



INTRODUCTION

The Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established based on Bangkok Declaration on 8 August 1967, initiated by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The regional institution has expanded to ten countries in mainland and maritime Southeast Asia with the admission of Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Myanmar and Laos in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999. After more than a half century of its foundation, ASEAN has expanded widening and deepening amidst a great variety of challenges be it political, security, economic, social and cultural, as well as climate changes and the pandemic of Covid-19. Currently, the institution has become the most developed region institution in the world after the European Union (EU) and determined to drive its future's plan through the ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision.

This book aims to provide to academics, professors, and students from Mexico and Latin America, with an international, history, economy, and legal general vision about ASEAN, about ASEAN, and the important countries that integrate it. At the same time, it discusses the relevance of ASEAN in the new global order, including the role of this regional institution in the



new conformation of East Asia and Asia Pacific, its role in the framework of the new performance of China and its One Belt One Road (BRI) initiative, in the line of Indo Pacific, and in the new reality of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). During the writing process of this book, the pandemic of Covid-19 hits all countries in the world; it does not only change the way we live but also provides huge challenge to international relations and multilateralism. These new realities in the 21st century have encouraged us to observe and assess ASEAN's visions and strengths as it dealt with internal and external challenges. The former refers to regional dynamics created by each of ASEAN countries and relevant actors in the area whereas the latter denotes to competitive relations among the major powers in the region namely USA, China, India, Japan, etc.

It is a general knowledge that one of the most fundamental phenomenon in the early of 21st century is the rise of China and its consequences to regional and global order. An ancient power whose glory dates back to millenniums ago, China has developed strong economy and advanced technology that allow the state to emerge significantly as regional and global power that challenges the post-World War 2 international order. Under President Xi Jinping, China has taken a bold foreign policy to strengthen its international stand and to pursue its global interests by launching the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013.¹ The BRI is a -trans-continental venture as China projects its power

¹ Previously known as One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative.

INTRODUCTION

globally but this endeavor has not been clearly understood by the West -and other countries- as observed by Oropeza:

“The new initiative One Belt One Road (OBOR), or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), One Integration, One Path, The New Silk Road, etc., constitutes, in fact, the second great opening of China. While in 1978 its way out was to the Pacific, for being a natural evolution towards its geographic strength and of the use of the infrastructure that had survived the economic collapse of its communist phase; the BRI, or its opening towards its opposite axis, namely, towards Central Asia, Asia Minor, North Africa and the Countries of its western border (more than 70 countries), represents a bold measure of innumerable interpretations that the West has not fully understood, not has it constructed an adequate interpretation, or even worse, tried to elaborate a response of the BRI’s magnitude...

With the BRI proposal or the new Silk Road, ..., China communicates to the world without any reservation its clear desire to be the global leader of the 21st century in 2049, 100 years after the triumph of its revolution.” (Oropeza, 2020, pp. 19-20).

This observation shared by scholars and country-leaders around the world when they watched the ways the Chinese had implemented two BRI’s schemes, namely the new Silk Road for the inland route from Western China to Southern Europe and the 21st Maritime Silk Road for oceanic lane from Eastern China to the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. The BRI have received supports and oppositions -from stake holders in involved countries- along the way.

As the closest China’s neighbors in East Asia, ASEAN members countries have affected -be it positively, be it negatively- by the rise of China and the BRI launch. All ten ASEAN members countries involve in the BRI as this initiative has apparently treated as cooperative schemes under ASEAN-China Dialogue partnership. However, taking part in the BRI is not easy for ASEAN members countries due to competitive nature of China and the US -and its alliances- in the region. AS in other parts of the world, Southeast Asia has become one of -if not the- main ground of China-US geopolitical competition. The regional countries have long known that their strategic location and abundant natural resources are very attractive to extra-regional major powers that have fought for domination in the region for centuries. Indeed, one of the underlying reasons that encouraged the five regional countries to established ASEAN in 1967 is to stabilize the region from -among other- major powers’ competition and to develop collective ownership over their region. History has shown that great powers have mixed impacts on

INTRODUCTION

ASEAN regionalism (Fitriani, 2017) as ASEAN unity or centrality does not always bring benefit for those extra regional powers. It's especially necessary to take into account this context, in analyzing BRI under China bilateral relations with each of ASEAN members states or China-ASEAN interactions.

This book was being written when the pandemic of Covid-19 started so some dynamics of ASEAN-China relations during the pandemic were captured in addition to the focus on ASEAN's roles and its relations with China's BRI. ASEAN countries were among the first victim of the Covid-19 and the pandemic has put pressures so much on their capability to provide health service and medication to their people. The pandemic has not only tested ASEAN solidarity to support each other but also challenged ASEAN centrality to respond to China-US continuing tensions in the South China Sea amid the health emergency. China has played important international roles during the pandemic as it tried to lead international community's response to the global health challenges. Together with Japan and Korea under the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) scheme, China involved significantly in the Special APT -online-Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 led by Vietnam on 14 April 2020. Time will tell whether the pandemic brings ASEAN closer to China or *vice-versa* through the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), adopted at the 37th ASEAN Summit in November 2020.

This investigation is structured to show ASEAN's relevance in contemporary world through four levels of analyses. The first is a global and regional level in which ASEAN is observed. The second is states level of analysis by assessing individual ASEAN members states and their relations with ASEAN. The third is inter-regional level of analysis by observing ASEAN relations under Latin America glance. The fourth is a general introduction to the ASEAN regulatory legal framework. We are lucky that authors from respective countries were able to engage in this book writing and their contributions are the strength of this book as they are able to provide insights from their respective countries

In relation to the above, the book is divided into four Chapters. Chapter one *The Role of the Southeast Asian Nations and the New Global Order* develop the ASEAN scheme within the framework of the new global scenario and its relationship and geopolitical importance with global trends. It is composed by eight dissertations: Arturo Oropeza García (Mexico) explains the Role of Chinese History and Culture in East and Southeast Asia and the millenarian Chinese civilization as a significant part of its current reality; Michael G. Plummer (USA) contributes to the study of the US-ASEAN economic relationship; Nie Wenjuan (China) analyzes China's engagement with ASEAN countries in different periods as well as the role of the RCEP and BRI; professors Fusanori Iwasaki, Masahito Ambashi, and Hidetoshi Nishimura

INTRODUCTION

(Japan) explains how Japan has developed a significant partnership with ASEAN as well as how ASEAN has played a pivotal role in the mega-regional development; Preeti Saran (India) offers a perspective from India's ancient links with the region go back centuries and how the cultural diffusion between India and Southeast Asia essentially came through trade and commerce; Tham Siew Yean (Malaysia) study the ASEAN response to the globalization and the changing dynamics in East Asia; Fithra Faisal Hastiadi (Indonesia) attend to economic aspects by concentrating on ASEAN engagement with key dialogue partners in the post-pandemic recovery through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Chapter two, *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). A Brief Perspective*, provides a state level analysis on ASEAN members countries that includes the internal relevance of each of them, the experiences, challenges and strengths with the development of the region in the 21st century. Consecutively, this part presents eleven papers from ten different countries scholars: on Brunei by Abdul Hai Julay; on Cambodia by Kosal Path; on Indonesia by Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad; on Laos by Vanxay Sayavong; on Malaysia by Jatswan S. Sidhu and Nurliana Kamaruddin as well as by Siti Darwinda binti Mohamed Pero and Muhammad Ali Ridha bin Norman; on Myanmar by Chaw Chaw Sein and Oak Soe San, on the Philippines by Aries A. Arugay, on Singapore by Tai Wei Lim, on Thailand by Kittti Prasirtsuk and Sunida Aroonpipat, and finally on Vietnam by Le Thuy Linh.

These eleven opinions which come from 15 of the prominent academics from ASEAN countries, offer us the historical, international and economic explanation of the reality of a region that for a long time has remained far from the Latin American academic vision. In fact, one of the attributes of this book is that academics from the ten ASEAN countries are present.

Chapter three *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations. A Latin American Vision* offers a regional glance in relation to ASEAN and the Southeast Asia trough three studies: Francisco Javier Haro Navejas (Mexico) offers an analytical approach to the China's multilateral relations with ASEAN and the role of China as a global power; Carlos Moneta (Argentina) writes about the importance that the formalization in East Asia of the "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership" (RCEP) might achieve for Latin America in the present and future dealings with Southeast and Pacific Asia; Sebastian Herreros (Chile) studies the regions of Latin America and ASEAN in demographic and economic terms and examines their institutional arrangements for economic integration and the current and potential linkages with Latin America.

Finally, in Chapter four, *General Legal Framework of the ASEAN Region*, presents as an introduction to the ASEAN regulatory legal framework

INTRODUCTION

through three papers: Andy Omara aims to understand the current regulatory legal framework of the ten country members of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and their possible ties of legal interconnection of regional integration. A particular study on Indonesian Law is put forward by Herliana and the chapter on Cambodia legal system by Phalthy Hap.

This project was made within the framework of the multiple inconveniences and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has represented in its different modalities, which in addition to administrative delays in the preparation of each of the stages of the publishing process. Also this pandemic caused the contagion of some of our authors, as well as the tragic death of some relatives or close friends of whom we have participated in this book.

Therefore, the coordinators of this book, Doctors Evi Fitriani and Arturo Oropeza García, as well as the institutions they represent, the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Indonesia (UI) and the Institute of Legal Research of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (IIJ, UNAM), deeply thank each and every one of the authors for their professional commitment by having participated with their respective papers to the integration of this work of this important international academic project in which 31 authors from 17 countries have participated.

Finally, we hope that the result of this collective academic effort on one of the most dynamic and relevant regions of Asia and the world, will contribute to its better understanding, within the framework of the inauguration of a new global order of which we can barely glimpse its first lines of explanation.

EVI FITRIANI
ARTURO OROPEZA GARCÍA