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**KOREA'S
CHANGING
ROLES
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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KOREA'S CHANGING ROLES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Expanding Influence and Relations

Edited by
David I. Steinberg



ASEAN-KOREA CENTRE
Seoul



**INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST
ASIAN STUDIES**
Singapore

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Foreword

The year 2009 marks the 20th anniversary of the ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Dialogue Partnership. As such, Korea hopes to use this occasion as an opportunity to further strengthen and expand its relationship with many Southeast Asian countries. In March of this year, ASEAN and ROK established the ASEAN-Korea Centre, aimed at promoting economic and sociocultural cooperation between ASEAN and Korea. In June 2009, the parties welcomed the opening of the ASEAN-Korea Commemorative Summit held for the first time in Korea.

The celebratory events merely reiterate and reinforce the importance that South Korea attaches to its relationship with ASEAN. In trade, ASEAN is Korea's third largest partner with a total volume of \$90 billion (2008). It is also Korea's third largest investment destination with a total accumulated FDI amount of \$29 billion (1968–2008). It is Korea's second largest construction market in the world with a cumulative order of \$54 billion (1966–2008). Southeast Asia is also an important source of import commodities such as oil, gas, coal, palm oil, tin, and pulp for South Korea. ASEAN and Korea concluded an FTA (AKFTA) related to goods in June 2007 and shortly thereafter concluded an FTA on service provisions in November 2007.

Cultural and personnel exchanges between Korea and the countries of Southeast Asia have expanded rapidly in recent years. The number of Korean visitors to ASEAN countries has increased more than three-fold in twelve years from 1.1 million in 1995 to 3.5 million in 2007. Nearly half a million ASEAN visitors travelled to Korea in 2007.

In the context of a series of agreements such as the ASEAN Integrated Initiative (2000), Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation Partnership (2004) and Korea-ASEAN Action Plan (2005), the two sides

agreed on cooperation in building IT infrastructure, human resource development, environment, energy, eradication of contagious diseases, and cultural exchange.

But it is in the area of East Asian cooperation where the interests of ASEAN and Korea have coincided closely and the two parties have worked together most productively. Through the efforts of such bodies as the East Asian Vision Group (EAVG) and East Asian Study Group (EASG), Korea and ASEAN countries worked together to plan and build an East Asian community. This cooperation resulted in creating and/or re-invigorating such mechanisms as the East Asian Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN+3 (APT).

It is true that Korean policy towards ASEAN has not always been constant or consistent over the years. Either because of its preoccupation with more urgent and immediate issues, its relations with the major powers or with the Northeast Asian region, South Korea's main attention was sometimes diverted from Southeast Asia. However, it is clear that in the 20th year of the Dialogue Partnership, South Korea now firmly recognizes the centrality of ASEAN as an important regional partner in development, culture, diplomacy and security.

To South Korea, Southeast Asia is both a friend and partner in politics, economics, and cultural life. That partnership, which is growing ever stronger and closer over time, is here to stay. That is the reason why I welcome the publication of the book, *Korea's Changing Roles in Southeast Asia: Expanding Influence and Relations*.

Han Sung-Joo
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Message from the Director

In June 2009, the leaders of Korea and the ten ASEAN member countries met in Jeju for the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Commemorative Summit. At that historic meeting, the eleven leaders recognized that Korea and ASEAN had been developing a mutually beneficial relationship over the past twenty years. The summit took place also in the context of Korea's efforts to strengthen its relations with ASEAN through the New Asia Initiative.

The world's economic centre of gravity is shifting towards the continent. Korea, as an Asian economic powerhouse, and ASEAN — a potential economic heavyweight in Asia on account of its population, its growth rates (dented but not destroyed by the global crisis), and attractiveness to foreign investors — enjoy natural points of compatibility and convergence that can solidify their cooperation in the years ahead. Cooperation is something that policy-makers in Korea and the ASEAN capitals must work towards if the region at large is to fulfil its potential.

Unfortunately, Asia is home to several security challenges as well. The actions of the North Korean Government in upping the strategic stakes in Northeast Asia are a case in point. Terrorism remains a problem in Southeast Asia. As two responsible stakeholders in the international system, South Korea and ASEAN have a common interest in ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity in the two Asian sub-regions. One important point to remember is that they can achieve much because both are non-threatening international actors whose benign intentions are recognized by others as well.

Finally, the importance of people-to-people ties cannot be overestimated. The peoples of Korea and ASEAN must see themselves as

culturally fellow-Asians if the new Asia is to take its place at the table of the great powers.

I look forward to that time.

K. Kesavapany
Director
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