Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

ASEAN BULLETIN

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From the CAG Team

Is ASEAN's Economic Security Model Still Fit for Purpose?

By Denis Hew & Su-Hyun Lee

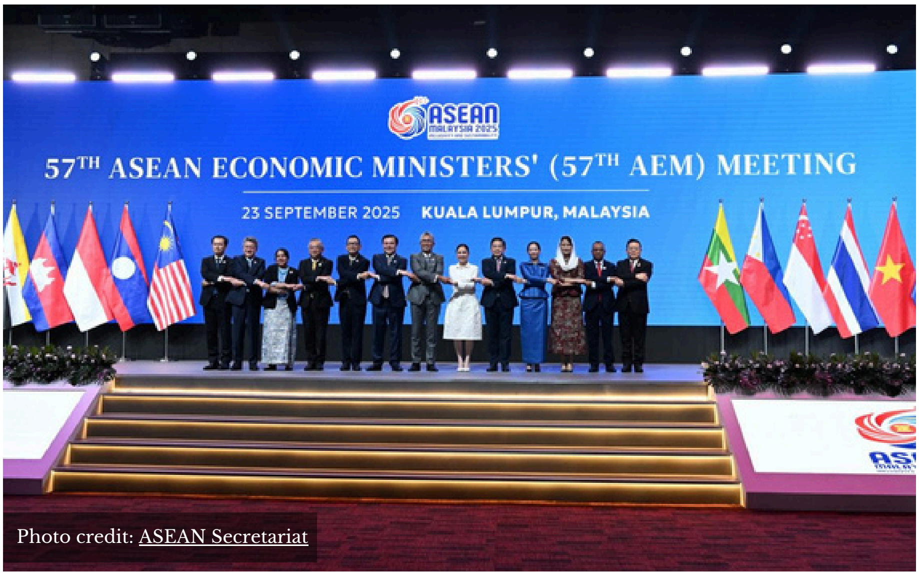

Photo credit: ASEAN Secretariat

It is tempting to view ASEAN's approach to economic security as a direct copy of Western neoliberal theory, which emphasises the positive association between economic interdependence and peace under multilateral frameworks. Nevertheless, ASEAN's approach is rather more home grown and far more pragmatic. In the 1960s and 1970s, Southeast Asian states faced distinctive realities of the region, including underdeveloped economies, weak institutions, limited industrial capacity, deep social divisions and, in some cases, active insurgencies. ASEAN and its member countries' pursuit of economic cooperation was intended not merely to promote trade and investment, but also to support domestic consolidation and generate

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politically sustainable growth, while promoting external stability. Regional peace, economic development, and regime durability were therefore closely intertwined.

ASEAN's approach to regional economic security was thus less an ideology than a pragmatic bargain. External market openness was combined with an internal emphasis on comprehensive security and often moderated by political and social considerations of domestic interests. Yet the region's success over many decades has also made institutional reforms more difficult, as long-standing institutions and practices inevitably acquire powerful defenders. Against a backdrop of global fragmentation, the question is whether ASEAN's economic security model remains fit for purpose.

Two key conditions underpinned this economic security arrangement. The first was an open, rules-based global economic system in which export-led growth offered a viable development strategy for ASEAN's predominantly small and medium-sized economies. The second was that the major powers, particularly the United States and China, despite their differences, did not require Southeast Asian economies to choose sides as conditions for closer regional economic cooperation and integration. Thus ASEAN's economic security model functioned fairly well under a permissive international environment that allowed political leaders in the region to utilise the gains from economic cooperation and integration for domestic political and socioeconomic priorities.

Both conditions that have effectively sustained ASEAN's economic security, however, are now weakening. Major powers increasingly view economic interdependence not simply as a source of mutual gain, but as a vulnerability to be managed or exploited. Rising global protectionism across countries and the expanding adoption of investment screening mechanisms (ISMs) against foreign firms from 21 to 52 economies over the past decade signal countries' changing views on the security implications of trade and investment.

More importantly, the intensifying US-China rivalry in trade and technology leaves Southeast Asia highly exposed to uncertainty stemming from geopolitical dynamics. Southeast Asia's economic growth has long relied on a bifurcated pattern of global supply chain integration, with China supplying many of its production inputs and the United States remaining a major market for final exports. What once offered the best of both worlds now places the region's long-established supply chains and production networks at the centre of strategic rivalry. A series of protectionist measures that the United States has imposed over the past few years is also exerting mounting pressure on Southeast Asian economies.

Starting from the "Liberation Day" reciprocal tariffs, the Trump administration has continued to add various protectionist measures and sanctions on Chinese technology, including rules-of-origin disputes, heightened transshipment scrutiny, stricter local content requirements, and trade coercion exercised through legalistic instruments, signalling that ASEAN economies should take sides with either of the two great powers. The US's coercive measures to discourage the region's connection with China in the global supply chain are also well represented by its recent conclusion of the Section 301 investigation on forced labour, which targets seven out of eleven ASEAN countries with tariffs of 10–12.5 percent. Beyond the US-China competition, the ongoing Middle East conflict and the Strait of Hormuz disruptions have raised serious energy security concerns for ASEAN countries that rely on Middle East oil and gas, exposing them to rising fuel costs, price volatility, and inflationary pressures. Ongoing geopolitical dynamics, including great power rivalry and regional conflicts, are now directly being transmitted into ASEAN's economic security model. Openness still matters, but it can no longer deliver the stability and prosperity it once promised.

ASEAN's characteristic response to external shocks is one of gradual institutional adaptation rather than transformation—a process often described as "institutional layering." Each crisis adds another distinctive framework, working groups, or funds to the existing architecture, while leaving the underlying governance framework largely intact. Financial crises produced regional safety nets; health emergencies generated new forms of cross-pillar coordination; and trade disruptions have accelerated existing integration initiatives rather than prompted fundamental institutional reform. Yet institutional layering has its limits, and ASEAN may be approaching them. The accumulation of mechanisms can produce an architecture that is dense but without the speed, depth, and decisiveness required for crisis management. Some regional initiatives have never been tested in practice. For example, the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), created after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, remains unused as a crisis-response mechanism. Stronger national buffers may have reduced the need to use it, but the more sobering conclusion is that its effectiveness in a major financial crisis remains uncertain.

Three constraints make this institutional shallowness a material risk. Many mechanisms are underfunded and dependent on voluntary contributions or external partners. Consensus-based decision-making is often too slow for fast-moving crises, pushing members towards national responses precisely when collective action is most needed.

ASEAN also lacks rigorous post-crisis reviews, limiting institutional learning and subsequent reforms. In a compound crisis involving financial stress, trade disruption, health emergencies, and climate shocks, the regional response risks being too small, too slow and too poorly coordinated to matter.

The solution is not to create more institutions, but to strengthen those already in place. ASEAN should fund them adequately, establish clear activation triggers and decision-making procedures in advance, and institutionalise post-crisis reviews so that adaptation becomes cumulative rather than repetitive.

The deeper shift concerns what ASEAN seeks to secure. ASEAN's economic security model has traditionally prioritised the state, assuming that human welfare would follow from growth. That assumption is increasingly untenable as the costs of geoeconomic fragmentation, rapid technological transformation and automation as well as climate disruption fall unevenly across different communities. A genuinely people-centred economic security agenda must therefore treat adjustment support, skills development and social protection as core objectives, while fostering closer cooperation among governments, business and civil society.

ASEAN must also confront widening development gaps among its member states, particularly following Timor-Leste's accession. While more capable economies can absorb external shocks, the most vulnerable cannot. If these gaps widen, ASEAN risks becoming a multi-tier grouping, undermining the effectiveness of regional cooperation and integration.

The case for rethinking ASEAN's existing economic security model is compelling. But the real constraint is political will, and no regional framework can fix this. ASEAN's economic security model remains relevant but relevance is not enough. It must now be recalibrated or risk being overtaken by the very challenge it was designed to manage.

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From the CAG Team

A Haven for Growth, But for Pollution Too? ASEAN and the Pollution Haven Debate

By Abigail E. Andrada

Photo credit: istock/Chhinapong

As production networks diversify away from China, ASEAN is increasingly emerging as the next major manufacturing hub, particularly for electronics and semiconductors, automotive and electric vehicles, machinery, textiles, and solar manufacturing. In 2023, roughly one-third of China's 76 billion USD in outbound manufacturing FDI went to Southeast Asia. This shift brings significant economic benefits to ASEAN countries, as firms relocate their production to more cost-competitive destinations across the region. However, it may also create environmental risks if more pollution-intensive activities move into countries with weaker enforcement of environmental regulations.

This risk is tied to the same factors that make the region attractive for manufacturing, such as lower labour and production costs. Despite being a key driver of industrial growth, the diversification towards Southeast Asia has been associated with higher greenhouse-gas emissions and air pollution, which contributes to climate change, thus raising concern over who bears the environmental costs of global production.

To better understand this concern, it is useful to distinguish between the pollution haven effect and the pollution haven hypothesis. The pollution haven effect occurs when firms in pollution-intensive industries shift production from countries with stricter environmental regulations to take advantage of lower compliance costs. By contrast, the pollution haven hypothesis makes a broader macroeconomic claim: that free trade will continuously drive pollution-intensive industries to relocate, shaping which industries countries specialise in based on the stringency of their environmental rules. As such, countries with less stringent regulations are assumed to become more competitive in pollution-intensive industries, and vice versa.

With this distinction, ASEAN's experience likely reflects pollution haven effects rather than a broader pollution haven hypothesis. Uneven findings across sectors and Southeast Asian countries indicate that while weaker environmental regulations may influence some relocation decisions, they are not the main determinant of ASEAN's overall industrial specialisation. Environmental regulation matters, but only as part of a broader set of determinants. ASEAN's role in pollution-intensive production is also shaped by structural factors such as industrial capacity, production costs, FDI, and uneven enforcement of regulations across member states.

Assessing the Pollution Haven Hypothesis in the ASEAN Context

The main concern is not only whether pollution-intensive industries have shifted production to ASEAN to exploit weaker environmental regulations, but also whether differences in environmental rules help explain why the region specialises in those activities. This sets a higher bar than isolated pollution haven effects. It requires evidence of a consistent pattern in which weaker environmental regulations give countries a comparative advantage in pollution-intensive production, systematically linking to ASEAN's pattern of industrial specialisation. However, in ASEAN, the evidence for the pollution haven hypothesis remains incomplete.

At the country level, evidence from five ASEAN member states suggests that pollution haven effects are concentrated in specific country contexts rather than showing a uniform regional pattern. A study on pollution-intensive goods found that FDI significantly increases pollution-intensive exports in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, but not in the Philippines and Singapore. This difference partly reflects the sector-specific nature of FDI: foreign investment raises exports in some pollution-intensive industries but has negative or insignificant effects in others. These economies can also serve as competitive alternatives to China in some pollution-intensive sectors such as non-metallic mineral products and industrial chemicals.

Differences in environmental policy may contribute to this shift. For example, China's national emissions trading system (ETS) has expanded to regulate more than 3,300 companies, spanning power generation, steel, cement, and aluminium. By contrast, Indonesia's mandatory ETS remains concentrated in the power sector, while Thailand's national ETS is still under development. Such differences can affect the relative cost of pollution-intensive production and create incentives for firms to consider alternative locations in Southeast Asia. Yet the uneven country- and sector-level findings indicate that regulatory differences alone do not systematically determine industrial specialisation across ASEAN. Instead, the evidence points to pollution haven effects in particular countries and industries rather than a region-wide pollution haven hypothesis.

At the regional level, a broader look at industrial relocation in Southeast Asia supports a more cautious interpretation. Based on existing evidence from the region, rising emissions are not simply the result of weak environmental regulation. Patterns of industrial relocation in Southeast Asia also reflect other forces, including productivity growth and changes in emission intensity. While rising pollution burdens are consistent with pollution haven pressures, they do not by themselves indicate that weak environmental regulation is the main basis of ASEAN's comparative advantage.

At the firm level, evidence also implies that the pollution haven story is not straightforward. A case study of the Philippines shows that foreign firms are not drawn by weak environmental regulation. Many Japanese manufacturing Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) in the Philippines operated above local requirements, implying that stricter Philippine environmental rules would be unlikely to deter these types of investment. Rather, this hints at the possibility of a pollution halo effect, wherein foreign investors bring cleaner practices and stronger management systems. Although broader pollution haven pressures may still exist across ASEAN, the evidence shows that behaviour across firms is not uniform.

Another reason for caution is that relocating pollution-intensive production does not sufficiently explain changes in emissions. Trade affects the environment in several ways: a scale effect (larger production tends to increase emissions), a composition effect (shifts in the mix of industries can raise or lower them), and a technique effect (cleaner technologies can reduce environmental damage). As a result, rising pollution in a host economy cannot automatically be attributed to regulatory arbitrage. Much of the scholarship finds that the industrial structure often has limited effects, while technology effects matter more.

Environmental outcomes therefore depend not only on the relocation of pollution-intensive industries, but also on changes within industries, such as emission intensity, energy use, productivity, and firm behaviour.

Overall, regional findings do not clearly support the pollution haven hypothesis. Variations across countries, sectors, and firms are too great for regulatory stringency alone to explain the region's role in pollution-intensive production. This distinction matters because weak regulations are only one factor among many in investment decisions. ASEAN countries have the space and capacity to strengthen environmental enforcement while pursuing manufacturing growth.

Policy Implications for ASEAN

Although pollution haven effects in ASEAN are uneven and localised, they still warrant a policy response. While the "grow first, clean up later" approach may seem practical, there is little reason to support it: pollution-intensive industries are not a desirable foundation for growth. Instead, ASEAN should pursue cleaner industrial development by strengthening environmental governance, enforcing standards more effectively, and promoting the adoption of clean technologies.

ASEAN also needs a more differentiated policy approach to reflect where each economy stands in the industrialisation process. While some countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand are already attracting more pollution-intensive FDI and require stronger monitoring and enforcement practices, others, like Cambodia and Lao PDR, which are still building their industrial base, have an opportunity to establish stronger environmental guidelines. Although targeted national approaches are necessary, they must be paired with regional coordination. Narrowing regulatory gaps across member states through stronger environmental standards, closer coordination, and greener investment regulations would help ASEAN compete for manufacturing without undermining environmental protection.

Ms Abigail Andrada was an intern at the Centre on Asia and Globalisation. She graduated with a master's degree in Public Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on international trade and regional integration.

NEWS ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY

News Articles

ASEAN naval chiefs strengthen maritime security cooperation at Thailand meeting

Indonesia Business Post, August 21

ASEAN naval chiefs are strengthening maritime security cooperation and trust through greater coordination, dialogue and naval diplomacy.

Min Aung Hlaing Vows to Serve Russia's Interests in SE Asia

The Irrawaddy, August 19

After a visit to Russia, Myanmar coup leader Min Aung Hlaing has told Russian President Vladimir Putin that Myanmar will always remain Russia's trusted ally in Southeast Asia and is "ready" to serve its interests.

Thailand hosts Myanmar military chief, deepening bilateral ties

Nikkei Asia, August 19

Thailand hosted Myanmar's military-backed leader Min Aung Hlaing for his first official visit as civilian president, signaling Bangkok's push to normalise relations and deepen cooperation despite international criticism of Myanmar's junta.

Philippine defence chief rejects China criticism, calls response a 'squid tactic'

Reuters, August 15

The Philippines is pushing back more forcefully against China, with its defence chief accusing Beijing of using disinformation and coercive tactics to deflect attention from disputes over law enforcement and bilateral tensions.

Why US Indo-Pacific 'burden sharing' risks deepening polarisation and big power rivalry

South China Morning Post, August 15

The US push for greater Indo-Pacific burden-sharing could deepen regional polarisation by pressuring countries to align more closely with Washington amid US-China rivalry.

Selected Commentaries & Publications

Should Asia be concerned that Washington dropped 'Indo' from the US Indo-Pacific Command?

CNA, August 20

By Sinderpal Singh, Assistant Director and Coordinator of the South Asia Programme and Regional Security Architecture Programme at RSIS, NTU.

The US shift back to "Pacific Command" signals a narrower focus on East Asia, raising questions for Southeast Asia about the future of the broader Indo-Pacific strategy.

Thailand's Myanmar Strategy: Restoring Access, Recalibrating Leverage

ORF, August 20

By Sreeparna Banerjee, Associate Fellow in the Strategic Studies Programme and Tiyasa Basu Das, Research Intern at ORF.

Thailand is recalibrating its Myanmar policy by restoring direct engagement to protect its strategic interests while using its access and influence as leverage.

Trump's South Korea Move Fuels Growing Fears of U.S. Retreat From Asia

CFR, August 19

By Joshua Kurlantzick, Senior Fellow for Southeast Asia and South Asia at CFR

Trump's rollback of US-South Korea military exercises is fuelling fears of US retreat from Asia.

NEWS ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY

News Articles

US swaps ideology for 'flexible realism' and hard deterrence in Southeast Asia

South China Morning Post, August 11

The US is shifting toward pragmatic defence cooperation and stronger deterrence in Southeast Asia, asking regional partners to contribute more to security.

Myanmar pushes back on ASEAN envoy and call to free Suu Kyi

The Straits Times, August 10

Myanmar has rejected ASEAN's call for its special envoy to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and for her unconditional release, arguing that the envoy is no **longer necessary after its disputed election.**

Cambodia, U.S. seek to jointly combat online scam centers

Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, August 8

Cambodia and the US are strengthening cooperation to combat online scam centres, reflecting growing security engagement around transnational crime.

Myanmar's ties with ASEAN remain strained despite signs of renewed engagement

CNA, July 24

Engagement has remained cautious, with ASEAN gradually reopening dialogue with Myanmar while withholding full political recognition and continuing to press the junta to implement the Five-Point Consensus.

Rubio reassures Asian allies they're not being abandoned as top diplomats meet

Reuters, July 23

Top diplomats gathered in Manila amid rising US-China tensions, with the US reassuring Asian allies of its commitment to the region while ASEAN sought to navigate competing geopolitical pressures.

Selected Commentaries & Publications

Calibrating the Singapore-US Security Anchor for a New Era: An American View

Fulcrum, August 13

By David Santoro, President and CEO of the Hawaii-based Pacific Forum

As the US shifts toward a more transactional approach in the Indo-Pacific, Singapore's self-reliant, self-funded defence model positions it well to deepen the Singapore-US security relationship.

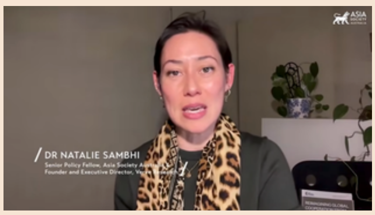
Southeast Asian states, defence cooperation and geopolitical balancing

IISS, May 30

By Evan A. Laksmana, Shangri-La Dialogue Senior Fellow for Southeast Asian Security and Defence, and Editor, Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment

Southeast Asian states are expanding defence cooperation and partnerships with external powers to strengthen their security while maintaining strategic flexibility and avoiding alignment with either the US or China.

Media Discussions



If China and the U.S. Clash Over Taiwan: How Would Southeast Asia Respond? | Virtual Roundtable

Asia Society, July 23

NEWS ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

News Articles

ASEAN Moves Closer to a Landmark $2 Trillion Dollar Economy Agreement

Thailand Business News, August 20

ASEAN is nearing agreement on the Digital Economy Framework Agreement, which aims to harmonise digital-trade rules, facilitate cross-border data flows, and integrate the region's digital economy.

AI Boom and Energy Shocks See Growth in Southeast Asia Bifurcate

Bloomberg, August 18

"The global AI investment boom has been stronger than expected," the Ministry of Trade and Industry said in a statement. "For the rest of the year, a further acceleration in AI-related capital expenditure is expected to lift the growth prospects of economies plugged into the global technology value chain."

ASEAN's next competitive advantage isn't cheap labour. It's trust

World Economic Forum, August 18

ASEAN's next competitive advantage will increasingly depend on institutional trust, regulatory predictability and good governance, which can encourage long-term investment, adopt new technologies, and build higher-value operations in the region.

IBM: ASEAN data breach costs hit record US$4.12 million as AI attacks rise

CRN, August 17

The average cost of a data breach for organisations across ASEAN reached 4.12 million USD in 2026, the highest level recorded in the region.

Southeast Asia remains 'a clear priority' despite concerns over Trump tariffs: US envoy to ASEAN

CNA, August 17

ASEAN economies are urged to strengthen integration and resilience amid global uncertainty.

Selected Commentaries & Publications

The Geoeconomic Statecraft of Small and Middle Powers amid Great-Power Rivalry: Singapore's Leverage and Challenges

Asia Policy, July 29

By Chin-Hao Huang, Director of CAG and Associate Professor at LKYSPP, NUS, and Scarlet Xu Ni and Mae Chow, Research Assistants at CAG, LKYSPP, NUS.

The article argues that Singapore uses trade agreements, regional institutions and strategic economic networks to turn its structural vulnerabilities into leverage, preserving strategic autonomy amid US-China rivalry.

China's manufacturing boom moves the goalposts for Southeast Asian development

East Asia Forum, July 27

By Ian Coxhead, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization.

China's manufacturing dominance is raising the bar for Southeast Asian development, forcing ASEAN economies to move beyond low-cost manufacturing and pursue greater productivity, technological upgrading and domestic capabilities to remain competitive.

NEWS ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

News Articles

Singapore may be expected to tighten measures after US 'transhipment scam' report: economists
The Business Times, August 16
"Singapore may be asked to tighten measures to enforce rules of origin and step up checks," Chua Hak Bin, regional co-head of Maybank's macro research team, said in response to queries from The Business Times.

China-Asean trade ties deepen as supply chains, connectivity and businesses strengthen
The Star, August 16
Latest data from Nanning Customs show Guangxi's trade with ASEAN reached 248.21 billion yuan (36.6 billion USD) in the first seven months of 2026, up 2.5 percent year on year and a record for this period.

US flags 40 economies, including Singapore, in China's 'shadow transshipment network'
The Straits Times, August 14
Southeast Asian economies, including Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia, have been identified by the US as part of a "shadow transshipment network" allegedly used to evade US tariffs on Chinese goods.

Southeast Asia remains 'a clear priority' despite concerns over Trump tariffs: US envoy to ASEAN
CNA, August 12
ASEAN economies are urged to strengthen integration and resilience amid global uncertainty, to sustain growth.

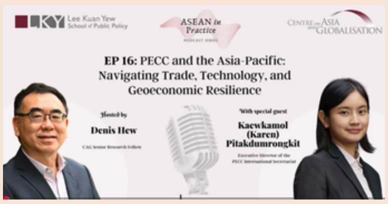
Thailand pushes EU free trade to reduce US reliance
The Straits Times, June 10
Thailand is accelerating negotiations for a free-trade agreement with the EU to diversify its export markets and reduce reliance on the US amid growing trade uncertainty, while trying to catch up with Southeast Asian neighbours that already have preferential access to the European market.

Selected Commentaries & Publications

Small States, Big Stakes: ASEAN's Narrowing Space for Collective Agency
Fulcrum, July 13
By Denis Hew, Senior Research Fellow at CAG, LKYSPP, NUS.
ASEAN's collective agency is narrowing as intensifying US-China rivalry and economic coercion constrain its traditional strategic hedging, making deeper regional integration and stronger institutions increasingly important for preserving ASEAN's influence.

ASEAN's critical minerals and industrial-upgrade dilemma
IISS, June 20
By Wakana Asano, Research Associate, API Takano Fellowship.
While Southeast Asia's abundant critical mineral resources provide it with significant opportunity to become a high-value manufacturing hub, financial constraints and external dependencies make this challenging.

Media Discussions



[AIP] PECC and the Asia Pacific: Navigating Trade, Technology, and Geoeconomic Resilience
CAG, LKYSPP, August 7

NEWS ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

News Articles

How Southeast Asia is Building its Own Gaming Identity

Branding in Asia, August 17

Southeast Asia is developing a distinct gaming identity, increasingly drawing on the region's diverse cultures and experiences to produce games that resonate both locally and globally.

Selangor Fashion Week International 2026 unites fashion, heritage, culture and tourism with Asean and China

The Star, August 14

Selangor Fashion Week International 2026 welcomes participants and stakeholders from across Malaysia, Asean and China, creating opportunities for tourism promotion, education, cultural exchange, business networking and people-to-people connectivity.

Japan and Southeast Asia: Deepening Trust and Strengthening People-to-People Exchanges - The Shared Future of Asia and Japan

The Nation, August 10

Relations between Japan and Southeast Asia are growing ever closer. People-to-people exchanges are becoming increasingly active, while interest in each other's cultures continues to grow.

Social media and digital culture between Asean and China

The Star, August 3

Social media is reshaping ASEAN–China cultural exchange by enabling participatory, cross-border digital communities that increasingly influence how cultural identities, traditions and practices are created and understood.

Selected Commentaries & Publications

ASEAN needs a story that young people can own

The Jakarta Post, August 15

By Lee Yoong Yoong, ASEAN Secretariat community affairs directorate director.

ASEAN needs to make regional cooperation more meaningful and relatable to younger generations by giving them a stronger sense of communal identity.

Dear You and the Demand for Identity

RSIS Commentary, August 12

By Zhou Jinquan, a Research Assistant at the Institute of Policy Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Dear You highlights how unmet needs for cultural identity and belonging can create openings for foreign influence, underscoring the importance of underpinning societal resilience through inclusive, locally rooted cultural narratives.

Art, Surveillance, and the Politics of Memory in Southeast Asia

The Diplomat, August 11

By Deepthy Menon, a Strategy and Narratives Facilitator at Urgent Action Fund Asia and Pacific.

Artists and cultural spaces in Southeast Asia face growing surveillance and moral policing, showing how control over art and public memory can shape what societies are allowed to remember, express, and debate.

NEWS ARTICLES & COMMENTARIES

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

News Articles

Cambodia Backs Malaysia's ASEAN Social Media Safety Guidelines

Khmer Times, June 25

Cambodia has expressed strong support for Malaysia's initiative to develop regional guidelines on the safe and responsible use of social media, calling for closer ASEAN cooperation to tackle emerging digital threats.

More than manufacturing: Vietnam has hopes to become Asia's next cultural powerhouse

Fortune, June 16

Vietnam is positioning its rapidly growing pop culture and creative industries as a new source of economic growth and regional soft power.

'Where do we go now?': Malaysia's under-16 social media ban leaves teens detached and displaced

The Straits Times, June 15

Malaysia has barred children under 16 from registering or maintaining accounts on major social media platforms.

Dear You-the Chinese migration film igniting a propaganda debate in Southeast Asia

South China Morning Post, June 14

China's hit Teochew-language film Dear You has sparked debate across Southeast Asia over whether its portrayal of Chinese migration and diaspora identity is a form of Chinese propaganda and soft power.

The haze in Southeast Asia clouds more than the sky

Lowy Institute, May 19

Climate change will intensify Southeast Asia's fire risk, but without stronger governance, accountability, and incentives, haze will remain a recurring regional failure of political and economic governance.

Selected Commentaries & Publications

Safeguarding Children Online: Beyond Singapore's Social Media Ban Debate

The Diplomat, July 31

By Xue Zhang, Research Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS, NTU and Qiaolei Jiang, Professor and Vice Dean at the School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University, China.

Banning social media use may be the simplest solution, but it is not necessarily the optimal one.

The Lure and Lore of Southeast Asia: Understanding the Dynamics of Soft Power

Fulcrum, May 28

By Irna Nurlina, a Fellow of the Regional Social and Cultural Studies Programme and the Indonesia Studies Programme at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

Greater ASEAN integration could strengthen a more collective form of regional soft power.

Media Discussions

Who gets to decide what beauty means? | Real Stories from Asia

CAG, LKYSPP, February 24

Our team

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OTHER CAG PUBLICATIONS

- [ASEAN in Practice Podcast Series] PECC and the Asia Pacific: Navigating trade, Technology, and Geoeconomic Resilience (Centre on Asia and Globalisation, August 11, 2026)

- [Counterpoint Indo-Pacific] AI in the Indo-Pacific: A Path to Gains or Instability? (Centre on Asia and Globalisation, August 5, 2026)

- Chin-Hao Huang, Scarlet Xu Ni and Mae Chow, "The Geoeconomic Statecraft of Small and Middle Powers amid Great power Rivalry: Singapore's Leverage and Challenges" (Asia Policy, 2026).

- Mae Chow and Sarah Teo, "ASEAN and the Evolving Maritime Order in Southeast Asia: Limits and Possibilities," in *Regional Maritime Security Outlook: The Evolving Maritime Order*, ed. Geoffrey Till, Jane Chan Git Yin, and Chong De Xian (World Scientific Publishing, 2026), 95-104.

- [Counterpoint Southeast Asia] Can Southeast Asia Safeguard Strategic Autonomy in Critical Minerals as US-China Rivalry Deepens? (Centre on Asia and Globalisation, July 14, 2026)

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