

# **CLMV, ASEAN6 and China's Belt and Road Initiative: Economically Secure, Politically Insecure**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to explore the influence of BRI in CLMV countries and its implications for the process of ASEAN economic integration. ASEAN faces an economic development gap between ASEAN6 and the CLMV bloc that can be filled by China through various economic development schemes, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI can be a dilemma at various levels, but it can also be a stimulant to strengthen ASEAN economic integration. The characteristics of the ASEAN region that adheres to open regionalism or hybrid regionalism can be an advantage in economic integration through AEC, where economically, ASEAN member countries can freely determine the pattern of bilateral economic cooperation with virtually any country, but politically, the ASEAN Way principle can determine the pattern of political decision making at the regional level. Without the domination of a country in the region, all member countries will speak on behalf of the region if there is a political decision concerning the region. At this point, the tendency of sub-regionalism within ASEAN can be suppressed while still obtaining economic benefits.

## **Keywords**

ASEAN6, CLMV, ASEAN integration, China, Belt and Road Initiative

## **1. Introduction**

The Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) is seen as an ambivalent initiative from China, both as an opportunity and as a challenge, domestically and regionally. In the ASEAN context, the BRI is a promising mechanism to facilitate future trade between ASEAN and China. BRI is considered capable of creating opportunities for ASEAN to strengthen its intra- and extra-regional economic relations (Foo et al, 2019). Regionally, ASEAN still grapples with the integration of the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam) and the founding countries of ASEAN 1967 (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand), plus Brunei which joined in 1984 ("ASEAN6"). These problems relate mainly to different historical aspects, which complicate the existence of a common ground as well as difference in unequal economic development (Soja, 2017). However, considering the fact that CLMV's economic growth is quite competitive, CLMV has become a strategic "sub-region" in ASEAN economic integration (Global Data, 2021). Theoretically, sub-regionalism might serve as the possibility of being a stimulant for regional integration, but it might also open the opportunity to disrupt regional stability. Hence the issue.

However, the economic obstacles of CLMV do not lie in their relatively excellent economic growth, but in the similarity of conditions such as an economy based on export of agricultural and light industry products, lack of significant natural resources, a high level of poverty and corrupt state bureaucracy (Soja, 2017). Soja also added, CLMV economies are constantly changing, and such economies transform into specific forms of free markets with limited state intervention but are not followed by democratization and recognition of civil rights in politics. It is at this point that the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) may pose a solution in the context of economic integration to fill gaps in order to realize ASEAN's Vision. This trend of integration coincides with China's global expansion through BRI. ASEAN is certainly a region that China will not sweep out off the radar in its global ambition of "China Era and an Asian Century". Cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, technology and culture are being promoted comprehensively in accordance with the ASEAN target of eliminating gaps of inequality to realize comprehensive regional integration.

Apart from the longstanding bilateral cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, in the regional context, the idea of comprehensive China-ASEAN cooperation has been in effect since the ratification of CAFTA (China-ASEAN Free Trade Area) in 2000 and effective in 2010. This cooperation is expected to strengthen China-ASEAN economic relations, where China demonstrates strong commitment upon its implementation. For example, with

China's participation in the 1st GMS Summit of Leaders (Phnom Penh) 2002. In addition, in commitment to developing CLMV, China offers the "Asian Debt Relief" initiative, writing off old debts and operating foreign aid with the aim of strengthening China-CLMV economic cooperation (Suehiro, 2017). On the other hand, cooperation with China (especially China-initiated) is always suspected of containing a Sinification agenda, which is far from win-win principles. But interestingly, apart from other countries/regions, Suehiro considered that China was very aware of the significance of relations with ASEAN and seemed willing to follow the characteristics of ASEAN. Especially since 2000's, the Chinese government respected ASEAN's autonomy and chose to adhere to the ASEAN Way. Sinification, even if it really exists, is not carried out in an arrogant way, but China is able to show a "China friendly" character. Thus, apart from unseen interests and agendas, cooperation with China is a positive prospective cooperation for the comprehensive integration of ASEAN (Suehiro, 2017; Chenyang & Xiangzhang, 2019).

However, the challenges are also still intact. Since the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation (AMBDC) mechanism was put into operation in 1996, followed by a whopping \$2 billion investment have been announced for 2021, as well as the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) initiative 2002, a project formally initiated by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) but led by China, observers are also aware of China's ambitions to replace ASEAN6 as a traditional partner of CLMV. Although the intra-regional cooperation and collaboration between ASEAN6 and CLMV appears to be improving in general, the socio-cultural dimension of the Indochina region still serves as the biggest obstacle to ASEAN regional integration. For example, CLMV's leading export products in the form of rice, alcohol and certain meat (mostly pork) cannot broadly absorbed into the regional market because the majority of ASEAN's population is Muslim (Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, a few in the Philippines and Southern Thailand) and relatively self-sufficient in rice crop. Consequently, CLMV still relies on extra-regional markets for its economic development (Soja, 2017), with China becoming its main partner.

### **1.1. Objectives**

Apart from economic efforts, in political decision-making, CLMV does not yet have equal opportunities in the context of decision making in ASEAN's governance, which is often referred to as the "founder versus new member" problem. The characteristics of a non-democratic government are considered to be the biggest issue of this political gap. ASEAN itself is considered unable to show a proportional attitude to such conditions due its "ASEAN Way" stature. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to explore the influence of BRI on CLMV and its implications for the AEC integration process. We argue that the implementation of BRI can have a positive impact on the development of ASEAN integration in its capacity as a stimulus for ASEAN to strengthen intra-ASEAN economic relations embodied in the AEC, but if and only if ASEAN6 can resolve intra-regional governance issues with its characteristics of open regionalism. We argue that the key to the success of AEC integration is reducing the gap between ASEAN countries that are considered to have the potential to develop with CLMV, where BRI can become an accelerator in the process. But at the same time, ASEAN also needs to work out the socio-political dimension and decision-making at the intergovernmental level by taking a more proportional stance regarding the democratic gap among its members. To that end, this paper is divided into three main parts; (1) mapping the dilemma that occurs with the strengthening of China as the main partner of ASEAN for ASEAN member countries; (2) mapping the region's internal dilemma with the presence of China; (3) looking at the CLMV and ASEAN6 strategies in the complexities of relations with China and with intra-regional ones, both economically and politically.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *ASEAN Economic Integration and CLMV Problems*

ASEAN is predicted to become the world's fourth economic power in 2050, behind the US, China and the European Union. However, in general ASEAN faces intra- and extra-regional challenges related to its open regionalism characteristics. This is inseparable from the evolution of ASEAN which was founded as a non-violent conflict resolution forum which turned into a successful economic region, as evidenced by perseverance in the 1997/98 Asian Economic Crisis. ASEAN's economic policies have also evolved from a protectionist and inward-looking economy to be more open to the global value chain. This is considered an extraordinary achievement, given the diversity of social conditions, economic development, culture, politics, and history. ASEAN's efforts to integrate its economy are listed in one of the 3 pillars of the ASEAN Charter, translated into four goals: (a) single market and production base (b) competitive economic region (c) equitable economic development (d) integration into the global economy. AEC becomes a strategic forum for this purpose. For Plummer (2006), AEC is strategic in the terms of (1) the desire to create a comprehensive post-ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) agenda (2) the need to deepen ASEAN economic integration on FTAs (3) the potential for FTAs that could jeopardize ASEAN economic integration (4) recognition as a result of the 1997 Asian financial crisis that cooperation in the real and financial sectors must be extended simultaneously and the free flow of labor is indispensable (Plummer, 2006; Petri et al, 2010; Chia, 2013). Das (2016) explains that the main concern of AEC has two clear objectives: the

first is to attract foreign investment to the region and the other is to promote its manufacturing into the global value chains.

The biggest challenge for ASEAN's unity and centrality is the unequal economic development within the group. Some observers agree that tensions over internal cohesion and lack of capacity to lead its own regional integration agenda create uncertainty about whether ASEAN is able to realize the single market it wants (Hong, 2016). The joining of CLMV to ASEAN in the 1990s indirectly caused CLMV to open its economy to the global market and also caused ASEAN's gap in the socio-economic field widens (Chia, 2011). Given the agreed goal of achieving a competitive, integrated market and a global production base, economic disparities form a constraining factor in the process towards that market (MacGillivray & Carpenter, 2013). In 2010 in terms of GDP, CLMV generated a total GDP that was fifteen times lower than other ASEAN countries (AEC Chartbook, 2011). From the start, the CLMV presented a dilemma for ASEAN6 for regional economic development, i.e., whether to slow down or launch technical and financial assistance mechanisms in such a way that CLMV can follow suit. Whatever ASEAN chooses, emerging policies must consider the widening developmental gap and the potential for the creation of "two-tier organizations" in the region (Soja, 2017). This dilemma deepened because the majority of ASEAN6 are also grappling with their national economic and political development. Consequently, technical, and financial assistance to CLMV is very limited. The production network acts as the backbone of ASEAN economic integration (Chia, 2013). However, differences in the quality and quantity of infrastructure between countries prevents ASEAN from creating efficient production networks and serves as an obstacle to participation in the creation of intra-regional connectivity (MacGillivray & Carpenter, 2013). ASEAN requires greater investment to align and enhance intra-regional connections to a higher level and have a positive impact on AEC integration, especially from extra-regional sources.

BRI is considered to be able to help fill the gap in economic inequality in ASEAN by playing a role as the dominant force in determining the future economic landscape of Southeast Asia (Hong, 2017; Vu, 2014). China can help in the form of investment or production capacity to CLMV through improvements and synergies with the AEC Blueprint 2025 to improve connectivity and sectoral cooperation (Hong, 2016) as well as promote broader regional growth mechanisms and encourage the development of policies oriented towards global value chains. This will improve infrastructure connectivity and liberalize trade and investment through the removal of trade and non-trade barriers (Yu, 2017). On the other hand, ASEAN as a "hybrid regionalism" or open regionalism makes Southeast Asia a strategic area due to multilateral mechanisms that can be carried out such as ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit (EAS), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (Shambaugh, 2018). Consequently, Southeast Asia is considered the forefront of the Maritime Silk Road because of its geographical location around the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean (Blanchard, 2018).

China has established the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund (SRF) which aims to ensure the implementation of BRI can run smoothly without any financial problems. According to Foo et al (2019), relations built between China and ASEAN through trade and investment can be combined under BRI and AIIB. China has allocated more than USD 900 billion to China Development Bank (CDB); committed to provide USD 40 billion to the SRF to improve infrastructure and strengthen economic integration; and AIIB will provide USD 150 billion for infrastructure development (Yu, 2017; Soong, 2018). According to Jianren (2016), five opportunities for industrial cooperation between China and ASEAN through the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road can be further developed. First, it opens up opportunities for industrial cooperation between China and ASEAN. Second, complete the needs of ASEAN. Third, the coincidence of BRI with ASEAN economic construction. Fourth, acceleration of the development of connectivity between China and ASEAN. Fifth, increase cooperation in the development of a free trade area between China and ASEAN. With regard to connectivity, Jetin (2017) stated that BRI can integrate Asia and connect Asia with other regions so that it has positive implications for efforts to achieve the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) for the benefit of China and ASEAN. BRI offers another opportunity to expand trade in goods and services of its members and find new markets to drive economic growth through trade relations with China (Devadason & Govindarajan, 2017). Soong also mentioned that China-ASEAN trade reached USD 443.6 billion in 2013, an increase of 11% and accounts for around 15% of ASEAN's total trade. China-ASEAN trade increased 8.23% in 2014 to reach USD 480.4 billion with increased volume to almost USD 500 billion in 2015 (Soong, 2018). BRI and AEC are vital projects that focus on economic development and need to be realized. The common goal of AEC and BRI is the promotion and facilitation of cross-border economic activities for development through trade and economic cooperation under the ASEAN and BRI plans centered on soft and hard infrastructure connectivity which aims to form a regional infrastructure network that is integrated with China as the center (Yu, 2017). The elimination of cumbersome red tape, improved customs procedures, and increased use of digital trade documents and online platforms can greatly benefit businesses in moving goods across borders by improved connectivity (Schinas & Westarp, 2017; Boffa, 2018; Hsu, 2020).

We argue that BRI does not directly affect the development of the AEC but acts as a stimulus for ASEAN for the development of the AEC by helping to improve the CLMV economy. Reducing the developmental gap must also be followed by a strong commitment from ASEAN countries to lead their own regional integration agenda. Okfen (2003) states that within a community there must be a sense of belonging, mutual trust, and a sense of collective identity in an effort to survive. This can be realized if all community members share the benefits of integration equitably. In this case, AEC will not be judged by the complete implementation of various agreements but by the economic prosperity that will be obtained by *all* ASEAN countries (Austria, 2011). The “Moving Towards an ASEAN Economic Community” document explains that a high level of economic integration in the AEC requires the commitment of ASEAN members to sacrifice a minimum of national autonomy in order to pursue collective action or not prioritize certain interests under a common agenda. This document also explains that weak relations among ASEAN members should not be compromised.

However, economic development is very different from political and social development. It is quite clear that the CLMV is moving towards limited liberalization of the economy, but strong state control still looms over it. This characteristic is very similar to China’s state capitalism, so there are concerns that if CLMV becomes a strong partner of China, the integrity of ASEAN is at stake. Some of these dilemmas concerning agency and structures can be mapped as, *first*, ASEAN’s economic dilemma, between the acceleration of regional and sub-regional economic development stimulated by the presence of strong extra-regional actors, which potentially change the intra-regional political map. *Second*, the dilemma of domestic relations and China in a more general context, with very limited sovereignty pooling on the one hand for ASEAN member countries and the domestic interests of each country. *Third*, political dilemmas that arise from gaping governance between ASEAN6 and CLMV that must be managed carefully to create political equilibrium. *Fourth*, the dilemma of ASEAN and other extra-regional relations, such as ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, and so on, which demands a balance in the achievement of domestic, regional, and global interests, given the complex conditions of China’s relations with the global community. This paper will not describe complexity comprehensively, thus leave us with many research gaps to elaborate it even further. However, we argue that there needs to be a certain point of equilibrium in the relationship between CLMV and ASEAN6 which is stimulated by the existence of BRI which can be a determining factor for these relations.

#### *Theoretical Foundation for ASEAN Regional Integration*

China’s presence in ASEAN through BRI must be understood as a stimulus that may change the intra-regional structure of ASEAN. Its presence through economic support is inseparable from how China plays a larger political interest, which places ASEAN as a strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN itself has witnessed a major evolution in their regionalism while trying to maintain the principles of the ASEAN Way (non-interference, consultative, based on consensus), which is considered to have not been able to achieve an “ideal” like the European Union (EU). However, the ASEAN Way is an ideal of its own kind and China is very aware of these principles. The evolution of ASEAN regionalism may not be fully understood from the point of view of functionalism and intergovernmentalism alone. Therefore, it is important to unravel the structure of ASEAN regionalism to get a more adequate picture of the complexity aforementioned.

Theories of regionalism such as functionalism and neo-functionalism are seen as less able to understand the complexity of ASEAN integration. Besides being modeled after EU, functionalism and neofunctionalism which are rooted in the irrelevance of state sovereignty understand regional integration as a domestic urge to cooperate at the regional level through a supranational body collectively, functionally, where state actors are considered less relevant as the main agency (Aje & Chidozie, 2018). This does not apply in ASEAN because the principles of the ASEAN Way place state sovereignty as non-negotiable. Meanwhile, intergovernmentalism shares its basic assumptions with rationalist institutionalism in IR that understand regional integration as the outcome of intergovernmental negotiations, in which governments’ relative bargaining power determines to which extent they can realize their preferences. *First*, states (or governments) are the central actors in international politics, and they are rational actors (at least minimally or boundedly). *Second*, international interdependence creates demand, and international institutions help to supply international cooperation (Schimmelfennig, 2018).

Both Liberal and Realist Intergovernmentalism (LI and RI) both stem from national interests. The two differ only in their integration demand. RI separates the interests of low-politics and high-politics, where the core of the national interest remains in high-politics and low-politics does not shake the autonomy of the state in the supranational body. Meanwhile, LI emphasizes mediation between the domestic interests of interest groups and civil society through national political institutions. The demand for LI depends on the market where national interests depend on how competitive domestic products are, so the state can choose to be more protectionist or liberal (Schimmelfennig, 2018). Moravcsik (1993) stated that LI is a theory based on a combination of rationalism,

liberalism, and intergovernmental constitutionalism theories. LI considers that non-state actors do not have a significant influence in determining the outcome of negotiations because non-state actors have an organizational structure that is less qualified than state actors. His assumption is supported by a statement from Sweet & Sandholtz (1997) which explains that supranational organizations only act as a tool to bind each of its member states with international agreements and do not have the power to control the integration process. At glance, ASEAN falls into the second category of intergovernmentalism. However, intergovernmentalism also requires a little pooling of sovereignty. This is what intergovernmentalism cannot satisfactorily explain about ASEAN. ASEAN treats sovereignty seriously through the ASEAN Way, so that pooling of sovereignty as happened in the EU is deemed to be impossible in ASEAN. For this reason, ASEAN regional integration is often referred to as “soft regionalism” (Guan, 2004) or even “quasi-regionalism”. Interestingly, this formula is what made ASEAN survive the 1996-1997 economic crisis (Drysdale, 2017).

ASEAN regionalism needs to be explained considering the plurality of state actors and non-state actors who play various interests. However, the main characteristic of ASEAN does not lie in its market-driven, bottom-up approach; commonly referred to as “regionalization”. ASEAN liberalization is highly dependent on movements at the domestic government level that respond specifically to the market. ASEAN, however, remains an elite organization and project that carries out top-down integration or “regionalism” (Jönsson, 2010). In contrast to its European counterparts, ASEAN’s top-down regionalism is based on government initiatives through various domestic policies and controls, including subsidies and non-tariff measures (NTM). This applies both in democratic countries such as ASEAN6 (except Brunei), as well as CLMV. This approach based on market interests, especially after ASEAN transformed from a non-violent conflict resolution forum into a free trade area, resounds with the LI’s explanation. However, the national interest being the commander in chief in the forum is a characteristic of Indonesia, considering that apart from being an economic community, ASEAN also acts as a security community and a socio-cultural community. If LI is associated with ASEAN, then ASEAN countries have recognized the many positive consequences of integration by looking at the comprehensive AEC plan and the desire of ASEAN countries to integrate. This theory cannot predict the development of integration after AEC because it depends on each other’s calculus in the deeper integration. This is because LI is a parsimonious theory albeit believing in the multicausal explanation. This theory rejects the monocausal explanation on the grounds that at least three theories are arranged in a multistage model of preferences, bargaining, and institutions that are required to explain integration (Table 1).

Table 1. LI Assumptions and Predictions for ASEAN

Elements	Assumptions	Prediction for ASEAN	Indicators	Goal(s)
<b>Economic integration process</b>				
Government scope	Based on rational cost-benefit calculus	Based on rational cost-benefit calculus	National interests	1. Narrowing developmental gaps between ASEAN6 and CLMV bloc 2. Integrating ASEAN as a whole to the global market
Driving Mechanism	Congregation of interests based on cost-benefit calculus	Prioritize collective and mutually beneficial ASEAN interests	1. Profitable potential for single market and production base 2. Potential to be competitive in the region 3. Potential to erase economic disparities in the region 4. Potential to integrate with global market	
<b>Political Consideration</b>				
	Inequality of negotiations between countries	The gap between “founder countries” versus “new members”	Dominance in decision-making in ASEAN	Preventing political and security interference

*Source: adapted from Fauzisyah, V. (2017) with several adjustments*

This multistage model can be elaborated further. *First*, national preferences. Actual preferences emerge from domestic conflict processes where interests in a sector, adjustment costs, and geopolitical issues play an important role. National preferences driven by general geopolitical ideas and interests or the importance of specific issues, such as the forces of economic globalization, play an important role in all sectors and half of geopolitics and ideology also have important secondary impacts. *Second*, substantive bargaining. In an attempt to explain the

nature of the substantive outcomes of international negotiations among countries with different national preferences, LI uses bargaining theory. Countries must be able to resolve suboptimal outcomes collectively and achieve cooperation for mutual benefit. *Third*, institutional choice. The foreign policy of national governments is always different in response to pressure from social groups whose preferences are incorporated in political institutions. National interests arise through domestic political conflicts when a social group competes for political influence, national and transnational coalitions, and policy alternatives will be approved by the government. This variable is based on domestically constrained preferences, indicating that conflict and international cooperation can be modeled as a process that takes place in two stages: *First*, the government sets several interests. *Second*, the government makes bargains in an effort to realize these interests. These two stages form the supply and demand function for international cooperation. The interaction of demand and supply, preferences, and strategic opportunities shape the behavior of a country's foreign policy.

### **3. Methods**

This research is qualitative research through library research as a data collection technique. The data for this paper are sourced from various forms of relevant literature such as books, journals, theses, media publications, and reports and the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) as a trusted website for credibility to obtain data that can support research results. The collected data is then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns within a phenomenon and explain to what extent a phenomenon occurs from the researcher's point of view (Feredey & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

### **4. Results and Discussion**

#### *FDI, Intra-Regional Investment and The Dilemma of Sub-Regional Interests*

Apart from China's investment, since AFTA 1992, through tariff reductions of up to 5%, CLMV have shown quite encouraging progress, even though they only joined AFTA in 2004. With their joining, the tariff reduction target was later postponed to 2006. The results are quite satisfactory, considering that 66% of goods from the Inclusion List had reached the recommended level. By 2015, the average for CLMV was already 90.9%, while ASEAN had set 99.2% of their Inclusion List tariffs at 0%. CLMV also benefits from the ASEAN Integrated System of Preferences. Between 2000 and 2003 alone, the CLMV received more than 2,000 tariff preferences from the ASEAN6, for products which had been declared as particularly needed (Soja, 2017). This is a remarkable achievement despite Asia being overshadowed by the 1996-1997 economic crisis.

Prior to BRI, since AMBDC 1996, the Mekong Basin area, including Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, (as well as the Chinese province of Yunnan), has demonstrated a commitment to developing the Mekong Basin area. Besides aiming to improve the standard of living of CLMV and the areas around the Mekong Basin through trade and investment, China is also investing in developing human resources and modernizing transportation and infrastructure. The target is to connect CLMV with Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Yunnan province. These projects went under the name Kunming-Ruili Expressway, where China invested no less than 169.6 billion USD to Myanmar, separated into two terms (2005-2015 and 2022); Kunming-Hekou Railway with Vietnam in 1989-2014 (29.8 billion USD); Noi Bai-Lao Cai Expressway Vietnam in 2009-2014 (1.5 billion USD) and Hanoi-Hai Phong Expressway Vietnam in 2008-2018 (2.2 billion USD). In addition, the energy business sector is also China's main target (Cox et al, 2018; Ishida, 2019).

Further, investments to develop the CLMV were also channeled into various projects with BRI funding. China invested in road, highway and railway construction in Cambodia such as, National Highway No.5 in 2013-2016 (160 million USD); National Road 55 in 2015 (133 million USD); National Road 214 (117 million USD); Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway in 2017-2020 (1.9 billion USD); and Preah Vihear-Kaoh Kong Railway in 2013-2017 (9.6 billion USD). In Laos, China invested 2.8 billion USD in Nam Ou Hydro power plant project, Phongsaly-Yunnan road (910 million USD), and Vientiane-Boten Railway in 2015-2021 with budget of 5.8 billion USD (Cox et al, 2018; Ishida, 2019). In total, China has invested 21.42 billion USD in CLMV. We can then compare it with the investment in ASEAN6 (minus Singapore and The Philippines), shown in Table 2. From this comparison, we find that up to 2018, the investment ratio of BRI to CLMV and ASEAN6 was USD 21.42 billion compared to USD 34,372 billion (1 : 1.6). On its shores, Singapore does not have any major BRI-related infrastructure projects. Nonetheless, Singapore will not be immune from the potential impact of BRI on the capital markets, and there are a number of risk factors rooted in the development of a deeper economic connection to China, hence deepening the investment disparity with CLMV.

Table 2 BRI Projects in ASEAN6 Countries 2013-2018

No	Projects	Type	Starting year	Expected finish	Country	Value (USD)
1	Muara Terminal	Port	N/A	N/A	Brunei	3.4bn
2	Cirebon-Kroya	Railway	2017	2019	Indonesia	105mn
3	Jakarta-Bandung	Railway	2016	2019	Indonesia	5.5bn
4	Purukcahu-Bangkuang Railway, Central Kalimantan (PPP) Railway	Railway	2018	2023	Indonesia	5.3bn
5	Morowali Industrial Park	Steel industry and power plant	N/A	N/A	Indonesia	1.6bn
6	South Sumatera 5 Power Plant	Power plant	N/A	Done	Indonesia	318mn
7	East Coast Rail Link	Railway	2017	2024	Malaysia	13.47bn
8	Gemas Johor Bharu Double Tracking	Railway	2016	2020	Malaysia	2.18bn
9	Melaka Gateway	Port	2014	2019	Malaysia	1.96bn
10	Bangkok-Nakhon Ratchasima (Ph. 1)	Railway	2017	2021	Thailand	539mn
					<b>Total</b>	<b>34.372 bn</b>

Source: Cox et al (2018)

On the other hand, intra-ASEAN investment rose by 26%, from US\$ 19.4 billion in 2013 to US\$ 24.4 billion – accounting for 18% of total inflow into the region. Singapore is still the biggest investor in the intra-region. Intra-ASEAN investment declined by 3% in 2018, to \$25 billion. Intra-ASEAN investment is inflated by investments originating from outside the region channeled through Singapore. Excluding such conduit flows, the share of intra-regional stock drops by about one fifth (World Investment Report, 2019). In 2018, total investment from Singapore into other ASEAN Member States remained flat at \$17 billion, with 61% portions going to Indonesia. Meanwhile, intra-regional investment into the CLMV only covered a total of insignificant USD 5.942 billion in 2018 (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). In terms of cost-and-benefit calculus, these facts seem to make sense why the CLMV turned to China as a major partner in national and regional development. However, the position of CLMV as a sub-region within ASEAN will appear more complicated without comparing the national strategies of each ASEAN member country and how BRI will have domestic and regional impacts. Through the following analysis, we will get a relatively more comprehensive picture to see the pattern of cooperation between each country on a bilateral basis and how this has consequences for ASEAN integration.

#### *National Strategies: Balancing National Interests and Potential External Threats*

In the context of ASEAN6, cooperation between Brunei and China is linked through economic diversification. Brunei's economy relies on unsustainable oil and gas extraction. The infrastructure investment offered by BRI potentially increases Brunei's trade flows by switching its economy to trade rather than oil and gas extraction (Zoltai & Klemensits, 2020). For the Philippines, the BRI provides an opportunity for Duterte to fulfill his development promises by attracting large investments from China to offset the Philippines' limited budget. Duterte adopted a strategy of improving relations with China to balance the unequal relationship with the United States by putting aside issues in the South China Sea to avoid factors that could lead to disputes between the Philippines and China (Chao, 2020).

For Indonesia, three strategies are applied to deal with BRI, i.e.: (1) *balancing*; not only cooperating with China, but also cooperating with other countries that want to invest in Indonesia. The Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment of Indonesia emphasized that project cooperation, including in the context of loans, would be carried out on a B2B basis, so that there would be no loans to the Indonesian government and loans would go directly to projects, BRI cooperation would not increase Indonesia's debt to China (2) *bandwagoning*; several Chinese companies have educate Indonesian workers to occupy managerial positions due to the awareness of Chinese management who considers that they will not always stay in Indonesia, so that Indonesian workers are needed to replace their positions; and (3) *hedging*; tightening requirements for Chinese entrepreneurs who will invest in Indonesia. These conditions include (a) Chinese investors must use Indonesian workers (b) companies that invest in must produce goods that have added value (c) Chinese companies must transfer technology to

Indonesian workers (d) Indonesia prioritizes investment concepts through B2B not G2G (e) the business that is built must be environmentally friendly (Mursitama & Ying, 2020).

Malaysia implemented a hedging strategy during Mahathir Mohamad’s second term as an effort to reduce risks and maximize the potential arising from China’s behavior as a great power. To implement a balanced relationship, Malaysia engages directly politically and diplomatically with other countries to support the deepening of bilateral structures and mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation. Broadly speaking, Malaysia is trying to build a balanced relationship with all countries, this is an effort to reduce the influence that comes from BRI (Gerstl, 2020). On the other hand, Singapore has publicly stated its support for BRI. Liu et al (2021) argue that Singapore’s strong state capacity and longstanding relationship with China has promoted effective policy and coordinated institutional mechanisms that strengthen its involvement in the BRI. They explained that Singapore is conceptualized as a networked state, through communication with various key players through new and old institutional mechanisms, both from state and non-state actors. This institution is important because it can coordinate and manage diverse key interests, build effective and broad-based cooperation (Liu, 2018). Meanwhile, Thailand is implementing a strategy in developing transportation networks and logistics systems through the integration of BRI with the 20-year Thai Transportation System Development Plan of 2018-2037 which focuses on integrating Thailand’s transportation system into one and connecting Thailand’s transportation system more effectively (Punyaratabandhu & Swaspitchayaskun, 2020).

On the CLMV side, Cambodia sees BRI as a new catalyst for its economic development strategy, as well as regional integration and connectivity. Cambodia enthusiastically supports BRI because it can complement the national development strategy that has an impact on strengthening economic competitiveness by diversifying sources of growth and expanding the Cambodian economy. Cambodia views the rise of China as a great opportunity to develop its economy and strengthen its autonomy in the face of pressure from the West demanding Cambodian political and governance reforms (Chheang, 2017). Laos has economic growth that relies on exports and tourism, but does not have a large flow of trade and trading partners. Currently, the most important cooperation between Laos and China is in the railway project. If this project is realized, it will be the longest railway line in Asia outside of China. The aim of the project is to channel Laos as a landlocked country into trade and turn Laos into a continental hub (Zoltai & Klemensits, 2020). BRI provides an opportunity for Laos to improve its economy by assisting in building infrastructure that can open its trade to a wider market. Thus, there is no reason for Laos to reject the BRI.

For Myanmar, after the political transition in 2011, its strategy towards China has brought about a change from state-to-state relations to multi-layered relations and even to open domestic and foreign relations to manage relations between the state and society in order to balance the long-term economic and political benefits. long. This is evidenced by the existence of projects such as the Kyauk Phyu Deep Sea Port Project (state-oriented), the New Yangon Development Project (market-oriented), and the MyitSone Dam Project (society-oriented) that do not only involve the state, but are inclusive of market and society. Meanwhile, Vietnam implemented 3 strategies in dealing with BRI, namely: (1) balancing implemented to ensure Vietnam could anticipate if China attacked first and reduce dependence on China, (2) bandwagoning, prioritizing the development of friendly, peaceful, and friendly relations. comprehensive cooperation with China, and (3) hedging through multilateralization and diversification of foreign policy to establish good relations with all international organizations and countries. Such action can be seen as Vietnam’s multi-aspect, comprehensive and dominant strategy to protect its value against China in the context of BRI (Vu et al, 2020).

Table 3. Pattern of Cooperation Strategies between ASEAN Member Countries and BRI

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Pattern of Strategies</b>	<b>Form of Strategies</b>
Brunei Darussalam	Bandwagoning	Economic diversification
The Philippines	Balancing	Improving relations with China to balance the unequal relationship with the United States
	Bandwagoning	Attracting investment from China for the development of the Philippines and setting aside problems in the South China Sea to avoid high tensions with China
Indonesia	Balancing	Establish neutral relations to all countries
	Bandwagoning	Education of Indonesian workers by Chinese companies
	Hedging	Tightening terms and conditions for Chinese investors
Cambodia	Bandwagoning	Integration of national development with BRI



Lao People's Democratic Republic	Bandwagoning	Integration of national development with BRI
Malaysia	Hedging	Direct political and diplomatic engagement with other countries to support the deepening of bilateral structures and mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation
Myanmar	Multi-layered relations	State, market, and community involvement in BRI
Singapore	Bandwagoning	Promote effective policies and coordinate institutional mechanisms that strengthen engagement in BRI
	Networked state	Involvement of non-state actors to enhance cooperation between Singapore and China
Thailand	Bandwagoning	Integration of national development with BRI
Vietnam	Balancing	Establish neutral relations to all countries to reduce dependence on China
	Bandwagoning	Development of friendly, peaceful, and comprehensive cooperation with China
	Hedging	Multilateralization and diversification of foreign policy to establish good relations with all actors.

*Source: authors*

Through this mapping, we can already see that in general ASEAN countries assume similar strategies in relation with China. China itself seems to be aware of this and is adopting a strategy of more restraint (Table 3). The principle of “give and take” on the same basis defines a large part of FTA negotiations, but to show its generosity towards its neighbors, China adheres to the strategic principle of “give more and take less” or the principle of “give more without taking” and mutually beneficial equality all the time. Hong (2015) explains that the BRI signals a change in China’s foreign policy where trade priority will be given to neighboring countries. Academics from China have consistently pointed out that China always strives to give more than to receive (Ting, 2016; Chengyang & Xiangzhang, 2019). This is evidenced by Jiang & Li (2013) which states that China continues to experience a trade deficit with ASEAN. China imported more than it exported for a relatively long period in the past in 2000-2011. Soong (2018) explained that cooperation in CAFTA has increased from what was previously called the golden decade (2003-2013) to the diamond decade (2014-2024) which aims to promote cooperation and ensure development. What China does brings greater benefits to its cooperation partners. BRI acts as a booster that supports cooperation between China and ASEAN in the development of the new decade. The diamond decade provided an opportunity for China to lead the peace, prosperity, and integration of East Asia.

*ASEAN Way as a Way of Preventing Dominance, or Dominance with Face of ASEAN Way?*

China wants ASEAN to play a more crucial role in building an open and inclusive regional architecture. This is evidence that shows China’s support for AEC integration. China’s seriousness in supporting ASEAN’s role in East Asia is shown by China’s participation in cooperation mechanisms such as ASEAN+. At the summit marking the 25th anniversary of China-ASEAN relations in 2016, the two entities emphasized each other’s policy priorities emphasizing that China supports ASEAN’s centrality in the regional architecture. At the 22nd China-ASEAN Summit, Li Keqiang as a high-ranking official in the Chinese government said that China has always supported ASEAN’s centrality in East Asia cooperation. Politically, China seeks to involve ASEAN in larger regional affairs, an effort that has the potential to elevate the status of ASEAN countries on the international stage. China’s desire to involve ASEAN in regional affairs is not only based on its own interests, but also to demonstrate ASEAN’s ability to handle regional affairs. If ASEAN can show positive results, it will indirectly affect the international community’s assessment of ASEAN countries and especially CLMV which will get many benefits. Thus, CLMV will no longer be considered a difficult country to develop in ASEAN, CLMV will be seen as countries that have the same quality and equality with other ASEAN countries. This is certainly a strategic step from China to build good relations with ASEAN as a strategic partner in the Pacific Hub. But does this strategy at the domestic level work at the regional level in tensions between key regional and sub-regional actors?

The dilemma of sub-regional integration into the ASEAN region is related to the unequal decision making between the founding countries and the new member countries. It is true that since the formation of ASEAN there has been emphasis on a fair negotiating position to provide stability in the region (MacGillivray & Carpenter, 2013). Rattanaseevee (2014) explains that this principle has not changed much even after the joining of CLMV into ASEAN. This is evidenced by the absence of special advantages from one of the countries in ASEAN. Theoretically, LI suggests different negotiating positions based on the social, economic, and political factors of each country (Moravcsik, 1993). The existence of a more powerful country will influence in pressuring other

countries to comply with the plans of the ruling state, so that the decision-making process becomes faster. Currently, ASEAN does not have the power to lead other countries in directing the integration process. Members respect ASEAN principles and refuse to put their country above other countries, because it is feared that such action will undermine the AEC integration process.

According to Soong (2018), the existence of a strong and unified ASEAN is the key that determines the development of East Asian integration through ASEAN centrality, ASEAN centrality will encourage ASEAN to play a stronger role in dealing with larger global powers. In simple terms ASEAN centrality is a strategy that does not depend on any party, so that these conditions can ensure and enhance regional peace and stability. Politically, the ASEAN Way principles may serve as a mechanism to prevent the domination of a country in the ASEAN region. But on the other hand the ASEAN Way may serve as logic of domination related to political decisions that must be taken by this region. There is a positive side to this mechanism which prevents decision-making from being dominated by one of the strongest countries in the region. In other words, all decisions are joint decisions by consensus, with ASEAN as a single, unitary actor. Through this principle, ASEAN countries bilaterally can establish economic cooperation freely with China through any mechanism, but when speaking on behalf of the region, political decisions depend on how decisions play out in the region. At this point, if CLMV have increased political capacity, ASEAN6 will see it as a threat to the way of playing that has existed for a long time since the founding of ASEAN. However, the principles of the ASEAN Way were designed when ASEAN was founded in the first place. Suspicion of the non-democratic political system of the CLMV can be an obstacle to more total political integration.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper conducts an analysis at the domestic level of politics and the economy to identify the influence of BRI on the AEC. At the domestic level, BRI helps to realize the national interests of ASEAN members, especially CLMV. At the political level, China through BRI can stimulate ASEAN in forming a more effective decision-making system to avoid decisions that harm ASEAN in AEC integration. However, in the case of ASEAN, the logic of decision-making differs from that of economic logic. Politically, there will always be a chasm between CLMV and ASEAN6 countries. countries in the CLMV can receive tremendous economic benefits from China. However, ASEAN6 will have their own decision-making logic at the intergovernmental level. As a consequence of regional integration based on government initiatives, not on the market, the processes that occur at the market level will be fully controlled by the governments of each member state. ASEAN6 is likely to maintain the dominance of decision-making by the founding countries of ASEAN and will continue to be wary of the steps taken by sub regional actors in decision-making at the supranational institutional level. The role as the founder of ASEAN will remain a *conditio sine qua non* in political decisions at the regional level. However, this can be seen as an ASEAN advantage that is able to harmonize the necessary economic dimensions, while maintaining the political pattern that has been going on so far. In this case, there is no need for an integral and institutional political mechanism as long as ASEAN's security is not at stake, such as the EU. Due to various limitations, this dilemma cannot be resolved in this paper.

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