

**ASEAN AND INDIA–ASEAN RELATIONS: NAVIGATING SHIFTING
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BOOK REVIEW

Nguyen Huu Chanh

University of Health Sciences, Viet Nam,
National University Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam
(nguyenhuuchanh06@gmail.com)
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Evaluation on Indo-Pacific geopolitics and regionalism has expanded significantly, but little attention is paid to the intricate and evolving partnership between India and ASEAN. *ASEAN and India–ASEAN Relations: Navigating Shifting Geopolitics*, edited by M. Mayilvaganan, is a timely publication that integrates historical, economic, security, and cultural dimensions and features growing cooperation amid a shifting geopolitical landscape. It delves into the dynamic, evolving relationship between India and ASEAN within the broader geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific. By covering different critical themes, from historical connections and economic integration to security architecture and maritime partnership, the book demonstrates a valuable understanding of how both India and ASEAN manage intricate difficulties and advantages and move global power dynamics. The book also features the strategic imperatives driving India's Act East Policy, ASEAN's efforts to maintain regional stability, and the importance of external factors, e.g., the United States. It serves as a useful learning resource for policymakers, scholars, and students in Asian regionalism, international relations, and strategic studies.

The book is thematically structured into 15 chapters, analysing the multi-dimensional relationship between India and ASEAN. It starts with the historical evolution of India–ASEAN ties and situates them within the shifting geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific (Chapter 1). The following chapters delve into ASEAN's role amid external actors and emerging contests over natural resources, regional security architecture, and the evolving strategic interests of major powers like the US and India (Chapters 2–5). Subsequent chapters analyse India's Act East Policy, the strategic significance of Northeast India, and India's expanding defence diplomacy and maritime cooperation in Southeast Asia (Chapters 6–9). The volume further highlights the cultural and connectivity dimensions of the relationship, as well as trade and commerce challenges, diaspora engagement, and the importance of soft power in deepening ties (Chapters 10–13). The final chapters focus on future prospects for ASEAN-India relations and India's strategic options amid an increasingly complex Indo-Pacific landscape (Chapters 14–15).

Chapter 1 serves as a foundational introduction, setting the stage for the entire book by outlining the historical, cultural, and geopolitical context of ASEAN-India relations. It traces India's transition from the Look East Policy to the more assertive Act

East Policy, emphasising that this shift is largely driven by China's growing influence in the region. The chapter situates ASEAN at the centre of India's Indo-Pacific strategy and highlights the mutual importance of the partnership in addressing regional security and development challenges. This chapter is critical since it shapes the subsequent chapters and recognises the main themes, e.g., strategic recalibration, economic integration, and cultural ties, and furthermore offers audiences a thorough roadmap of the book's scope and objectives.

Part I offers an in-depth exploration of the evolving security environment in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific at large. It thoroughly discusses ASEAN's importance as a security actor in growing tensions between key powers, particularly the US, China, and India. It then sheds light on the ASEAN's efforts to navigate regional conflicts, natural resource disputes, and the wider security architecture. The detailed analysis of US and Indian engagement enhances the geopolitical setting, demonstrating the impact of external powers on ASEAN's security dynamics. While this part provides a comprehensive exploration of regional security, it slightly undergeneralises ASEAN's internal difficulties, e.g., political fragmentation and institutional limitations, essential to fully grasping its security role.

Part II focuses on India's strategic relationship with ASEAN, particularly in the view of India's northeastern region and its connections under the Act East Policy. It provides a thorough perspective on how India's domestic growth priorities intersect with its regional diplomacy, positioning Northeast India as a strategic gateway to ASEAN cooperation. This part highlights the significance of infrastructural projects and people-to-people ties, showing India's multidimensional approach. Nevertheless, the section primarily highlights India's insights, with little focus on ASEAN's priorities or responses, which somewhat limits a balanced bilateral investigation. However, it effectively emphasises India's evolving foreign policy orientation toward Southeast Asia and its strategic ambitions within the Indo-Pacific.

Part III delves into defence diplomacy, maritime cooperation, trade, cultural connectivity, diaspora engagement, and soft power, which are the important aspects of the ASEAN-India relationship. By discussing these various dimensions, it introduces a complex and multifaceted view of bilateral ties beyond mere security issues. The in-depth analysis of trade difficulties and defence partnership emphasises both advantages and challenges in the mutual cooperation. The chapters address cultural and diaspora connections, highlighting the role of soft power. Although the book explores various themes, the lack of synthesis among them somewhat limits narrative cohesion. However, this part greatly contributes to understanding the intricacies and depth of India-ASEAN engagement.

Part IV predicts the trajectory of ASEAN-India relations, including potential regional and global challenges. It focuses ASEAN's institutional pillars and the imperative of ensuring ASEAN centrality amid shifting power balances. The chapters propose strategic and policy options for India to effectively engage ASEAN and adapt to an uncertain Indo-Pacific environment. While the future outlook is well-framed, the discussion could be expanded to incorporate broader non-traditional security problems, e.g., climate change, technological disruptions, and social transformations, that will also shape the partnership. Despite this, the part successfully encapsulates the book's key perspectives and highlights the continuing strategic role of ASEAN-India ties, thereby filling a critical gap in envisioning the future of regional cooperation and stability.

One of the book's main contributions is its comprehensive inclusion of the multi-dimensional ASEAN-India relationship. For instance, Chapter 10 by M. Mayilvaganan explores cultural and connectivity ties, emphasising centuries-old civilisational links and the current difficulties in enhancing physical and people-to-people connectivity. Meanwhile, Chapter 12 by S. Y. Surendra Kumar centres on India's diaspora in Southeast Asia, recognising it as an often ignored but strategically essential asset. These chapters, along with others on trade (Chapter 11 by Shelly Gupta) and soft power (Chapter 13 by Doan Truong Thu), collectively widen the analysis beyond security and diplomacy, providing a holistic picture of bilateral ties.

A further contribution of the book lies in its discussion of ASEAN's importance in the evolving Indo-Pacific security architecture. Chapter 4 by Udai Bhanu Singh critically engages with ASEAN-led regional security frameworks, juxtaposing constructivist optimism about ASEAN centrality with realist skepticism. Chapter 2 by Subhadeep Bhattacharya delves into how external actors have long affected ASEAN's security environment, featuring contemporary geopolitical rivalries. This thorough debate improves audiences' understanding of ASEAN's security challenges, especially in managing relations with key powers, e.g., China, the US, and India.

Last but not least, the contribution of the book is also in the strong focus on India's strategic recalibration in the Southeast Asia, particularly through the Act East Policy. Chapter 6 by Gitanjali Sinha Roy offers a comprehensive exploration of how India's "Act East Policy" seeks to counter China's increasing assertiveness by enhancing ties with ASEAN and improving regional connectivity via India's Northeast. Chapter 7 by Mohor Chakraborty offers a detailed attention on Northeast India's importance as a gateway to Southeast Asia, illustrating the domestic-foreign policy nexus. These strengths address an essential gap by featuring India's operationalisation of its Indo-Pacific strategy.

One minor limitation is the imbalanced insights, with much of the discussion highlighting India's perspectives while undergeneralising ASEAN member states' voices. For example, Chapter 5 (Vivek Mishra on US, India, and ASEAN) and Chapter 15 (Gautam Mukhopadhyaya on India's strategic options) mainly centre on India's evolving policies without effectively integrating ASEAN's internal dynamics or national interests. Therefore, it restricts a complete understanding of ASEAN's agency and its various member states' priorities.

Another area that could be strengthened is in the fragmented treatment of topics, e.g., trade, culture, and diaspora, which, although discussed separately, lack incorporation. For instance, Chapter 11 (Shelly Gupta) examines trade and commerce issues, while Chapter 10 (M. Mayilvaganan) centres on culture and connectivity, and Chapter 12 (S. Y. Surendra Kumar) includes diaspora engagement. Nonetheless, the book overlooks an area to synthesise these aspects into a cohesive narrative about how these non-security factors jointly affect the trajectory of ASEAN-India relations. This fragmentation detracts from a unified vision of forward-looking collaboration.

Overall, this book serves as a useful learning resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in Indo-Pacific geopolitics, ASEAN integration, and India's foreign policy. It provides valuable perspectives that situate historical contexts within current strategic challenges, making this book comprehensive for those seeking to understand the ASEAN-India relationship amid regional power shifts. The audiences are

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well-equipped with a comprehensive analysis essential for informed policy formulation and academic inquiry in this critical area of international relations.

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