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**PROCEEDING OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON ASEAN (IC-ASEAN)**

**“TOWARDS A BETTER ASEAN”**

**September 5-6, 2019  
Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia**

**Editor  
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## Preface

ASEAN is a dynamic force which maintains its growth despite obstacles and problems. After completing the first period of its vision of an integrated regional community (ASEAN Community 2015), ASEAN is now preparing for the launch of ASEAN Community Vision 2025, supported by ASEAN Connectivity 2025. As a study center focusing primarily and solely on ASEAN, Pusat Studi ASEAN (PSA) Universitas Andalas in collaboration with the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs believes that this time of transition is the most appropriate moment to evaluate past actions, to discuss present issues and to provide an outlook for the future of ASEAN.

The main objective of the International Conference on ASEAN (IC-ASEAN) was to gather academics and practitioners, from various backgrounds, in order to specifically compile knowledge, theory and scientific suggestions which could contribute to the success of ASEAN's future; thus the theme of this conference "Towards a Better ASEAN". In order to directly connect to ASEAN, the subtheme of IC-ASEAN was aligned with the three ASEAN Community pillars which are ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Moreover, the subthemes were designed to be general to accommodate the diverse and numerous backgrounds of participants.

The keynote speakers, who were experts in their field; academics and professionals (diplomats), came from ASEAN member countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei Darussalam. There were more than 100 papers presented at the conference, originating from more than 30 universities and institutions from all over Indonesia and also Malaysia. We do believe that this conference is an initial step towards collaboration between academics and practitioners from various backgrounds to play a role in the development of ASEAN as a regional organization. It still has a very long way to go, but this initial step is the start of many years of collaboration.

This proceeding is the first of what we hope will be a series of the International Conference on IC-ASEAN proceedings. The papers published in this proceeding are selected articles from IC-ASEAN conference. Our most notable achievement will be the contribution of the knowledge within this proceeding for the advancement of IC-ASEAN, but also the enlightenment that it could bring to anyone who was able to read it.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	i
<b>Organizing Committee</b> .....	ii
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	ii
<b>1. ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY PILLAR</b>	<b>1</b>
Influence of Interest Groups in Indonesian Humanitarian Assistance Policy Making to Rohingya in 2017 .....	1
<i>Abdul Halim, Putiviola Elian Nasir</i>	
Legal Aspects of Oral Literature as a Cultural Art in South Sumatra .....	8
<i>Abdullah, H.KN. Sofyan Hasan, Iza Rumesten, Taroman Pasyah</i>	
ASEAN Responses to External Challenges from the Cold War to Indo-Pacific: Does ASEAN still Play Pivotal Role?.....	18
<i>Abubakar Eby Hara, Himawan Bayu Patriadi, Agus Trihartono</i>	
Trafficking in Persons Laws and Border Challenges in Malaysia: ASEAN Discourse .....	27
<i>Aiman Aizuddin Junaidi, Salawati mat Basir, Rohani Abdul Rahim, Mohd Shukor Abdul Mumin, Muhammad Afiq, Ahmad Tajuddin</i>	
Analysis of Local Government Web Transparency of South East Asia Countries: a Case Study in Indonesia.....	36
<i>Asniati Bahari, Amsal Djunid, Hestriyana Putri, Anggri Pratwi Vitra, Anggun Tiara Dwiputri</i>	
The Regional Open in Southeast Asia “Is there a Threat or Chance for Indonesia as Quintessential Transit Country?” .....	48
<i>Cifebrima Suyastri, Dini Tiara Sismi</i>	
EU Citizenship and Relevancy for ASEAN in Sustainable Refugee Management through the Role of TNCs.....	57
<i>Fauzan, Helmi, Zulkifli Harza, Sri Oktavia</i>	
The Regulation of Internet as Literacy Media for Cyber Community.....	66
<i>Febrimarani Malinda, Rogaiyah, Yanuar Syam Putra</i>	
The Continuity of ASEAN Centrality within Indonesian Foreign Policy under President Joko Widodo.....	72
<i>Gibran Mahesa Drajat</i>	
The Securitization of Cyber Issue in ASEAN.....	90
<i>Inda Mustika Permata, Bima Jon Nanda</i>	

ASEAN Connectivity 2025: Shall Australia become the Future Member of ASEAN?.....	98
<i>Johni Robert Verianto Korwa</i>	
Implementation of Halal Food Policy in Padang City and Southeast Asia .....	106
<i>Khairunnisa, Alfian Miko, Syamsurizaldi</i>	
Implementation of Indonesian Law No 18/2017 and ASEAN Consensus for Indonesian Women Migrant Worker by Placement and Protection Service Center, South Sumatra Province .....	110
<i>Nur Aslamiah Supli, Sari Mutiara Aisyah, Retno Susilowati</i>	
The Need for Children's Toy Safety Policy in ASEAN .....	117
<i>Rahmah Ismail, Wan Amir Azlan Wan Haniff, Syed Sagoff Alsagoff, Suzanna Mohamed Isa, Kartini Aboo Talib Khalid, Rozlinda Mohamed Fadzil</i>	
The Factors that Caused ASEAN Security Regime Fail to Deal with the Transnational Crime of Narcotics Smuggling in Southeast Asia .....	124
<i>Rendi Prayuda</i>	
Development of Law on Access and Benefit Sharing from Utilization of Genetic Resources of Indigenous People .....	134
<i>Retno Kusniati, Helmi</i>	
Securitizing the Environment: A Case of Marine Debris in Indonesia .....	141
<i>Rifki Dermawan</i>	
Indonesian Maritime Connectivity, Development Equality and ASEAN Connectivity .....	148
<i>V.L Sinta Herindrasti</i>	
The Potential Source of Conflict in ASEAN Seawater .....	157
<i>Sofia Trisni, Inda Mustika Permata, Bima Jon Nanda, Alfian Miko</i>	
Implement the Save Maninjau Policy on Lake Maninjau .....	166
<i>Soni Aulia, Ria Ariany, Hendri Koeswara</i>	
Implementation of the Policy for the Establishment of Village-Owned Enterprises in the Era of the ASEAN Economic Community in South Solok Regency .....	169
<i>Suherdian Antoni, Syamsurizaldi, Indradin</i>	
Transformation from State-Centered to People-Centered Security in ASEAN Community: Milestone of the ASEAN Approach to Human Security .....	178
<i>Suyani Indriastuti</i>	
Local Political Contestation with National on the Implementation of Democracy and Good Governance in ASEAN Countries .....	187
<i>Tamrin Kiram, Afrizal, Helmi, Asrinaldi, Indah Adi Putri</i>	

## ASEAN RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL CHALLENGES FROM THE COLD WAR TO INDO-PACIFIC: DOES ASEAN STILL PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE?

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### Abstract

This paper discusses how ASEAN responds to its international environment by specific reference to the concept of ASEAN centrality. The approach that has been used to explain the centrality of ASEAN, namely neorealism and constructivism generally emphasizes just one aspect, either external or internal. Therefore, we need an approach that can see how the two elements are filtered by ASEAN decision-makers to respond to the developments in the region. We argue that neo-classical realism can fill this gap. From neoclassical realism approach, the accomplishment of ASEAN centrality is largely determined by the ability of decision-makers to formulate attitudes and positions in a solid manner in facing challenges and opportunities in the international structure. Failure to formulate joint responses solidly can result in the ease of ASEAN members being infiltrated by outside interests.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, Indo-Pacific, neo-classical realism, norms, identity

### INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to discuss how ASEAN responds to its international environment by referring to the concept of ASEAN centrality. In the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN Centrality has become a target that must be pursued. In the Charter it is mentioned "To maintain the centrality and the proactive role of ASEAN as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners in a regional architecture that is open, transparent, and inclusive" (Article 1.15). It also emphasizes "the centrality of ASEAN in external political, economic, social and cultural relations while remaining actively engaged, outward-looking, inclusive, and non-discriminatory" (Article 2.2)[1]. The goals to become central is important, but their realization, in the view of this paper, depends on external and internal situations. Although some observers such as Acharya said that the task of ASEAN Centrality was initially considered by some members to be too ambitious[2], in the period observed in this paper namely during the Cold War, the Post-Cold War and Indo-Pacific era, the role of ASEAN centrality in its region is not something that cannot be achieved.

The issue is how and under what circumstances ASEAN can be said to be successful in playing its central role and in what situations the centrality experiences difficulties. This paper argues that the success of ASEAN centrality is determined by the creativity of ASEAN decision makers and the condition of its external environment. ASEAN's central role will be strong if there is unity within ASEAN members in formulating the challenges it has to face in the region.

This paper follows this structure. First, in the method and literature review section, we will discuss the approach to capture ASEAN response patterns to international challenges. Second, in the results and analysis section, the paper will look at ASEAN responses on a case-by-case basis and the difficulties faced by ASEAN when it deals with issues that are still volatile both inside and outside its region.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Although already contained in the Charter, a clear definition of ASEAN centrality is debated. The term is often exchanged with the leader, the driver, the architect, the institutional hub, the vanguard, the nucleus, and the fulcrum [2]. Caballero-Anthony said centrality means to be a node in a network cluster. ASEAN plays a central role in setting the agenda in the regional institutional architecture, which includes great power [3].

Meanwhile, Acharya said that the centrality of ASEAN is that if it plays its traditional role as a regional consensus-builder between conflicting big powers in its region [2]. In this case, ASEAN can play a role as norm entrepreneur. According to Surin Pitsuwan, that role must also involve substance of how the region should cooperate [4].

From these various views, there are at least four meanings of ASEAN's central role. First, it is a node in an institutional network. Secondly, it becomes norm-builders, especially when there is conflict. Thirdly, it must determine the substance of cooperation in the region. Fourthly, ASEAN must become a driving force.

Departing from these characteristics, this paper attempts to see how the application of the ASEAN centrality in the three different periods, namely the Cold War, the Post-Cold war, and the Indo-Pacific era. These three periods were chosen because they have different characteristics one and another.

In our study, several theories and writings that explain the centrality of ASEAN, have their limitation to grasp satisfactorily how ASEAN responds to its international environment. In this literature review, we try to look at the limitations of these approaches and offer a more comprehensive approach based on the Neo-Classical Realism (NCR) approach.

ASEAN's response to its international environment is often seen from one side only, namely internal aspects of ASEAN or external aspects in the form of international pressure on ASEAN [5]. Internal aspects, for example, are explained by constructivists who emphasize on how ASEAN can form norms of cooperation, collective identity and the security community [2] [6] [7] [8]. Constructivists argue that ASEAN shared norms have strengthened ASEAN unity and cooperation [9]. ASEAN's collective identity is indeed essential in relating or responding to international development, but it is not the only factor. Although there is a strong and robust identity in ASEAN, if the international situation is not conducive, then the centrality of ASEAN will not work well.

Conversely, approaches that emphasize external factors such as explained by neorealism saw the importance of international structures in determining state behavior [10] [11] [12]. International relations are determined by the capabilities of large countries, while countries with small capabilities cannot do much in dealing with that international structure. International structures based on capabilities create, for example, bipolar, multipolar, and unipolar structures. These structures largely determine the choice of the behavior of small countries. Even, Jones sees that ASEAN's activities are not so relevant in such context and only imitates what has been done in the European experience as an organization amid big powers rivalries [11].

Neorealism theory cannot fully capture the dynamics of ASEAN in responding to its environment. Although it is a group of countries with small military capability, ASEAN countries have their ways to compromise and fight for their interests to make their region free from foreign interference. The institutionalization of the norms of cooperation that they have done not only succeeded in reducing tensions among themselves but also made ASEAN the only organization that was ready with the institutional mechanisms of cooperation in the Asia Pacific. ASEAN succeeded in expanding dialogues with several countries in the region in several forums such as EAS, ASEM, ARF, ASEAN+3, APEC, and ASEAN-PMC. As such, ASEAN can play an important role even though it does not have the capabilities of big countries. In this context, neorealism cannot fully explain the dynamics of ASEAN.

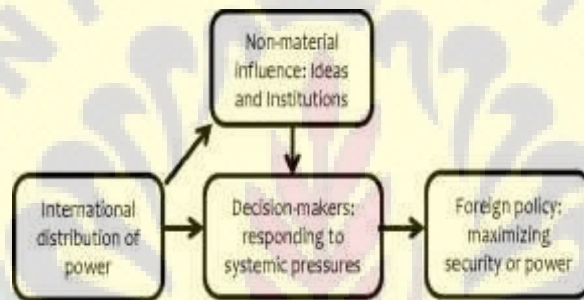
With this background in mind, we need an approach that can explain both external and internal aspects in understanding the dynamics of ASEAN centrality and how both aspects interrelate.



Understanding these two aspects can open up opportunities for understanding the strength of the ASEAN centrality. Only by looking at ASEAN's identity, we cannot see how that identity plays a role in the context of international pressure. In contrast, using the neorealism approach, we ignore ASEAN's role and efforts in the region [13].

Neo-classical realism is expected to bridge the above gap. It is called classical, because like classical realism, it concerns the state as an individual actor in international relations with all the attributes and elements of its national power. On the other hand, it does not neglect the aspect of international capability distribution described by neo-realism.

It needs to be understood here, aspects of the international structure in neorealism approach do not directly affect the behavior of the state, but it passes through the intervening variable, namely the decision makers in a state. They are actors that exist in the middle of these two environments. Decision-makers in a country try to understand the limitations and opportunities in both their external and internal environments. Their perceptions can also be shaped by the historical experience, identity, and strategic culture inherent so far. The following table shows the flow of how external factors and identities are interrelated in shaping foreign policy [14].



In the scheme above the assumption of neorealism is still used, but it does not directly affect foreign policy. The distribution of international power must go through a domestic process in a country where decision-makers, based on their identity and experience, try to adjust and look for opportunities that benefit their country's interests.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Research for the writing of this paper was carried out through a literature review of media, news, academic views, and various documents. The authors also conducted interviews with experts. We attempt to trace back how ASEAN faced international pressure during the Cold War by reviewing the available literature, putting it together in the theoretical framework used. Such historical analysis is also carried out in the subsequent periods covered in this study. An analysis of identities and norms is done by tracing the writings on the establishment of a security community in ASEAN, the expansion of ASEAN members and in how the ASEAN norms are adopted by new member countries. Interviews, in particular, were conducted to strengthen the understanding of ASEAN centrality.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research and analysis presented here are made chronologically according to the periods discussed to facilitate the comparison of ASEAN centrality. In the Cold War period, ASEAN (which still consisted of 5 non-communist members) was worried about the increasing threat to their security interests with the fall of Indochina into communist hands followed by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978. Indeed, the international environment at that time was bipolar and indeed easy to assume that ASEAN's policies against Vietnam intervention in Cambodia were part of the influence of the international system [15].

On the one hand, there was indeed such an indication. With ASEAN's weak capabilities, it would be effortless for ASEAN to ask for military support from the West as happened with other regions such as Europe under NATO. But ASEAN from the very beginning had declared its territory to be free from influence and interference by outside forces in the concept of ZOPFAN [16].

Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia pushed ASEAN even further to declare the principle that the resolution of problems in the region must be carried out through ASEAN ways that use a peaceful path. In the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), it emphasized that in addition to the principle of non-intervention and respect for the sovereignty of other countries, there is also a statement that the use of threats or violence in solving problems between countries must be abandoned [16].

ASEAN then made active diplomatic efforts to reject the invasion of Vietnam in Cambodia [17] [18]. This diplomatic pressure was indeed considered ineffective and doubtful and took years to process, starting from the Vietnam invasion of Cambodia in 1978 until negotiations began in the late 1980s. This ongoing effort through diplomatic pressure also gradually showed results.

After Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia and recognized the principles of ASEAN TAC, there was no reason for ASEAN not to include this country as ASEAN members. This is also part of realizing the ideals of One Southeast Asia. ASEAN would likely feel more comfortable if they stick with their old membership because they had built mutual understanding and shared identity. But apparently, ASEAN continued to spread its wings. ASEAN's action certainly also paid attention to international developments after the End of the Cold War in which the communist threat was considered to have ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In this stage it was seen that ASEAN decision-makers succeeded in making a solid joint stance against the invasion of Vietnam in Cambodia. They are also in a conducive international system where Western countries are also very worried about strengthening the influence of the Soviet Union through Vietnam in Southeast Asia. In the NCR analysis, we see that the international structure does not directly affect ASEAN, because ASEAN has its own choice in responding to the situation, namely by making diplomatic efforts to resolve disputes with Vietnam. They are actually worried that Western military involvement in Southeast Asia will only make the situation of the region more complicated.

The ASEAN diplomatic pressure received support from Western countries and the US, and in international forums, Vietnam was isolated and finally accepted a resolution through negotiation. This ASEAN effort finally paid off when the Paris agreement was held in 1989 which later gave birth to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to help the process of transitioning power and elections in Cambodia [19].

ASEAN's response to the Post-Cold War international environment also showed the dynamics of external influences and internal ASEAN's reactions and perceptions on its environment. Politically, the End of the Cold War left the US with no more enemies, and the world system was known as unipolar [20]. Some academics like Fukuyama refer to this situation as the end of history where the world has come to an end because the liberal ideology and democracy have won battles with other ideologies [21]. The principles of liberal democracy and human rights then come to the attention of the US and the West in international relations.

ASEAN countries reacted fairly strongly to the international pressure on human rights, based on the belief that they had sovereignty and autonomy as independent countries. They used this justification of international law to resist Western pressure on democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia. This view was widely criticized because ASEAN was considered to apply 'negative sovereignty.' According to this criticism, ASEAN took refuge by using the principle of sovereignty to resist international pressure and did not really try to address the real problems of human rights and freedom as it was supposed to be as sovereign states [22].

ASEAN members developed their own principles and ideas about human rights and democracy. They, for example, emphasizes that the application of human rights must be following the context and

situation in their country. They also stressed at international meetings about Asian values that differed from the West as a basis for governance and democracy. We were familiar with the term Singaporean school, who was keen to develop such a view [23]. In Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, claims of local values were reflected in the claims of the importance of Asian values and of their own democracy models such as Pancasila democracy [24].

ASEAN at that time was solid enough to face Western pressure, because of the common interests of each ASEAN country which at that time had not carried out political reform. Indonesia was still under the authoritarian regime of the New Order, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines were often seen as semi-authoritarian regimes that were still repressive to their citizens despite holding relatively safe and open general elections. The elites in these countries agreed that a drastic change would make their country unstable and chaotic. They often gave examples of the failure of a fully democratic system in the world, such as in Sri Lanka and Lebanon. In this context, they also saw China as an ally in the context of resisting human rights and democratic pressure from Western countries [25].

Even so, ASEAN countries recognized the limitations they had in relations with Western countries. These ASEAN countries depend on Western countries in the economic and industry as well as in financial assistance. A good relationship with them is needed for the continuity of this collaboration. They then tried to accommodate the international pressure [26], as evidenced by the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission in several ASEAN countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines [27] [28]. International pressure was particularly strong with regard to human rights violations in East Timor which made Indonesia had to make a fact-finding mission to look for perpetrators of human rights violations there.

ASEAN also made changes in its organization by declaring ASEAN Charter, People-Centered ASEAN, ASEANCommunity, and ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). Some ASEAN countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines are pushing for greater openness and want the formation of a stronger AICHR [29]. This process shows that the external conditions also affect domestic conditions in ASEAN.

Changes in the international environment subsequently occurred in the Asia Pacific in the era called the Indo-Pacific. With the end of the Cold War, a decline in the US involvement in Southeast Asia had created a vacuum which is then filled by the presence of Chinese in the region. The strengthening of Chinese power was then responded by the US with countries that have the same interests as the US, namely Japan, Australia and India which are often referred to as 'the Quad.' These countries try to compensate for what they perceive as the rising threats of China, which, for example, began to control the South China Sea.

Strengthening of American power through cooperation with allied countries took place quite seriously. The US, for example, plans to place its weapons in Asia to strengthen its long-established military base in Darwin Australia. In a statement on August 2019, the US defence secretary Mark Esper clearly stated that the US will build new US bases and increase its ballistic missiles in Asia [30]. The US view is primarily to stem the expansion of Chinese influence both in the economic and political fields. Balancing efforts is one of the steps taken. During Trump's administration, the US continues to calculate which countries the US can approach to providing military assistance to contain Chinese influence.

The Americans put forward their conception of the Indo-Pacific region named the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) which implicitly alienates China with the term free region [31]. In FOIP, it is said that the desired Indo-Pacific region is free and open. This, in other words, excluded China which is not really free country.

ASEAN is the last entity that can be said to have responded to developments in the Indo-Pacific. In contrast to the FOIP concept, which is very exclusive and isolate China, ASEAN develops the principle of inclusiveness. In the ASEAN proposal, the desire is for all countries to engage in cooperation in the region. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) consists of five components of collaboration namely integrating the Asia-Pacific Region with the Indian Ocean Region, then encouraging dialogue and cooperation rather than competition as it is now likely to occur

[4]. ASEAN also emphasizes development progress and prosperity for all and the importance of the maritime region in regional cooperation. The ASEAN-driven collaboration includes the fields of maritime, connectivity, sustainable development, and economy.

The appearance of ASEAN with its views is an effort to re-realize the centrality of ASEAN in this region, which for some time was a vacuum. ASEAN had the opportunity to begin the process of structuring the region in 2013 when the Indonesian Foreign Minister at the time, Marty Natalegawa proposed the Treaty of Indo-Pacific friendship and cooperation [32], but that did not go far because of Indonesia's reduced attention on ASEAN during the Jokowi first period of administration. Only at the end of his first term of administration, Indonesia took the initiative to propose AOIP, which became the platform for ASEAN's Indo-Pacific policy.

In current situation, ASEAN can occupy the position called the driver seat for dialogue in the region by providing various forums such as ASEAN+3, ARF and EAS. However, centrality should not mean just sitting as a driver. In this situation, unfortunately ASEAN cannot play more roles, because the region has dynamically changed with the increasing presence of China and the strengthening US coalition. This development has been anticipated differently by each ASEAN states without any ability of ASEAN as an organization to control it. Things that have been worried by Natalegawa in 2013 namely 'trust deficit, territorial disputes and strategic changes' [33], seems to be confirmed nowadays. AOIP is an attempt to coordinate ASEAN response but whether it is too late or not, only time will tell.

This is, in contrast, to a situation when ASEAN was actively playing its part in facing Vietnamese intervention or actively negotiating with the West in upholding human rights. ASEAN at that time not only tried to mediate but also seriously fought for their interests by filling in substantially the direction of cooperation in the region.

Moreover, regarding AOIP, not all ASEAN countries fully support this proposal. It is no secret; there are divisions in ASEAN. For example, countries like Cambodia, as seen in the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh 2012, gave support to China so that for the first time the consensus in ASEAN was flawed even though it was later bridged by Indonesia. This disagreement also occurred in Vientiane, Laos in 2016. The very close economic ties between China and the mainland ASEAN countries made the country take such a position (Interview with Herman Kraft 6 September 2019). Likewise, before the ASEAN proposal was submitted to the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Singapore felt that the AOIP proposal had not been sufficiently consulted with them [34].

In the face of the economically expansive development of Chinese forces in the world, including in Southeast Asia, ASEAN countries individually seek their advantages. They tried to seize opportunities from the development of Chinese economic influence through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Almost all ASEAN countries took the opportunity and became part of the big project. Even though there are countries like Indonesia that face great public pressure in rejecting BRI projects, overall, BRI shows the expansion of the Chinese economy. China has become a rival of ASEAN's traditional economic partners such as Western countries, the US, Korea, and Japan. Japan especially became very worried about China's aggressive move in the economic field, especially because some projects were given to China in several ASEAN members.

External and internal analysis of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific era shows that ASEAN centrality is in an uncertain situation. If the centrality of ASEAN is measured by its ability to lead the dialogue process with existing forums, then ASEAN may still play central role. ASEAN also has also set up norms of relations that are generally adopted by ASEAN members, although the commitment to this matter is also debated at this time. These norms are also formally sought to become a code of conduct for countries in the region. But the extent to which the norm was internalized by countries outside ASEAN in the midst of increasingly intense competition in the Indo-Pacific requires further analysis. In short, whether ASEAN has concrete collective interests in dealing with developments in the dynamic Indo-Pacific is in uncertainty.

## CONCLUSION

This paper shows that ASEAN's response to the international environment can be more vigorously seen from the NCR approach, which accommodates both the external and internal environment. These two environments determine the centrality and active role of ASEAN. A conducive external environment and ASEAN solidity such as during the Cold War allowed ASEAN to play a central and contributory role to pressure Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia. ASEAN was also able to unite in responding to Western pressures on human rights and democracy after the End of the Cold War. In both cases, ASEAN's solidity is quite strong, and this makes ASEAN's centrality very strong in responding to the situation in its international environment. In the Indo-Pacific era, ASEAN's common interests were not too solid. ASEAN still occupies the driver seat for the development of dialogue and norms in the region, but whether ASEAN can contribute substantially to the peaceful relations in this region is difficult to ascertain.

The NCR approach, in the view of this paper, can be said to be a synthesis of the continuing debates in seeing how ASEAN survives and plays a role in its external environment. The debate between neo-realism and constructivists originally began in 1980s between Michael Leifer in neorealist camp and Amitav Acharya from constructivist group. It continues today in looking at ASEAN centrality in this region. The introduction of the NCR approach is expected to create new insight that can reveal things that have not been revealed by the two approaches.

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