

# THE RESPONSE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA ISLAND COUNTRIES TO CHINA'S INFLUENCE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

VU PHAN TO UYEN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD student of the Faculty of International Studies, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Hanoi.VIETNAM

## ABSTRACT

*Southeast Asian nations, and island Southeast Asia in particular, have long been influenced by China, the area's bordering power, due to its near geographic proximity and extensive development distance. The influence that Southeast Asian nations have on islands suffers even more following the 19th National Congress, when China strengthened its economic initiatives, military activities, and promotion of soft power in the region. The article focuses on examining how China's influence has affected island nations in Southeast Asia. The research findings demonstrate that there are two opposing reactions (consensus and disagreement) in Southeast Asian island countries to China. From the recognition of the reactions of the above countries as well as its subsequent impacts, it is possible to draw experiences and lessons for Vietnam's policy making in the process of long-term coexistence under the influence of China.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Southeast Asian nations, China, BRI, policy response*

## INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia is home to more than 680 million people and has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Its proximity to the South China Sea - an important trade shipping route through which trillions of dollars of the world's trade passes - adds to the region's strategic importance. For many years, the United States has maintained a significant presence in Southeast Asia through both security and economic commitments. But since US President Donald Trump took office in 2017, the country has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership - a major trade agreement that includes several Southeast Asian nations - and key officials America's top government has been conspicuously absent from several key regional summits. The decline in relative power of the United States coincides with China's push for greater influence in Southeast Asia through economic programs such as infrastructure investment under the Belt and Road Initiative, military activities as well as strengthening soft power.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

It can be seen that, after the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party, China has made more and more moves to increase its influence in the island Southeast Asian countries, especially notably in communication and medical activities. The adaptation of the Southeast Asian island countries to the increasing influence of China since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, edited by Duong Van Huy,

focuses on key issues such as influencing factors to the adaptation of the Southeast Asian island countries to China's increasing influence. The authors analyze and clarify the impact of interactions between China and Southeast Asian island countries from the period before the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, strategic competition between major powers in the region, the impact from the East Sea issue, the transformation of ASEAN, as well as the changes from China.

At the same time, the study presents the method of increasing China's influence over the island Southeast Asian countries, thereby analyzing the specific adaptation measures and areas of each country to China factor. Finally, in this book, the authors also analyze the impact of the above processes on ASEAN and especially on Vietnam, thereby researching the adaptation trend of Southeast Asian island countries before the increasing influence of China in the near future. This is a relatively comprehensive study of China's influence as well as the adaptation of Southeast Asian island countries to this increase in influence. However, the work has not mentioned much about public opinion in other countries and due to limited research time, facts and data are only updated from 2020 onwards.

The military activities of China and the Southeast Asian island countries are also described in Jennifer Dodgson's research paper, China's Security and Defense Cooperation in Southeast Asia. This document examines the relationship

between China and the 10 countries of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in the area of Security and Defense Cooperation. The study also analyzes the scale of media coverage by topic in Southeast Asia in English and Chinese media.

In addition to activities to increase economic and military influence, China also promotes the increase of soft power in the region through health and media. In particular, China's medical diplomacy is most evident in the Covid-19 pandemic. China's COVID-19 Assistance to Southeast Asia: Uninterrupted Aid amid Global Uncertainties by Lye Liang Fook provides information and analysis of China's aid activities to Southeast Asia in the context of the Covid-19 epidemic, pointing out the differences in aid activities with each ASEAN member (AMS) and predicting China's intentions.

The reaction of the Southeast Asian island countries to China's influence can also be seen clearly in the survey on the Situation in Southeast Asia by the Center for ASEAN Studies at the ISEAS-Yusof Institute. The survey was conducted from November 18, 2020 to January 10, 2021, covering regional issues and geopolitical developments, including but not limited to current issues such as the pandemic COVID-19. The survey serves as a barometer of the general attitudes and perceptions of interested stakeholders towards key developments in the region. The Southeast Asian Situation Survey has become a major reference source in studies on Southeast Asia and ASEAN.

To answer the questions: How has China increased its influence in the island Southeast Asian countries? What are the reactions of these countries to the above activities and what are the lessons for Vietnam?... the author uses historical, logical, synthesis and document analysis methods (main analysis). books or other relevant policy and academic literature).

### **SOME MOVES TO INCREASE CHINA'S INFLUENCE**

The ways and tools to increase China's influence in Southeast Asia in recent years are becoming more diverse and used depending on the degree of Chinese involvement, on the strength of the institutions of that country and China's own relationship with the main actors of the regime. Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the ways and tools to increase China's influence in Southeast Asia have manifested in many aspects such as economic, military and soft power.

In 2017, China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the State Oceanic Administration released more details on maritime cooperation, announcing a vision of three "blue economic paths" in the sea connecting Oceania, Africa and Europe. In particular, the China - Oceania -

South Pacific route is responsible for connecting the East Sea with the Pacific Ocean. In the case of the Philippines, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)\*\* is expected to link the Philippines' north and south Manila with the Chinese cities of Ningbo, Qingdao and Shanghai. According to the Xinhua - Baltic International Shipping Center Development Index Report, the establishment of a shipping network at these seaports will create a great advantage in providing services directly from Thanh Hoa. Island and central China to Manila. The Philippines' participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) involved in the creation of maritime corridors and trade networks also entails the planning of ports, bridges, routes and critical infrastructure. Indonesia has also benefited significantly from the BRI strategy, with the Chinese government pouring money into major infrastructure projects across the country.

Not only has increased its economic involvement, China has shown many tough moves on the military. It currently claims a large area in the exclusive economic zone also claimed by Malaysia, the coast of Borneo. China has repeatedly exercised its navy in the vicinity of James Shoal, a submerged sandbar about 80 kilometers north of the coast of Borneo. Chinese Coast Guard ships also regularly enter Malaysia's exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, where Malaysia's state-owned oil company Petronas is drilling for oil and gas. In 2021, 16 Chinese military aircraft were within 60 nautical miles (112 km) of Sarawak state, prompting Kuala Lumpur to summon the Chinese ambassador and accuse Beijing of posing a "serious threat to with national sovereignty and aviation safety".(Amy,2023)

Other Southeast Asian island countries are also suffering from the same situation. For example, in December 2019, the Chinese Coast Guard escorted a number of Chinese fishermen into an area near the Natuna Islands, located within Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Despite its political and economic influence in Southeast Asia, China's soft power influence in the region is disproportionate and relatively faint. China sees the growing influence of the media and the expansion of its popular culture into Southeast Asia as a means of consolidating its soft power and improving its image in the eyes of the neighboring public. As a result, many Chinese language teaching programs, educational exchanges, media expansion and cooperation, as well as multi-billion-dollar pop culture icons have been promoted. For example, in the Philippines, China launched the program "Chinese Theater" on channel 4 of Philippine National Broadcasting Station (PTV-4). In addition, Chinese entertainment programs have been broadcast on the two largest private television networks in the Philippines, ABS-CBN and Global Media Arts (GMA). Besides TV shows, Chinese movies are also becoming more and more

popular in the Philippines. Not only TV programs, other media platforms are also exploited by China. A joint program between China Radio International and the Philippine Broadcasting Authority called “Wow China” has been broadcast on local radio station Radyo Pilipinas since mid-2018.(Tuan,2021)

Content-sharing apps - including messaging service WeChat, short-video app TikTok, live-streaming platform Bigo and news aggregator Dong Bao - are owned by China-based companies among the ten most downloaded apps in Malaysia. The program of China's state broadcaster CCTV can also be accessed on the local TV station used by more than 70% of Malaysian households.<sup>4</sup> Given the large number of Chinese speakers residing in Malaysia, WeChat, owned by China-based tech company Tencent with close ties to the Chinese Communist Party, is a particularly popular app variable in Malaysia. Nearly 28% of Malaysian netizens have used WeChat, making it the fourth most commonly used communication app in 2020.(*Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission,2020*)

In recent years, Chinese state media outlets such as Xinhua have also opened social media accounts in Bahasa Indonesia, recruiting local journalists to "tell China's story", and partnered with Antara News Agency, Media Indonesia and The Jakarta Post to republish articles from Xinhua News Agency. China also focuses on strengthening cultural and educational cooperation with Southeast Asian island countries. Cooperation in education, training and science is carried out through the provision of scholarships by China for equipment, materials, books, and study tours in China, in order to create a class of people who are perceptive imbued with Chinese culture, especially in the field of political ideology.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also provided an opportunity for China to work directly with the four countries in new ways - in terms of providing medical equipment, biomedical expertise and capital for coronavirus-related needs. China's medical aid to four Southeast Asian island countries in 2020 is as follows:

Supported country	Time	Quantity and type
Philippines	3/2/2020	200,000 surgical masks (KTPT) (Lye,2020)
	March 16, 2020	2,000 test kits (DCXN) (Ibid)
	March 21, 2020	100,000 sets of DCXN, 100,000 KTPT, 10,000 KN95 masks and 10,000 personal protective equipment (PPE) (ibid)
	March 28, 2020	500,000 masks (Ibid)
	April 5, 2020	12 medical experts, 30 ventilators, 5,000 protective suits (QABH), 300,000 medical

Malaysia	10/5/2020	masks (KTYT), 30,000 N95 masks and 5,000 face shields and 12 tons of other anti-epidemic materials (Xinhua,2020)
	Until October 2020	More than 150,000 sets of DCXN and 18,000 sets of QABH (Lye,2020)
	February 28 - June 6, 2021	250,000 sets of DCXN, 1.87 million KTPT, PPE and other donations (Xinhua,2021)
	March 19, 2020	3 batches of Sinovac (after promising to deliver 300,000 doses in January 2021)
	March 26, 2020	5,000 masks and 10,000 face shields (Lye,2020)
	March 28, 2020	20,000 masks (Ibid)
	March 29, 2020	500,000 KTPT, 100,000 KN95 masks, 100,000 DCXN sets, 50,000 PPE and 200 (Ibid)
	April 18, 2020	166,000 masks (Ibid)
	8/5/2020	Medical team (Ibid)
	March 29, 2021	Masks (out of a total of 600,000 pieces for 6 countries (Ibid)
Indonesia	March 22, 2020	100,000 sets of DCXN, 100,000 N95 masks, 500,000 KTPT, 50,000 sets of QABH and 200 portable ventilators (CGTN,2020)
	March 27, 2020	9 tons of medical supplies and 17 tons of medical supplies including 800,000 DCXN sets, 50,000 gloves and other materials (Lye,2020)
	12/5/2020	40 tons of medical supplies and equipment including DCXN kit, mask, PPE and ventilator (Ibid)
Singapore	5/2020	Medical supplies and equipment (Ibid)
	8/5/2020	620,000 masks (Ibid)
	8/5/2020	Masks (out of 600,000 for 6 countries) (Ibid)

These developments demonstrate that China's presence in Southeast Asian countries in general and island Southeast Asia in particular is no longer primarily economic, but is related to a larger, multi-dimensional effort to raise the position and strengthen its long-term strategic interests in the region.

## THE ADAPTION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN ISLAND COUNTRIES

Recognizing the opportunities and challenges of China's growing influence, Southeast Asian countries have different ways of reacting and acting.

### PHILIPPINES

The Philippines is one of the countries that has a territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea. This is causing many obstacles to the relationship between the two

countries. Up to now, although China and the Philippines have made many efforts, the territorial dispute between the two countries in the East Sea has not been resolved. However, territorial disputes have not deterred the Philippines' desire to cooperate economically with China.

According to statistics from the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry, in 2021, China will be the Philippines' largest trading partner, import supplier and second largest export market. The bilateral trade relationship between the two countries is developing strongly.

Year	Trade in total	Export from China to the Philippines	Import from the Philippines to China
2017	51.31	30.07	19.24
2018	55.65	35.04	20.61
2019	60.96	40.76	20.20
2020	61.22	.88	19.36
2021	82.05	57.29	24.76

Source : National Bureau of Statistics, China

Total trade between the Philippines and China has continued to grow in recent years, with Philippine imports from China growing at an average annual rate of 20.7% from 2010 to 2017. China and the Philippines have signed hundreds of bilateral agreements in a number of cooperation areas such as defence, tourism, agriculture, finance and trade. In particular, the BIT agreement and the DTA agreement aim to facilitate investment and business exchange between the two countries.(China Briefing Team, 2023)

The Philippines' participation in the BRI has also resulted in a number of multi-billion dollar bilateral agreements and cooperation projects. For example, the Philippines "Build Build Build" (BBB) program is expected to provide the necessary financial support from the wave of Chinese investment. The Philippines also became a founding member of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). In April 2022, former President Duterte inaugurated the Chinese-funded Binondo-Intramuros Bridge. The Binondo-Intramuros Bridge is part of a US\$96 million grant that was agreed to during President Rodrigo Duterte's visit to China in 2017. The other bridge, the Estrella-Pantaeon, was completed in July 2021. The Philippines can benefit from participation in the BRI also from the point of view of implementation and human resource development: by 2020, BRI-related projects are expected to employ nearly 21,000 Filipino citizens, while the agreements Another deal with Chinese companies would bring in an investment of \$12 billion for the country.

Relations between the Philippines and China have grown significantly stronger, especially during the tenure of former President Duterte, although ambivalence has often been maintained. President Duterte tends to express a relatively relaxed attitude towards China's activities in the South China Sea. "It makes no sense to go to war. It doesn't make sense to fight over a body of water. We want to talk about friendship, we want to talk about cooperation and most of all, we want to talk about business"(Tom,2016). In 2020, the Philippines participated in a joint naval exercise with China and refused to participate in a US-led exercise in the South China Sea. Almost immediately, however, the Philippine government reaffirmed its maritime claims, saying it welcomed the US security offering in the region. Duterte's successor, Ferdinand Marcos Marcos, also publicly defended his predecessor's China-friendly approach, claiming that the policy adopted by the Duterte administration was too appropriate and that cooperation with China would be The only way to move forward. After the election, Marcos immediately received high-ranking Chinese officials. On this occasion, he made it clear that China will have a central role as the "strongest partner" in the post-pandemic economic recovery and that the Philippines will maintain the "new golden era" of bilateral relations.

It can be seen that, although there are still actions to protect national sovereignty, in the context of China's increasing influence in Southeast Asia, the Philippines is also looking for ways to take advantage of economic benefits from this country. The cooperation between the two countries in the fields of bilateral economic and trade, people-to-people exchanges and high-level exchanges, as well as the synergy of the BBB program with China's BRI and anti-pandemic cooperation, brought practical benefits to both sides. All the cooperation projects with China in the past time are a testament to the relationship between China and the Philippines as well as showing the country's adaptation to the influence of its giant neighbor.

### MALAYSIA

China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years, with bilateral trade reaching \$203.6 billion by 2022, but it also maintains close economic and security ties with the US. Chinese investment in Malaysia boomed as Malaysian authorities advocated closer cooperation, especially through the BRI that Malaysia joined in 2017 (Benjamin,2023). However, Malaysia's adaptation to economic influence China's growth also faces many difficulties. In 2018, as a result of the scandal surrounding the Malaysia Development Berhad (MDB) fund and concerns that Chinese-funded megaprojects such as the East Coast Link Rail (ECRL)

were contributing to corruption. With corruption and unsustainable financial burden on the state, Prime Minister Mahathir canceled several BRI projects and warned against “a new form of colonialism”. In 2019, Mahathir successfully renegotiated the ECRL and Malaysian ministers and deputy ministers are said to have visited China about 30 times, while more than 50 Chinese vice-ministerial delegations and above have visited Malaysia (Ngeow, 2020)

Unlike other disputed island Southeast Asian states, Malaysian governments tend to be relatively more lenient towards China's territorial ambitions (. Former Malaysian Defense Minister Hishamuddin Hussein, when referring to US criticism of China's actions in the region, said, “Just because you have an enemy, doesn't mean your enemy is an enemy”(Malay, 2023).

The Malaysian government has also suggested that it would be willing to work with China to reach a negotiated settlement of the dispute, rather than trying to reach a common agreement with other ASEAN members. However, consensus between Malaysia and China on security and defense issues is still far away. In June 2021, the Chinese ambassador was summoned after a Chinese military plane flew into Malaysian airspace and the Malaysian foreign minister stated that “having friendly diplomatic relations with any country that does not have which means we will compromise our national security”(Joseph, 2023). The two countries have held occasional talks, but further cooperation has largely failed to materialize and Malaysia maintains its official opposition to China's maritime claims.

Recent polls show Malaysian respondents have become increasingly wary and skeptical of the Chinese government's motives both regionally and internationally since 2019, even as they also express sympathy response to China's support during the COVID-19 pandemic (Saron, 2021). A poll by the ASEAN Studies Center and ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute found that 58 per cent of Malaysians polled had little or no confidence that “that China will 'do the right thing' to contribute to peace, security, and prosperity. Global Security, Prosperity and Governance” by 2021, up from 50% in 2020. When asked what ASEAN should do if forced to choose between Beijing and Washington, 53% of Malaysian respondents chose Washington. (up from 39 in 2020) compared to 47% choosing China (down from 60% in 2020), representing a significant reversal in preferences within a year (Yeta,2023).

## INDONESIA

Indonesia's relationship with China has traditionally fluctuated. In 2022, Chinese investment in Indonesia -

Southeast Asia's largest economy - will reach \$5.18 billion, with more than 1,500 projects running across the archipelago. The total of 1,584 projects funded by China last year in Indonesia was lower than in 2021, recording 1,806 projects. But the value of Chinese investment in Indonesia in 2022 has actually increased by 63.92% year-on-year - and is the highest in ten years. China has also surpassed Singapore to become Indonesia's largest investor.

Despite the economic warmth, China's moves to increase its military influence have also been met with a reaction from Indonesia. In 2019, in response to China, the Indonesian Navy deployed 10 ships and four F-16 fighter jets to the disputed area. The two countries spent the first week of 2020 in a state of stalemate. Despite this, Indonesia still intends to buy naval patrol boats from China (but canceled the purchase in March 2020 due to US pressure). This also reflects the continued growth in economic relations between the two countries, despite differences in views on the territory and disputes.

Recent public opinion surveys also show that Indonesians' views of China are deteriorating, mainly due to China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, a potential debt trap caused by its investments. China's cause and China's Xinjiang policy. According to a survey in July 2022 by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute on Indonesians' perceptions of Chinese investment, only 30% of respondents believe that Indonesia can “benefit greatly” from having Chinese investments. A recent Lowy Institute survey conducted from November to December 2021 also found that views on China have worsened. According to the survey, 43% of Indonesians agree with the view that “China's growth is good for Indonesia”, while 60% strongly agree with the statement “Indonesia should cooperate with other countries to limit its influence of China”. Meanwhile, 49% of Indonesians surveyed in Lowy's poll see China as a threat over the next decade (Ibid). However, despite the harsh public sentiment, in October, Indonesia voted against the draft UN Human Rights Council resolution on “Debating the Human Rights Situation in the Uighur Autonomous Region” Er Xinjiang, China”.

From the above moves, it can be seen that Indonesia's flexibility in dealing with China. China will continue to grow to become the strongest economy in the world and this will also benefit Indonesia as a cooperation partner. Despite public skepticism, the Indonesian government clearly sees the potential for cooperation with China and shows a welcoming attitude in economic cooperation with China; at the same time, try to minimize political and security disagreements through

economics as well as pro-China attitudes in the international arena.

## SINGAPORE

Unlike many countries in the region, Singapore has the economic strength to maintain its relative independence from China. Singapore has received no formal infrastructure investments from the Chinese government under the BRI project. Geographically, Singapore has a fairly defensible position and the military capabilities needed to hold it. Over the years, it has tried to maintain a position close enough to China for economic interests but far enough to preserve its independence. However, according to the ranking of East Asian countries most affected by China - Doublethink Lab's China Index 2022, Singapore ranks second only to Cambodia. Besides, Singapore is also ranked 3rd (after Korea and the Philippines) in the countries affected by China economically. At the same time, only behind Cambodia and Thailand in the ranking of East Asian countries influenced by China militarily.

Because of the great influence of China, Singapore often maintains a friendly but aloof attitude, especially when it comes to military relations with China. Both countries conduct regular joint exercises, but Singapore has closer military ties with Taiwan, conducting regular training courses at facilities there, regardless of the country's offer to allow it. This uses bases in Hainan from the Chinese side.

China is the world's largest trader and producer - and it has a substantial capital base and foreign exchange reserves; Connectivity and infrastructure projects are also what Southeast Asian island countries want to exploit. Because of economic interests, the countries that are the hardest on China in the South China Sea issue like the Philippines have also "avoided" direct attack. Similarly, since 2017, a dramatic shift in China-Indonesia relations can be seen. It can be said that at present, balancing and adapting to China's influence on the Southeast Asian island countries are still facing many difficulties. China's growing influence will not only jeopardize sovereignty but will likely exacerbate domestic divisions in all four countries. However, for now, China is still considered a partner that can support the development needs of the island Southeast Asian countries.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

According to a survey by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Southeast Asia: About 94.5% of respondents consider China as one of the three countries with the largest political power and influence in Southeast Asia today, while 92% choose the US. Respondents from Thailand,

Malaysia and Indonesia are most optimistic about China's future political power and influence. Respondents also have different perceptions of China's political and economic influence in Southeast Asia. A majority of 53% see China's role in the region as "very or somewhat beneficial", compared with 46% who consider it "somewhat or very detrimental". Singapore leads with the highest approval rating for China, followed by Malaysia. Notably, respondents from the Philippines - one of the countries with "the largest maritime territorial dispute with China" - were most negative about China's role in Southeast Asia. One such survey, published earlier this year by Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, also found China to be the most influential economic and political power in the region (Yen,2020). Because of China's great and growing influence, the Southeast Asian island countries must constantly adjust their actions and show flexible adaptations to the moves of this great power. The increase of China's influence in the region and the policy conquest of Southeast Asian countries to adapt to China has affected Southeast Asia in general and Vietnam.

Firstly, the differences in political institutions, socio-economic development level as well as in relations with the US... are the factors that make the difference in the actions of Southeast Asian island countries toward China's growing influence. However, in general, to adapt to China's increasing influence, island countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore are actively strengthening their economic ties with this country, especially by participating in positive change with BRI. However, the lack of deep participation in economic mechanisms initiated by China also helps Vietnam to be less affected by this power. Like other Southeast Asian countries, China is one of Vietnam's main and available trading partners. However, according to China Index 2022, Vietnam is only ranked 43rd out of 82 assessed countries, ranked last, ie the lowest affected among the 7 assessed Southeast Asian countries.(Doublethink Lab, 2022). This also means that Vietnam is less influenced by China's economic decisions. This is also an opportunity for Vietnam to consider China's economic cooperation projects carefully and avoid the negative problems that Southeast Asian island countries have encountered when doing economic cooperation with China.

Second, close economic cooperation with China also means that the relationship between China and the Southeast Asian island countries is increasingly close, increasing economic dependence will make these countries more vulnerable to Chinese decisions. This also greatly affects the defense of these countries' sovereignty. Although 3 out of 4 Southeast Asian island countries have sovereignty disputes and conflicts with China, in the face of China's increasing influence,

these countries all show relatively soft behavior. For example, in the period 2016 - 2022, the Philippines' South China Sea policy has adjusted in terms of objectives, priorities, and measures.

The Philippine government pursues the goal of preserving sovereignty and gaining legal and public advantages in exchange for stable relations with China. By "tacitly accepting" China's actual control of Scarborough, the Philippines considers shelving its claim to Scarborough Shoal a small "cost" in exchange for a larger benefit than an opportunity for economic development. Or Malaysia tends not to publicly criticize or mention China by name in the East Border issue. Despite Chinese warships and fishermen encroaching on Malaysia's exclusive economic zone, the defense relationship between Malaysia and China remains very "close". From the Philippines' constant change of attitude or the contrasting moves between economic cooperation and sovereignty conflicts, it can be seen that the Southeast Asian island countries have not found the most optimal solution. for the problems China brings.

Third, with the view that a bilateral negotiation mechanism is more effective than a multilateral one, China actively promotes the construction of a bilateral consultation mechanism with each country, avoiding the "internationalization of the South China issue". This can not only make it difficult to protect the sovereignty of the Southeast Asian island countries themselves, but it can also weaken the role of ASEAN and make it difficult for ASEAN to find a common voice in the China issue. This is also a problem that Southeast Asian island countries and Vietnam have to deal with.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, China's influence in the Southeast Asian island countries is reflected in the appearance of asymmetric models and equations in economic relations. It is the economic dependence that is directly proportional to the political influence and foreign policies of these countries towards China. The Southeast Asian island countries on the one hand have to deal with China's sovereignty claims as well as the expansion of influence, on the other hand, they must maintain friendly relations with China for the sake of the great power's interests. this brings. Therefore, the Southeast Asian island countries have implemented several policies to exploit benefits, strengthen cooperation with China, and limit unwanted effects from China's rise in the region. area. The somewhat complex and flexible policies and moves of these countries in response to China have created many impacts on the general situation of the region. In that volatile context, Vietnam needs to draw

lessons for itself and come up with appropriate countermeasures to protect its sovereignty and develop the country.

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