

Original Paper

The Study on China-ASEAN Cooperation under “the Belt and Road” Initiative

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Abstract

Since “the Belt and Road” initiative was proposed ten years ago, ASEAN has always been a priority region. China and Southeast Asian countries, adhering to the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits, have made significant achievements in political consultation, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, environmental protection, and other aspects. In the new international political and economic situation, both sides are facing challenges from factors such as intervention from foreign powers, political uncertainty within ASEAN countries, competition for economic development space, and misunderstanding and concerns about China’s rise. Nevertheless, China and ASEAN are geographically connected by mountains and rivers, historically by humanities. With the RCEP implemented and the RMB regionalized in ASEAN, cooperation between China and ASEAN in emerging fields such as the digital commerce and green energy will see more benefits. In order to better promote China ASEAN cooperation, China should maintain the regional center status of ASEAN, solidly promote bilateral trade and enterprise investment, through cultural exchanges and international public opinion promotion, tell China’s story well, win the hearts of ASEAN people, and enhance trust between each other.

Keywords

China-ASEAN Cooperation, China-ASEAN Community, “the Belt and Road” initiative

1. Introduction

Spanning thousands of miles and years, the ancient silk routes were not only routes for trade but also roads for cultural exchanges, making a great contribution to human progress. The year 2023 marks the tenth anniversary of “the Belt and Road” initiative, through which China has helped many participating countries improve their economic development environment. The World Bank report shows that cooperation under the BRI framework has increased the trade volume of participating economies by

4.1%, attracted foreign investment by 5%, and increased the GDP of low-income countries by 3.4%. 2023 is also the 10th anniversary of building a closer China ASEAN community. Over the past ten years, China and ASEAN countries stick to the principle of pursuing shared growth through discussion and collaboration, and promote connectivity in policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people exchange. At present, China and ASEAN have become each other's largest trading partners. As a priority direction for China's neighboring diplomacy, the ASEAN region plays an important role in maintaining China's peripheral security and economic and social stability. In the new international context, summarizing the development achievements of BRI cooperation between China and ASEAN countries, analyzing the challenges and opportunities faced, and proposing strategies and solutions are of great significance for pursuing steady and sustained progress in high-quality BRI Cooperation. Reviewing previous literature, scholars at home and abroad often study issues related to China and ASEAN's BRI Cooperation from a certain perspective. This article, based on existing research at home and abroad, takes the tenth anniversary of "the Belt and Road" Initiative as the background, and studies from political, economic, social and other multi-disciplinary perspectives to sort out the progress made in China-ASEAN cooperation in the past ten years, analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by China and ASEAN countries in the past and coming years, exploring new paths for future co-operation between China and ASEAN countries.

2. Achievements in the Past 10 Years

2.1 Improved Dialogue and Cooperation Mechanism Enhance Political Mutual Trust between the Two Sides

Over the past decade, China and ASEAN, as well as multiple ASEAN countries, have established multi-level and multi-disciplinary mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech titled "Joining Hands to Build a China-ASEAN Community" in Indonesia's parliament, in which he elaborated on China's policy of "good-neighborliness" and friendship toward Indonesia and ASEAN, and put forward proposals to strengthen the China-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and to build a China-ASEAN community, realizing common development and prosperity. In 2018, heads of state and government of China and ASEAN member nations gathered in Singapore, mapping out the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership Vision 2030, which formulated a new cooperation framework with political security, economic cooperation, social and cultural communication as the main threads, rendering countries in China-ASEAN community connected more closely. Dialogue and cooperation mechanisms between China and East Asian countries has also been developing steadily. For example, China and Singapore in 2015 launched the China-Singapore Strategic Connectivity Demonstration Project, with the theme "Modern Connectivity and Modern Service Economy", focusing on some areas, like financial services, transportation and logistics, and information and communications technology. The 2019 China-Thailand Ministerial Dialogue Mechanism on Digital Economy Cooperation is centered on

strengthening cooperation in the areas of digital economy, smart cities and cyber security, and the 2021 China-Indonesia High-Level Dialogue and Cooperation Mechanism involves view exchanges in the fields of political security, trade and investment, maritime cooperation, public health, etc. In terms of exchanges between heads of government, China and ASEAN countries have maintained frequent high-level visits and contacts, with the heads of state or government of Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos and Viet Nam participating in “the Belt and Road” Summit Forum for three consecutive sessions. The improved dialogue and cooperation mechanism between t China and ASEAN countries have removed discrimination, consolidated consensus, enhanced political mutual trust and provided a favorable political environment for regional cooperation.

2.2 Increasing Trade and Investment Have Contributed to the High-Quality Development of the Two Economies

China-ASEAN has become each other’s largest trading partner. Over the past decade, China-ASEAN trade has maintained rapid growth in both imports and exports, with total trade growing at a rate of 9.9 percent per year. According to the data of 2022, the trade between the two sides amounted to \$975.3 billion, expanding 1.2 times from \$443.6 billion in 2013, or 1.2 times in a decade. Looking at the specific products traded between the two sides, China’s imports of major products such as palm oil, rubber and minerals have been significantly boosted in both quantity and quality. With China’s manufacturing and technological development, China’s high-speed rail technology, new energy vehicles, and mechanical and electrical products have also accelerated their entry into ASEAN, boosting ASEAN’s infrastructure construction and meeting its market demand. Since 2019, the two sides have been engaged in several rounds of negotiations on CAFTA-Upgrade on the basis of CAFTA, which is aimed at further lowering tariffs on China’s ASEAN commodities and expanding the scope of trade. To see investment, China and ASEAN are important sources and destinations for each other. Data shows that until July 2023, the bilateral investment between China and ASEAN countries has exceeded \$380 billion, and China has set up more than 6,500 direct investment enterprises in ASEAN. Investments from both sides have been increasing, covering manufacturing, finance, science and technology, and infrastructure. The two sides have built economic and trade innovation and development demonstration zoon, utilizing “Two Countries Twin Parks” model (the China-Malaysia Bilateral Industrial Park (MCKIP) and the China-Thailand Bilateral Industrial Park (CTRIZ)) to provide new opportunities for Chinese and ASEAN enterprises to develop and promote industrial collaboration, scientific innovation and technological sharing.

2.3 Frequent Cultural Exchanges Strengthen Friendship between the Two Places

China-ASEAN has, in the past 10 years, exchanged frequently in education, academia, media, arts, tourism, etc., and established a number of communication platforms, forming a diversified exchange pattern. China-ASEAN exchanges areas become much broader. Since 2008, the China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week has been successfully held in Guizhou Province for 13 consecutive years. The themes of the exchanges cover a wide range of fields such as higher education, vocational

education, basic education, special education, continuing education and youth communication, and the activities include seminars, forums, competitions, exhibitions, summer or winter camps, symposiums, workshops, training courses, conferences and other forms. Under this framework, several universities in China and ASEAN countries have established alliances and reached consensus on the course opening, information sharing and personal training. In 2017 Fudan University joined hands with nine academic institutions from ASEAN countries to establish the Network of ASEAN-China Academic Institutes (NACAI), which involves annual international meeting, academic exchange and joint publications. Researchers from member institutions work together to research on China-ASEAN relations and other related topics, contributing their wisdom to promote China-ASEAN common development. The China-ASEAN Media Cooperation Forum, founded in 2018, has been held for six consecutive sessions, becoming a representative exchange platform for the news media between China and the 10 ASEAN countries. The media of ASEAN countries and China have worked closely together to increase coverage of each other's affairs and bilateral relations, raising a voice that both sides want to promote peace and cooperation. Chinese film and television works are popular in ASEAN countries, with more and more films and TV dramas from ASEAN countries coming into the view of Chinese audiences. Guangxi radio and television has opened columns such as "Chinese Theatre", "Chinese TV Drama" and "Chinese Animation" in mainstream media of ASEAN countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, and has broadcast nearly 1,000 episodes of excellent Chinese TV dramas annually. Some excellent film and television works of ASEAN countries have also been introduced into China. The Thai film *The Talented Gunman*, released in China in 2017, was highly appreciated by Chinese film fans. China and ASEAN have also made impressive gains in art exchanges. The ASEAN Centre for Cultural and Artistic Exchange, with the aim of "going out with traditional Chinese culture and bringing in diversified cultures from abroad", promotes traditional Chinese culture, protects cultural and artistic treasures, serving as a base for artistic creation and exchange between Chinese and ASEAN cultural scholars, artists, collectors, and art enthusiasts. China and ASEAN are important sources and destinations for each other. In 2019, 39.483 million people from China visited ASEAN countries, and ASEAN countries made 25.934 million trips to China. In recent years, China and ASEAN have organized "the Belt and Road" Cultural and Tourism Exchange Week, ASEAN Tourism Festival, International Tourism Fair, and other activities, cooperating to film travel videos, expand tourism markets, create high-quality trip routes so as to enhance the bilateral travel experience. Frequent cultural and cultural exchanges in those fields strengthen the China-ASEA friendship

2.4 Environmental Protection Cooperation Promotes Regional Green and Sustainable Development

China and ASEAN countries have a good foundation for environmental protection cooperation, covering a wide range of aspects such as green transformation, sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, green industry investment and financing. China and ASEAN countries are complementary in the environmental protection industry. In the past decade, ASEAN member states in, the context of "carbon neutrality", have successively added low-carbon emission reduction and green

transformation into national strategies so that they have huge demand for technologies and capital to develop green industry. At the same time, China has been actively promoting the opening up of green finance and project investment, and various policy measures have provided a good environment for China and ASEAN to carry out in-depth cooperation on green finance in the future. Since “the Belt and Road” initiative was put forward in 2013, China and ASEAN have attached great importance to ecological and environmental protection and green industry financing, which will serve as a new engine for political and economic cooperation between China and ASEAN. The 2021-2022 China-ASEAN Cooperation Year has taken “sustainable development” as the theme for two consecutive years, prioritizing ecological and environmental protection. The Lancang-Mekong Environmental Cooperation Center and the China-Cambodia Environmental Cooperation Center have been established successively to improve regional environmental cooperation mechanisms. Proposals such as the “China-ASEAN Eco-friendly City Development Partnership” and initiatives like the “China-ASEAN Cooperative Action on Climate Change and Air Quality Improvement” will create a China-ASEAN environmentally sustainable development community, driving “regional green integration” and promoting high-quality synergistic development in the South China Sea and the Western Pacific region. The Figure 1 shows the themes of China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Forums from 2013 to 2022.



Figure 1. Themes of China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Forums from 2013 to 2022

3. Threats

3.1 *The Interference from Outside Powers Is the Main Obstruction*

Southeast Asia has always been a place of competition among great powers due to its rich natural resources and strategic geographical location. In recent years, the U.S. has been increasing its strategic investment in Southeast Asia in an attempt to hedge against China’s influence in the region through economic, military and diplomatic means. In 2011, the Obama administration launched the “the Rebalance to Asia” strategy to strengthen cooperation between the U.S. and Southeast Asian. In 2018, the Trump administration explicitly positioned China as a “strategic competitor” and passed the Asian

Reassurance Creation Act (ARCA), which commits funds of \$1.5 billion annually to pay for the expenditure of U.S. military and diplomatic operations in the Indo-Pacific region in order to improve the U.S. security status in the Asia-Pacific, especially in Southeast Asia. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, introduced after Biden came to power in 2021, clearly sets out to deepen long-term cooperation with ASEAN and strengthen the U.S.-Japan-India-Australia “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue” (QSD) with ASEAN countries. In order to stem China’s “the Belt and Road” initiative extending in ASEAN countries, the U.S. launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in 2022 under the guidance of the “Rebuilding a Better World” in order to rebuild the U.S. dominance in the Asia-Pacific economy, and to create an “economic and trade encirclement” through enhanced cooperation with regional allies or partners. The Japanese government regards the rise of China as a “systemic threat to the liberal order in East Asia” and hopes to play a more proactive role in this region. The game between China and Japan in Southeast Asia is mainly in the economic field. Japan established the “Partnership for High-Quality Infrastructure” (POI) in 2015 to maintain its presence in Asia’s infrastructure investment field through equipment donations, official assistance, and partnership establishment.

3.2 Political Uncertainty in ASEAN Countries Poses Great Challenges to Cooperation

In recent years, some ASEAN countries have experienced political instability, frequent political crises and increasing internal conflicts. “Belt and Road” economic cooperation projects have often been a “negative” topic issue for domestic political competition and power struggles, and even become the target attacked by domestic political opponents on those currently in power. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad took Chinese engineering projects as an example to attack previous Prime Minister Mohd Najib’s corruption. After he came to power, the number of cooperative engineering projects involving China was cut down, the amount of investment shrunk, and a number of projects were halted for a long time. The 2014 China-Vietnam oil rig crisis, also known as the Hai Yang Shi You 981 standoff, triggered an unprecedented wave of anti-China protests in Vietnam and attracted political commenters and scholars to re-evaluate Vietnam’s diplomatic, security, and domestic policies towards China. In early 2021, the Myanmar military took over state power on the grounds of electoral fraud, triggering nationwide riots. Incited by Myanmar’s domestic NGOs, a large number of Chinese companies were smashed, looted and burned in the chaos. Myanmar’s domestic political struggle and public opinion campaign may also damage joint projects. The Taiping River Power Station, Myitsone Power Station, and Letpadaung Copper Mine and the like have all experienced a period of being unilaterally suspended. The sub-healthy internal political and ecological environment in those ASEAN countries will be a problem that cannot be ignored in China-ASEAN cooperation.

3.3 The Relationship between China and ASEAN in the Global Market is Often Competitive

China and ASEAN compete with each other in trade and China has a trade surplus with ASEAN. As developing economies, China and ASEAN have very similar levels of economic development and industrial structures: both are export-oriented economies that rely on Western markets for trade. Both sides compete on the basis of attracting foreign investment and technology for domestic economic

development, and produce similar products on the basis of natural resources and labor cost advantages. Since 2012, China's trade deficit with ASEAN countries has turned into a surplus, which resulted in the rise of conservative voices within ASEAN countries that resist trade and economic cooperation with China. In response to the trade imbalance problem, according to the World Trade Organization, ASEAN member countries have collectively imposed 46 anti-dumping trade protectionist measures on China in the past decade. Both China and ASEAN pursued similar policies to attract foreign investment, tending to attract labor-intensive industries and some low value-added industries from developed countries, which has led to a high degree of similarity in their industrial structures. In March 2012, ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) was passed to give preferential treatment to foreign enterprises to invest and build factories in ASEAN countries. ASEAN now seems to be more attractive to Western countries, attracting \$154.7 billion of foreign investment by 2019, while China attracted \$141.2 billion in the same period, so the two will continue to compete fiercely in FDI.

3.4 ASEAN Countries Have Some Concerns and Misgivings about China

While China's role as the engine of the world economy has provided massive markets, a vast array of products and abundant opportunities for global trading partners, including ASEAN, the China's growing power and increasing influence in the world has also raised concerns and misgivings among Southeast Asian countries. In the report "The State of Southeast Asia 2020" released by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in January 2020, it was found that people from ASEAN countries acknowledge that China becomes more powerful and influential, but a high proportion of respondents seem to be concerned. When asked about "the impact of China's emergence as a great power", 38.2% of the respondents believed that "China is a revisionist one trying to bring Southeast Asia into its sphere of influence"; 34.7% of the respondents believed that "China is gradually replacing the role of the United States as the regional leader"; when it comes to their views on "the Belt and Road Initiative", only 36.4 per cent of respondents expressed reassurance and trust in the project. As overseas investment projects based on "the Belt and Road" Initiative continue to advance, the "debt trap theory" has gradually become a public opinion tool used by Western countries to undermine China's cooperation with ASEAN, claiming that China has intentionally provided loans to developing countries at a liability risk and plunged them into debt crises. Affected by the hype of "debt trap theory", Myanmar scaled back Chinese investment in the Kyaukphyu port invested by China in 2018: the original plan to build 10 berths was adjusted to two, and the total value of the project was revised to about \$1.3 billion.

4. Opportunities

4.1 China and ASEAN are Geographically Linked by Mountains and Rivers, and Historically by Humanities

Geographically, China is adjacent to the ASEAN seas. Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia are also connected to China's southwestern interior through the Trans-Asian Railway

network. “The Belt and Road” co-operation has greatly enhanced ASEAN countries’ connectivity. With important projects such as the Yavan high-speed railway in Indonesia, the Bangkok to Korat section of the China-Thailand railway, and Malaysia’s East Coast Railway moving forward, ASEAN countries are able to enjoy more dividends of China’s economic growth and benefit more from the open Chinese market. Throughout history, since the time of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, when the navigator Zheng He travelled to the West, Chinese merchants have left their footprints exploring the sea routes of South-East Asia. Currently, there are about 50 million Chinese nationals in the world, about 78 per cent of whom live in ASEAN countries. They still maintain Chinese traditions, inherit the same customs and speak the same language. For generations, these overseas Chinese have adapted to life in a foreign land, while at the same time integrating the Eastern and Western cultures and economies. They have an in-depth understanding of the technical, cultural, legal and economic aspects of ASEAN countries, as well as the cultural, economic and institutional environment of China. The same traditional customs and language have created a natural affinity between the Chinese and Southeast Asian people, making Southeast Asia the most likely destination for Chinese entrepreneurs when they go global.

4.2 RCEP Entry into Force will Build a High-Standard Global network of Free Trade Areas

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) entered into force on January 1, 2022. As the world’s most populous free trade area with the largest economic and trade scale and the most development potential, RCEP will promote the opening up of China and ASEAN countries’ markets, facilitate liberalization and facilitation of economic and trade cooperation between China and ASEAN, and realize the structural transformation of the regional economic co-operation mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region. RCEP mainly works by reducing tariffs, opening markets, and reducing trade barriers. Under the RCEP agreement, more than 90 per cent of imported and exported goods will have zero tariffs in the future, which significantly reduces the tariff cost of cross-border trade, promoting high-speed and wide-ranging economic and trade cooperation between China and ASEAN. According to the Peterson Institute in the United States, RCEP will lead to a net increase in member countries’ exports of \$510 billion in 2030 and a net increase in annual income of \$186 billion. In addition, RCEP integrates five ASEAN+1 Free Trade Agreements (FDAs), combining the past isolated and fragmented FTAs into a whole, cutting down the restrictive and discriminatory factors in cross-border service trade, resolving the past problem of different trade rules in respective trade agreements, which facilitates goods and commodity flow within the region. In 2020, despite the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, China’s imports and exports to the other 14 RCEP member states reached 10.2 trillion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 3.5%, which was 1.6 percentage points higher than the overall growth rate of China’s foreign trade in the same period, accounting for 31.7% of the total import and export value. At the same time, according to customs statistics, in the first eight months of 2022, China’s imports and exports to ASEAN were 4.09 trillion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 14%. ASEAN took advantage of the momentum to continue to become China’s number one trading partner. The upgraded RCEP can

break the economic and trade resistance, strengthen the cooperation of production division of labor among the countries in the region, effectively contribute to the security, stability and accelerated integration of the regional industrial chain supply chain, and bring more opportunities for economic and trade cooperation between China and ASEAN. With the RCEP fully implemented and being upgraded, the economic and trade resistance within regional countries will be broken, and the production division and collaboration among regional countries will be strengthened, contributing to security and stability of the industrial chain and supply chain, which will guarantee a win-win economic and trade cooperation between China and ASEAN. By 2025, RCEP is expected to boost member countries' exports, outward investment stock, and GDP by 10.4 per cent, 2.6 per cent, and 1.8 per cent, respectively, over the baseline.

4.3 China Will See Significant Opportunity for RMB Regionalization in ASEAN

The RMB has now become the world's fourth largest payment currency, the fifth largest reserve currency, and the most actively traded currency in the world among emerging market countries. ASEAN lacks a unified regional currency due to the uneven development of ASEAN countries. The frequent use of the "dollar weapon" by the U.S. to impose economic sanctions against foreign countries, especially the "tsunami of sanctions" against Russia after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, will force other countries to reflect on the security for over-reliance on the dollar system. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of "de-dollarization" in ASEAN countries. For example, at the ASEAN Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting, which concluded at the end of March 2023, the countries agreed to reduce their reliance on major international currencies, like the US dollar and the euro, in cross-border trade and investment, and to effectively strengthen the use of local currencies. In the context of "de-dollarization", China and ASEAN countries could seek more opportunities for monetary cooperation. By the end of 2021, China had signed bilateral local currency settlement agreements with Vietnam, Indonesia and Cambodia, and currency swap agreements with Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, amounting to about RMB 800 billion. In September 2022, the People's Bank of China authorized the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Vientiane Branch to act as the RMB clearing bank in Laos. This is the fifth RMB clearing bank based in ASEAN countries, following Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. The steady spread of RMB business clearing banks in ASEAN countries reflects the deepening use and acceptance of RMB in ASEAN countries. According to the "Report on the Use of RMB in ASEAN Countries 2022", the total amount of RMB cross-border receipts and payments between China and ASEAN countries totaled 4,814.79 billion yuan in 2021, a year-on-year increase of 16 per cent (see the Figure 2 below). Compared to 10 years ago, the amount of RMB cross-border receipts and payments between China and ASEAN was less than 500 billion in 2012, a nearly 10-fold increase in 10 years. The share of ASEAN countries using RMB has increased, and naturally the share using other currencies has decreased. With the RCEP entering into force, regional trading in the interbank market of RMB against currencies of ASEAN countries continues to expand, RMB products in the offshore market are enriched and

upgraded, and a number of innovative cross-border RMB businesses have been successfully launched.

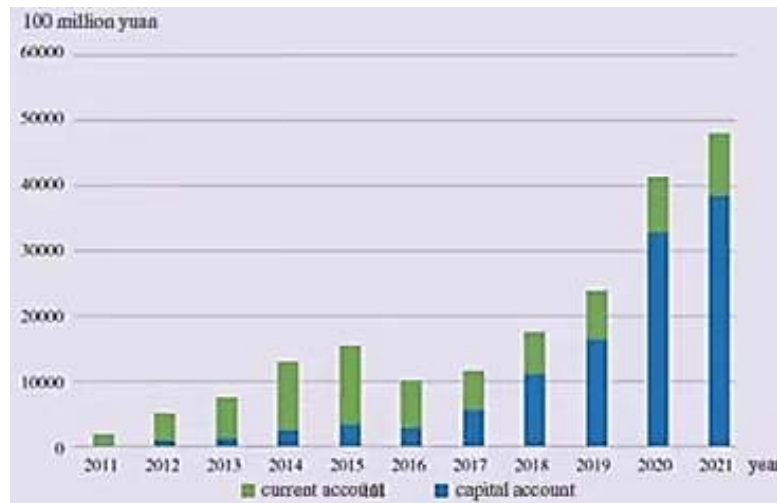


Figure 2. Cross-Border RMB Receipts and Payments in ASEAN Countries from 2011 to 2021

4.4 Emerging Industries Will Be a Key Area of Co-Operation between China and ASEAN

There is huge room for China-ASEAN cooperation on digital economy. According to relevant reports, the market size of Southeast Asia's digital economy has reached nearly \$200 billion in 2022, and may grow to \$600 billion to \$1 trillion in 2030. However, as far as digital infrastructure is concerned, especially in terms of network coverage and Internet connection speed, there is a huge gap in the for ASEAN countries to make progress, and the development of digital industrialization in many countries is still in its infancy. In order to promote digital economic development, ASEAN and ASEAN member states such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Myanmar have approved various project documents for digital economy development. China is at the forefront of digital infrastructure, digital technology application and digital industry development in the world, while ASEAN countries have a huge consumer market and an urgent need for the development of the digital economy, so the cooperation between the two sides in the digital economy will be incredibly promising and will make great achievements. There is also potential for green finance cooperation between China and ASEAN countries. Concerns about climate issues have prompted ASEAN countries to focus on the sustainability of development. The Asian Development Bank estimates that climate issues may reduce the GDP of the ASEAN region by 11 per cent by 2100, and in order to cope with this problem, ASEAN countries may accelerate the layout of the green transformation of energy. However, ASEAN countries are facing a large funding gap in green development, and the demand for green investment in ASEAN countries from 2016 to 2030 is about \$3 trillion. Compared with ASEAN countries, China not only has advanced infrastructure technology but also leads the world in green financial development. To promote green development, the two sides have implemented the Green Messenger Programme and designated 2021 as the "Year of Cooperation for Sustainable Development", which can be used to

vigorously develop and deepen cooperation in the areas of sustainable finance, green energy and sustainable cities.

5. Strategies to Create better China-ASEAN Relations

5.1 Maintain ASEAN's Regional Centrality

China should take the “ASEAN Vision” as the core concept, respect the integration path and process independently designed by ASEAN, and support ASEAN’s central position in Southeast Asia. When dealing with matters involving the ASEAN countries, ASEAN norms should be observed and ASEAN feelings be considered. In the process of reshaping the regional order, it is imperative to safeguard the ASEAN voice in international community, advocate the principles of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and reciprocity, support ASEAN in “not taking sides”, and oppose the patchwork of “Asian version” NATO”. Disputes may be settled by making full use of the existing system of International Law or RCEP Trade and Investment Dispute Settlement Mechanism. China and ASEAN countries’ judicial coordination requires a regional arbitration settlement institution to serve “the Belt and Road” dispute resolution, and political settlement models such as mediation as an alternative at any time.

5.2 Broaden Economic, Trade, Business and Investment Cooperation

China should work with ASEAN to build an open world economy, defend the WTO-centered multilateral trading system, stand against unilateralism and protectionism, and safeguard the stability and smooth operation of global industrial chains and supply chains. The greater harmonization of China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative with development strategies in other countries could promote regional and global economic integration processes. Advanced construction of China-ASEAN FTA, ASEAN Economic and Trade Industrial Park and 10+3 regional “fast-track” network will encourage more and more micro, small and medium businesses to cooperate in those emerging industries, such as digital technologies, cross-border e-commerce and clean energy. Online and offline trade and investment fairs organized regularly could expand mutual markets, optimize the structure of trade products and avoid fierce competition between similar goods. The traditional model of purely exporting “Made in China” can be gradually changed to implement the dual export model of “capital + production capacity,” with Chinese enterprises adjusting the investment structure, expanding the scale of their investments in ASEAN countries, and leveraging the leading roles of railroads, power, and other advantageous industries to restructure the East Asia regional value chain. China’s investment in ASEAN countries still has a lot of room for development, the structure is not balanced, mainly in the secondary industry, with relatively few investments in the primary and tertiary industries. Therefore, Chinese enterprises can expand the scale of investment and actively adjust the investment structure in ASEAN countries, gradually change the traditional model of purely exporting “Made in China” in the past, implement the dual export model of “capital + production capacity”, and actively leverage the leading role of railways, power and other advantageous industries to restructured the East Asia regional

value chain.

5.3 Strengthen International Communication Capacities

China should improve international communication capacity and effectiveness, forming an international discourse that matches its overall national strength and international status, so as to better tell China's stories and convey China's voice. In the first place, China should follow the law of communication and integrate the traditional Chinese communication mode with the international mode. China's media should increase their international impact, using local languages of ASEAN countries to promote China's ideas and concepts, thereby presenting a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China. In response to the rhetoric that slander China, the Chinese government should vigorously fight back based on facts, removing ASEAN's concerns and misgivings and increasing mutual trust. Besides, targeted expression should be emphasized in international communication, which means that Chinese media's words should be close to the speech habits, mind-sets and discourse styles of audiences who come from different ASEAN countries and have different cultural backgrounds in order that what Chinese intend to say could be correctly, fully and comprehensively understood by ASEAN people.

5.4 Promote Exchanges in Science, Education, Culture and Health

China and ASEAN should deepen exchanges in the fields of science, education, culture and health. Firstly, the dimension of scientific and technological cooperation should be broadened. It is essential to encourage the cooperation between China's scientific research institutes, universities and large-scale enterprises with ASEAN countries to establish laboratories or research centers, which could help form a large innovation network, strengthening a cross-border "industry-university-research" integration. Additionally, a new educational cooperation platform should be created. China and ASEAN countries could set up colleges and universities abroad by developing a bilateral personnel training system in which courses and academic qualifications are mutually recognized, and designate some ASEAN-oriented education programs in south-western China, making them important roles in the China-ASEAN regional education integration. Last but not least, mutual assistance in health service and industry should also be strengthened. China and ASEAN countries could collaborate with each other in health emergency response and medical assistance, such as maternal and child health care, infectious diseases prevention and control and vaccine research and development, building a China-ASEAN health community.

6. Conclusion

Looking back to the past and anticipating the future, China always stands ready to work with ASEAN countries to pursue closer and more fruitful cooperation under the BRI framework, implement the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, and build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity. China and ASEAN goals are to pass on the torch of peace from generation to

generation, sustain development, ensure that civilizations flourish, and build a global community of shared future.

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