International Journal of Social Science, Management and Economics Research
Volume 3 Issue 3 May-June 2025
ISSN: 2583-9853| www.ijssmer.com

EVALUATING DEPENDENCY AND NEOCLASSICAL THEORIES IN EXPLAINING WEALTH INEQUALITIES THROUGH THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI) AND ANTI-DUMPING POLICY IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

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Received: 29/04/2025 Accepted: 12/05/2025 Published: 13/05/2025

DOI - https://doi.org/10.61421/IJSSMER.2025.3302

ABSTRACT

This research examines the effects of the Belt and Road Initiative (2013) on ASEAN's economy, uncovering complex regional reactions to international economic stimuli. Within ASEAN, there is heterogeneity regarding anti-trade defense measures; for instance, some countries implement anti-dumping strategies against Chinese imports while others remain completely unresponsive. The study exemplifies the clash between protecting local industries and promoting economic liberalism and shows how different ASEAN countries deal with the balance of big-picture policy decisions and on-the-ground economic realities, international relations, and differing levels of economic cooperation.

Keyword: BRI, Anti-dumping, Weak State, Geopolitic, ASEAN

INTRODUCTION

Original research tracks ASEANs economic shifts from the moment Chinas Belt and Road Initiative burst onto the scene in 2013. Responses, researchers note, have been anything but uniform. Some capitals slap anti-dumping tariffs on Chinese goods; others do little more than shrug. Each government, in its own way, wrestles with the awkward overlap between shielding local firms and staying plugged into the wider world economy. In those deliberations' macro numbers, street-level headaches, and geopolitical nudges all compete for attention.

This research delves into the intricate economic interactions between ASEAN member states and China, revealing a complex landscape of strategic challenges and opportunities. The analysis uncovers two distinct approaches to economic engagement: an active protection group (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines) demonstrating robust anti-dumping mechanisms, and a passive protection group (Singapore, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar) with minimal practical implementation of trade defense strategies in ASEAN-China Economic Relations: Strategic Dynamics and Trade Policy Challenges.

Policy-makers also face glaring blind spots in commodity-market safeguards, a shortcoming that hits small farmers and corner-merchants hardest. The unevenness leaves whole classes of products exposed to sharp pricing swings while letting big industries claim most of the safety net. Member states end up entangled with China to differing degrees, so the risk-reward calculus varies from Jakarta to Vientiane, from Manila to Naypyidaw.

Three opening doors stand out. First, ASEAN could streamline its rule book across member states, easing the compliance burden for exporters. Second, a shared baseline on tech-transfer guidelines would let less wealthy countries grab more value from foreign investment instead of just renting out access. Third, region-wide programs to up-skill workers would blunt fears that modernization wipes out whole livelihoods. A strain of diplomacy branded bandwagoning crops up here, too:

weaker countries line up beside the superpower but stay watchful, hoping to snag benefits while keeping enough leverage to avoid being steamrolled.

Chinas recent foreign policy has come to combine its much-publicized neighborhood diplomacy with the lofty rhetoric of a community of common destiny. Such an approach inserts a new layer of diplomatic maneuvering into a regional order already populated by competing influence projects. Two watershed moments stand out-the countrys World Trade Organization accession in 2001, so often presumed completed but only now fully understood in younger data series, and Xi Jinpings rise to the top spot in 2013, an event that kicked off frenetic expansion in everything from 5G gear to low-end consumer electronics. Both jolts remade supply chains, once neat verticals that folks imagined could be turnkey, into sprawling webs that nobody really controls. Researchers studying this mess, however, keep hitting the same brick walls.

Questions about anti-dumping probes pop up again and again, especially when scholars try to stack those figures against the other economies grouped under ASEANs umbrella. Capital flows tell an even fuzzier story, partly because Beijing prefers its offshore cash routes shrouded in half-light and partly because nobody yet has a clean dataset on the Belt and Road once the accountant-sized caveats are stripped out. Still the big picture remains hard to argue with.

Trade linkage pulls member states closer, yet security second-guesses the economists happy ending almost daily. Countries hedge, flirt with decoupling for a headline or two, then sign another long-haul shipment agreement the next month-an emotional yo-yo that frustrates diplomats but still weirdly gets results. Real improvement would demand standards that flex instead of crack, new safety buffers for industries that wobble at first touch, fresh classrooms and labs that outpace cheap assembly, and a foreign-policy posture steady enough that normal people stop noticing the whiplash.

All this thinking sits on a decade-plus firmament of policy papers, plenary speeches, trade stats and interviews gathered in every ASEAN capital between 2001 and late-2023. The resulting study does not portray ASEAN and China as harmonious cohabitants sharing a confined space; rather, it presents them as two mismatched travelers on a crowded overnight bus who spend much of the journey disputing over the air-conditioning, yet ultimately exchange snacks as dawn breaks.

Two Segments of BRI Impact on ASEAN Countries' Anti-Dumping Policies

ASEANs trade environment was irrevocably altered when China joined the WTO; the enlargement brought customs codes, tariff schedules, and dispute-settlement rules that deepened supply-chain interdependence. By 2014, the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement had quintupled the annual two-way exchange, lifting it past $400 billion, yet the very growth that thrilled economists exposed stark divergences in regulatory style from one capital to the next.

In practice, the bloc now cleaves along a noticeable line. Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines routinely invoke anti-dumping instruments to shield steel, chemicals, and textiles, framing those tariffs as industrial defense. Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Singapore, Timor-Leste, and Myanmar, conversely, favor a virtually open market, viewing such duties as a brake on trade flows they hope will spur local-sector dynamism.

President Xi Jinpings shared destiny slogan underpins much of Beijings diplomatic outreach; the phrase, circulating in summits and document margins, pledges mutual trust and win-win outcomes. Generous credit lines and infrastructure commitments have indeed flooded hundreds of billions into the region, yet many technocrats now whisper that that same largesse sometimes blurs the line between cooperative investment and subtly coercive economic leverage.

Significant policy blind spots remain in the ASEAN commodity markets, notably in the protections extended to smallholders and local retailers. Pricing pressures often tilt toward larger industrial players, leaving the more vulnerable segments exposed. Each national economy also interacts with China along its own dependency spectrum, resulting in asymmetric costs and rewards that diverge dramatically from one state to the next.

Three avenues for strategic advancement stand out: first, the region could streamline regulations so that cross-border trade becomes less cumbersome; second, common standards for technology transfer would help avoid a patchwork of technical hurdles; and finally, coordinated workforce training initiatives could close skill gaps that otherwise fragment the market. Within this framework, the so-called bandwagoning tactic offers smaller countries a way to court Chinese investment while hedging their policy autonomy.

Beijing has layered its engagement with the neighborhood diplomacy banner, often framed as a community of common destiny. Milestones such as Chinas entry into the WTO in 2001 and Xi Jinpings consolidation of power after 2013 have upended supply chains, with consumer electronics serving as a prime example of the disruption.

Persistent dispute over the South China Sea injects a security threat that overshadows nascent economic cooperation, and scholars still know too little about how Chinese firms exploit domestic anti-dumping shields or about the precise forms of capital penetration they deploy. Comparative studies on those mechanisms, along with wider investigations into indirect coercion, remain urgent but underexplored.

ASEAN-Chinas partnership is never just economics or security in isolation; investors, diplomats, and the occasional university student feel the mix up close. Nations hedge their bets while still subscribing to shared regional meetings, a balancing act that never seems to end. To keep the experiment alive, policymakers talk about flexible tariffs, stronger safety nets for smaller firms, home-grown tech upgrades, and-diplomatically speaking-a steady hand on the wheel.

This study stitches together two decades of budget speeches, ministers summits, and container-ship ledgers from all ten ASEAN members. The time-line runs from 2001, when the conversation was mostly quiet, to late 2023, when nearly everyone carries five trade-deal drafts in a briefcase. The detail lets the reader see why the partnership is both promising and plain awkward.

China-borne projects, branded the Belt and Road Initiative in bright letters, land differently on each ASEAN doorstep. Goods courses boom after Chinas WTO entry; AFTA soon kicks in and trade rockets past $400 billion within a decade, but the price tag on that growth is policy mismatch. Some capitals advertise open ports and call it free market; others crank out anti-dumping notices almost like clockwork to guard local jobs and steel sheets.

Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines tend to file those notices daily and lean hard on import duties whenever margins shrink. Brunei, Cambodia, and Singapore answer with lighter rules, convincing themselves that literally unfettered access will lure other foreign investors. The divide sketches itself neatly: one bloc sharpens tariffs, the other barely blinks; both insist, for very different reasons, that their strategy is the right way forward.

Meanwhile, Xi Jinping notion of a shared destiny has quickly become part of Chinas economic playbook. Under the banner of mutual trust and cooperation, it lures partner countries with new investment while quietly raising questions about whether the partnership is genuine or one-sided.

That ambiguity does not stop ASEAN from looking for tangible benefits. Member states sift through invoices from Beijing, hoping the numbers will tilt their way even as global supply lines twist in unexpected directions.

SEGMENT I: STRONG ANTI-DUMPING POLICY AND BALANCING WITH GREAT-POWER STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT PATTERNS IN ASEAN

Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines form an ASEAN bloc that openly courts China because the trade upside is hard to ignore. Yet they know the diplomatic balance is delicate, so they stash anti-dumping laws in the background as a safety valve. Jokowis Jakarta and Prayuths Bangkok now lead in that defensive game. Both capitals have hammered out thick rulebooks to turn every suspicious invoice into a paper trail that slows imports and shores up homegrown firms.

Thailand enforces its anti-dumping laws through a detailed statutory scheme that stresses methodical investigation, especially in steel and chemicals. Officials argue the system curbs price distortions, nudges local production patterns, and backs broader industrial policy, all without flouting ASEAN integration pledges.
Malaysia adopts a notably procedural style, tracing the ripples through supply chains before reaching a decision. Regulators say the resulting balance shields local manufacturers while steering clear of undue burden on import-dependent users.
Filipino policymakers, on the other hand, fuse internationally recommended practices with the rough edges of domestic markets. By zoning in on sectors deemed vital, they treat trade defense as a deliberate lever for economic ascent.

Vietnams model reflects duality-part rival, part partner with China-and has grown more intricate since the 2017 Trade Remedies Law landed. Officials claim the framework fortifies homegrown industries even as it nudges them toward technology upgrades and tighter supply-chain links.

Xi Jinpings crew, for its part, leans on neighborhood diplomacy laced with reciprocity to keep regional fires manageable. Tensions flare, especially in the South China Sea, yet Beijing has so far sidestepped open crises while quietly pushing its own strategic agenda. Long-standing economic negotiations across the region display an assertive blend of trade diplomacy, domestic posturing, and protective tariffs, each instrument executed in the name of nurturing national industries while signaling commitment to broader neighborhood goals.

Thailand's engagement with China reads almost like a case study in irresistible gravitational pull. In practical terms the narrative begins in 2015, when Bangkok signed the first Southeast Asian Belt and Road memorandum and later reopened the file after the change of government.

Financial muscle soon followed. Chinese banks, largely state controlled, underwrote roads, railbeds, apartment towers, and power plants, permitting companies to capitalize on the headline projects without writing every check from home. The Asia-bound high-speed railway, an axis connecting Kunming and Vientiane before curving toward Bangkok, remains the marquee illustration. Down the coast, the Eastern Economic Corridor enjoys equal fanfare. Policymakers promote that zone as a future Silicon Valley-on-Sea, wiring factories to 5G and dangling tax rebates in front of software firms.

Container traffic intersects the story at Laem Chabang, whose deep-water berths are being widened and dredged under Chinese contracting. That expansion turns the port into a choke point for goods traveling not just within Thailand but on to ASEAN, hinting that Bangkok may yet outpace its neighbors in logistical allure. Taken together, Beijing's capital and Thailand's ambition sketch the portrait of a trading hub ready to link any willing investor with the rest of Southeast Asia. Foreign money, having noted the pattern, continues to trickle in behind the headline deals, broadening the economic footprint beyond anything first promised.

Thailand's turn toward China, often framed as a diplomatic handshake, in fact pulses with economic calculation and military caution born of the 2014 coup. Since that rupture, Bangkok has nursed an impulse to loosen its old American ties by planting new vines in Beijings soil, a trend Vinogradov (2024) tags as intentional hedging.

Chinas Belt and Road Initiative stepped into the opening like a well-timed river. Pavlićević and Kratz (2018) note that Thai rail beds, ports, and pipelines quickly became the projects physical nerve endings. The Bangkok-Nong Khai high-speed line, underwritten by Chinese loans, now threatens to outrun national memory of how loudly Washington once spoke. Even so, Thailand still swings a protective hammer. Anti-dumping tariffs on steel and sugar crop up tomorrow and vanish next week, a seesaw that shields local voters while keeping project calendars on track. In the end, Bangkok illustrates an odd but revealing marriage: trade armor worn atop a vest of solid regional cooperation.

In recent years Thailand has signed on to Chinas broader geostrategic vision, and the Belt and Road Initiative (B.R.I.) figures prominently in this embrace (Punyaratabandhu & Swaspitchayas, 2018). It became the first Southeast Asian country to formalise membership through a memorandum of understanding, an act that generated headlines even before the heavy machinery rolled in. Soon after the ink dried, the Eastern Economic Corridor and a sweeping upgrade of Laem Chabang port took shape, projects that promise to remake the Thai logistics landscape for a generation. Parallel engagement in another Chinese forum, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (L.M.C.), has nurtured cross-border water and rail links that stretch from Chiang Rai to Vietnam.

A decisive turning-point in the China-Thailand equation appeared when President Xi Jinping landed in Bangkok during October 2013. The visit crystallised in a dramatic accord to build a high-speed rail line, an undertaking that many observers now cite as the moment bilateral business ties entered a decidedly new gear (Lauridsen 2020). The railway itself quickly morphed from a single signature project into a fresh channel for Chinese money, feeding construction firms, property developers, and green-energy ventures across the Eastern Economic Corridor. Stalls that once relied on local banks now openly display the logos of state-backed lenders from Beijing.

Thai leaders do not follow China out of fear, yet they court Beijing with an evident cool-headedness driven by domestic growth targets. Policymakers in Bangkok regularly tweak their requests, pushing Chinese negotiators to accept terms that preserve Thai autonomy on sensitive issues (Poonkam 2023). Still, Thailand remains high on tourism receipts, and early openness to Chinese funds has placed wrench-like leverage in the hands of incoming investors. Over-reliance on this monetary muscle means Thai ministers must juggle their pro-Beijing stance with louder calls for balanced partnerships, a task that has proven maddeningly delicate.

None of these contradictions have stopped Bangkok from leaning toward China; the tilt seems instead to fortify a wider strategy that includes the European Union, India, and the United States. Thai diplomats call it pragmatism, outsiders sometimes label it bandwagoning, but the underlying calculus is straightforward: more friends mean more room to negotiate and a better chance of maintaining sovereignty amidst great-power rivalry.

Southeast Asias shifting diplomatic landscape no longer hinges on single, monolithic threats. Even if Beijing is not the immediate worry, the new alignment sets off a dense lattice of economic linkages and geopolitical aftershocks that scholars are only beginning to trace.

Thailand runs its foreign policy like a ledger, measuring costs against revenue and drawing lines that intersect with Beijing more often than with the West. The 2014 coup severed many conventional partnerships, so Bangkok embraced Chinese roads, rails, and renminbi to fill the gap and keep growth visible in the quarterly reports. Thailand rarely frames China as a threat, which allows officials to tout the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation without fumbling over the idea of hegemony. That casual language masks a quiet fear: rampant borrowing could lock the Kingdom into a debt chain that awkwardly overlaps with its claim to strategic independence. Balance in this case means drifting toward the offer that looks biggest today, then hoping tomorrow brings enough maneuver room to escape heavier obligations.

Indonesias playbook reads differently, mixing deliberate hedging with bursts of nationalist confidence. From Yudhoyonos cautious multilateralism to Jokowis blunt hashtag diplomacy, train-station selfies sit beside formal declarations of sovereignty in the South China Sea. Each administration has tested Americas outreach or argued at ASEAN while quietly courting Chinese investors; the contradiction is the point. By keeping the field crowded, Jakarta preserves enough policy space to sidestep fatal dependency on any single capital.

During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyonos presidency, Jakarta deepened economic engagement with Beijing, weighing immediate commercial gain against longer-term power dynamics (Pang, 2017). The idea was to harvest Chinese trade and investment while quietly reinforcing insurance policies in defense and finance. In marked contrast, Joko Widodos administration now projects naval assertiveness and openly contests encroachments in the archipelagos waters. That posture has coincided with expanded military exercises with Washington and the purchase of upgraded hardware, signaling a readiness to confront potential maritime challenges head-on (Arif 2021). Historians of Indonesian diplomacy argue that a strategy of strict hedging misreads the countrys impulse for equilibrium. Hedging smacks of neutrality, yet Indonesia consistently opts for active balance, an orientation captured by its long-standing bebas-aktif doctrine of independent-active foreign policy (Anwar, 2022). The government moves among great powers not with intentional vagueness, but through disciplined realignment that preserves strategic autonomy while courting workable partnerships to further national objectives.

Indonesia now juggles at least three big jobs: keeping its maritime borders secure, pushing a patchwork of economic upgrades, and still looking the part of a regional leader. Researchers already note that the archipelago rarely goes in a straight line; its diplomats stitch together West, East, and home-grown partners and call it hedging. Each neighbor-watch their own comfort level, so responses to America-China pull never look alike along the coast of Sulawesi, for instance.

Stripped to basics, Jakarta prefers a policy roadmap that avoids heavy signatures, much like a student who loans out notes but insists on studying alone. That distance lets officials chase contracts-lifting highways, mapping 5G grids-without erasing the word sovereignty from the briefing book. Crossings with Chinese cash show how thin that wire can be; steel and sensors sit in the balance between fast development and slower decision-making. Scholars visiting Jakarta leave with the same thought: a strategy that bends but does not break could still teach half the region something useful.

Malaysia and the Philippines: Contrasting Paradigms in Managing Chinese Influence

Malaysia has, somewhat quietly and with little fanfare, opted for an elegant if understated brand of bandwagoning. The choice springs from a conviction laid out by its strategists that publicly casting China as an existential danger risks whipping up a self-fulfilling panic (Gerstl, 2020).

Consequently, Kuala Lumpur keeps its tone steady but builds in discreet hedges that cushion any sudden shift.

The centerpiece of this orientation is economic pragmatism laced with calculated restraint. Chinese money shows up at Malaysian construction sites and technology parks, yet the government carefully separates short-term gain from long-term dependence. Bids for Chinese finance are penciled into budget talks next to alternate offers, allowing the nation to accept Beijing's boost while refusing to cede control over key projects. So far, that arithmetic has let Malaysia meet ambitious development timelines without courting open diplomatic brawls.

Key Differences in Approach

Thailand and Malaysia each frame their dealings with China through sharply different strategic prisms. For Bangkok, Beijing largely represents an economic windfall; the kingdom has woven its budget and infrastructure projects into Chinas sprawling financial web with little public talk of grey-zone risks. Kuala Lumpur, by contrast, juggles engagement and scepticism in roughly equal measure. Petronas may off-load LNG to China on one ledger while diplomats assure voters that sovereignty wont slip away on the next. The contrast isn trivial-as one government aligns, the other hedges, weighing national independence against the lure of fast cash.

The Philippines Strategic Recalibration

President Rodrigo Dutertes rise in 2016 delivered the Philippines a policy earthquake that analysts still tally. Manila drifted from America toward Beijing, courting Chinese firms even as it muted arguments in the South China Sea. Highways, rail lines, and other baubles quickly followed, bolstered by soft loans and on-the-spot pledges that thinned the red tape most investors dread. Revisions to military practice and maritime law arrived in lockstep, leaving many jurists to wonder whether the bargain chipped at statehood itself. Skeptics, including former officials and sector watchers, insist the concessionary posture erodes Philippine leverage and invites greater dependence on Beijings calendar.

Malaysia and the Philippines have different strategies of dealing with Chinese influence. Malaysia follows a calculated, constructivist approach that is concerned with strategic autonomy, achieving economic engagement and avoiding direct confrontation. The Philippines uses more flexible methods characterized by fluctuating tendencies to balance against or accommodate China depending on political leaders' preferences and regional dynamics. Thus, while Malaysia maintains stable diplomatic flexibility, the Philippines has experienced disruptive strategic realignments that highlight the complexities inherent in navigating great power contestation within the Indo-Pacific region.

Vietnam's Diplomatic Tightrope: Balancing Economic Pragmatism with Strategic Autonomy

In today's intricate geopolitical tapestry, Vietnam's stance on China's Belt and Road Initiative (B.R.I.) exemplifies typical dilemmas faced by emerging economies in an increasingly multipolar world. The Vietnamese leadership has demonstrated remarkable political acumen in crafting a nuanced approach that neither wholly embraces nor categorically rejects Beijing's ambitious infrastructure initiative.

In terms of realpolitik, the Vietnamese government has a smart way of doing things in such a way that it realizes the inescapable reality of China's economic rise while safeguarding its strategic autonomy (Vu et al., 2022). This balancing act displays itself through a complex strategy of diplomatic hedging where Vietnam works hard to have an international partnership mix that is not over reliant on its northern neighbor.

The circumspect approach of Vietnamese policymakers towards B.R.I. participation emanates from a convergence of well-founded concerns. The most significant among these apprehensions is debt-trap diplomacy which occurs whenever infrastructure projects, financed by Chinese loans, potentially compromise the economic sovereignty of recipient countries (Nguyen et al., 2022). Moreover, historical experiences and current territorial disputes with China add to this cautionary attitude particularly in respect to South China Sea, one of the world's most contentious maritime areas.

Vietnam's involvement with the B.R.I notwithstanding these reservations demonstrate great diplomatic sophistication. Vietnam, while participating formally connectivity initiatives has skillfully defined parameters based on international legal frameworks, mutual respect and equitable partnership This sophisticated move allows Vietnam to selectively exploit some benefits associated with B.R.I while at the same time maintaining its strategic independence. It is worth noting that Vietnam has been unafraid to assertively articulate its own concerns regarding maritime territorial disputes.

Vietnam has linked its B.R.I. involvement to China's behavior in the South China Sea, instead of allowing economic cooperation to silence its territorial claims (Bama Andika Putra, 2024). This strategy demonstrates Vietnam's diplomatic ingenuity in using economic engagement as a tool for addressing security concerns.

In sum, Vietnam's strategy towards the B.R.I. is an exemplary case of modern-day diplomatic statecraft. In deftly balancing between economic pragmatism and strategic autonomy, Vietnam has fashioned a nuanced approach to China's rise that may become a model for other nations grappling with similar geopolitical issues. Vietnam's position as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has transformed it into a counterweight to China's regional maritime expansion, especially in relation to territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Vietnam's nuanced understanding of international relations in modern Asia is showcased through such assertiveness against the backdrop of economic cooperation. In Southeast Asia's wider response to Chinese influence, Vietnam embodies what can be called a "strategic resistance" (Stromseth, 2019). This positioning reflects an understanding which goes above and beyond simplistic binary definitions of pro-Chinese or anti-Chinese sentiment. On the contrary, it exhibits a more advanced kind of diplomatic liaison that appreciates China's economic weight while strongly protecting national interests.

Vietnam handles China's influence on the country through a nuanced diplomatic strategy that juxtaposes selective engagement with strategic autonomy. By treading very carefully in its response, it maintains friendly ties whilst shielding its core security concerns and being strategically involved in Chinese proposals without compromising sovereignty. Through this sophisticated model, smaller nations can have productive associations with great powers using measured and principled engagements thus offering direction on how to navigate complicated geo-political competition without compromising independence.

Segment II: Vulnerabilities of ASEAN States to Chinese Economic Influence and Risk of Market Monopolization; Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Brunei, Timor-Este and Singapore

Cambodia finds it difficult to develop anti-dumping policies due to strong presence of China in its economy. The Burmese economy cannot afford to impose trade barriers against China because this would expose them further towards Japanese investments

In this case, the countries' critical weaknesses include limited institutional capacity, nascent trade defense mechanisms and heavy dependence on Chinese imports and investments. Policy frameworks are characterized by rudimentary investigating structures, low technical expertise and juggling of domestic industrial development vis-à-vis external economic dependencies—especially with China.

Brunei's anti-dumping framework is a testimony to the limitations of ASEAN's smaller economies in trade defense. It lacks independent investigation capabilities despite being formally aligned with ATIGA and WTO agreements. The country relies heavily on ASEAN's collective expertise, which stems from institutional constraints like its limited technical resource base, making it difficult for it to enforce its anti-dumping measures specifically against Chinese imports hence minimal practical utilization of trade remedy policies.

Timor-Leste has an under-developed anti-dumping policy that reflects the challenges faced by emerging economies in terms of trade defense. With little institutional capacity and focus on developmental partnerships including those with China, there is no formal anti-dumping framework in place. Instead, Timor-Leste depends on regional mechanisms and outside expert opinions as it seeks membership into WTO and ASEAN; rather than focusing on strict trade enforcement they prioritize cooperation

Singapore also employs an "advisory" approach that seeks to encourage fair competition and adherence to global trade norms. The country's philosophy on trade reflects a desire for openness, as well as a commitment to ensuring a level playing field. In this regard, the policy framework of the country is characterized by transparent practices and a preference for settling trade disputes through consultation and negotiation rather than enforcement of protectionist measures. Consequently, Singaporean anti-dumping policy is consistent with its goal of free trade and neoliberal market policies that advocate for minimal use of trade defense measures. As an open economy, Singapore generally refrains from imposing antidumping actions but ensures strict adherence with WTO rules when necessary.

Myanmar's Strategic Metamorphosis: A Comparison with Brunei

Belt and Road Initiative in Myanmar make an invaluable contribution by shedding light on the country's hedging considerations (Soong& Aung, 2020). These projects emphasize the delicate balance that Myanmar strikes as it exploits Chinese economic resources while maintaining control over its strategic assets (Mannan, 2020). The current situation in Myanmar is a relentless civil war which includes many armed battles between different ethnic armies and the state military institution called Tatmadaw. It has lasted for many years and is characterized by ethno-national aspirations, territorial autonomy struggles, challenges to centralized military authority that ultimately unsettle social-political structure and institutional foundation of the country.

Myanmar's reaction towards self-induced internal political upheavals serves as evidence of shifting from hedging to explicit bandwagoning with China. In the aftermath of the coup d'état, Myanmar's interim government attempted to maintain diplomatic equilibrium while dealing with various regional stakeholders (Marston, 2023). China initially had concerns about how this would affect their trading interests since they have been Myanmar's key trading partners historically. However, China quickly made a U-turn from its initial caution to providing full support for military junta within one year (Peng, 2021), evidenced through diplomatic backing at UN and provision of weapons support.

The reorientation of Myanmar's foreign policy has caused significant disruptions in Beijing's economic and political calculations, which include the termination of major infrastructure projects like Myit Sone Dam and special economic zones on China-Myanmar border (Soong & Aung, 2020). This readjustment highlights Myanmar's efforts to balance its economic needs with China while pursuing diplomatic diversification.

The ongoing conflicts are the result of long-standing historical grievances and contemporary political tensions. Various ethnic armed groups have been resisting sustained military dominance. The result is a grave humanitarian crisis alongside undermining regional stability and inter-state relations within the ASEAN framework.

II. Brunei's Pragmatic Accommodation

The approach adopted by Brunei in handling Chinese influence, especially concerning South China Sea territorial disputes indicates strategic accommodation that is nuanced and predicated on bilateral mechanisms as well as adherence to ASEAN-China normative framework. The sultanate's refusal to assert sovereignty over disputed territories combined with its conscious decision to maintain low-key military presence reflects a complex calculation in diplomacy. The strong support for Belt and Road Initiative arises from the need to diversify its economy whilst protecting its own political supremacy since Brunei is highly dependent on hydrocarbons.

Putra (2020) states that Brunei's technique of clinging to its traditional Malay Islamic Monarchy ideology enables it to strategically reduce China's territorial claims while pursuing economic integration. This complex move helps affirm the authority of the current regime within the country while minimizing the potential political backlashes.

The bilateral relationship has been transformed under Xi Jinping, and resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018 (Liu et al., 2020). Yet, these events cannot be taken as an indication of full-scale alignment with China's interests since Southeast Asian countries usually pursue multi-vector foreign policy balancing economic needs and security concerns (Stromseth, 2019).

Chinese investment capital in Brunei discloses critical weaknesses in national anti-dumping regulation. The present policy gap leaves local economic interests exposed to probable market manipulation particularly in areas where Chinese investments are substantial. This situation reflects the difficult challenge posed by the need to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) versus sustaining domestic economic resilience within Brunei's emerging markets context.

Comparative Analysis: Myanmar and Brunei's Approaches to Chinese Influence

Myanmar's approach differs significantly from that of Brunei towards China indicating different priorities – strategic evolution, integration into global economy, diplomatic prominence or internal priorities determine Myanmar's and Brunei's different foreign policies towards China. While Myanmar has moved from hedging against china towards more explicit alignment with china primarily driven by changing domestic priorities, Brunei continues with its long-term pragmatism hence balancing economic cooperation with careful diplomacy.

Myanmar deals with China under its own terms by selective economic relations and Brunei makes comprehensive integration in order to reduce dependency on hydrocarbon industries. As for diplomacy, Myanmar follows a complex strategy of triangulation to counterbalance between China and other key regional players while Brunei maintains a mostly bilateral framework within ASEAN, keeping low-key yet balanced foreign policy. Local conditions also play a role: the military junta ruling Myanmar has serious problems with legitimacy that are reflected in its alignment process, while Brunei's foreign policy is built around the support for monarchy stability and succession planning, which implies relatively mild posture towards China.

Theoretical Implications

This comparison shows how smaller states respond differently to their more powerful neighbors. Shifting strategies in Myanmar reflect domestic political instability whereas the stable monarchical system of Brunei supports continuity. The difference can be seen also through respective economic approaches where Myanmar's concentration on commodity diversification contrasts with Brunei's interest in deeper integration due to its position as an enclave economy. These cases highlight how domestic structures and strategic cultures shape foreign policy orientations which vary depending on the region.

Laos' Diplomatic Equilibrium: A Paradigm of Strategic Hedging in Contemporary Southeast Asia

I. The Architecture of Chinese Influence

China is now Laos' major external power whose multifaceted influence is extended through diverse economic, infrastructural and diplomatic means within intricate interplays existing between both nations. Chinese investment has greatly changed the face of Laos' economy with over $10 billion in different sectors. China's financial dominance is best illustrated by their holding of about half of Laos' government debts and being the second largest trading partner after Thailand.

When the Lao-China high-speed railway finally reached the ground in December 2021, observers could almost hear the concrete humming with ambition. Chinese laborers, engineers, and traders poured into the country afterward, tightening the economic and familial knots that already bound the two nations.

Reducing Laos foreign policy to a China-only lens oversimplifies what has always been a montage of diplomatic maneuvers. The tiny, landlocked state exploits old friendships and new ententes alike, carefully tilting this way or that to keep great powers guessing.

For decades Japan stood at the head of Laos bilateral aid table, bankrolling schools and roads with quiet, low-visibility grants. By routing funds through the Asian Development Bank, Tokyo gave Vientiane a counterweight to Beijings ascendant cheque book (Fukuda-Parr & Shiga 2016). In recent years, Seoul has entered the scene, splashing extra yen and won onto provincial projects so Laos can hedge its bets without looking rude (Rubiolo & Aguirre 2023).

Vietnam still sits in the front row of Laos diplomatic, the two countries bonded by half a century of revolutionary yelping. Thailand, meanwhile, waltzes back and forth in cooperative gestures one week and competitive barbs the next, embodying the regional love-hate cliché that Laos knows all too well.

Strategic Evolution Since 2013, the steering wheel has tilted firmly toward Beijing, with highways, rail lines, and power plants springing up almost on command.

Laoss 2013 pivot is less an ideology than an overdue deadline-make fast money now or miss the freight train. Since the mid-2010s, heavy Chinese financing has rewired Laoss highways, railways, and power stations. Journalists and economists alike call it a modernization spree, yet they warn Read Morenbspudgetary pressure nudges the government closer to Beijing. In 2016, when

Vientiane refrained from publicly challenging Chinas South China Sea position at the ASEAN summit, observers noted that diplomatic alignment echoed the deeper economic ties (Kuik 2021).

Skyscrapers, showrooms, and casino-hotels now punctuate the skyline, reshaping street life almost overnight. Veteran residents describe a jarring contrast between morning markets and neon-lit malls that opens a window on what some sociologists label rapid socioeconomic metamorphosis.

Rural citizens watch the bonanza unfold while wages lag far behind the rising cost of living. Gated resorts and high-stakes gambling halls bind themselves to foreign tourists rather than to the Laotian community, creating an economy within an economy. Many Laotians voice unease, citing traditions of shared prosperity and collective wellbeing that have now drifted beyond everyday reach.

Cultural gaps that never quite closed now sit alongside sudden economic jolts, and the combination has sent local poverty measures, by every available yardstick, sharply upward (Sims, 2017). Wealth and opportunity cluster around a small center while entire neighborhoods drift outward to the edges, left to watch the new marketplace thrive without them.

China courts Laos with a two-part playbook. On one side, Xi Jinpings high-profile handshakes and toast-filled banquets tighten the bonds between his government and Lao decision-makers (Cheng, 2018). On the other, concrete-and steel projects branded with Belt and Road logos lace the country with rail lines and power grids, and those breakthroughs owe much to the influence of the Party-financed Pol Sena clan (Kuik, 2021). A pairing this tight can easily tip over into full-blown dependency, leaving Vientiane looking to Beijing for funds, ideas, and even the blueprint for its own policies. The danger is obvious: overreliance shrinks the room Laos leaders have to chart a course of their own, and that gradual loss of sway could drain the nations ambitions of anything resembling self-rule.

The continuing trend of Chinese investments has, as a direct result, brought about lasting changes in the economic and international relations of Laos. This deep bilateral interdependence takes on a new level with China's strategic alignment that goes beyond commercial partnerships to significant contributions to its soft power and geopolitical influence. The economic integration has thus deeply linked Lao's developmental path with the Chinese regional objectives that have impacted profoundly ASEAN's geo-political dynamics.

Laos, notwithstanding its affiliations with China, tries to maintain an even diplomatic balance by nurturing several partnerships, preserving economic choices, and avoiding exclusive alignments. It is an approach that blends historical continuity with modern adaptation (Pang, 2017). For instance, a successful act of balancing for Laos depends on diversified economy management of debts effectively and internal stability within it. However, as regional dynamics continue occurring thus changing ASEAN's cohesion will challenge Laos' hedging strategies.

Laos' ability to navigate through these competing global influences will further be influenced by sustainable development as well as political succession domestically. Laos' intricate strategy remains relevant for smaller states who would wish to exploit their status amid great powers competition. This presents how sophisticatedly Laos navigates the complexities associated with contemporary Southeast Asian geopolitics which show that even as smaller states can maintain strategic autonomy through careful calibration of international partnerships and diplomatic engagement.

Singaporean Strategic Postures: Divergent Approaches towards Great Powers

Chinese investments across Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam represent varying patterns of interaction within the ASEAN framework. Singapore has become a major intermediary between China and Southeast Asia where Chinese capital is concerned, even as it retains its practical approach to economic relationships and regulatory control.

The strategy has since evolved to encompass the whole range of military cooperation, technology transfer and strategic dialogue (Tan, 2016). However, Singapore has shown extraordinary acumen in maintaining productive economic relations with China by taking part in the "Belt and Road Initiative" and selectively collaborating with China's technological startups (Tong & Yuen Kong, 2021). By contrast, Singapore demonstrates a more sophisticated diplomatic stance vis-à-vis Beijing compared to Indonesia's steadfast balancing position while at the same time cultivating robust links with Washington. This diplomatic sophistication is based on Singapore's unique geopolitical reality as an ethnic Chinese-majority nation within a Malay-dominated region. Historic evidence suggests that Singapore has maintained deep ties both economically and culturally with China while simultaneously fostering critical security partnerships along with extensive economic cooperation with the United States.

Singapore employs its cultural heritage of being Chinese and its strong alignment to American military as a basis for strategically balancing its involvement with these two countries. The nuanced approach entails participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative while providing U.S. Navy facilities thereby demonstrating a sophisticated diplomacy that gives priority to sovereign autonomy and regional stability. The methods used by Singapore are different from those of Indonesia, indicating different approaches to managing great power competition through selective economic partnerships and strategic positioning.

In conclusion, caution is needed since many nations have enjoyed substantial economic development through their alignment with China, but overreliance may be problematic. This means that while countries have derived considerable gains from engaging with china economically and politically, this has also made them susceptible to Chinese influence thus necessitating a more cautious approach. While the South China Sea territorial disputes and human rights abuses of Uyghurs remain unresolved, ASEAN national governments which are moving into closer relationship with China have shown a tendency to downplay these issues. These are some of the future tensions which remain dormant but could spark off fresh conflicts; and keeping on ignoring them can lead to disastrous consequences in future if they burst.

Moreover, the perception that China is increasingly becoming dominant in international politics may undermine Western efforts to promote human rights and preserve global norms. Responsibilities could be divided between Asia's two most powerful states in order to reduce the risk of dependence upon either one. Even though countries practicing band-wagoning within ASEAN can make some economic gains, balancing approach as evidenced by hedging mechanisms can help curb dangers associated with overdependence on China.

Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines (categorized as Segment I), for instance need policy independence coupled with balanced approach between United States and China in order to address challenges posed by monopolistic practices and foreign interference.

Dumping is a form of predatory pricing by which a foreign company sells its products in the United States at prices below what it charges in its home market or below cost. The Thai, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Philippine anti-dumping policies towards Chinese goods reflect a refined blend between domestic industrial protection and regional economic integration compulsions. Thailand maintains strong anti-dumping measures that involve extensive investigations and duties mostly applied to steel and chemicals sectors so as to protect local manufacturers. Malaysia has mature institutions regarding trade remedies where data driven approaches are employed to counter the market distortions resulting from Chinese imported goods especially within the industrial domains. Vietnam has significantly improved capacities for defense trade including using Trade Remedies Authority (TRA) for managing difficult inquiries across different areas while at same time addressing commercial interdependence with China.

The Indonesian selective approach revolves around giving attention to specific measures guided by careful investigations aimed at protecting national industries without tampering with it core trading bond with China. On the other hand, Philippines' institutional mechanisms are less advanced but keep on strengthening their anti-dumping systems, particularly considering market distortions in some sectors like steel even though financial constraints exist. Taken together, these states represent an assortment yet united approach within both ASEAN and WTO frameworks as they strike a balance between protecting their domestic industries and maintaining constructive economic engagements with China; an important business partner.

On the other hand, countries in Category II such as Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Brunei, Timor-Este and Singapore might face trade-offs by deepening relations with China which could cause opportunity costs and potential losses. In this context, these states have to carefully consider hedging strategies that balance national interests within wider economic engagements. This is evident in the anti-dumping measures initiated against Chinese products across Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Brunei, Timor-Leste, and Singapore which show that trade policy dynamics in Southeast Asia are influenced by economic dependency and institutional capacity. A case in point is Myanmar and Laos which have very weak antitrust regime because of limited technical capacity and a strategic focus on maintaining profitable economies from their relationships with Beijing under BRI. Similarly, absent are key elements of Cambodia's trade defense mechanisms whose regulatory enforcement is largely replaced by informal dispute resolutions meant to prioritize Chinese investment. Brunei however takes a laissez faire approach based on its resource wealth preferring minimal interventionism hence aligning itself with WTO and ASEAN tenets to maintain free market orientation. Whereas Timor-Leste lacks formal anti-dumping statutes due to significant institutional constraints while focusing on developmental partnerships with China as it remains non-ASEAN member country but still developing state. In sharp contrast, Singapore has an advanced trading system employing anti-dumping measures sparingly only according to WTO mandates; thereby ensuring its status as the first-class world trading center.The countries that form ASEAN underline the connection between economic pragmatism and institutional limitations, which is an indication of a regional inclination toward cooperative engagement rather than confrontation in regulating trade relations with China.

A key question is whether hedging can work as a long-term mechanism to balance interests and serve national priorities. It is important for smaller states operating in a world where competition between superpowers is increasing to be alive to shifts in geopolitical dynamics. Thus, policies must take into account both global and regional changes to avoid strategic lag and minimize political risk.

CONCLUSION

Countries with higher levels of political, economic, and social stability have greater room for maneuvering when it comes to deploying hedging strategies against dominant powers. However, caution must be exercised with respect to debt risks associated with loans from institutions like Asian Development Bank (ADB). In the case of joint financing of infrastructure projects by nations together with China; particularly such as Vietnam faces a risk of entering a "debt trap" leading to unsustainable dependence on Chinese support. Proactive adoption of alternative financial strategies can help secure long-term stability and mitigate vulnerabilities. Lack of strong measures leaves these nations trapped in poverty cycle resulting from overdependence on others thereby posing lasting challenges on sovereignty and economic resilience. Three pairs of countries are examined: Cambodia/Vietnam; Philippines/Malaysia; Indonesia/Thailand.

These nations differ significantly in terms of how they engage Chinese investment which sheds light on the complexity in ASEAN-China economic relations whereby each country's unique developmental priorities, institutional capacities, and strategic considerations have given rise to different approaches towards managing Chinese economic influence among them.

The pattern of responses from the panel members to the questionnaire underpins the diversity that characterizes regional economic integration and different levels of economic interdependence in a wider context of ASEAN-China relationship.

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