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THE "ASEAN WAY" REVISITED FOR STRENGTHENING REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE: A MACRO PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The "ASEAN Way" has been applied to tackle regional environmental problems in Southeast Asia for decades. As the political economy in Asia Pacific has become more turbulent in the 2020s, the "ASEAN Way" faces more difficulties. This article attempts to explore how the "ASEAN Way" could play a larger role under new circumstances. After looking into the traditional concerns about international actors, it discusses the domestic constraints of the "ASEAN Way", which include corruption, lack of environmental capacity and negligence. On this basis, it analyses traditional implications of the "ASEAN Way" for environmental governance. It suggests that being non-interfering in nature, the "ASEAN Way" has three technical features in the sense that it is in favour of strengthening and using institutional linkage, promoting standard harmonisation, and integrating environmental protection into a broad development agenda. Three new challenges at the macro level are identified and discussed: industrial relocation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Sino-US tension. Then it analyses three directional policy options for augmenting the "ASEAN Way" in the face of old and new conditions: further involving environmental NGOs, incrementally engaging neighboring countries and international institutions, and adopting a market-oriented approach to transnational policy coordination. It concludes by discussing how these policy options could be gradually implemented by ASEAN and its external partners.

Keywords: the "ASEAN Way", environmental governance, traditional concerns, new challenges, directional options

INTRODUCTION

For decades, environmental problems have posed serious threats to the development and prosperity of ASEAN and its neighbors (Howes & Wyrwoll, 2012). Rapid socioeconomic development in ASEAN countries has been accompanied by heavy pollution and intensive resource exploitation (Aung et al, 2017; Hoang et al, 2019; Nathaniel & Khan, 2020). Typical transboundary environmental challenges in ASEAN range from industrial water and soil contamination, air pollution, marine fishery decline, climate change, etc. (Gong & Trajano, 2018; Hsu, 2018; Ding, 2019). As the environment has become a common concern, concerted efforts have been made, featuring the negotiation and implementation of regional cooperation initiatives (Elliott, 2003; Qiao-Franco, 2021).

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However, environmental governance in this region has been undermined by the intertwining of multiple issues, such as the lack of economic incentives, low-level mutual trust, involvement of and tension between various stakeholders, etc. (Litta, 2010; Maggio, 2019). Despite the various obstacles, ASEAN countries have made considerable efforts to strengthen regional environmental governance in the past two decades. The approach adopted by ASEAN countries towards treaty negotiation and implementation, which highlights the maintenance of state sovereignty, mutual understanding, institutional capacity-building, etc., has long been conceptualised as the "ASEAN Way" (Acharya, 1997; Nischalke, 2000; Goh, 2003).

While the "ASEAN Way" has symbolised the common stance of ASEAN countries towards regional affairs, there have been some variations in practice (Yukawa, 2017). As far as environmental protection is concerned, the impact of the "ASEAN Way", which reflects ASEAN's general perception of regional environmental governance, has been controversial. On the one hand, it has proved capable of institutionally engaging ASEAN's member states (Heilmann, 2015). On the other hand, however, the direct effect of the "ASEAN Way" in mitigating environmental pollution is not free from criticism (Varkkey, 2012). It has either been unable to engage some ASEAN countries, or required a long time period for negotiating action plans, the implementation of which could still be doubtful (Ibitz, 2012; Varkkey, 2018). Despite the controversies, the "ASEAN Way" has been a pragmatic approach for the region (Balakrishnan, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been changing the world political economy, together with other geopolitical issues such as the tension between China and the United States. As a result, the environmental problems in Southeast Asia need to be tackled in a more complicated context, which is likely to make inter-state cooperation and implementation of international agreements more challenging than before (Bieber, 2020). For instance, evidence has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially undermined support for climate change mitigation (Ecker et al, 2020). Although it is not a perfect solution, the potential of the "ASEAN Way" as a flexible and pragmatic approach to engaging relevant countries and other stakeholders deserves further attention.

Therefore, this article attempts to reappraise the role of the "ASEAN Way" in regional environmental governance under new circumstances. Section 2 reviews the old and constant concerns behind the regional approach preferred by ASEAN countries. Section 3 briefly introduces the traditional implications of the "ASEAN Way" for regional environmental governance in Southeast Asia. Section 4 explores the recent developments of Asia's political economy which could significantly affect the foundation of regional policy coordination. Section 5 analyses some policy options which follow the "ASEAN Way" to improve environmental governance in Southeast Asia. It concludes by discussing how these options could be implemented to augment the "ASEAN Way".

In qualitative research of international relations and international governance, a macro perspective tends to develop analysis which could broadly apply across different issue-areas (Sørensen, 2001; Jakobi, 2009). The goal more than often is to directly depict the features of key stakeholders - especially state actors, and the general patterns of their

interactions. While the line between macro and micro perspectives might be blur, a micro perspective is inclined to rely on detailed tracing of individual or institutional-level events, interview records, documents etc., in time sequences (Rosenau, 2003; Holsti, 2004; Checkel, 2008). The contribution of such research is to provide a better understanding of individual and institutional behaviour, as well as changes at comparable levels, and then their implications at larger scales. In studies of ASEAN's environmental governance, there have been discussions of the functioning of private actors, and the development of institutional frameworks in specific environmental issue-areas, while attention has also been paid to analyse ASEAN's obstacles, efforts, and opportunities and its interactions with external stakeholders in a more general sense (Razzaque, 2013; Anbumozhi & Intal, 2015; Elliot, 2017; Nesadurai, 2018). While using the haze pollution as a case study, this article mainly adopts a macro perspective in the sense that it attempts to explore how the "ASEAN Way" could be augmented to strengthen ASEAN's regional environmental governance in a relatively comprehensive manner.

BEHIND THE "ASEAN WAY": OLD AND CONSTANT CONCERNS

Concerns about international actors

Concerns about powerful states

The principle of state sovereignty empowers nation states to exploit their own natural resources within some, yet ambiguous, limitations (Scholtz, 2008). From a developing country perspective, the principle could be used to confront developed countries which intend to unilaterally pursue their own benefits through coercion and threats (Perrez, 2000). With many areas being the former colonies of European countries, most of Southeast Asia and South Asia became independent states between 1946 and 1976 (Grossman & Iyigun,1997; Schrijver, 1997). Although there have been suggestions that state sovereignty should be reinterpreted to include more obligations in environmental governance, the developing world has been very reluctant to deviate from the traditional notion of untrammeled sovereignty (Lal, 2000; McCarthy, 2005). In Southeast Asia, a similar memory of the colonial past has contributed to a common prioritisation of state sovereignty, even between countries within this region (Soesilowati, 2010).

As part of the geopolitical context, the long-lasting disputes around the South China Sea (SCS hereinafter) add to the strategic distrust in Asia-Pacific towards relatively powerful states. Having been there for several decades, the SCS disputes have not stopped the booming of international trade in Southeast and East Asia (Domachowska, 2019). However, it is still suggested that the SCS disputes have been obstacles to reaching a higher-level cooperation on a variety of issues, including environmental protection (Bateman, 2017).

Specifically, regarding environmental issues, a widely spread view across Asian developing countries, and even the developing world, has been that international environmental agendas could be dominated by the developed world so as to hamper the

economic growth of developing countries (Tabb, 2004; Schrijver, 2008). Three decades ago, it was suggested that in developed countries environmental problems were derived from the "excess of affluence", while in developing countries environmental problems were the "environmental problems of poverty" (Ntambirweki, 1990, p. 908). To quote the former Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohamad at the Rio Summit in 1992:

> *"Obviously, the North wants to have a direct say in the management of forests in the poor South at next to nothing cost to themselves. The pittance they offer is much less than the loss of earning by poor countries, and yet it is made out as a general concession […] The poor are not asking for charity [but] the need for us to co-operate on an equitable basis. Now the rich claims a right to regulate the development of the poor countries…"* (Mohamad, 1992)

Today, the gap has still not been substantially fulfilled (Halvorssen, 2018). In ASEAN's negotiation with the EU towards a free trade agreement, many disagreements have emerged on trade-environment relations (Hai, 2017). The fear about powerful states is not just against non-ASEAN countries, but rather against all other state actors interfering with domestic environmental policy (Rusli, Mustafa & Dremliuga, 2017). Consequently, it should not be expected that ASEAN would admit the legitimate use of trade or other coercive measures by either its member states or external actors.

Concern about international institutions

A relatively centralised approach to global or regional environmental governance is to empower international institutions which would be authorised to decide what kind of incentives should be used on a participating country. Yet, international institutions never exist in vacuum, instead, they are often obsessed by problems rooted in power politics or geopolitical tensions (Franck, 1998; Hurrell, 2001).

Traditionally, developing countries have always been the complaints of the dominating role of developed countries in major international institutions. As an example, the conditionality made by the World Bank in its projects have led to non-negligible side effects in the developing world, including in ASEAN countries (Stiglitz, 1999; Caroll, 2010). Similarly, the conditions of loans provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF hereinafter) significantly depend upon the borrowing country's relationship with the United States and other Group 7 countries (Bird & Rowlands, 2001; Dreher & Jensen, 2007).

Environmental governance has long been a focus in the activities of international development institutions (Head, 1991). From a developed country perspective, linking the amount of foreign financial transfers to developing countries with improvements in forest conservation has been suggested to be one of the options on the table of international institutions (Soest & Lensink, 2000). However, recipient countries from the developing world more than often doubt if international institutions would fully consider and protect their national interests.

This logic does not only apply to ASEAN's relationship with international development institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. In similar ways, ASEAN countries have also been concerned about unbalanced power within the region, which has led to the use of internal "balance of power" strategies even between ASEAN members (Emmers, 2012). In fact, some of its strong member states have already taken advantage of ASEAN environmental institutions and policies for their national interests in forest, international funding, etc. (Giessen & Sahide, 2017). As a result, it would be natural for ASEAN to be against substantially empowering an international or regional institution in environmental governance.

Domestic constraints

In addition to the common concerns about state actors and international institutions, at the domestic level there have been multiple factors which could impede the implementation of regional or international environmental initiatives. If the OECD's experience could be drawn on, then government, economy and society constitute the three linked dimensions which determine the level of sustainable development (Strange & Bayley, 2008). The discussion here categorises the domestic constraints into three types: corruption of governments, lack of environmental capacity, and negligence of environmental problems.

Corruption of governments

The prevalent corruption problem across developing countries could substantially undermine their capacity and willingness of undertaking international environmental obligations (Kanowski, McDermott & Cashore, 2011; McCullough, 2017). According to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) calculated by Transparency International, most ASEAN countries, except Singapore, have a CPI score below the average for countries in Asia-Pacific in 2014 (Stagars, 2016). In the environmental field, an early investigation by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP hereinafter) indicates that corruption in the exploitation of natural resources in resource-abundant Southeast Asia is extremely serious (UNDP, 2008). Even after Indonesia ratified the Haze Agreement, it is still suggested that addressing illegal deforestation activities remains a big challenge for treaty implementation (Ding & Peh, 2016).

Lack of local support and environmental capacity

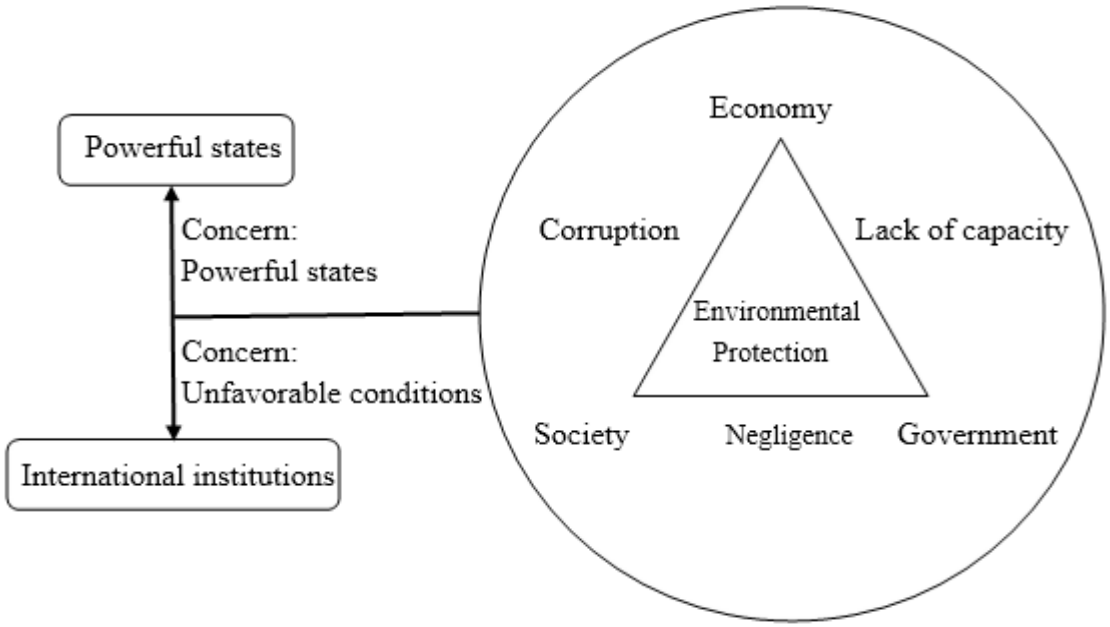
It is not uncommon for people in low-income and low middle-income developing countries to focus upon economic growth without paying attention to environmental protection. As exemplified in the haze pollution issue, local-level marginalisation of environmental protection has created obstacles to top-down approach to implementing regional or national environmental policies (Nguitragool, 2011). While the trade-off between economic development and environmental protection is widely perceived as unsustainable, empirical evidence shows that the former has been prioritised and significantly contributed to environmental degradation across ASEAN countries (Le, 2019). Obviously, it would be very difficult for treaty enforcement measures to be effectively adopted in the absence of support from local governments and communities.

Negligence of environmental problems

The negligence of environmental protection has its roots in local socioeconomic conditions, which point at the lack of necessary capacity for addressing environmental challenges. Environmental capacity, as defined by the OECD, refers to "a society's ability to identify and solve environmental problems" (OECD, 1994, p. 8). Capacity is a broad term which consists of expertise, material resources, the educational level of people, etc. (Keohane & Levy, 1996). For a long time, most ASEAN members have been low-income or low middle-income countries, with education development even lagging behind their income level. The lack of local capacity has substantially inhibited ASEAN's potential of formulating and implementing strict regional environmental policies (Kheng-Lian, Robinson & Lin-Heng, 2016).

Figure 1 illustrates ASEAN's traditional concerns about international factors and domestic constraints.

Figure 1: Traditional concerns at the international and domestic level



THE TRADITIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE "ASEAN WAY" FOR ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Basic Attitude

The "ASEAN Way" was put into practice earlier than being theorised by the academia. As aforementioned, relevant activities were already noted in the mid-1990s. Then, as a milestone of regional environmental governance, in 2002 the ASEAN issued the Joint Statement of Environment Ministers at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which required that "(T)he existing frameworks for regional intergovernmental governance

should be fully utilised as part of the international governance structure. Greater use should be made of regional, inter-governmental and other organisations to promote coordinated sustainable development initiative for that region."[1]

Based on official statements and relevant practices, three norms of environmental governance which underpin the "ASEAN Way" were identified: non-interference in domestic affairs, consensus-based and cooperative planning, and national implementation (Kheng-Lian & Robinson, 2002). These norms, which reflect traditional wisdom of international relations in this region, have made the "ASEAN Way" flexible and inclusive in terms of involving state actors with different attitudes and interests - even including those which are skeptical of the intention of other countries or international institutions. The obvious deficiency, as mentioned above, is the slow progress of negotiation and transboundary pollution control.

Technical features

The adoption of the "ASEAN Way" does not necessarily mean that pressure would not be exerted upon relevant countries in environmental governance. Instead, incentives could be provided in soft and smooth ways. At a more technical level, the "ASEAN Way" has been interpreted and applied in several aspects to respond to the traditional concerns and support regional environmental governance.

Firstly, in addition to regularly facilitating bargaining and negotiation between member states, the "ASEAN Way" favours establishing and using institutional linkage within the region which, as a form of networks, should of course, be different from supranational bureaucracies (Mulqueeny, 2004). While the evolution of centralised environmental institutions has long been slow, quite a few institutional linkages or networks have been developed after environmental issues were integrated into the ASEAN agenda in 1997 (Soesastro, 2001; Elliott, 2011). In addition to formal linkages between ASEAN countries, the Track Two process has provided a supplementary approach to facilitating regional interaction and cooperation.[2]

Secondly, regional harmonisation of environmental standards has been indispensable to the application of the "ASEAN Way". Even for international institutions like the World Bank, it has been long suggested that their primary goals should be knowledge dissemination and technological development (Gilbert, Powell & Vines, 2001; Ravallion, 2016). In 1994, ASEAN's Resolution on Environment and Development adopted a set of long-term Harmonised Environmental Quality Standards.[3] For addressing the haze pollution problem, developing and using common standards have always been identified as an important task in ASEAN's campaign.[4] Unlike some treaties which set absolute and binding targets for contracting parties, the standard-oriented approach reduces the possibility of triggering state sovereignty concerns. Instead, it concentrates on minimising technical discrepancies so that countries could pursue technological upgrading, and avoid direct confrontation on benefit and burden allocation, and that regional integration could be facilitated on an institutional and technical basis (Menon & Melendez, 2017).

Thirdly, considering the heavy influence of economic activities on the environment, the "ASEAN Way" has put emphasis on integrating environmental protection into economic development. With the 1992 Singapore Resolution as a start, quite a few declarations and other official documents have addressed the role of environmental protection in the regional sustainable development agenda (Tan & Kamaruddin, 2019). However, economic integration has progressed faster than environmental policy collaboration, which has led to reflections on how the flexible and consensus-based "ASEAN Way" could make more contributions at the environment-economy interface (Anbumozhi, 2017).

The example of the haze pollution

The haze pollution issue provides a window for observing how the "ASEAN Way" has been applied and assessed. As the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP hereinafter) was adopted in 2002, the long period in engaging Indonesia in the AATHP has led to criticism about the usefulness of the "ASEAN Way" (Don Ramli, Hashim & Mohammed, 2019). It was even suggested that to deal with the haze problem, it would be necessary for the "ASEAN Way" to incorporate some "hard law" elements into relevant discourses (Kheng-Lian & Robinson, 2002; Varkkey, 2014).

Despite the controversies, policymakers and diplomats from relevant ASEAN members have adhered to the "ASEAN Way", which is deemed as a practical approach to engaging countries with different or even conflicting considerations. For example, having reached the Indonesian Parliament in early 2000s, the AATHP was not ratified until September 16, 2014. For quite a few years, the factors which dragged Indonesia behind all other ASEAN members included the absence of sufficient external incentives and the relatively high implementation cost for involving key domestic stakeholders (Tacconi et al, 2006; Quah & Tan, 2018). To engage Indonesia, the "ASEAN Way" has played a contributive role in different but connected aspects. With haze pollution often raised as a contentious issue on ASEAN's policy agenda, arguably an "anti-haze norm" emerged, which generated momentum for Indonesian legislature and business elites (Tobing, 2018). Particularly, the continuous attention from neighboring countries - particularly Malaysia and Singapore, gradually motivated both the Indonesian Parliament and its palm oil industry to support ratifying the AATHP (Hurley & Lee, 2020).

The ratification of the AATHP by all ASEAN members was, of course, neither a one-for-all nor a once-for-all solution to haze pollution, the control of which would be a long march (Robertua & Sigalingging, 2019). From the perspective of institutional development, as early as in the beginning of this century, the "ASEAN Way" has been used to promote capacity building in various forms, including regular and frequent meetings, in-depth discussion about the driving factors of the haze problem, exposure of the challenge to the ADB, UNEP and international NGOs (Tay, 2001; Robertua & Sigalingging, 2019). Nevertheless, attention paid to local-level capacity building and practices has still been insufficient under the "ASEAN Way" (Nurhidayah, Alam & Lipman, 2015). Furthermore, the complexity of the haze problem at the local level has been highlighted, which refers to heavy economic interests, involvement of diverse groups, different policy goals, etc. (Lee, Jaafar & Tan et al, 2016; Rusli, 2018).

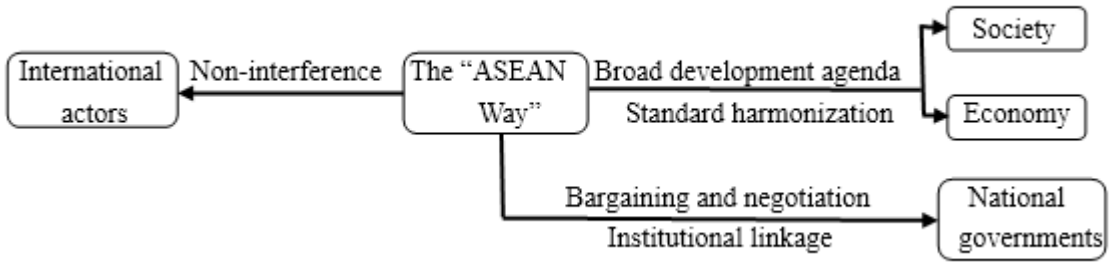
An approach with long-term effect

The "ASEAN Way" is by no means a perfect solution to regional cooperation. Yet, in light of the domestic constraints and the common concerns about state actors and international institutions, it has served as a pragmatic approach to regional environmental governance. As exemplified by the non-interference norm, its underlying norms and technical features which allow for flexibility in negotiation and implementation have reflected what is necessary to do in a region of high-level diversity (Nguyen, 2016).

Correspondingly, it usually takes quite some time before the "ASEAN Way" starts to effectively address a specific challenge. In recent years, the slow yet visible progress in haze control policy coordination is a good example, which still requires an uncertain long term to fix the problem (Varkkey, 2012, 2014, 2018). And with domestic development which needs to be taken into account in a long period, an effective application of the "ASEAN Way" would call for international actors, both within and outside the region, to render more support in a continuous manner. In particular, external resources should be directed to assist a further integration of environmental solutions into a broad regional development agenda (Honkonen, 2016).

Figure 2 summarises the two-directional functioning of the "ASEAN Way" - resist the interference of international actors with domestic affairs, and channel international resources to support capacity building and an integral approach to environmental governance and economic development.

Figure 2: The functioning of the "ASEAN Way"



NEW CHALLENGES FOR A SLOW-TO-EFFECT APPROACH

Issues in international environmental governance are not free from the influence of contextual factors, such as geopolitical tension (Deudney & Matthew, 1999). As mentioned before, traditionally environmental governance in Southeast Asia faces a few internal challenges. The development of geopolitics and regional economy in Asia-Pacific further adds to the complexity of the context of ASEAN's environmental governance. This section identifies and analyses three contextual factors which are very likely to affect the potential of the "ASEAN Way": industrial relocation to some ASEAN countries, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the geopolitical and trade tension between China and the United States.

Industrial relocation to some ASEAN countries

ASEAN countries are still in the progress of industrialisation. Since the production cost in China and other neighboring countries have been increasing in recent years, a variety of manufacturing industries, many of which are energy and labor intensive, have relocated to some ASEAN countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. (Yang, 2016). Those relocated manufacturers have played an important role in the industrialisation process of their new host countries in the sense of contributing to not only economic development and employment, but also industrial upgrading and modernisation (Lee, Wong, Intarakumnerd et al, 2019; Chan, Ho, Yip et al, 2020). At the same time, however, the expansion of local manufacturing industries has made environmental challenges in the region more difficult to tackle. Empirical data shows that the relocation of heavy industries from China has led to dramatic increase of energy and emissions intensity in some ASEAN countries (Pappas, Chalvatzis, Guan, et al, 2018).

The uneven relocation of polluting industries poses new challenges to the "ASEAN Way" in terms of common standard-setting and development policy coordination. First, countries with concentrated polluting industries could simultaneously acquire more economic resources and knowledge to establish advantage in bargaining. To use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG hereafter) as an analogy, it has been noticed that even technical-level discussions under the United Nations were politicised, mainly in favor of power actors which had resources and interests to shape negotiation processes (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). Similarly, research has shown that ASEAN countries in which the auto industry concentrates could dominate relevant regional policy dialogues (Permana et al, 2021).

Second, as those relocated polluting industries become significant contributors to local societies and economies, their linkage with domestic stakeholders could exacerbate the divisions between the host countries and other ASEAN members regarding how to balance economic development and the need for regional environmental protection. It has already been noted that in ASEAN, substantial policy coordination, if incurring high short-term costs for certain members, would be particularly difficult to proceed (Winanti & Hanif, 2018). Inevitably, with more local interest groups involved, the "ASEAN Way" as an inclusive and non-interfering approach would encounter more obstacles to well-function.

The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 has proved to be a serious disturbance to world politics and economy. While its profound impact is yet to be fully uncovered, some consequences have already been visible. At least two problems could be identified as relevant to the discussion here. One is that the heavy losses caused by the coronavirus and countermeasures have forced countries to prioritise economic recovery. The shrinking economies in many countries have resulted in less industrial and residential pollution, including in Southeast Asia (Kanniah, Zaman & Kaskaoutis et al, 2020). However, in terms of regional and national environmental governance, recession is a negative change as it weakens the social and

economic support for environmental protection (Zambrano-Monserrate, Ruano & Sanchez-Alcaldec, 2020).

Additionally, the pandemic together with the public health economic crisis have motivated countries to rethink about the impact that their dependence on global supply chains might have on national interests. The global shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE hereinafter) products in early 2020 is a good example (Gereffi, 2020). Germany, the United States and some other developed countries which used to rely on foreign suppliers started to invest in domestic PPE production, which is deemed as of strategic importance. Such a concern has spilled over to other "strategic" manufacturing industries (Jenny, 2020). ASEAN countries as major exporters of commodities would face a more intensive competition in developed country markets, which could mean a decreased space for environmental protection.

These two problems could have interlinked and negative implications for applying the "ASEAN Way" to regional environmental governance. First, as governments, businesses and societies have all focused attention on the pandemic and economic recovery, strengthening institutional arrangements for environmental protection, or emphasising environmental precaution would not seem to be an attractive policy option for ASEAN's elites and the general public. In fact, in such a worldwide crisis, to provide economic stimulus and create jobs are commonly deemed as the top priority, which makes the pursuit of the long-term benefit of sustainable development perceived as less urgent on national, regional and even global policy agenda (Steffen, Egli, Pahle et al, 2020; Vaka, Walvekar, Rasheed et al, 2020).

Second, as some major economies have adopted a more conservative attitude toward trade liberalisation, ASEAN countries would have rising concerns about the implications of a highly-integrated market for supply chain security (Marc et al, 2020; Dallas et al, 2021). Standard harmonisation, as advocated by international institutions and ASEAN, is in essence supportive of market integration. It would be doubtful if standard harmonisation would be pursued as before the pandemic, with both ASEAN and non-ASEAN countries reflecting on their supply chain and market access policies (ERIA, 2020; Miroudot, 2020; Free & Hecimovic, 2021).

The tension between China and the United States

The rising tension between China and the United States over trade and security issues might be one of the biggest challenges to global governance (Harris, 2020). For ASEAN countries, the escalated Sino-US tension means a dramatically changing context for trade and regional cooperation on other issues (Anwar, 2020). The ongoing struggle between China and the United States has led to industrial and investment relocation to some ASEAN members, but meanwhile have negative impacts on the production and output of some others (Tam, Yi & Ann, 2019; Pangestu, 2019; Nidhiprabha, 2019).

Furthermore, in the past few years, regional diplomacy in East and Southeast Asia has always centred on issues like military security, energy, trade, investment, etc., rather than

on air pollution or climate change (Huang, 2018; Koga, 2018; Burgess, 2020). After all, national security in the traditional sense is always the top concern of nation states. And within the ASEAN, how to approach a variety of non-traditional security issues which include, but are not limited to, environmental protection, is still in controversy (Martel, 2017).

Like the other new challenges, the U.S.-China rivalry, which centres on traditional security issues and leads to discrepancies between ASEAN countries, would also create more obstacles to the use of the "ASEAN Way" in regional environmental governance (Murphy, 2017). First, the continuous tension between China and the United States has added to the already-uneven industrial relocation which, as discussed above, could increase the difficulties for ASEAN members to voluntarily reach consensus on common environmental policy.

Second, if the regional policy agenda is occupied with traditional security topics and disputes, then the difficulty for strengthening environmental governance would very likely increase. It would be natural for ASEAN's elites and general public to focus attention on short-term economic stability, and their security and balance between China and the United States (Ng, 2020; Vu, 2020). Consequently, these considerations would significantly downplay the priority of environmental policy coordination, such as standard harmonisation and the integration of environmental considerations into regional development agenda.

Table 1 briefly summarizes how the new challenges relate to the three dimensions which determine the effectiveness of regional environmental governance efforts.

Table 1: The influences of the new challenges

Challenge / Dimension	Industrial relocation	COVID-19	Sino-US tension
Society	Involvement of local societies in polluting industries	Declining public support for environmental governance	Prioritisation of security and economic stability ratherthan environmental protection
Economy	Local interests like job creation, tax, etc.	Economic recession	Economic disturbance
Government	All socio economic interests in consideration	Public opinion, economic recession, competition on developed country markets	Public opinion, economic disturbance, occupation with traditional security issues

AUGMENTING THE "ASEAN WAY"

The start of the third decade of this century has been turbulent. For regional environmental governance, ASEAN not only has to cope with a high-level internal diversity, but also must adapt to the drastically changing political economy in Asia-Pacific. In such a complicated landscape, the "ASEAN Way", a flexible approach in essence, is worthy of being augmented to improve environmental governance in a populous and rapidly industrialising region of more than 650 million people.[5]

Further involvement of environmental NGOs

In light of the old concerns and new challenges, it would be necessary to further involve domestic and international NGOs. Compared with the cooperation between nation states, environmental NGOs could help build and strengthen transnational communities or networks which could directly support domestic environmental activities (Pagnani, 2003). In Southeast Asia, environmental NGOs have been active for a long time (Bryant, 2001; Mushkat, 2004). Forest management in some ASEAN countries shows that environmental NGOs have a non-negligible role to play in major environmental reforms (Dauvergne, 2003).

However, at both the regional and local level, support for environmental NGOs has not been sufficient in the past two decades (Rahman, 2016; Lange, 2020). Considering the technical features of the "ASEAN Way", potential policies to support environmental NGOs could be further delineated. First, environmental NGOs should be encouraged to promote information exchange across different levels. As non-state actors, environmental NGOs have the advantage of directly interacting with numerous grassroots actors. Hence, with appropriate arrangement, environmental NGOs could bring first-hand information to Track One and Track Two communications under the "ASEAN Way". As an example, environmental NGOs have attracted more attention to the controversy around palm oil plantations, but are in need of more support from state actors (Nesadurai, 2017).

Second, environmental NGOs could become more contributive to standard enhancement and harmonisation. "Race to the bottom" often happens when polluting industries have the choice between a range of different places with different environmental standards. As a countermeasure to the "race to the bottom", environmental NGOs have launched sustainable supply chain management initiatives across quite a few countries (Rodríguez, Giménez & Arenas, 2016). Under this approach, as long as a polluter is a member of a monitored supply chain, it could not avoid paying for environmental protection simply by relocating itself. Under support from ASEAN and its neighbors, domestic and international NGOs could collaborate to strengthen local capacity of pollution control in the sense of tracing and involving polluters regardless of their locations.

Third, the integration of environmental protection and economic development necessitates further engaging environmental NGOs at the local level, which could interact with communities, vulnerable groups, governmental agencies, etc., in a nuanced manner. In fact, to put a broad sustainable development agenda into practice is highly demanding on the

capacity of local institutions (Rosati & Faria, 2019). As far as environmental governance is concerned, it is not only about figuring out suitable ways of pursuing economic growth, but also related to public awareness enhancement, education, anti-corruption, etc (Yee & Rahman, 2019). With more top-down support, environmental NGOs could play a larger part in those areas.

An incremental approach to involving neighbours and international institutions

The "ASEAN Way" does not exclude neighbouring countries or international institutions from exploring cooperation opportunities. There have already been a few platforms between ASEAN and its neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region, such as ASEAN Plus Three and ASEAN Plus Six, etc. International institutions e.g., Asian Development Bank, OECD, have also been enthusiastic actors in areas such as anti-corruption and capacity-building.[6] The major problem is how the environmental policy collaboration between ASEAN and those actors could be strengthened, with the traditional concerns about international actors remaining, and geopolitical tensions rising.

An incremental approach might be pragmatic in light of the various restrictions (Parks, Maramis & Sunchindah, 2018). Instead of seeking one-for-all or once-for-all solutions, such an approach is more interested in starting in-depth cooperation in specific issue areas and expanding horizons step by step (Mack & Ravenhill, 2019). For example, marine environmental protection, which is of common interest to ASEAN and its neighbours, is suggested to be a way of bridging gaps and facilitating cooperation (Trajano, 2017). It has also been suggested that ASEAN Plus Three could be of better use for addressing the haze pollution (Varkkey, 2017). And a common framework of transboundary environmental assessments has been proposed as a good field for ASEAN's collaboration with international institutions (Dávila, Zhang & Kørnøv, 2020).

A market-oriented approach to transnational policy coordination

While geopolitical confrontation might have some influence on their decision-making, businesses in the Asia Pacific region are usually much less burdened with traditional security concerns if compared with nation states. As noted before, manufacturing industries have been undergoing redistribution amid continuous increase of international trade within this region. The stance of manufacturers, which are the direct emitters of industrial pollutants, is crucial to ASEAN's campaign against air pollution, water contamination and other major environmental challenges.

For engaging global supply chains in ASEAN's sustainable development agenda, a market-oriented approach which encourages businesses and other non-state actors to develop and use environmental governance capacity, is probably preferable to "command-and-control" approach. In general, market-based mechanisms are deemed as more efficient in resource allocation than government-led ones (Aldy, 2020; Lapan & Sikdar, 2020). Particularly, modeling results indicate that if world market prices are not affected by involved countries, then serious distortion of environmental policy could take place in the form of corruption, subsidy, or others (Fünfgelt & Schulze, 2016). To the contrary, transnational coordination

and harmonisation of pollution control policies should rather focus on leveling the playing field and using market-based instruments to incentivise manufacturers (Schlegelmilch, Eichel & Pegels, 2017).

Table 2 briefly summarises how measures following the above three directions could be adopted to augment the "ASEAN Way".

Table 2: Three directional options for augmenting the "ASEAN Way"

Direction / Factors	Further involvement of environmental NGOs	An incremental approach	A market-oriented approach
International concerns	Linking local communities with intergovernmental discourses, promoting standard harmonisation	Strengthening cooperation on environmental issues of common interests and bridging gaps	Reducing distortion of environmental policy and promoting transnational policy coordination
Domestic constraints	Promoting standard harmonisation and integration of environmental protection and economic development	Focusing on specific issue areas which do not trigger state sovereignty concerns	Strengthening the capacity of non-state actors and enhancing the efficiency of domestic environmental policy

CONCLUSION

It is not uncommon for diplomacy-oriented measures to take a relatively long time to yield substantial effects on national or domestic governance (Cooper et al, 2008; Nowotny, 2011). In particular, it has been noted that patience across governments, businesses and the society is crucial to addressing complicated environmental challenges, such as climate change (Cai et al, 2020). Being non-coercive and inclusive in nature, in several decades the "ASEAN Way" has proved its usefulness and robustness under changing global and regional contexts. Meanwhile, however, there would be no doubt that its application would need to be reinforced in the turbulent 2020s.

Three directional options for augmenting the "ASEAN Way" are discussed above, the feasibility of which depends on whether the key stakeholders in ASEAN and its neighbours would make concerted efforts with patience and an inclusive attitude. First, as environmental NGOs have long been active and contributive participants in environmental protection in ASEAN countries, it should be relatively easy for key stakeholders to provide more support. For example, attention from the general public is always important to enhancing the influence of environmental NGOs (Berny & Rootes, 2018). In addition, environmental NGOs could be encouraged to generate and disseminate science-based information in relevant policy discourses in ASEAN countries (Ekayani et al, 2016).

Second, the effective use of the incremental approach in involving neighbours and international institutions would still require deliberate consideration of sovereignty concerns, economic development goals and environmental protection needs (Maier-Knapp, 2019). For instance, as cooperation on marine environmental protection might involve the establishment of joint working teams, it would be necessary for participating countries to start with fully exchanging opinions and building mutual trust from non-sensitive issues (Qi & Xue, 2021). The linkage between the haze pollution and global climate change is also a good example, in the sense of indicating that external stakeholders could help with technical issues of ASEAN's low-carbon development, rather than get involved in sensitive controversies about resource sovereignty (Mukherjee, 2018; Varkkey, 2019).

Third, with the contribution from environmental NGOs, businesses, neighbouring countries and international actors, the market-oriented approach to transnational policy coordination could also be incrementally implemented to engage ASEAN's key stakeholders at both the national and the local level. As exemplified by the participation of the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance in aquaculture practices, ASEAN countries already have experience in collaborating with domestic and international corporations and environmental NGOs on common business standard-setting and implementation (Samerwong et al, 2017). To comprehensively and formally promote market integration is, of course, very challenging for ASEAN in such a turbulent era (Desierto & Cohen, 2021). Therefore, it would be practical for ASEAN and its external partners to further strengthen policy support for the functioning of non-state actors, such as businesses, NGOs and consumers which, with latest technologies, could contribute to market integration and environmental protection, sector by sector, through supply chain management and transnational private governance (Perdana, 2019).

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Notes

[1] Retrieved from https://asean.org/?static_post=joint-statement-of-the-ministers-responsible-for-environment-of-the-member-states-of-asean-to-the-world-summit-on-sustainable-development-4-june-2002-bali-indonesia.

[2] In the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF hereinafter), Track One activities refer to those carried out by ARF governments; and Track Two activities refer to those carried out by strategic institutes and NGOs. The Second ASEAN Regional Forum: "Chairman's Statement". Retrieved from http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Chairmans-Statement-of-the-2nd-ARF.pdf

[3] Retrieved from https://environment.asean.org/resolution-on-environment-and-development/
[4] Retrieved from: http://haze.asean.org/
[5] Retrieved from https://www.usasean.org/why-asean/what-is-asean
[6] For example, see the ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia and the Pacific. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/site/adboecdanti-corruptioninitiative/

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