pro-Beijing, public opinion surveys often show the people's uncertain feelings regarding China. Despite cordial official relations, when asked which country will "do the right thing" in contributing to global peace, security, prosperity and governance, 23.8 percent of Cambodian respondents chose the US, 53.5 percent chose Japan, and 17.9 percent opted for China. A November 2018 poll shows that Filipinos generally view China quite negatively despite improvements in bilateral relations. Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific, feelings about China are generally negative, at best mixed. In 2018, a shockwave swept across Southeast Asia after the Sri Lankan government handed Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease after failing to repay its debt to a state-owned Chinese firm, leading to alarms over BRI "debt traps." All in all, medical diplomacy is one element of China's strategy in developing ties with Southeast Asian states.

ASEAN and China, respectively the largest multination bloc and the largest economy in Asia, share close working relations on numerous fronts. As entities with much common interest, cooperation between ASEAN and China has strong influence over global trends. While China's powers expand, ASEAN is increasingly drawn towards China, including in collaborative areas. This report focuses on ASEAN-China cooperation in the public health arena. Namely, what kinds of cooperation mechanisms exist, how are they functioning so far, and what opportunities are there for future partnerships.

3. Cooperation Amid COVID-19

When engaging with counterparts of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, Chinese leaders have promised to upgrade public health cooperation through providing free medical service to citizens of those countries, increasing cooperation between medical professionals, and building new medical facilities. In the past years, we have seen the realization of promises in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste, countries with strong demand for improving public health infrastructure and have a welcoming attitude toward aid from China. Initiatives in other Southeast Asian states have been limited either due to adequate local healthcare infrastructure or the local government's unwelcoming position regarding Chinese medical aid. Yet the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has opened-up new avenues for cooperation.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, China and ASEAN has kept up engagement at numerous multilateral forums such as the ASEAN Plus Three Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development and ASEAN-China Health Ministers' Meeting, in addition to opening official information exchange channels between Chinese and ASEAN organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a milestone for China's medical diplomacy in Southeast Asia. While pre-COVID-19 medical diplomacy only had lasting influence in a few

countries, the Chinese government and private partners have seized upon the opportunity to expand its initiatives to more ASEAN states. China's aid to ASEAN countries started in mid-March, immediately after it began sending aid to Europe's epicenter Italy. Yet medical assistance amid COVID-19 is not unidirectional. Earlier this year, ASEAN countries donated medical equipment worth millions of dollars to China at the peak of its COVID-19 outbreak.

So far, the Chinese government has sent aid to Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Laos. The bulk of China's aid consists of medical supplies such as face masks, gloves, medical devices, and test kits. Take the Philippines as an example, China shipped some 100,000 test kits, 100,000 surgical masks, 10,000 N-95 masks and 10,000 sets of personal protective equipment to Manila on 21 March. Private actors such as the Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation donated two million masks, 150,000 test kits, 20,000 sets of protective gear and 20,000 face shields to the four countries. China's Zhejiang Hengyi Group, which operates a petrochemical and refinery plant in Brunei, has donated medical equipment to the Sultanate.

Besides personal protective equipment, the Chinese government has also dispatched medical teams to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, and Malaysia to assist local counterparts with combating COVID-19. Also, in the case of Thailand, the Chinese government promised that it will coordinate the export of anti-COVID-19 drugs to the Kingdom.

During the ASEAN Plus Three special summit on April 14 with APT heads of government, China's Premier Li Keqiang promised additional aid to ASEAN countries through grant assistance and commercial channels consisting of "100 million face masks, 10 million protective suits and other urgently needed medical supplies."

While China's stated intention is to return the favor of ASEAN aid to China during the early stages of the outbreak, when ASEAN governments, businesses, and civil society organizations sent large amounts of medical supplies to China, another motivating factor is surely China's desire to be seen as a benevolent power. Besides, aid to ASEAN states could also open up valuable new markets for China's pharmaceutical industry. Although China has seen its outreach backfire in Europe due to quality issues with its personal protective equipment, we have not seen similar incidents in Southeast Asia, even with Chinese government's recent order to expand export checks on medical equipment, which implies that the quality issue is not limited to one geographical region only.

While Chinese medical diplomacy to Southeast Asian states amid COVID-19 has just begun, we should note that current efforts are built upon past experiences before the onset of

COVID-19, when China's medical experts spent considerable amount of time working in ASEAN countries. Such worthwhile exposures provided valuable experiences with long-term benefits will be discussed in the subsequent pages on a country-by-country basis. In the past years, China's medical diplomacy has focused on four Southeast Asian countries-Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste. The following sub-sections will outline the context of Chinese medical diplomacy towards these states and detail current aid initiatives.

This research finds that ASEAN-China cooperation in the area of public health has been steadily developing in the past decade both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Several public health cooperation mechanisms exist between ASEAN and China in the form of information exchange platforms, disease monitoring networks, and ministerial level dialogues, etc. In addition, China also prioritizes medical diplomacy in its engagement with ASEAN partners and Chinese medical teams have embarked on frequent service tours to ASEAN states with the aim of building goodwill with the local populace and government elites.

ASEAN and China have worked closely together to overcome past and current epidemics and pandemics, including the ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). However, this report also identifies obstacles regarding the operation of ASEAN-China cooperation mechanisms.

4. Conclusion

In sum, this paper raises three policy recommendations. First of all, given the high risk associated with confronting global pandemics, Asian countries such as ASEAN Plus Three or APT (China, Japan, South Korea) should set-up a permanent, proactive response mechanism that can coordinate transnational epidemic and pandemic countermeasures. Secondly, ASEAN and China need to jointly design contingency plans for future pandemic and epidemic scenarios. Various models must be tested with both ASEAN and China shouldering responsibilities in regional countermeasures. Finally, it is necessary for ASEAN to dedicate more resources to understand China's medical diplomacy targeting specific ASEAN states. China sees medical diplomacy as an important tool when it comes to engaging ASEAN nations and some ASEAN countries have had much closer cooperation with China in public health compared to other regional states. Although ASEAN countries have welcomed China's public health aid, knowledge regarding such initiatives should be further organized and categorized. With the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, China has made medical diplomacy a foreign policy priority. Therefore, a database tracking China's medical diplomacy and other public diplomacy actions among Southeast Asian states would be beneficial to ASEAN-China cooperation.

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How can ASEAN-China relations weather the COVID-19 crisis?

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The COVID19 pandemic has disrupted from mid-February to mid-March 2020 the global supply chain of numerous manufactured goods and services, in particular food, medicine and personal protective equipment (PPE), when China was in lockdown. It was followed by a demand shock when the lockdown in the rest of Asia, Europe and Africa led to a collapse of the global economy. The end of the lockdown in China at the end of March, and the recovery in activity that followed, led gradually to an upturn in international trade and a decrease of supply shortages in the rest of the world. This can be seen in the resurgence of maritime trade in the third week of June 2020 in Southeast Asia, Europe and North America. However, the long-lasting consequences of countless bankruptcies, layoffs and loss of income, suggest that growth will not resume at best until 2022 or even 2023, if new waves of contagion are contained and mass vaccination campaigns start successfully in 2021.

During this dramatic episode, China appears as the country from which the crisis left and the country that may provide the solution. The world discovered both its dependence on China for the supply of PPE and of basic substances needed for the production of medicines, and the fragility of global value chains (GVC). Calls for a reduction of a perceived “overreliance on China, for the return to a more self-sufficient economy in critical supplies, such as food, medicines and PPE, were voiced in many countries.

Criticisms to overstretched GVCs led to a plea for a relocation of part of the activities involved, if not in all countries, at least at the regional level, where it seems that their supplies may be more manageable and robust. This renewed interest for proximity and nearness is pushing the world towards more regionalisation, which is perceived as an alternative to the excess of globalisation. In Europe, the failure of the EU to play a primary role in the midst of the crisis will probably and paradoxically contradict this growing interest for the region. The EU has a high level of political integration. It was expected that the European Union would be able to establish a common policy in the area of health, the supply of protective and care equipment, and for the movement of people at European level. It was not the case and the disappointment is great.

However, in Asia, the pandemic will probably strengthen regional institutions like ASEAN, which is an association of nation states based on voluntary cooperation whenever a consensus exists. For a regional grouping like ASEAN, it is natural that the nation state plays the leading role, and any additional measures taken by ASEAN appears as a bonus. ASEAN has developed a basic platform for health security cooperation since 1980 to fight previous epidemics like SARS, H1N1 and MERS-CoV, which have been expanded with the launch of the ASEAN Community in 2015, under the umbrella of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). These schemes of cooperation have not been very effective during the first five months of the COVID19 pandemic as countries prioritised national emergency actions to control the contagion at the national level. But they may be useful in the following months concerning health security coordination and cooperation mechanisms to minimise the costs of disruption and prepare the economic recovery. In this regard, ASEAN has made a series of non-binding recommendations to its member states to help maintaining their economic activities and keep the GVCs running. However, because of the intensity of the integration of ASEAN with Asia-Pacific and the rest of the world, these recommendations are more relevant at a wider level. This explains why ASEAN multiplied the bilateral meetings with the countries of the ASEAN+6 grouping, such as China in February, the USA in May, Australia in June, and then during the 37th ASEAN summit of November 2020 with all the countries involved.

Among the different partners, China plays a unique role. ASEAN and China have an annual travel flow of over 65 million visits and in countries where tourism is a critical industry like Thailand, Chinese tourists are by far the most numerous. Chinese students have also become critical for the financial sustainability of many universities in the Asia-Pacific region.

China is also the largest trading partner of ASEAN, ahead of the EU, the USA and Japan, and ASEAN is also China's second largest trading partner. In global value chains, China is traditionally the country of final assembly of parts and components produced in Southeast Asia, but the trade in final products is also growing. In terms of foreign direct investment, the EU, USA and Japan are still bigger players than China. However, Chinese investment is growing, propelled by the Belt and Road Initiative which has led to billions of Chinese investment and loans in transport and energy infrastructure in the region.

Finally, the signature of the new megaregional trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), at the last ASEAN+6 summit appears as a success for China and will refocus ever more Asia's economic ties in the region itself. In this

context, the COVID19 pandemic may further strengthen China's influence on global value chains in southeast Asia. There are two factors in this regard.

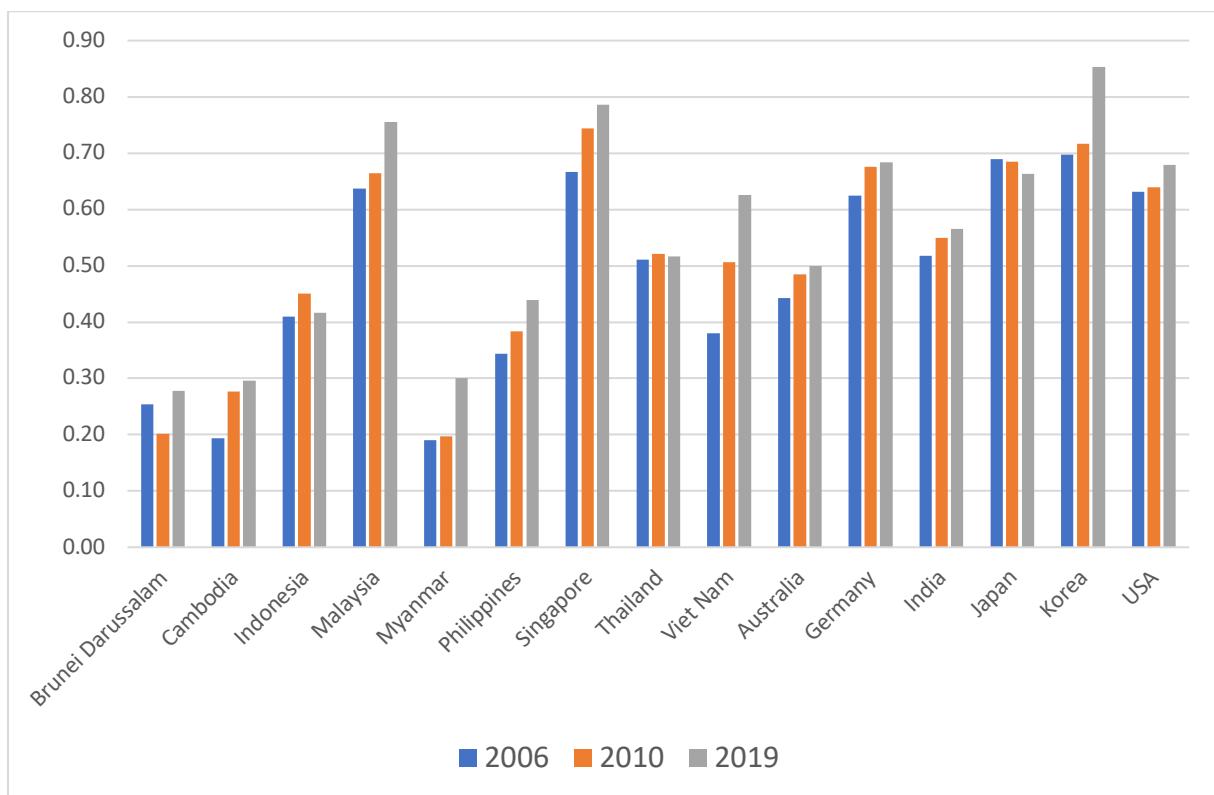
The first and primary reason is the pandemic itself. For Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, which have been ravaged by the virus, vaccines are seen as the only way out. Protection measures are difficult to implement and the lockdown is difficult to maintain for a long period as people, in particular poor people need to work. China is a leader in producing the first generation of COVID-19 vaccines, accounting for four of 10 vaccine candidates currently in Phase 3 clinical trials, and three of them vaccines do not require refrigeration at very low temperatures, which makes their use easier in developing countries. Indonesia has signed an agreement to trial vaccines from China and produce them locally. China has the manufacturing capacity to produce them in large scale and has promised to make Chinese-made vaccines a global public good and prioritise the developing world. This is materialised by China's decision to join the COVAX initiative backed by the World Health Organisation, which aims at distributing the vaccines equally between nations. This contrasts with the "America first" policy of the present US administration, which gives priority access to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to American citizens. The so-called "vaccine diplomacy" gives China a huge advantage in Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, on top of Indonesia, it has promised priority access to Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The supply of Chinese vaccines to Southeast Asia gives an impetus to the regionalisation of the supply chains. The other large powers in the region, like Japan or South Korea are not in a capacity to provide an alternative.

The second factor is the growing connectivity between China and ASEAN member states. This is particularly the case for maritime transport, which moves more than 80 per cent of global trade by volume. Maritime transport is key for the GVCs that links ASEAN with China and vice-versa. To see how the intensity of maritime transport has evolved in the region over the last decade, we have compiled the UNCTAD Data which measures the liner shipping bilateral connectivity index (LSBCI). This index indicates a country pair's integration level into global liner shipping networks¹. We compare the bilateral connectivity of China with ASEAN

¹The LSBCI is computed by taking the simple average of the five normalized components. As a consequence, the LSBCI can only take values between 0 (minimum) and 1 (maximum). Data accessed on 15 November 2020. The data and the detail of the methodology can be checked on: <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=96618>

(Figure 1) and Japan with ASEAN (Figure 2) over the period 2006-2019. We have also added the largest trading partner outside ASEAN for comparison.

Figure 1: China's Liner shipping bilateral connectivity index, 2006-2019.

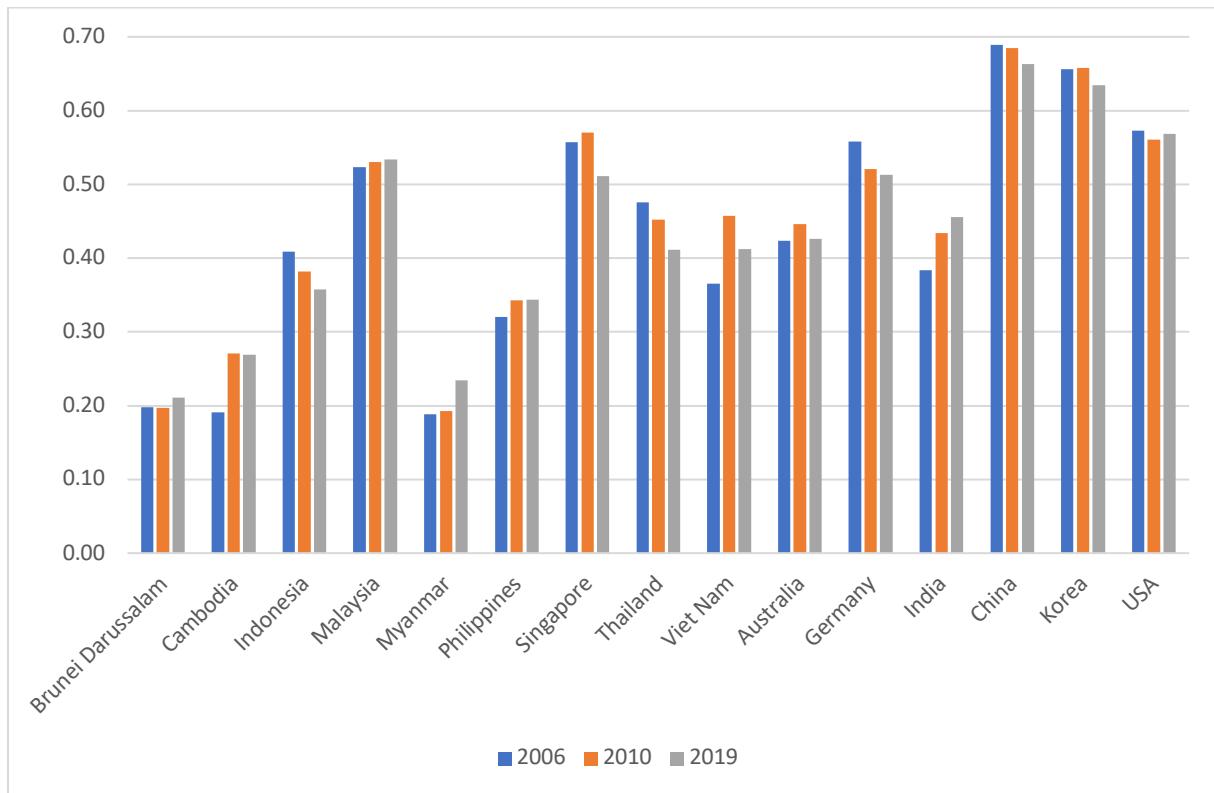


Source: Author's elaboration with UNCTAD data

Figure 1 shows that the bilateral connectivity of China has increased with all countries of ASEAN. The increase has been exceptionally high in the case of Vietnam, which probably reflects the relocation of many companies from China to Vietnam. These companies import resources and components from China to Vietnam where the final product is produced. Outside of ASEAN, it is interesting to observe that connectivity decreased only with Japan.

Figure 2 shows the recent evolution of Japan's bilateral connectivity with ASEAN and main trading partners outside ASEAN.

Figure 2: Japan's Liner shipping bilateral connectivity index, 2006-2019



Source: Author's elaboration with UNCTAD data

The picture is quite different. Within ASEAN, Japan's maritime bilateral connectivity has decreased with Indonesia, Singapore Thailand and Vietnam, and stagnating in most other countries. It only increased modestly with Myanmar. Outside ASEAN, it only increased with India, and decreased or stagnated with other main trading partners, China, Korea and the USA, although from a high level.

This contrasted evolution shows clearly that China had significantly strengthened its connectivity with ASEAN before the COVID19 pandemic. This intense bilateral maritime connectivity reflects the growing dominance of China on the regionalisation of Asian GVC. The factors presented above lead to believe that the pandemic will reinforce this dominance.

Conclusion

The regionalisation of Asian GVCs was underway before the pandemic. The long-lasting negative impact of the great recession of 2008-09 on global growth and trade, the rise of

economic nationalism and the shift from multilateral trade liberalism to trade protectionism, had already induce a relative de-globalisation epitomised by the Trade conflict between the USA and China and the debate, mostly in the USA, about a “decoupling” of the US economy from China. These factors had already prompted a trend towards the regionalisation of GVCs that the pandemic will accelerate. Regional GVCs are easier to manage because they can rely on institutions and trade and investment agreements. They seem better fitted to bring the resilience and robustness that is needed to avoid the disruptions of GVCs. This last point is contested by those who stress that shocks like natural disasters or pandemic may affect a whole region like East and Southeast Asia, in which case having the possibility to diversify suppliers' location outside the region may be the best way to minimize the risk of disruption. This may be the case if for instance Asia is struck by a regional shock such the nuclear disaster provoked by the Tsunami in Japan in 2011. However, in case of global shock, like present COVID19, it appears that the region is the best place to start the process of recovering. This does not prevent from maintaining links with the rest of the world. The evidence presented in Figure 1 reflects precisely this fact that a growing connectivity within Asia can be combined with a increasing connectivity with the rest of Asia.

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Concluding Remarks

The 4th NACAI International Symposium has produced a research report based on the theme “ASEAN- China Cooperation in the fight against COVID-19” and the scholars from ASEAN countries and China have contributed their insights. The research report shares the insight that a stronger ASEAN unity is needed in facing the non-traditional security issues and ASEAN cooperation with China plays one of the keys roles in overcoming the risk of pandemic. The scholars generally focus on the ASEAN-China cooperation in the public health arena through different aspects.

Some highlights of the scholars are summarized as follows: -

- COVID-19 highlights that states that has no resources to build up their health capacity to fight the pandemic find ASEAN as a multilateral instrument which can provide the cooperation with the regional power such as China. China can take this opportunity to gain the trust from the ASEAN countries.
- Beijing will focus ASEAN to promote its Health Silk Road (HSR) which provides the policy frames for China to strengthen and reform its foreign medical aid system, increase its influence in regional and global health governance, direct BRI investment to basic public health investment, and enlarge China’s role in the supplies of medical products and services.
- China will use bilateral as well as multilateral in negotiating concrete health cooperation projects with the ASEAN countries and in terms of trade and investment, Beijing will treat differently upon the ASEAN countries depending on their level of economic development.
- So far China has acted as a responsible global leader to gain trust from the ASEAN states through the ASEAN+3 framework. China’s role in the post pandemic ASEAN’s recovery is a major question for ASEAN countries.
- In pursuing its health resilience, ASEAN- should focuses on ASEAN-led mechanisms while working together with its partner -China.
- Asian countries such as ASEAN Plus Three or APT (China, Japan, South Korea) should set-up a permanent, proactive response mechanism that can coordinate transnational epidemic and pandemic countermeasures.

- ASEAN and China need to jointly design contingency plans for future pandemic and epidemic scenarios. Various models must be tested with both ASEAN and China shouldering responsibilities in regional countermeasures.
- It is necessary for ASEAN to dedicate more resources to understand China's medical diplomacy targeting specific ASEAN states

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