

Reproduced from *Southeast Asian Affairs 2020* edited by Malcolm Cook and Daljit Singh (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020). This version was obtained electronically direct from the publisher on condition that copyright is not infringed. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of ISEAS Publishing. Individual chapters are available at <<http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>>

SOUTHEAST ASIAN AFFAIRS 2020

The **ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute** (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) is an autonomous organization established in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are grouped under Regional Economic Studies (RES), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS). The Institute is also home to the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC), the Singapore APEC Study Centre, and the Temasek History Research Centre (THRC).

ISEAS Publishing, an established academic press, has issued more than two thousand books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN AFFAIRS 2020

EDITED BY

**MALCOLM COOK
DALJIT SINGH**

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

First published in Singapore in 2020 by
ISEAS Publishing
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119614

E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg

Website: <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

© 2020 ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

The responsibility for facts and opinions in this publication rests exclusively with the authors and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the publisher or its supporters.

ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Title: Southeast Asian affairs 2020.

Description: Singapore : ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020.

Identifiers: ISSN 0377-5437 | ISBN 9789814881302 (hard cover) | ISBN 9789814881319
(pdf) | ISBN 9789814881326 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Southeast Asia—Periodicals.

Classification: LCC DS501 S72A 2020

Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd

Printed in Singapore by Mainland Press Pte Ltd

Contents

Introduction <i>Malcolm Cook</i>	vii
THE REGION	
Southeast Asia in 2019: Adjustment and Adaptation to China's Regional Impact <i>Graham Ong-Webb</i>	3
Economic Overview of Southeast Asia <i>Manu Bhaskaran</i>	19
The Rise of the Right: Populism and Authoritarianism in Southeast Asian Politics <i>Kanishka Jayasuriya</i>	43
American Foreign Policy and Southeast Asia <i>Daljit Singh</i>	57
China's Belt and Road Initiative Financing in Southeast Asia <i>Xue Gong</i>	77
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM	
Brunei Darussalam in 2019: Issues Revisited <i>Pushpa Thambipillai</i>	99
CAMBODIA	
Cambodia in 2019: Entrenching One-Party Rule and Asserting National Sovereignty in the Era of Shifting Global Geopolitics <i>Kheang Un and Jing Jing Luo</i>	119
INDONESIA	
Post-Election Politics in Indonesia: Between Economic Growth and Increased Islamic Conservatism <i>Amalinda Savirani</i>	137
Social Media and the 2019 Indonesian Elections: Hoax Takes the Centre Stage <i>Jennifer Yang Hui</i>	155
LAOS	
Laos in 2019: Moving Heaven and Earth on the Mekong <i>Geoffrey C. Gunn</i>	175

MALAYSIA

Malaysia in 2019: A Change of Government without Regime Change
Ross Tapsell 191

Malaysia and the Pursuit of Sustainability
Serina Rahman 209

MYANMAR

Myanmar in 2019: Rakhine Issue, Constitutional Reform and Election Fever
Nyi Nyi Kyaw 235

The 2020 Myanmar General Election: Another Turning Point?
Ye Htut 255

THE PHILIPPINES

The Ones Who Don't Walk Away from the Philippines
Lowell Bautista 275

SINGAPORE

Singapore in 2019: In Holding Pattern
Khairulanwar Zaini 295

The Bicentennial Commemoration: Imagining and Re-imagining
Singapore's History
Terence Chong 323

THAILAND

Thailand in 2019: The Year of Living Unpredictably
Kanokrat Lertchoosakul 337

Future—Forward? The Past and Future of the Future Forward Party
James Ockey 355

TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste: Twenty Years after the Self-Determination Referendum
Rui Graça Feijó 381

VIETNAM

Vietnam in 2019: A Return to Familiar Patterns
Paul Schuler and Mai Truong 393

Succession Politics and Authoritarian Resilience in Vietnam
Nguyen Khac Giang 411

Introduction

Malcolm Cook

The twenty-two chapters in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2020* again highlight the dynamism and diversity of the eleven countries covered and Southeast Asia as a region.¹ Events ranged from the tragic deaths from overwork and poor conditions of many election workers in Indonesia during the national elections to the release on social media of a rap song supporting former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak, the first leader of UMNO to lose a parliamentary election.

Six overarching themes each feature in many of the twenty-two chapters, and no chapter is devoid of all six. Two of these themes are global in nature, two relate to major powers outside of Southeast Asia, and two are domestic in nature. The enduring and definitive nature of these themes is underlined by the fact that many of them feature heavily in previous volumes of *Southeast Asian Affairs*, including those like major power competition and transitions in political leadership that have been constant themes since the first volume was published almost a half century ago. Others, like environmental degradation and the political ramifications of social media, are distinctly modern.

Environmental Degradation

In the thematic chapter for Malaysia, Serina Rahman looks at the ambitious environmental policy agenda of the Pakatan Harapan government and the political challenges it faces. Global pressure particularly from the European Union on the Malaysian palm oil industry, a major source of Malaysian exports, has led to a defensive response from Kuala Lumpur in contrast to the proactive position the government has taken against the export of trash to Malaysia from advanced Western economies. The Pakatan Harapan government has taken a regional lead in trying to address some of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation. Will others follow?

MALCOLM COOK is Senior Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.

Social Media Politics

The thematic chapter for Indonesia by Jennifer Yang Hui looks at the use and influence of social media in the 2019 elections in the largest country of Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, social media is now the predominant channel of political communication between politicians and voters and supporters of politicians and voters. A large industry of social media political communication has arisen that is changing the conduct of election campaigns fundamentally. In the 2014 and 2019 presidential campaigns, black propaganda against political opponents has proven to be widespread even if its effectiveness is questionable.

In the thematic chapter for Thailand, James Ockey's study of the rapid rise of the Future Forward Party shows a positive democratic-opening dimension to social media politics. The clever use of social media greatly aided the party's phoenix-like rise to become the third-largest party in Thailand, and one that is particularly popular among young urban voters. The country review chapters on Vietnam by Paul Schuler and Mai Truong and on Singapore by Khairulanwar Zaini highlight the concerns of the ruling regimes with the political impact of social media.

China

As with last year's volume, the chapters of *Southeast Asian Affairs 2020* underline that China is now the leading external power in Southeast Asia and its influence is expanding and becoming more politically salient. In the first chapter, the regional political and security outlook, Graham Ong-Webb goes into some detail on the centrality of China regionally. The regional thematic chapter on China's Belt and Road Initiative by Gong Xue evaluates President Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy endeavour and counters criticism from within Southeast Asia and internationally of the initiative's rationale and effects on host countries. The country review chapter for the Philippines by Lowell Bautista looks into President Duterte's close embrace of China. The country review chapter for Brunei by Pushpa Thambipillai, Cambodia by Kheang Un, and Laos by Geoffrey Gunn each show the growing asymmetrical importance of China for each of these countries. In the thematic chapter for Singapore on the Bicentennial commemorations, Terence Chong posits that concerns with China's growing influence was a major external factor in the ongoing recasting of Singaporean history reflected in the Bicentennial.

US-China Rivalry

In 2019, the nature and regional ramifications of the US-China major power rivalry became clearer and of greater concern. In his regional thematic chapter, Daljit Singh

looks at changes in US foreign policy and grand strategy and what they mean for Southeast Asia. In the regional economic chapter, Jayant Menon analyses the economic fallout for Southeast Asia of the rivalry and how this is strengthening intraregional economic integration efforts. Most of the country-level chapters make no or only brief mention of this significant regional strategic development. This lack of juxtaposition suggests either that the domestic ramifications of this new rivalrous regional strategic order are still nascent or that the links between regional strategic and domestic political developments are fewer and weaker than many international relations scholars posit.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure development is a key political and performance-legitimacy focus of each of the eleven Southeast Asian governments, a source of domestic political debate, and a central component of Southeast Asian states' relationships with China. China is the predominant source of foreign financing for public infrastructure in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam and a major source for Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Timor Leste. In her country review chapter for Indonesia, Amalinda Savirani looks at the political importance of President Jokowi's infrastructure development agenda in an election year. Geoffrey Gunn, in his chapter on Laos, looks at the strong focus on delivering China-financed infrastructure projects by the ruling regime in Vientiane.

For both President Jokowi in Indonesia and President Duterte in the Philippines, infrastructure development is a central component of their focus on the delivery of public services as their source of political legitimation, and for Jokowi's successful re-election campaign. Lowell Bautista in his chapter on the Philippines contrasts this with the preceding Aquino administration's appeals to liberal values and good governance. In the most conceptual chapter in this volume, Kanishka Jayasuriya, using the cases of the Jokowi and Duterte administrations, looks at how this focus on service delivery (often at the cost of the loss of political rights and space) is part of the global shift towards conservative democratic politics and populism.

Political Transition

Transitions in political leadership and elections are the central theme for this volume's chapters on eight of the eleven states. It did not feature prominently for the Philippines, where President Duterte is halfway through his six-year term, for Brunei Darussalam, or for Laos. For Myanmar, Vietnam and Singapore,

leadership transitions and national elections will take place in the near future. The two chapters on Myanmar by Ny Nyi Kyaw and Ye Htut focus on the upcoming national election that will most likely be held in 2020 and which will probably see the return of a National League of Democracy administration led by Aung San Suu Kyi. The thematic chapter for Vietnam by Nguyen Khac Giang highlights the outsized role the current president and general secretary of the Communist Party, Ngyuen Phu Trong, is to play in the leadership transition scheduled for 2021. The Vietnam country review chapter by Paul Schuler concurs.

For Thailand and Indonesia, 2019 saw elections that returned the incumbent leaders: for Indonesia, the re-election of President Jokowi with a larger majority; and for Thailand, Prayut Chan-o-cha, the head of the 2014 coup, as prime minister and leader of the ruling multiparty coalition. In the country review chapter for Thailand, Kanokrat Lertchoosakul analyses why the nineteen-party ruling coalition led by Prayut has remained together and has been able to pass legislation despite many forecasting its demise.

For Malaysia and Cambodia, it is about the political transition after the last election. In the case of Malaysia, this saw a truly historic result where UMNO lost power in 2018 for the first time. Ross Tapsell in his country review chapter for Malaysia looks at the challenges the new Pakatan Harapan government under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed is facing in living up to its campaign promises and the expectations its victory sparked. Cambodia's flawed election in 2018 saw the ruling Cambodian People's Party under Prime Minister Hun Sen win all the seats. Kheang Un's chapter looks at how the current Hun Sen government is taking steps to address domestic and international backlashes against the 2018 result and the emasculation of the political opposition and jailing of Kem Sokha that preceded it.

Timor Leste, the smallest and poorest democracy in the region, is a case of a failed transition that may lead to an unscheduled early election in 2020 to try to overcome the deadlock. Rui Feijo carefully dissects the causes of the current impasse between president and parliament and its likely future scenarios.

The year 2019 saw major worrying changes to the regional strategic order in Southeast Asia with the increasingly overt major power rivalry between the United States and China and significant domestic political change and tensions. The year 2020 promises more of the same.

Note

1. The authors were asked to submit their draft chapters in early December 2019 and were given only limited opportunity to update them after submission.