

# Part II

## 4. Strengthened ASEAN Centrality and East Asia Collective Leadership

### iii. Strengthened Centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Collective Leadership in East Asia: China's Role

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# Strengthened Centrality of ASEAN and Collective Leadership in East Asia: China's Role

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## Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the most successful case of regional cooperation in Asia. Starting with five countries in Southeast Asia, ASEAN now comprises all 10 countries in the region,<sup>2</sup> and has moved from a dialogue framework based on goodwill to an ASEAN Community based on a legal foundation (the ASEAN Charter).

ASEAN's valuable experiences over the past 50 years can be summarised simply as (i) insisting on the 'ASEAN Way', (ii) focusing on peace and development, and (iii) maintaining centrality in the regional networks. ASEAN's striking past achievements include peace building, which has turned a conflicted region into a peaceful one; and economic development, which has changed a backward region into a new emerging

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<sup>2</sup> Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

economic region. ASEAN has played a key role in establishing networks for dialogue and cooperation, including 'ASEAN+1' (China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Australia, or New Zealand [separately]); 'ASEAN+3' (China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea [CJK]); 'ASEAN+6' (CJK, Australia, New Zealand, and India); 'ASEAN+8' (CJK, Australia, New Zealand, the United States [US], and the Russian Federation); and the ASEAN Forum.

Maintaining ASEAN's centrality is crucial because it enhances ASEAN's unity and progress. ASEAN's centrality is also beneficial to East Asia as only ASEAN is accepted by all other parties. ASEAN, with its successful experience of community building, will play a leading role in community building for East Asia. No other large power can play such a leading role.

In the face of new challenges and uncertainty, ASEAN's own community and network building for East Asia are especially important. Through ASEAN's central role, East Asia can make a collective effort to support globalisation against unilateralism and protectionism, and generate new momentum for regional economic development and progress for cooperative security. As the Trump administration insists on an 'America first' doctrine, what East Asia needs is not an equivalent approach against the US, but more collective efforts to build a more open and integrated market and multilateral architecture.

China and ASEAN have established a stable and close relationship both on a bilateral level with all ASEAN members, and on a collective level with ASEAN. While handling complex bilateral relations with each country, China has prioritised the development of a strategic partnership with ASEAN, ranging from a free trade agreement (FTA), to a Declaration on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and a Code of Conduct. China's rise presents both challenges and opportunities for China's neighbours.<sup>3</sup> As China is a fast-growing big power, its neighbours

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<sup>3</sup> Whether China can regain the respect of its neighbours that it had during the 'Middle Kingdom' remains to be seen. This will be a difficult balancing act for China, which is demonstrating that it is back as a major power after the century of humiliation on the one hand, and wishes to be regarded as an important but peaceful neighbour on the other (Shen, 2012).

are naturally concerned with China's strategy and behaviour.<sup>4</sup> In ASEAN and East Asia, there is particular concern over the strategic competition between China and the US, although China has clearly stated that it will not compete for hegemony with the US.

China has announced that it is not following the example of the old powers, who either used force to invade other countries or otherwise competed for dominance. By keeping its rise peaceful, China can achieve a 'win-win' situation with East Asia that is good for both China and the region. Disputes amongst nations, including territorial disputes should be solved peaceably. Traditional Chinese culture reveres 'peace and harmony', commends 'defusing' contradictions, and pursues the results of 'reconciliation'. China is keeping its political system consistent with China's character, but it cannot live alone, and shares comprehensive interests with others. Chinese leaders have called for the building of a community with a shared future. This community building complies with the principles of 'amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness' (Xi, 2013).<sup>5</sup> Truly realising this 'community dream' will depend on the will and wisdom of China and its partners.

In the past, China and ASEAN worked together to build a stable and cooperative partnership based on mutual respect and trust. This is beneficial not just to China and ASEAN, but also to the region as a whole as it helps to nurture a desire to build a community with a shared future. China has no intention to rebuild a 'Middle Kingdom order' dominated by itself, but instead hopes to build a community to share its future with others. Building a community in East Asia will require collective effort and a 'shared leadership' with all partners, not led by ASEAN or China alone. Such a 'shared leadership' must be based on the initiatives and actions of all partners.

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<sup>4</sup> As commented by Shambaugh (2005: 41), 'Although China's posture of late has been largely reassuring to the region, its past behavior has not always been so. Long memories, residual concerns, and irredentist issues remain...and as a consequence several states appear to be practicing various types of "hedging" strategies.'

<sup>5</sup> The call to build a community with a shared future shows the real direction of China's foreign policy towards its neighbors (Liu, 2014: 3).

## Looking Forward: ASEAN 2040

The building of the ASEAN Community is the core marker of progress for ASEAN. The building process began in 2003 when the leaders of 10 ASEAN Member States (AMSs) agreed on the agenda at the Ninth ASEAN Summit. A big step forward occurred at the 12th ASEAN Summit in 2007 when leaders announced their intention to establish the ASEAN Community by 2015. The ASEAN Charter, which codifies ASEAN norms, rules, and values, as well as clear targets, came into force in 2008 to serve as the legal foundation for the building of the ASEAN Community.<sup>6</sup>

The building of the ASEAN Community reflects ASEAN's wisdom and innovativeness. Taking into consideration the conditions of the AMSs, the ASEAN Community is designed as an institutional identity comprising three pillars: (i) the ASEAN Political-Security Community, (ii) the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and (iii) the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Each pillar has its own blueprint and roadmap. The building of the ASEAN Community is promoted by forward-looking visions and concerted actions. While celebrating the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015, leaders adopted the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, which provided a clear picture for a more advanced community. According to the vision, by 2025 the community shall be 'a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community"' (ASEAN, 2015). ASEAN continually emphasises its nature 'as an outward-looking region within a global community of nations, while maintaining ASEAN centrality' (ASEAN, 2015). In adopting an outward-looking approach, ASEAN employs two strategies: (i) insisting on opening itself to the outside world while encouraging its members to develop their own external relations, and (ii) strengthening ASEAN's role as a representative identity for its members to develop cooperative networks with other countries and organisations.

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<sup>6</sup> The Charter was a milestone because it provides 'a legal personality for ASEAN...codifying ASEAN's norms, rules and values and serving as a legally binding contract for ASEAN member states'. Critics charge that, compared to the European Union constitution negotiated in Europe, the Charter is wanting. However, in drafting the Charter, the high-level task force never deemed it necessary to look at the European Union as a benchmark (Fuji, 2017).

However, this vision requires effective actions, and there are many challenges ahead in the quest to realise its goals. For example, the incredible economic, political, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity amongst the AMSs creates barriers to unity and community building. The 'ASEAN Way' is anchored on consultation and consensus amongst all AMSs. There are worries that ASEAN may not respond effectively to meet these challenges as the consensus can only be based on the 'lowest common denominator', and each member has veto power to oppose, postpone, or derail decisions and actions on urgent or critical problems (Morada, 2017: 23). As a 'shared identity', not a governing organisation, while enhancing the role of collective governance, ASEAN will continue to ensure its members' sovereign rights and benefits. It is argued that, despite ASEAN's promises, the 'internal' relevance of the community to each of its members remains far secondary to national politics and policy priorities within each AMS (Tay, 2018: 49). The challenge is to be bold enough to condition minds to create a new and reformed ASEAN by agreeing to forge a new consensus (Fuzi, 2017).

The building of the AEC lies at the core of the vision of the ASEAN Community. In a changing regional and international environment, ensuring the economic dynamics of ASEAN is essential for building the AEC. ASEAN has achieved great success in its economic development by opening up and integrating in the regional and global market. The 2008 financial and economic crisis significantly changed the economic growth environment, from booming up to cooling down. Furthermore, President Trump's 'America first' approach and protective trade policy have had a negative effect on globalisation and harmed international supply chains. As ASEAN's economy is highly integrated with global and regional market networks, it must respond immediately and effectively to rebuild economic dynamics through both internal reforms and external cooperation.

In the past, ASEAN has demonstrated considerable ability to adjust and redefine its role in the face of complex relations and conditions. The challenge it is currently facing is that of the increase in US–China strategic competition, as ASEAN must avoid becoming an arena for big power rivalry (Baviera and Maramis, 2017: 5). Some have argued that ASEAN's best option is maintaining its posture of neutrality with respect to big

power competitions, which has made ASEAN a more effective partner for all concerned powers than it would have otherwise been (Baviera and Maramis, 2017). However, maintaining neutrality is not enough—instead, ASEAN should be more active in containing the rising competition and play a critical role in leading dialogue and cooperation. Due to its collective identity, only ASEAN can play such a role, and it should do so both for itself and for the region.

ASEAN's future lies in the process of both its vision and its actions (Pangestu, 2017). Although it may be difficult to know precisely what ASEAN will look like in 2040, towards 2040 ASEAN will undergo a nonstop process that will achieve increasingly more progress. Generally, if ASEAN 2025 is seen as a milestone for the development of a more efficient and credible ASEAN, then ASEAN 2040 should see the redoubling of efforts towards all aspects of the ASEAN goals.

## **The Centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations**

Centrality is a key principle of ASEAN's own future development as well as its extra-regional interactions. As ASEAN's primary identity is that of a representative of its members' interests, it places itself at the centre of the region's dynamics and thereby draws its members together. On the other hand, ASEAN as a group identifies itself as core player in managing the region's external relations. To maintain its centrality, ASEAN works to remain a leader of progress and plays a driving role in creating and developing networks for dialogue and cooperation. Thus, 'ASEAN [has become] known as a norm entrepreneur, a driver of the consultative, confidence building processes' (Tay, 2018: 48).

Moreover, by maintaining its centrality, ASEAN aims to preserve security by creating a balance of power to avoid any single power acquiring dominance in regional affairs. As ASEAN's primary concerns are to keep peace in the region, ensure a good environment for its development, and avoid competition for dominance in regional affairs, ASEAN's role as a central player has been welcomed and supported by its members.<sup>7</sup>

ASEAN's remarkable role as a central player is well demonstrated by the '10+' networks that it has initiated and leads, including both dialogue partnerships like the ASEAN Forum and negotiation agreements like the '10+1' FTAs and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). These networks reflect ASEAN's successful experimentation in dealing with regional affairs (Gu, 2014: 64–66).

East Asia needs ASEAN to play a central role in ensuring the region's economic dynamism and peace as opposed to hegemonism, unilateralism, and protectionism. Compared with other players, only ASEAN as a united group aiming at amity and cooperation can play such a central role in engaging and building bridges amongst all parties for dialogue and cooperation, as ASEAN is required to address the concerns of all of its members.<sup>8</sup>

Towards 2040, ASEAN is expected to play a stronger central role, not just in setting agendas and convening dialogues, but also in taking action and making rules.<sup>9</sup> Moving forward, ASEAN must continue to work proactively to ensure its centrality, and make sure that external countries see value in ASEAN taking the lead (Tsjeng and Ho, 2018). However, the question remains how best to achieve these goals.<sup>10</sup>

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7 What ASEAN needs is not a power centre, but a 'functioning center', through which ASEAN can ensure its core interests and strengthen its position (Wang, 2013: 53).

8 According to Merz (2018), 'ASEAN's modest size and power carry advantages, leaving it uniquely positioned to mediate and foster cooperation amongst the great powers. Its nonthreatening nature and historical legacy of non-alignment allows ASEAN to serve as an arbiter of what is legitimate in the region's geopolitics'.

9 Tay (2018) argued that the old behavioural practices characterised by informality and flexibility may no longer be appropriate.

10 According to Valencia (2018), 'One reason for ASEAN's failure to maintain "centrality" in regional security is its great cultural and political diversity. It really never was and perhaps never could be a unified political/security body under the pressure of great power competition'.



## Collective Leadership in East Asia

Despite the region's great diversity and complexity, East Asia has had great success in economic development and peace building. In the past, political differences stemming from different backgrounds and national characters were sources of confrontation, but they can now coexist peacefully. Despite significant gaps in levels of economic development and income, all of the member economies have experienced high growth with remarkable progress and improvement in people's welfare. There are also ongoing disputes regarding territory and maritime areas, as well as increasing competition between the big powers; however, all sides have respected the use of dialogue, consultation, and cooperation, as opposed to confrontation and the use of force.

East Asia has achieved great success in realising peace and development supported by multi-layered networks, mostly based on a '10+' structure that ranges from 'track I' and 'track II' dialogue forums to negotiated agreements. Politically, the networks bring all related partners together for dialogue and consultation, which helps to improve relations as the parties come together to discuss their shared interests. Economically, the networks create an open and integrated market environment for trade, investment, and other economic activities. For example, the RCEP, which is currently under negotiation, will create a large market of 16 countries.

ASEAN has played a central role in building networks for dialogue and cooperation in East Asia; however, the progress of regional cooperation is based on collective inputs and a 'shared leadership' for shared interests. Although ASEAN's central leadership role is highly respected, ASEAN's ability and capacity to drive all initiatives and agendas is limited. Instead, as East Asian cooperation is characterised by multi-layered frameworks, progress is made by different institutions and drivers. In the context of a 'shared leadership', this means that no country, even a big power or a group such as ASEAN, can be a sole leader with the power to dominate regional affairs.<sup>11</sup> East Asia needs collective efforts and collective

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<sup>11</sup> As pointed out by the World Bank managing director and former Indonesian finance minister, Sri Mulyani, if the region is to embrace its new role in the world and demonstrate its newly-acquired economic heft, 'it needs to ensure that the rules of the game are developed within countries, across the region – and the world – rather than unilaterally by one leader, one nation or one group of regional powers' (Drysdale, 2015).

leadership, meaning that all parties can participate equally and share the benefits of cooperation. Collective efforts were clearly emphasised from the beginning of East Asian cooperation.<sup>12</sup> In the face of a competition of big powers, a country or group like ASEAN does not need to choose one side over the other. Instead, ASEAN stands in a crucial position to build networks to bring all parties together to engage in dialogue, cooperate, and reduce tensions.

## China's Role

China is committed to peaceful development as a key part of its overall strategy, as 'a harmonious and stable domestic environment and a peaceful and stable international environment' are preconditions for China to focus on development and realise the dream of 'China's renaissance'. As President Xi Jinping remarked, 'to pursue peaceful development in keeping with the development trend of the times and China's fundamental interest is a strategic choice made by our party' (Xi, 2014: 271).

It is very important for China to develop cooperative and harmonious relationships with its neighbours. The relations between China and its neighbours already bear many features of a new relationship, some of the most notable of which are the enhanced sharing of interests and the establishment of mechanisms of subregional dialogue and cooperation embodying a convergence of interests. In particular, China has become the constructive factor in this change in the nature of its relationships. China has managed to create a new order based on joint efforts and a shared leadership, as opposed to the old 'China-centred order'.

As a rising power, China is trying hard to make a positive contribution and play a new role. The 'One Belt, One Road Initiative' (BRI) put forward by China is a good case for understanding what kind of role

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<sup>12</sup> As stated in the Joint Statement (1999), 'mindful of the challenges and opportunities in the new millennium, as well as the growing regional interdependence in the age of globalization and information', they agreed 'to promote dialogue and to deepen and consolidate collective efforts with a view to advancing mutual understanding, trust, good neighbourliness and friendly relations, peace, stability and prosperity in East Asia and the world'.

China intends to play.<sup>13</sup> However, the BRI requires a collective effort as its success depends on mobilising resources not only from China, but also from the rest of the world. To explore a new model of win–win cooperation, the BRI’s doctrine is ‘joint consultation, joint construction, and joint benefit’, which welcomes collective inputs. Furthermore, the BRI is only one East Asian cooperative agenda. It is not intended to dominate or replace the other initiatives and efforts; instead, it promotes connections with other initiatives.

China respects the collective wisdom of the Southeast Asian countries for moving towards the ASEAN Community, and supports ASEAN playing a leading role in East Asia networking activities (such as the RCEP, East Asia Community, ASEAN Forum, and Asia–Europe Meeting). As for China–ASEAN relations, aside from managing complex bilateral relations, one indication of significant progress is the building of institutions with ASEAN following its ‘ASEAN Way’ approach. China and ASEAN agreed to negotiate an FTA in 2000 and completed the full agreement in 2010, which facilitated economic relations to a remarkable extent. China and ASEAN have also worked together to handle the issues of the South China Sea in a gradual way. In the Declaration on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, which they signed in 2002, they committed to solve disputes peacefully. In 2003, China joined the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and established a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity with ASEAN. China accredited its ambassador to ASEAN in 2008, allowing China to follow a dual-track approach to handle its relations with each member and with ASEAN at the same time.<sup>14</sup> China was the first of ASEAN’s dialogue partners to join the TAC, forge a strategic partnership with ASEAN, sign the Protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, and propose and negotiate an FTA with ASEAN.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that

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<sup>13</sup> According to Haque, ‘China’s bid to assume global responsibility is amply clear from its endeavors to ensure peace, stability and development of China and the rest of the world. This is evident in China’s efforts and roles in the proposed establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, BRICS [Brazil, China, India, the Russian Federation, and South Africa] Bank, SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization], Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), etc.’ (Haque, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> In discussing the South China Sea dispute, Wang notes that China supports and advocates the ‘dual-track’ approach, that is, relevant disputes being addressed by countries directly concerned through friendly consultations and negotiations and in a peaceful way; and peace and stability in the South China Sea being jointly maintained by China and ASEAN countries (Wang, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> ASEAN agreed to allow non-ASEAN countries to join the TAC in July 1998. China, the first non-ASEAN country to join, signed the treaty in October 2003.

China firmly supports ASEAN centrality in leading and coordinating regional dialogue and cooperation frameworks (Zhang, 2008). China is confident in trusting ASEAN as a strategic partner to play a strong role in the peaceful resolution of the South China Sea issue. Keeping this issue free from the intervention of outside powers is overwhelmingly important, because if the South China Sea issue is brought into any wider power games, there will be less room left for ASEAN to practice its constructive role in managing disputes.<sup>16</sup> Significant progress has been made in consultation as to a code of conduct, which is a test case for China and ASEAN to build trust and work closely together for regional peace and future cooperation. The rapid improvement of the China–Philippines relationship and amelioration of the crisis due to arbitration shows that confidence and trust are essential for two sides to manage their differences.<sup>17</sup>

However, it is important to overcome the trust deficit in the wake of China’s quick rise. To some extent, it is understandable for ASEAN countries to worry about a quickly rising neighbouring power; however, ASEAN must also recognise that China cares about its national interests. Based on common interests in a stable and cooperative regional order, China and ASEAN need to work together closely to handle disputes and continue their comprehensive cooperation agendas.

Economic relations lie at the heart of China–ASEAN relations. China is currently ASEAN’s largest trade partner, and ASEAN is China’s third largest trade partner. However, as geographical neighbours linked by land and sea, China–ASEAN relations go far beyond trade. By signing the FTA, China and ASEAN became a large open economic area. Advancing connectivity, from infrastructure networks to production chains and labour mobility, are creating great potential for future economic development. As China–ASEAN interactions are closely linked to East Asia, these efforts should naturally extend to a large region.

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<sup>16</sup> In recent years, larger countries have been playing strategic games in Southeast Asia. See He (2014).

<sup>17</sup> China’s new minister of commerce visited Manila on 8 March 2017; a \$3.7 billion contract for three projects was signed during this visit. President Duterte has promised to attend the BRI summit that will be held in Beijing in May 2019.

As ASEAN is the only regional organisation with a rich experience of community building, it plays a special role in nurturing the community spirit in East Asia. Based on the RCEP, China has a broad strategy to promote economic community building in East Asia.<sup>18</sup> East Asia is becoming a closely integrated economic region based on production networks. The 'East Asia miracle' is relied on as an open and cooperative market environment supported by market-friendly government policy, an open multilateral system, and regional cooperation agendas. However, the 2008 global crisis changed the landscape for East Asian economic growth, and President Trump's 'America first' policy and unilateral actions have forced East Asia to readjust and restructure its 'external trade driven' economic approach. Based on their past success, East Asian countries should work closely to generate intra-regional dynamics. China is undergoing fundamental change and restructuring as both its internal and external environments have changed. Internally, pollution and the rising cost of labour, amongst other things, has forced China to upgrade its economic structure and make more efforts to innovate. Externally, an economic slowdown and protectionism, amongst other things, are pressing China to change its export-led growth strategy and mobilise more domestic potential, including increased domestic consumption. According to China's new strategy, East Asia will become more important to facilitating its restructuring agendas.

Unlike other developed economies, China is not following the traditional practice of transferring old industries to less developed economies. What China really wants is for East Asia to move to an open and integrated economic area that can generate new dynamics. In doing so, China will actively promote collective efforts and support a 'shared leadership'.<sup>19</sup>

China has put forward a new type of security concept based on a common and cooperative security architecture. Under this new type of architecture, China has no ambition or ability to build up by itself

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<sup>18</sup> The idea of an East Asian Economic Community (EAEC) originates from a proposal made by the East Asia Vision Group in 2001; the second East Asia Vision Group proposed to make 'the realization of an EAEC by 2020' its main pillar for regional cooperation and community building. However, the building of the EAEC still seems to lack momentum (Zhu and Feng, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, 'One Belt, One Road Initiative', and BRICS [Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China, and South Africa] New Development Bank, China is trying to develop collective efforts and 'shared leadership', instead of acting alone.

to replace the existing security arrangements. Unlike a traditional security alliance, the new security architecture rests on a cooperative partnership.<sup>20</sup>

ASEAN has a crucial role to play in building this new type of security in East Asia. The Southeast Asian region used to be characterised by confrontation and wars. ASEAN has become a centrepiece for bringing together the countries in the region step by step to make peace. The principles of the 'ASEAN Way', especially those stipulated in the TAC, have provided a legal foundation for AMSs working together for common and cooperative security. As ASEAN's experience in peace-seeking and peace-building is key for building a new type of security architecture in East Asia, ASEAN's central role in leading the region towards a new security order is highly respected and accepted by the other partners.

China and ASEAN are working hard to build a new type of security regime based on consultation. In general, there are three major issues that must be handled carefully: (i) bilateral disputes, such as over borders, maritime territory, and islands; (ii) strategic issues, such as strategic intentions for regional security, whether on the side of China or ASEAN; and (iii) the involvement of other powers, especially the US and Japan. For China and ASEAN, bilateral security relations are at the best of times based on goodwill and shared interests. At a strategic level, the key issue is trust. ASEAN's primary concern is China's assertive behaviour over disputes and possible dominance in the future, while China's primary concern is ASEAN's 'balance of power' strategy, which may involve inviting the US and other outside powers to engage in the South China Sea issue.<sup>21</sup> Beyond dialogue and consultation, they must do more to enhance strategic trust, for example, by initiating more cooperative agendas for joint initiatives and actions (Li, 2015). The most problematic issue is third

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<sup>20</sup> Suspicions exist as to China's intentions. For example, Parameswaran argued, 'When China speaks of a 'new regional security architecture', it does not outline exactly how that squares with ASEAN centrality beyond acknowledging the principle itself, that only plays into fears about Beijing's true intentions' (Parameswaran, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Some argue that ASEAN was seeking security protection from the US while developing economic interests with China. This phenomenon was called 'dual structure' in East Asia to depict the relationship that ASEAN and other developing countries have with China and the US. See, for example, Zhou (2013).

party involvement. The US is a major factor as it is a superpower and is allied with many countries in the region. The US does not accept China's call for a new type of security architecture, but views China as a strategic competitor. Japan, an ally of the US, also seems reluctant to accept China's role as a principal security player.<sup>22</sup>

Moving from a security order dominated by big powers to a new order based on collective leadership and equal participation is a long process of immense transformation. As the process is still at an early stage and therefore sensitive and vulnerable, it is currently facing certain risks. There is neither complete consensus nor a ready model for this new security architecture. In particular, it is unclear whether the new architecture is based on collective willingness and inputs of all partners or on the balance of power.<sup>23</sup> Mistrust of China remains strong in the face of China's military build-up and assertive claims and actions in the South China Sea.<sup>24</sup>

The test of China's desire and initiative for a new order lies in China's own behaviour and timeframe. Although China is making efforts to modernise its military, it is committed to solving disputes with others peaceably. Traditional Chinese culture reveres 'peace and harmony', commends 'defusing' contradictions, and pursues the results of 'reconciliation'. As China's confidence rises, it is time for China to display its 'culture of harmony'.<sup>25</sup> While recognising the legacy of the existing security structure, China denounces the hegemonic approach of security relations.

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<sup>22</sup> There are worries that the relative decline of US power in Asia has led to new challenges. In particular, the principles, rules, norms, and methods for managing the international agenda are being questioned (Ryo, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> According to Ryo, the willingness of the US to maintain an active role in East Asia, alongside the behaviour of China and key groupings such as ASEAN, will define the region's future. How these key actors respond to the changing security environment will be crucial in determining the future of the security order in East Asia. Japan today seems to be the strongest supporter in the region for maintaining a US-led order in both the security and economic realms (Ryo, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> According to Arase, the rapid growth of China's naval, air, and missile forces may be a source of national pride for China, but it makes China's neighbours feel nervous. He also argues that China's strategy to divide and conquer the ASEAN members to secure its claim to the South China Sea has made ASEAN dysfunctional in its core mission, and has sowed the seeds of discord amongst its members. See Arase (2013).

<sup>25</sup> Some Chinese scholars, like Yu Dunkong, a senior fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences argue that the heart of Chinese culture is 'harmony'; China's calls for harmony are a recurrence of its cultural tradition, which is not just a slogan, but a real commitment. See Yu (2014: 4-5).

What displeases the US is not that China is being confrontational, but rather the trend of a rising China that reshapes its own position as a superpower. The US became a superpower after the Second World War, and its position was further strengthened with the ending of the Cold War. This has led the US to believe that any security architecture without its leadership or dominance is unacceptable. China's rise in an open and peaceful environment reflects its belief in the value of 'a community of a shared future'.<sup>26</sup>

In sum, China is well aware of ASEAN's importance to China's strategy to build a new type of order for a shared future based on its own initiative and collective efforts. China's perspective on ASEAN has not been affected by the differences and even disputes that have arisen, such as in the case of the South China Sea. As adjacent neighbours, China and ASEAN are linked by geography and interests. To ensure a better future for China and ASEAN, while enabling each side to express its perspectives frankly, it is important to define common goals and shared agendas (Zhang, 2017). To face the challenges that are emerging, it is especially important for China and ASEAN to build a cooperative agenda and mutual trust. If China and ASEAN relations are strong, East Asia will flourish as China and ASEAN constitute an essential part of the collective leadership in East Asia.

Due to the number of new challenges facing the region, the future is characterised by uncertainty and the unknown, and there may be some serious crises ahead. In Chinese culture, the word '*weiji*' (crisis) has two meanings: danger and opportunity. While dealing with danger, it is necessary to seize the opportunity as only this can provide a better future.

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<sup>26</sup> In the 19th Congress of Chinese Communist Party, Xi Jinping called for the building of a community of shared future for mankind. See Jinping (2017).



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