

## BOOK REVIEW

**Arturo Oropeza García and Evi Fitriani [Coordinators]. *The Role of the Southeast Asian Nations and the New Global Order*. Mexico: Institute for Legal Research, National Autonomous University of Mexico, 2022.**

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The book *The Role of the Southeast Asian Nations and the New Global Order*, as the title suggests, shines light on the rising Southeast Asian countries joined together by the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and their collective as well as individual role in the new global order in its existing relationships with world superpowers, the United States of America (U.S.), China and fast developing countries such as India. The book is carefully organised to help the reader navigate the issues with ease. With a variety of perspectives, the book gives a disparate and unique vision of the region. The book begins with a lucid analysis of ASEAN and its member countries, providing a comprehensive background of the region and the formation of ASEAN.

Similarities with countries like China are being drawn at several junctures which further stimulates the discussion towards the change in ASEAN outlook over the years. Going a step ahead, the book brings a third perspective from Latin America on the role played by the ASEAN countries, their evolution and changing dynamics. Though the book targets readers from academia, both professors and students, from Mexico and Latin America, it has the substance to serve a wider audience with interests in the changing landscape of the global order with new constructs and challenges emerging up in the Asia-Pacific such as the Indo-Pacific vision, China's One Belt One Road project, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and so on. Considering the multiple nuances that the book discusses, it is carefully organised into four broad chapters, each structured around multiple subchapters on specific topics.

Chapter 1 sets the tone of the book by outrightly approaching the main theme, the role of the Southeast Asian nations and the new global order. It starts by drawing historical parallels between the culture in China and individual Southeast Asian countries as well as the East Asian countries of Korea and Japan, and how the former has played an imperative role in the latter set of countries. Vietnam in Southeast Asia and Korea in the East Asia region strike close resemblance with the Chinese culture. The various subchapters in Chapter 1 follow in detail ASEAN's economic and political relationship with its long-standing external partners such as the U.S., Japan and India, and ASEAN's reclaim of globalisation power with agreements like RCEP after the COVID-19 pandemic. With the U.S., the chapter speaks on the untapped economic potential and suggests ways to breathe life into the unrealised elements of the U.S.-ASEAN economic relationship under the current administration through the Asia-Pacific mega-regionalism. The important role of RCEP and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) are clearly discussed. The next subchapter takes the reader to a timeline of China's initiatives in ASEAN between the 1990s and 2010s and until recently with the ratification of the RCEP and the participation of several ASEAN countries in China's Belt and Road Initiative. The following subchapter divulges on the significant partnership ASEAN has navigated with Japan over 45 years of their long and stable relationship, sharing an Indo-Pacific vision and stepping up on cooperation in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The following subchapter focusses on India and its strategy with ASEAN, going back to the ancient civilisational links, moving further to the renewal of India's policy towards ASEAN in the shape of "Act East", lists the various dialogue mechanisms between India and ASEAN and numerous cooperation funds. It reflects on how the various ASEAN-India Plan of Action have evolved and in its current form engulfs new areas of cooperation in addition to economic, politico-security, maritime security, etc. The succeeding subchapter provides a crisp analysis of ASEAN integration through trade, Foreign Direct Investment and Global Value Chains (GVCs) integration. Intra-ASEAN trade in the wake of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) has been a discussion point. It exposes data unavailability in smaller member states in ASEAN such as Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Myanmar. The final subchapter revisits ASEAN's progress in boosting intra-regional trade and examines RCEP as the external pull factor for ASEAN regional integration to reach its potential. By expending time and resources on the varied issues, the book's first chapter gives an essence of the complete book.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth discussion of the general economic and international vision of each of the ten ASEAN member states with a dedicated subchapter providing the future outlook of Myanmar's economy in the twenty-first century. In doing so, each ASEAN member state's bilateral and multilateral vision in the form of cooperation efforts it is presently carrying out are explicitly discussed. The chapter clearly articulates individual ASEAN member countries' strategies in the economic sphere to broaden the collective vision as well as an individual vision for the global economic environment. The chapter captures a lucid account of the economic environment in Lao PDR, and discusses the challenges for its expansion under the umbrella of infrastructure development. The chapter deals with the numerous challenges ASEAN member states face regarding economic and physical difficulties. Subsequent subchapters discuss the challenges ahead for member states such as Myanmar and the need to design an economic and growth strategy for these countries bearing in mind the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Singapore and Thailand are two of the most developed countries in the ASEAN group. Vietnam has emerged as a manufacturing and assembling hub for the world. The next few subchapters discuss the case studies of Malaysia as well.

Chapter 3 gives a Latin American lens to look at Southeast Asian countries, especially ASEAN. It commences with the Latin American perspective of China-ASEAN relationships, the various paradigms it has reached and compares it through the lens of hegemony. The second subchapter builds on the RCEP and ASEAN as probable connecting points for Latin America's journey to the East. The global landscape has undergone tumultuous shifts and countries are treading uncertain paths. Some subchapters see the opportunities Latin American countries may look for with ASEAN in the backdrop of the uncertain global world the pandemic has created. The discussion starts backwards, analysing the trade and investment linkages and substantiates future strategies not only in trade and investment cooperation but also on issues of mutual interest such as the build-up of protectionism, seeking the World Trade Organization (WTO) reforms, etc.

Chapter 4 lays out the regulatory and legal boundaries under which the ASEAN region works. It begins with an explicit discussion on the diverse legal rules governing the ASEAN member states. The chapter elucidates the regulatory structure of the amalgam of democracies and socialist economies together. A couple of subchapters relate to specific case studies of Indonesian and Cambodian law, the various laws in the country, and the procedures followed to make these legislations.

The book attempts to unravel a diverse area with a variety of cultures, civilisations, economic, political and legal characteristics. It delves into its

connections with other major developed and emerging economies in the neighbourhood and apart. The first chapter is the heart of the book, with subchapters dealing with multiple opportunities and challenges with external partners, and the way ahead. Although the book displays a rich blend of discussion on the region's complexities, it could be enriched with the inclusion of other developing countries such as Bangladesh. As two ASEAN member states, Thailand and Myanmar, are also part of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), a regional organisation of several South and Southeast nations, the book could have sought perspectives on the expected outcomes of ASEAN on BIMSTEC progress. While ASEAN's role in the new global order is rightly discussed in the background of RCEP, other important and emerging blocs such as BIMSTEC should have been more prominent in the discussion. Infrastructure is an important vehicle of ASEAN's transformation and has been reflected in its association with partners such as India.

With India, ASEAN member states such as Myanmar and Thailand have several multi-modal connectivity projects such as the Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Project, and others. The book could facilitate discussions on the infrastructure connectivity between the ASEAN and its external partners and suggest a way to expedite these multimodal projects. Similarly, digital connectivity is critical for the post-COVID recovery process of ASEAN. Some of the chapters may invigorate discussions on digital transformation and how ASEAN's big plans such as the ASEAN Masterplan on Connectivity 2025 can assimilate its external partners and speed up the economic recovery process in the region. The book could also share ASEAN's best practices in emerging areas such as traditional medicines and wellness care for the partners to learn and imbibe from them. Nevertheless, the book, with its expansive documentation and analyses, would be adjudged riveting by academia and media. It has the material and constructs to carry the voice of ASEAN far and wide exhibiting a renewed vibrancy with external partners like the U.S., China, Japan and India and attracting interest from Latin American countries as well.

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