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# ASEAN Centrality

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# ASEAN Centrality

*An autoethnographic  
account by  
a Philippine Diplomat*

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# ABBREVIATIONS

AADCP II	ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program II
ACB	ASEAN Center for Biodiversity
ACC	ASEAN Coordinating Council
ACCC	ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee
ACJCC	ASEAN-China Joint Cooperation Committee
ACTIP	ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
ADF	ASEAN Disability Forum
ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AEMM	ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting
AFDM	ASEAN Finance and Central Bank Deputies' Meeting
AFRP	ASEAN Secretariat Financial Rules and Procedures
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMS	ASEAN Member States
APCSS	Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies
APSC	ASEAN Political-Security Community
APT	ASEAN Plus Three
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASA	Association of Southeast Asia
ASCC	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

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ASEAN-IPR	ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASRR	ASEAN Secretariat Staff Rules and Regulations
AWPR	ASEAN Women for Peace Registry
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
COC	Code of Conduct in the South China Sea
CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Philippines
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs, the Philippines
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
DOC	Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea
DPs	Dialogue Partners
DSG	Deputy Secretary General
EAMJ	EAS Ambassadors' Meeting in Jakarta
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
ERIA	Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia
EU	European Union
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
GAM	Free Aceh Movement
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GMM	Global Movement of Moderates
GMMF	Global Movement for Moderates Foundation
IAI	Initiative for ASEAN Integration
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ILEA	International Law Enforcement Academy
IPS	Indo-Pacific Strategy
IRRI	International Rice Research Institute
IUUF	Illegal Unregulated and Unreported Fishing
JBIC	Japan Bank for International Cooperation
JCC	Joint Cooperation Committee
JCLEC	Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation
JCM	Joint Consultative Meeting
JOIN	Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation

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JPM	Joint Preparatory Meeting
JPM	Philippine Mission to ASEAN
JSCC	Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee
LIB	Lead Implementing Body
MAPHILINDO	Malaysia-Philippines-Indonesia Organization
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPAC	Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NEXI	Nippon Export and Investment Insurance
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PCs	Participating Countries
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PR	Permanent Representative
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RSA	Regional Security Architecture
SDP	Sectoral Dialogue Partner
SEARRCT	Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SEOM	Senior Economic Officials' Meeting
SOM	Senior Officials' Meeting
STOM	Senior Transport Officials' Meeting
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
TOR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

# FOREWORD

The book, *ASEAN Centrality: An Autoethnographic Account by a Philippine Diplomat*, written by the Department of Foreign Affairs' resident ASEAN specialist, Ambassador Elizabeth P. Buensuceso proves the point that diplomats and scholars should join forces to make this world a more coherent, more compassionate and more affable place to live in.

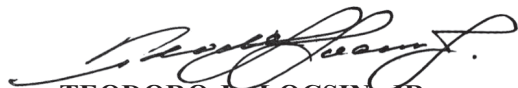
Ambassador Buensuceso's evocative, direct, uncomplicated but authoritative style is a refreshing departure from the boring reportage of ASEAN reports and treatises on the one hand and on the other, the incomprehensible balderdash of some academics pretending to interpret diplomacy from their distorting lenses of the wrong grade. Never since the renowned former ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo Severino do we find the rare combination of the academic perspective beautifully blended with the actual experience of a seasoned diplomat as in this author.

ASEAN Centrality is a concept that has, time and again, been put to the test. Once again, the world is experiencing a creeping polarization among the powers and countries of the world. And once again, their chosen theater is the region where the ASEAN Member States are in the midst of two of the most volatile flashpoints in the world—the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea. The region has gotten a new name: the Indo-Pacific arena, resurrected from its uncertain beginnings in 1994 when it was first broached. The big powers are now testing

and approaching ASEAN for alliances and cooperation. How ASEAN will take advantage of the opportunities of this renewed interest and not be swept away in the currents of contending forces will once again bring ASEAN Centrality to the fore and its greatest test. Even political instability among its members, as in the current crisis in Myanmar, is a clarion call for ASEAN Centrality to play its part and acquire substantive meaning beyond mere intention.

Ambassador Buensuceso makes an inventory of various definitions and views on ASEAN Centrality, juxtaposes them with her own take, and concludes that indeed, ASEAN Centrality should be understood from the point of view of one who has experienced and practised it. Her definition is fact-based and practical. It can be operationalized, observed, and put to test easily. It can serve the interest of ASEAN in a practical manner. She is able to define her parameters of what constitutes ASEAN Centrality that makes for an interesting, informative reading.

I am honoured that the book is published during my term as Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines. I would urge all students and practitioners of ASEAN diplomacy, especially diplomats of the Philippines and ASEAN Member States, to read this book and savour its unique approach and style. It does not merely inform, it educates, uplifts and sometimes, entertains.



**TEODORO L. LOCSIN, JR.**

Secretary of Foreign Affairs

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I dedicate this book to the officers and staff and their families of the Philippine Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, circa 2013–2019. I also appreciate Karen and Sab for always being there for me.