

The ASEAN Way: A Study of Its Evolution and  
Contemporary Relevance



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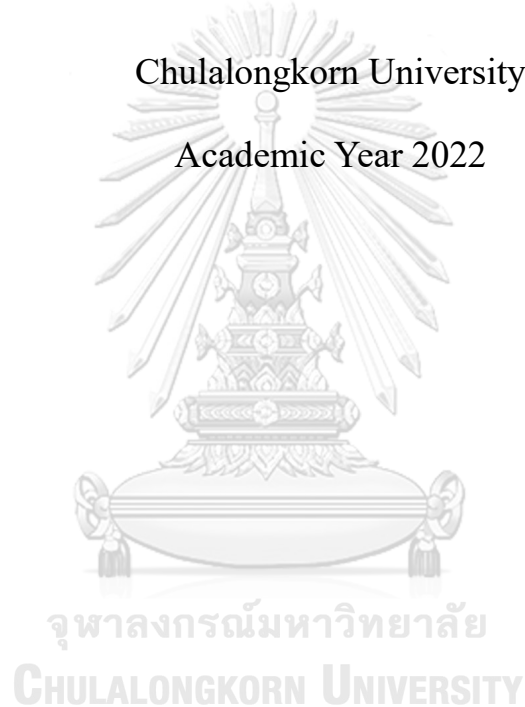
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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
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ไม่มีคำจำกัดความที่เป็นเอกภาพของ "วิถีอาเซียน" สามารถมองได้ว่าเป็นชุดจรรยาบรรณที่พัฒนาโดยอาเซียนเพื่อปรับความขัดแย้งและความร่วมมือ มีอยู่ในภูมิภาค "วิถีอาเซียน" เป็นกระบวนการที่อยู่บนหลักการของการไม่แทรกแซงและความเห็นพ้องต้องกัน คุณสมบัติหลักคือความเป็นกันเอง ความเป็นสถาบันที่อ่อนแอ และการไม่เผชิญหน้า บทความนี้พยายามไข่มุมมองทางประวัติศาสตร์ในระยะยาวเพื่อศึกษาการพัฒนาและการเปลี่ยนแปลงของ "วิถีอาเซียน" จากการทบทวนประวัติศาสตร์ของอาเซียนโดยทั่วไป จะพบกรณีทั่วไปบางกรณีที่เกี่ยวข้องกับ "วิถีแห่งอาเซียน" จากนั้นจะมีการกล่าวถึงการแสดงลักษณะ ลักษณะ และหน้าที่บนพื้นฐานของกรณีเหล่านี้ ผู้เขียนได้แบ่งขั้นตอนการพัฒนา "วิถีอาเซียน" ออกเป็น 4 ขั้นตอนดังต่อไปนี้ ประการแรก ช่วงเวลาระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2510 ถึง พ.ศ. 2519 เป็นช่วงก่อร่างสร้างตัวของ "วิถีแห่งอาเซียน" ประการที่สอง พ.ศ. 2520-2534 เป็นช่วงเวลาแห่งการพัฒนาและประยุกต์ใช้ต่อไป ประการที่สาม ตั้งแต่ปี พ.ศ. 2535 ถึง พ.ศ. 2550 "ถนนสายอาเซียน" ประสบกับความท้าทาย การเปลี่ยนแปลง และการแพร่กระจาย หายที่สุด ช่วงเวลาระหว่างปี 2551-2565 เป็นช่วงเวลาที่สำคัญ สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....

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The "ASEAN way" does not have a unified definition; it can be seen as a series of codes of conduct formulated by ASEAN to adjust intra-regional conflicts and cooperation. The "ASEAN way" takes the principle of non-interference as its core, and as a process it is based on consultation and consensus. Its main features are informality, weak institutionalization and non-confrontation. This paper attempts to use a long-term historical perspective to study the development and changes of the "ASEAN Way". Through a general review of the history of ASEAN, the paper identifies some typical cases that are more relevant to the "ASEAN Way", and then, on the basis of these cases, explores its manifestations, characteristics and functions. The author divides the development process of the "ASEAN Way" into the following four stages. First, 1967-1976 was the formative stage of the "ASEAN Way". Second, 1977-1991 witnessed its further development and application. Third, during 1992-2007, the ASEAN Way experienced challenges, change and diffusion. Finally, the years 2008-2022 represent the stage in which the "ASEAN way" has continued its constructive role. Overall, the "ASEAN way" has undergone a change from mainly informal meetings to the coexistence of a dual-track operational mechanism, through which its institutionalization and operative modes have continuously improved. However, the principle of non-intervention has always been difficult to undergo major change. This principle is not only the core connotation of the "ASEAN Way", but also the fundamental guarantee for promoting unity within ASEAN. Even in face of certain intra-regional problems, the member countries' concern to uphold their sovereignty and autonomy—hence, strongly intent upon maintaining this non-interference principle.

Field of Study:	Southeast Asian Studies (Interdisciplinary Program)	Student's Signature .....
Academic Year:	2022	Advisor's Signature .....

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Yanmei Zhou



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## **Introduction**

The establishment of ASEAN is not only a symbol of the rise of regionalism in Southeast Asia, but also an important achievement of the member states' efforts to eliminate differences and move towards unification. ASEAN is a regional organization with extensive influence. From 1967 to the present, after more than 50 years of historical development, ASEAN has made important contributions in uniting member states, maintaining regional order and promoting regional development. In 2015 The establishment of the ASEAN Community can also show that ASEAN is relatively successful as a regional organization.

In the 1990s, the "ASEAN way", which played an important role in the process of ASEAN integration, gradually attracted widespread international attention. Some scholars attributed ASEAN's achievements to the "ASEAN way". They believed that the glory of ASEAN today is due to the Members' adherence to the "ASEAN way" in the process of interaction is also due to the flexible application of the "ASEAN way" in specific practice. The "ASEAN way" was gradually formed after the establishment of ASEAN. This inclusive and non-confrontational decision-making method has promoted the gradual formation of collective identity in Southeast Asia and maintained the stability of the regional order. The emergence of the "ASEAN way" not only proves the feasibility of independent promotion of regional cooperation by developing countries, but also challenges the "European model" that European countries regard as a successful model. It is a typical case of regional development in

the world. As far as the academic level is concerned, it “transcends the theoretical paradigm of international relations based on European regional cooperation experience and conceptually reconstructs the regional cooperation experience outside Europe and the United States”<sup>1</sup> and provides the reality for Asian academic circles to create their own regional cooperation theories and possibility, the research significance is very great.

The academic research on the "ASEAN Way" has produced fruitful results since the 1990s. Due to the ambiguity of its concept, ASEAN officials have never defined the "ASEAN Way". way" has been interpreted differently. However, some similarities can be seen from these explanations, that is, the "ASEAN way" represents a cooperation model commonly used by ASEAN organizations in dealing with regional affairs, conducting regional cooperation and balancing relations between countries. Its connotations generally fall into two categories: One is a general principle based on the inter-state norms stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations, and the other is a decision-making principle based on "consultation" and "consensus".

After getting a general understanding of the basic information of the "ASEAN Way", the author found that the academic research on the "ASEAN Way", focusing mainly on its concept, characteristics and evaluation, the process of formation, development and change of the "ASEAN way" is not clear enough. Due to the ambiguity and abstraction of the concept, the "ASEAN way" has different manifestations in various

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Zhengyi. "Asian Regionalization: From Rationalism to Social Constructivism?—From the Perspective of International Political Economy." *World Economics and Politics* 5 (2003): 4-10.

stages of ASEAN history. Only studying the "ASEAN way" in the short term is not enough to explain some tendentious behaviors of ASEAN as an organization, such as Preference for informal meetings, close relations between leaders, emphasis on consensus and consultation, and strict observance of the principle of non-interference, etc. After getting a general understanding of the basic information of the "ASEAN Way", the author found that the academic research on the "ASEAN Way" focusing mainly on its concept, characteristics and evaluation, the process of formation, development and change of the "ASEAN way" is not clear enough. Due to the ambiguity and abstraction of the concept, the "ASEAN way" has different manifestations in various stages of ASEAN history. Only studying the "ASEAN way" in the short term is not enough to explain some tendentious behaviors of ASEAN as an organization, such as Preference for informal meetings, close relations between leaders, emphasis on consensus and consultation, and strict observance of the principle of non-interference, etc. Therefore, it is very necessary to study the long-term development history of the "ASEAN Way". Only by clarifying the development context of the "ASEAN Way" can we better understand and recognize ASEAN.

### **Literature Review**

In the late 1990s, under the background of globalization and regionalism, the "ASEAN Way" as an academic term began to appear in the world and gradually became popular, and caused wave after wave of research.

#### **(1) Basic research on the "ASEAN Way" in academic circles**

Scholars' basic research on the "ASEAN way" mainly revolves around its concept, characteristics and causes. Regarding the concept of "ASEAN way", ASEAN officials have not given a unified explanation and definition. It is understood that the first person in ASEAN to mention this term may be Ali Moertopo, a senior intelligence officer in Indonesia. Amitav Acharya in the article "Idea, Identity and Institution Building: From the "ASEAN Way" to the "Asia-Pacific Way"?"<sup>2</sup> and "Culture, Security, Multilateralism: The "ASEAN Way" and Regional Order"<sup>3</sup>, the "ASEAN Way" is regarded as a kind of security culture. After a systematic and detailed analysis, it also distinguishes between the "ASEAN way" and the "Asia-Pacific way". Jürgen Haacke believes that the "ASEAN way" is a unique "diplomatic and security culture"<sup>4</sup>, this view has a profound influence in the academic circles, and many domestic and foreign scholars' research on the "ASEAN way" is based on this view. Taku Yukawa<sup>5</sup> is committed to strictly defining the concept of "ASEAN Way", and he analyzed and studied it as an institution and a set of norms separately, which is a breakthrough

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<sup>2</sup> Amitav Acharya. Ideas, identity, and institution-building: From the "ASEAN way" to the "Asia-Pacific way"? [J]. *The Pacific Review*, 1997, 10(3).

<sup>3</sup> Amitav Acharya. Culture, security, multilateralism: The "ASEAN way" and regional order [J]. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 1998, 19(1)

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Haacke. ASEAN's diplomatic and security culture: a constructivist assessment [J]. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 2003(3).

<sup>5</sup> Taku Yukawa. Analyzing the Institutional and Normative Architecture of ASEAN: Reconsidering the Concept of the "ASEAN Way" [J]. 2012(162).

in the research on the concept of "ASEAN Way". Tommaso Visone<sup>6</sup> believes that the "ASEAN Way" is an original mixture of Western and Eastern values, which has surpassed the mask of "Orientalism" in Asia. Domestic scholars mainly have the following points of view on the definition of the "ASEAN Way": first, scholars represented by Wang Zichang<sup>7</sup> mainly focus on the cultural characteristics of the "ASEAN Way", affirmed its role and significance as a social and cultural norm; Second, some scholars<sup>8</sup> combine the standards and principles in the decision-making process of ASEAN, and focus on the cooperation tendency of ASEAN integration, and regard the "ASEAN way" as a decision-making method and cooperation criterion to guide ASEAN behavior. This view is popular in domestic academic circles. The highest degree of recognition; some scholars have other views. For example, Wang Zhengyi regards the "ASEAN way" as a "regionalized 'Asian way'<sup>9</sup>, and Zhao Wenlan believes that it is "a set of unique dialogue and cooperation mechanisms, decision-making and behavior methods, diplomatic and security cultures within ASEAN countries." From the perspective of institutional change, Jiang Fan believes that the "ASEAN way" is a system, "a state of transition from disorder to order in the interaction of Southeast Asian countries"<sup>10</sup>. The characteristics of the "ASEAN way"

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<sup>6</sup> Tommaso Visone. The "ASEAN Way", A decolonial path beyond "Asian values"? [J]. Perspectives on Federalism, 2017, 9(1)

<sup>7</sup> Wang Zichang. "Cultural Identity and ASEAN Cooperation." Southeast Asian Studies 5 (2004): 27-31.

<sup>8</sup> Zhu Renxian, and He Bin. "ASEAN decision-making mechanism and ASEAN integration." Nanyang Issues Research 4 (2002).

<sup>9</sup> Wang Zhengyi. "Asian Regionalization: From Rationalism to Social Constructivism?—From the Perspective of International Political Economy." World Economics and Politics 5 (2003): 4-10.

<sup>10</sup> Jiang Fan. The Evolution and Reasons of the "ASEAN Way" from the Perspective of Institutional Change[J].

are also a hot topic of academic research. The characteristics summarized by scholars are informality, non-compulsion, avoidance of institutionalization, inclusiveness and openness, etc. Among them, informality is an important feature that has attracted widespread attention from scholars at home and abroad. In Chapter 10 "The ASEAN Way" of their book (The 2nd ASEAN Reader, 2003), David Capie and Paul Evens expounded the non-governmental aspects of the "ASEAN Way" from three aspects: institutional resources, consultative processes, and elite diplomacy. formality. Former Secretary-General of ASEAN (Rodolfo C. Severino) explained the reasons for ASEAN's preference for informal and loose arrangements from the extreme diversity of Southeast Asia and the sensitivity of member states.

Deepak Nair paid attention to ASEAN's "golf diplomacy". He believed that this kind of informal negotiation method is more suitable for ASEAN than formal meetings.

<sup>11</sup> Domestic scholars have done thorough research on the characteristics of the "ASEAN Way": Wang Zichang pointed out that the ASEAN way "emphasizes the informality, non-confrontation and consensus spirit of organizational methods and decision-making"<sup>12</sup>; Wang Feng wrote in his master thesis "The ASEAN Way In "Expansion in the Asia-Pacific Region—A Case Study of the ASEAN Regional Forum", the main features of the "ASEAN Way" are summarized as the principle of

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Indian Ocean Economies Research, 2018(2):63.

<sup>11</sup> Deepak Nair. Sociability in International Politics: Golf and ASEAN's Cold War Diplomacy[J]. International Political Sociology, 2020(14).

<sup>12</sup> Wang Zichang. "The Consciousness of ASEAN's Cultural Identity—ASEAN Consciousness and ASEAN's Development ( I )." Southeast Asian Studies 3 (2003): 17-22.

non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, the principle of consensus, regional cooperation emphasizing informal organizations and mechanisms, and Attach importance to the four aspects of the "Track II" dialogue and consultation mechanism; Wang Zhengyi's "ASEAN in 50 Years: Has it Got Out of the Dilemma of Development in the Peripheral Area?" —Reflections on the "ASEAN Way" and "ASEAN-Centric" ("World Politics Research" No. 1, 2018) summarized the basic characteristics of the "ASEAN Way" as the principle of flexibility, consensus among members and There are three aspects of intergovernmental cooperation. Like the concept, the formation of the "ASEAN way" is also ambiguous, and exploring its cause or formation process has been the tireless pursuit of scholars at home and abroad. Acharya's "Building a Security Community: ASEAN and Regional Order" (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2004) is hailed as one of the most comprehensive and groundbreaking works on ASEAN studies. The origin and development of the book have been deeply discussed, and it is still an authoritative work on the study of ASEAN regionalization. "Exploring the Origins of Southeast Asian Community Construction: Insights from the Former Secretary-General of ASEAN" by Severino (Social Science Press, 2012) is a monograph on ASEAN studies in the eyes of ASEAN's "own people". In the first chapter, The authors explore the nature and origins of the "ASEAN Way". Relevant domestic research results include: Chen Hanxi's "ASEAN Way" and Regional Integration ("Contemporary Asia-Pacific" No. 12, 2002), Wang Zichang's "ASEAN Cultural Identity



Consciousness-ASEAN Consciousness and ASEAN Development (I )" ("Southeast Asian Studies" No. 3, 2003), Wang Feng's master's thesis "The Expansion of the "ASEAN Way" in the Asia-Pacific Region—A Case Study of the ASEAN Regional Forum," Zhao Yinliang's "Security and Diplomatic Culture in Southeast Asia—" Transformation of the ASEAN Way" ("South Seas Issues" Issue 3, 2006) and Jiang Fan's "The Evolution of the "ASEAN Way" and Its Reasons from the Perspective of System Change" ("Indian Ocean Economics Research" Issue 2, 2018), etc.

## **(2) Evaluation of the "ASEAN Way" by academic circles**

Whether the "ASEAN way" is suitable for ASEAN has been a topic of endless debate. Some scholars attribute the success of ASEAN to this unique code of conduct, but some scholars doubt the effectiveness of the "ASEAN way" for ASEAN integration.

The "ASEAN way" has played a huge role and contribution in promoting ASEAN integration. Gillian Goh compared the different responses of ASEAN and the Organization of American States to intra-regional conflicts, highlighting the role and benefits of the "ASEAN way".<sup>13</sup> Susy Tekunan discussed the possibility of ASEAN's "ASEAN Way" and its internal diplomatic practices being applied to other regional or multilateral organizations. <sup>14</sup>Alan Collins in his article "Where is ASEAN headed?" Where is constructivism going? Norms and the Fixity of the ASEAN Way"

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<sup>13</sup> Gillian Goh. The "ASEAN Way": Non-Intervention and ASEAN's Role in Conflict Management[J]. Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs, 2003, 3(1).

<sup>14</sup> Susy Tekunan. The Asean Way: The Way To Regional Peace?[J]. Jurnal hubungan internasional, 2014, 3(2).

("International Relations", Vol. 33, No. 3, 2019), explores the role of the "ASEAN way" in the regionalization of ASEAN. Varintorn Thanvichien took China and the United States as examples, and used the method of theoretical theme analysis to discuss the role of the ASEAN way in the management of major powers in the new geopolitical situation. He proposed, "The function of the ASEAN way is between the United States and China. are different" <sup>15</sup>. Norberto Bondoc conducted a detailed study on the role of the "ASEAN Way" in preventive diplomacy and conflict management in the South China Sea. <sup>16</sup> Logan Masilamani and Jimmy Peterson analyzed the normative-pragmatic balance of ASEAN's "constructive engagement" policy in its formation and early stages, arguing that the "ASEAN Way" brought flexibility and a multidimensional approach to conflict resolution of political issues. <sup>17</sup>In "The Interaction of Nationalism and Regionalism: A New Perspective for ASEAN Studies" (Peking University Press, 2005), Wei Min believes that the "ASEAN Way" dissolves the potential conflict between nationalism and regionalism, enabling them to coordinate with each other. While mentioning the need for "ASEAN Way" reforms, In "The "ASEAN Way" and ASEAN Regional Integration" (Contemporary Asia Pacific,

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<sup>15</sup> Varintorn Thanvichien. Understanding the functions of the ASEAN Way in Great Power Management: The Co-constitution between Social Structure and Agency in International Society of States in East Asia[D]. Lund University, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Norberto Tenorio Bondoc. The Efficacy of Asean Way of Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Management in the South China Sea Conflict[J]. Thammasat University, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Logan Masilamani, Jimmy Peterson. The "ASEAN Way": The Structural Underpinnings of Constructive Engagement[J]. Foreign Policy Journal, 2014, 10(15).

No. 12, 2002), Chen Hanxi still believes that the "ASEAN way" still plays an irreplaceable role at this stage. Similarly, due to its own limitations, the "ASEAN Way" limits the development of ASEAN's decision-making mechanism to a certain extent, resulting in a relatively slow pace of ASEAN cooperation. Shaun Narine's "ASEAN and ASEAN Free Forum: Limitations of the "ASEAN Way"" ("Asia Survey", 1997, Vol. The further development of integration. Dio Herdiawan Tobing took the Rohingya issue as a case study to examine the limitations of the "ASEAN way" in ASEAN's handling of the Myanmar issue. <sup>18</sup>Some Chinese scholars have reflected on the "ASEAN Way" and looked at its shortcomings from different aspects. Gao Weinong and Luo Yahong's "A Structural Deficiency of the "ASEAN Way" from the Perspective of Constructivism" ("Southeast Asia Vertical and Horizontal" 2004, No. Issue 6) and Wang Zhengyi's "ASEAN 50 Years: Out of the Dilemma of Development in the Peripheral Zone?" —Reflections on the "ASEAN Way" and "ASEAN-Centered"" ("World Politics Research" No. 1, 2018) are relatively representative. In addition, some scholars advocate looking at the role of the "ASEAN way" in maintaining regional security and stability from a dialectical perspective. "2002 No. 4), Duan Xiaoping's "ASEAN Way and ASEAN Development" ("Hubei Social Sciences" 2004 No. 9), Zhang Zhenjiang's "ASEAN Way": Reality and Myth" ("Southeast Asian Studies" 2005 No. 3), Xie Dan's "The Role and Limitation of the

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<sup>18</sup> Dio Herdiawan Tobing. The Limits and Possibilities of the "ASEAN Way: The Case of Rohingya as Humanitarian Issue in Southeast Asia[J]. *KnE Social Sciences*, 2018, 3(5).

"ASEAN Way" in ASEAN Regional Integration" ("Grand Vision" 2008 No. 7), and Wang Chenyu's "The "ASEAN Way" in Maintaining Regional Security and Advantages and Limitations in Stability" ("Guangxi Social Sciences" No. 9, 2017), etc. Such scholars will pay attention to both the rationality and limitations of the "ASEAN Way" in their articles. The central idea is that the "ASEAN Way" has made great contributions to the development and growth of ASEAN, but it also has a certain degree of It restricts the development of ASEAN, so reform is necessary.

### **(3) Academic research on other aspects of the "ASEAN Way"**

In addition to the above, some scholars have conducted research on other aspects of the "ASEAN way", such as the challenges it faces, changes and expansion, and so on. In the late 1990s, the development of ASEAN suffered setbacks, and the "ASEAN Way" was also facing survival crises and challenges. Chapter 13 of Reshaping ASEAN by Simon Tay et al. (published by Yusof Ishak Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001) provides a brief introduction to the "ASEAN way" and considers some of the cases, including broad debates on non-intervention, flexible participation and enhanced interaction. (Kim Hyung Jong), in his article "The ASEAN Way, Its Implications and Challenges to ASEAN Regional Integration" (Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 12, 2007), sheds light on the key factors challenging the practice of the "ASEAN Way", Such as changes in the regional security environment since 9/11, emerging non-traditional security issues, Deepen economic cooperation, strengthen ASEAN's external relations, and democratize ASEAN member states. In the article

"Cambodia and Burma: Here the ASEAN Way Ends" (Asia Survey, Vol. 38, No. 12, 1998), the author (Kay Moller) analyzes the current situation in ASEAN decision-making and implementation, using Myanmar and Cambodia as examples. A sign of an impending paradigm shift. Among them, the "flexible participation" proposal proposed by Thailand has attracted widespread attention from the academic circles. With the expansion of ASEAN member states, the change of leaders of some ASEAN countries and the emergence of some new regional problems, there are more and more voices expecting to change the "ASEAN way". Geoffrey B. Cockerham examines regional integration in ASEAN by analyzing the agreements developed within the ASEAN framework since its inception in 1967, and explores the possibility of institutionalizing the "ASEAN way".<sup>19</sup> Brendan Howe and Min Joung Park's research from the perspective of human security found that the state-centered, non-intervention "ASEAN way" is developing and accepting the perspective of human security to an unprecedented degree.<sup>20</sup> In recent years, the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area, the promulgation of the "ASEAN Charter" and the pursuit of "ASEAN as the center" all illustrate the tendency of ASEAN to independently pursue reform, and the "ASEAN way" is undergoing changes and transformations. Wang Zichang believes that the construction of the ASEAN Free

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<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey B. Cockerham. Regional Integration in ASEAN: Institutional Design and the ASEAN Way[J]. East Asia, 2010, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Brendan Howe, Min Joung Park. The Evolution of the "ASEAN Way": Embracing Human Security Perspectives[J]. Asia-Pacific Social Science Review, 2017, 16(3).

Trade Area has brought about some changes in the “ASEAN way”:"One is the introduction of a decision-making method in which the minority obeys the majority;The second is to strengthen the rules and procedures for specific implementation;The third is to establish a dispute settlement procedure”<sup>21</sup>, all of which have broken the inherent model of the “ASEAN way”.The "ASEAN Charter" can be said to be the biggest breakthrough under the transformation of ASEAN at this stage.Xie Bixia and Zhang Zuxing believe that through the ASEAN Charter, "ASEAN has successfully demonstrated to the outside world its firm determination to continue on the road of regional integration,at the same time, at least in terms of legal texts, ASEAN has achieved an 'image transformation' and a certain 'mechanism transformation', establishing an institutionalized and legalized image of ASEAN"<sup>22</sup>.Regarding the transformation and improvement of the "ASEAN Way" reflected in the content of the Charter, Peng Wenping pointed out in "Maintenance and Transformation of the "ASEAN Way" from the "ASEAN Charter"" ("Southeast Asia" 2019 No. 12):In addition to maintaining some principles in the "ASEAN Way", the Charter pays more attention to the role of the "Second Track" and the norms of "internal relations between countries", focusing on the transformation to "sound institutions and strengthened functions" and to "efficient legalization". However, some scholars are not optimistic about these reforms: for example Lee Leviter

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<sup>21</sup> Wang Zichang. "ASEAN Free Trade Area and ASEAN Cooperation Mechanism——A Sociological Investigation of the Changes of ASEAN Cooperation Mechanism." *Southeast Asian Studies* 6 (2004): 29-33.

<sup>22</sup> Xie Bixia, and Zhang Zuxing. "The Transformation and Continuation of the "ASEAN Way" from the "ASEAN Charter." *Diplomatic Review: Journal of China Foreign Affairs University* 4 (2008): 37-44.

believes that, although the "ASEAN Charter" is an attempt by the supporters of ASEAN integration to correct the shortcomings of the ASEAN system, these ambitious goals were eventually offset by the "ASEAN way"; <sup>23</sup>Jiang Fan once said that the above-mentioned development of the "ASEAN way" Still cautious, slow, and ASEAN's decision-making mechanisms are still very loose. With the increase of ASEAN's participation in Asia-Pacific cooperation, the "ASEAN way" has shown a tendency to expand outside the region, Sharon Siddique and Sree Kumar "Second ASEAN Reader" (2003, Yusof Ishak Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), Chapter 13 "Internal Challenges of the 'ASEAN Way'", Chapter 42 "ASEAN Regional Cooperation Model" and Chapter 95 "ASEAN's Evolving Regional Role", etc. Various studies have been done on this aspect. Regarding the expansion of the "ASEAN Way", Niu Haibin's article "A Constructivist Interpretation of East Asian Regionalism" (Contemporary International Relations, Issue 12, 2005) explained the reason why the ASEAN approach is generally recognized in East Asia from the perspective of the complexity of East Asian regionalism. Wang Feng's master's thesis, "The Expansion of the "ASEAN Way" in the Asia-Pacific Region——A Case Study of the ASEAN Regional Forum", conducted a special study on this issue, mainly focusing on why the "ASEAN Way" can be extended to the ASEAN Regional Forum. After analyzing the applicability of the "ASEAN way" in the Asia-Pacific region, Yu

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<sup>23</sup> Lee Leviter. The ASEAN Charter: ASEAN Failure or Member Failure?[J]. New York University journal of international law & politics, 2010,43 (1).

Changsen believes that "at present and in the future, this flexible and soft way is still the best model for multilateral security cooperation suitable for the reality of the Asia-Pacific region"<sup>24</sup>. As the South China Sea disputes inevitably become ASEANized, the role of ASEAN is becoming more and more important. The role of the "ASEAN approach" in the South China Sea dispute has also become a hot topic among scholars. The research results are as follows: Norberto Bondoc "ASEAN Diplomatic Approach and the Effectiveness of Conflict Management in the South China Sea Dispute" (Thammasat University, Thailand, 2017 Published), Li Guoxuan's "ASEAN Approach and the South China Sea Dispute" ("Journal of China University of Petroleum (Social Science Edition)" 2015 No. 3), Zhang Qiyue's "Application of the "ASEAN Approach" in the "South China Sea Code of Conduct" Negotiations and China's Countermeasures" ("Hebei Law" No. 2, 2020), etc.

#### **(4) Inadequacies of the "ASEAN way" research**

Although the current research on the "ASEAN Way" has taken shape and achieved certain results, it is undeniable that there are still many shortcomings. At present, the academic research on the "ASEAN way" is relatively scattered, and no systematic research system has been formed. As an important branch of ASEAN studies, the research on the "ASEAN way" has not received much attention from all walks of life. Scholars' research on the "ASEAN Way" mainly serves the needs of ASEAN integration, and there are few achievements that focus on its own development and

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<sup>24</sup> Yu Changsen. "An Analysis of the Role of ASEAN in the Process of Asia-Pacific Multilateral Security Cooperation." *Diplomatic Review: Journal of China Foreign Affairs University* 4 (2007): 59-66.



changes. From the perspective of research direction, the practicability of the "ASEAN way" in a short period of time has always been the focus of research, and whether it ultimately promotes or hinders ASEAN's regional integration is also a controversial issue. However, little attention has been paid to the reaction to the "ASEAN way" caused by the development of ASEAN and the changes in its external environment.

Although some scholars admit that the "ASEAN Way" is a changing framework, its rich connotations have not been fully fixed, and they also recognize that the ASEAN decision-making mechanism, which was known for its slowness and inefficiency, has changed. But unfortunately, there are very few research results that focus on the development process of the "ASEAN Way" itself and point out its outstanding characteristics at each stage, and its development context is not clear enough so far. Due to the ambiguity of the concept of the "ASEAN way" itself, it is difficult for scholars to form a relatively unified conclusion on all aspects of its content. Therefore, it is very necessary to find its essence and clarify its development from a long period of history. This article will systematically sort out the major events that occurred in the history of ASEAN, and examine some specific cases of ASEAN using the "ASEAN Way" from the two levels of the region and outside the region, and then use these cases as the basis for the development of the "ASEAN Way". And according to the development characteristics, the evolution of the "ASEAN Way" is divided into several important stages, and finally explores the reasons for the changes of the "ASEAN Way" in each stage, its specific manifestations and its role in the history of

ASEAN.

### **Chapter 1: The Preliminary Formation of the "ASEAN Way" from 1967 to 1976**

Like the conceptual issue that has been debated in the academic circles, the origin of the "ASEAN Way" is also a relatively vague and inconclusive issue. According to scholars' research, the term "ASEAN way" was first proposed by a senior Indonesian intelligence officer Ali Moertopo in 1974, and was frequently mentioned in the 1990s, but because academic research mainly focused on its concept, characteristics and applicability, etc., there is no clear answer to the question of when the "ASEAN way" will appear and what will be the sign of it. To find out the origin of the "ASEAN Way", we need to look for it from the historical process before and after the establishment of ASEAN.

#### **Section 1: Background and Reasons for the Establishment of ASEAN**

On August 8, 1967, the leaders of Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines signed the "ASEAN Declaration" (also known as the "Bangkok Declaration") in Bangkok, Thailand. The establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN for short) was announced. This is a key step for Southeast Asian countries to move from conflict to cooperation and achieve regional reconciliation. It opens a new chapter in regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Regarding the establishment of ASEAN, scholar Liang Yingming commented: "The establishment of ASEAN is of great significance. It is the first regional cooperation organization in East Asia, ahead of neighboring Northeast Asia (where no

cooperation organization has been established so far) and South Asia (where SAARC was established in 1985). Therefore, its establishment not only marks the rise and development of regionalism and regional consciousness in Southeast Asia, but also provides a successful example for the regional cooperation movement in Northeast Asia and South Asia. "<sup>25</sup>

### 1. The Background of the Establishment of ASEAN

After the end of the Second World War, the international structure has undergone tremendous changes. The power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union led to the formation of a bipolar structure, and this structural change also developed into the early post-war period in Southeast Asia. With the gradual withdrawal of European countries such as Britain and France, the forces of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, took the opportunity to enter this arena, and the military power competition and ideological collision made the situation in the region even more chaotic.

In order to maintain the stability of their own regimes, Southeast Asian countries began to try regional cooperation, trying to use collective power to resist foreign aggression and interference by major powers. The development of regionalism in Southeast Asia entered an embryonic period, roughly from the end of World War II to the end of the 1950s. "In this period, the regional cooperation in Southeast Asia was linked to the cooperation movement in the entire Asian region, and it did not have its

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<sup>25</sup> Song Youcheng, Tang Chongnan. East Asian Regional Consciousness and Peaceful Development [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2001: 496

own independent regional cooperation movement." <sup>26</sup> In March 1947, the first Asian National Conference was held in New Delhi, India. After the meeting, Indonesia and the Philippines attempted to launch the Southeast Asian Nations Conference, which was the first attempt by Southeast Asian countries to promote cooperation in the region. In July 1949, during the Second Conference of Asian Nations, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar discussed a new way of regional cooperation to jointly safeguard the independence and sovereignty of Southeast Asian countries, which reflected the germination of Southeast Asian regional consciousness. In 1955, some Asian and African independent countries held the Bandung Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. On the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the meeting proposed ten principles of the Bandung Conference, namely the famous "Bandung Spirit". Inspired by this spirit, regionalism in Southeast Asia developed rapidly. In the 1960s, the situation in Southeast Asia changed. China and the Soviet Union intervened in the Vietnam battlefield one after another. The U.S. military directly participated in the war in 1965, and the Soviet Union's global hegemony strategy during this period further escalated the U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Driven by this tense situation, the willingness to cooperate among Southeast Asian countries has strengthened, and regionalism in the region has also entered a new stage: some countries have begun to establish cooperative organizations in the region. The Association of Southeast Asia in 1961 and the MAPHILINDO formed by Malaysia,

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<sup>26</sup> Song Youcheng, Tang Chongnan. East Asian Regional Consciousness and Peaceful Development [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2001: 494

the Philippines, and Indonesia in 1963 are both the results of early cooperation in Southeast Asia. The "Association of Southeast Asia" established on July 31, 1961 is regarded as the predecessor of ASEAN. It is a loosely structured organization composed of Thailand, the Philippines and the Federation of Malaya. "Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman is this An active promoter of an organization, he was inspired by the development of cooperation in the European region and hoped to promote cooperation among countries in the Southeast Asian region"<sup>27</sup>. In the early 1960s, Thailand, Malaya, and the Philippines were all dealing with communist insurgencies at home, so the fear of communism was also an opportunity for the three countries to move towards unity. But the group has long been at a standstill due to a territorial dispute over Sabah between Malaysia and the Philippines. In July 1963, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaya issued a joint communiqué announcing the establishment of "Maphilindo". "Actually, the establishment of this organization is not for the future development and cooperation of various countries, but more of a strategic expedient established by all parties to check and hinder each other."<sup>28</sup> When each country emphasizes its own interests, this organization will not last long. More than a month later, the Federation of Malaysia was proclaimed, Indonesia announced that it would not recognize the legitimacy of Malaysia, and the Philippines also severed diplomatic relations with Malaysia. "Maphilindo" exists in name

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<sup>27</sup> Cao Yunhua. "Association of Southeast Asian Nations: Structure, Operation and External Relations." (2011).

<sup>28</sup> Gao Yanjie. "The Tortuous Regionalization Process—The Historical Trajectory and Origin of the Establishment of ASEAN." *Southeast Asia Across* 10 (2010): 54-58.

only. Although these two regional integration processes have yielded little, their establishment and activities. The development of regional cooperation has contributed and provided experience for ASEAN to establish a sound cooperation mechanism. By the second half of the 1960s, the situation in Southeast Asia had undergone new changes. In terms of external forces, the Sino-Soviet relationship broke down, the United States was deeply involved in the Vietnam War, and the United Kingdom announced its withdrawal from the east of Suez in 1967. All these made Southeast Asian countries see the possibility of regional autonomy; As far as countries are concerned, except for the Indochina countries that are still at war, other countries in Southeast Asia have entered a period of relative stability, and tensions between countries have also begun to ease; in addition, the rise of the International Non-Aligned Movement has also encouraged the determination of Southeast Asian countries to unite, these have laid the foundation for the successful establishment of ASEAN.

## 2. Reasons for the establishment of ASEAN

The establishment of ASEAN is the result of the development of regionalism in Southeast Asia, but if we only look at the interaction history of various countries in the 1960s, ASEAN is the direct product of the internal conflicts in Southeast Asia. As the famous scholar Acharya said: "The establishment of ASEAN is the product of the desire of the five founding members to try to create a kind of war prevention and

conflict resolution." <sup>29</sup>If the failure of the first two Southeast Asian organizations stemmed from the tense relations among member states, then the foundation for the successful establishment of ASEAN lies in the efforts made by various countries for regional reconciliation.Reconciliation between Indonesia and Malaysia is a prerequisite for the establishment of ASEAN. After Suharto came to power in 1965, Indonesia abandoned its previous confrontation policy and decided to reach a reconciliation with Malaysia. "In a speech in 1981, a senior Malaysian official closely associated with the formation of ASEAN recalled that he and Ali Mortopo met in Kuala Lumpur in late May 1966, explore the possibility of establishing a broader framework for regional cooperation.Under the mandate of their respective leaders - Indonesian President Suharto and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Razak,the two met to discuss how to expand the 'Indonesia-Malaysia Reconciliation' to other regional countries,and consider the establishment of the 'Association of Southeast Asian Nations'.<sup>30</sup> After that, Indonesia made outstanding contributions to the establishment of ASEAN. It took the abandonment of confrontation as a model of getting along with neighboring countries, and tried to establish a regional order without the use of force. This kind of behavior of fully supporting Southeast Asian regional cooperation is ASEAN key factors for its establishment.Judging from the

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<sup>29</sup> Acharya. Building a Security Community: ASEAN and Regional Order. Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Wei Boon Chua, Eddie Meng Chong Lim. Asean 50: Regional Security Cooperation Through Selected Documents[M]. World Scientific, 2017, p.2.

long-term historical development of Southeast Asia after the war, the establishment of ASEAN is not only a product of regional reconciliation, but also has other deeper reasons, which are the product of several factors. First of all, achieving regional reconciliation and resisting external aggression was a common aspiration in Southeast Asia during the Cold War, and these common aspirations were an important driving force for Southeast Asian countries to move toward unity. Against the background of Cold War confrontation, Southeast Asian countries are facing a common threat to survival, and the power competition among major powers in Southeast Asia has jeopardized the stability and development of the entire region. The reality that the Indochina region has been in war for a long time has also increased the need for countries to jointly defend against foreign affairs. It was with these political and security considerations that countries accelerated their efforts to achieve regional reconciliation, leading to the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967. Second, opposing the expansion of communism was the unanimous pursuit of the five founding countries of ASEAN, and the regional consensus reached under this goal provided the necessary conditions for the establishment of ASEAN. In the early days, the five member states of ASEAN all had close relations with the United States. Due to the ideological influence of the Cold War, the five countries reached an agreement in opposing the expansion of communism. A common language and position has been formed, removing some obstacles for regional unity. In addition, in order to curb the expansion of communist parties in their own countries, leaders of



various countries believe that strengthening anti-communist awareness and cohesion in the region is an important prerequisite for resisting the threat of communism. Finally, at the national level, the need to consolidate the new regime and get rid of economic difficulties has made Southeast Asian countries consciously accelerate the pace of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. During this period, the new nation-states that had just emerged from the war were faced with difficulties that could not be solved by a single country. For example, stagnant domestic economy, turbulent national political situation, frequent ethnic and religious conflicts, etc. These difficulties make countries eager to strengthen political and economic ties within the region, and drive national development through collective development. Moreover, a sound partnership is also conducive to alleviating the general sense of vulnerability and insecurity in Southeast Asian countries after independence, which was very necessary for all countries at that time.

## **Chapter II: Development and Application of the "ASEAN Way" from 1977 to 1991**

Since the promulgation of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 1976, the basic shape and connotation of the early "ASEAN way" have been determined, the outbreak of the Cambodian crisis in 1978 was a major test for the "ASEAN way", a series of activities were carried out in ASEAN around the Cambodian crisis, the "ASEAN Way" has begun to be applied in practice, In the end, the successful resolution of this crisis also proved the role of the "ASEAN way" in

maintaining regional security and stability.

In addition, the “ASEAN way” also developed to a certain extent during this period.

This development can be explained from two aspects: ASEAN’s conflict management system and regional cooperation mechanism: the ASEAN conflict management system is the embodiment of the "ASEAN Way" in conflict management. It is a preventive security mechanism centered on the principle of non-interference and promoting regional peace and stability. Among them, ASEAN's strict adherence to the principle of non-interference has established its core position in the "ASEAN Way"; the ASEAN regional cooperation mechanism is the embodiment of the "ASEAN way" in the field of cooperation. Divided into two mechanisms, internal and external, with dialogue, consultation and informal meetings as the main forms of expression, these two mechanisms were also gradually established during ASEAN's handling of the Cambodian crisis. During this period, ASEAN became more united internally, while an informal dialogue and cooperation mechanism was initially established externally.

### **Section 1: Development of the ASEAN Conflict Management System**

#### **1. Establishment of the core position of the principle of non-interference in internal affairs**

The principle of non-interference in internal affairs is the core content of the "ASEAN way". It comes from both the common understanding of ASEAN countries that sovereignty is inviolable and the actual need to prevent external forces from interfering. Since its establishment, ASEAN has always emphasized the core position

of the principle of non-interference, and strictly followed this principle in the course of its development in the following decades. The reasons why the principle of non-intervention can show such strong vitality in ASEAN are as follows: First of all, the trauma of colonialism has generally formed a highly sensitive awareness of national sovereignty in Southeast Asian countries. The principle of non-interference with the protection of national sovereignty as the main content has built a bridge of communication and mutual trust among countries, which is the prerequisite for the establishment of ASEAN; Secondly, the principle of non-intervention is a powerful weapon for developing countries to exclude external interference and defend against the invasion of powerful countries. During the Cold War, Southeast Asia was the center of great power conflicts. Holding high the banner of non-intervention was an inevitable choice for ASEAN to survive. Finally, the diversity of nationalities, languages, religions, and political and economic environments in Southeast Asia determines that the trust between countries is low, and the principle of non-intervention just makes up for this distrust. In order to safeguard its own interests and sovereignty without interference, ASEAN The member states have reached a consensus on the principle of non-interference. Although it is a basic norm in international relations, the practice of the principle of non-intervention within ASEAN has shown a certain degree of special features. Compared with other organizations, ASEAN follows the principle of non-interference almost harshly, and has repeatedly emphasized its importance in treaties and agreements. As a regional bloc, ASEAN

actively supports the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations, earnestly proceeds from the interests of member states, and safeguards the region's right to be free from external interference. The Bangkok Declaration of 1967 and the Declaration of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality of 1971 referred to the right of ASEAN to be free from external interference, the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia clearly emphasized the legitimate interests of ASEAN countries in mutual non-aggression and foreign interference.

Based on the above regulations, ASEAN strictly abides by the principle of non-intervention when facing internal disputes in the region. In the early days of the "Sabah Dispute" in 1968, other ASEAN member states also tried to pursue the principle of non-interference and maintain an impartial and neutral attitude. However, since Malaysia expressed its refusal to attend the ASEAN summit and other activities in order to boycott the Philippines, this attempt at total hands-off has failed. However, it is precisely because of this that ASEAN's conflict management approach, mainly in the form of promoting peace talks between the two sides, has taken shape. Even though the initial attitude was not positive, ASEAN still made some countermeasures to the Sabah dispute and avoided the expansion of the conflict. However, ASEAN's negative attitude towards Indonesia's aggression against East Timor in 1975 has never changed. Throughout, ASEAN has almost completely ignored the independence struggle of the East Timorese people, and has not responded to the UN General

Assembly Resolution 3485 calling for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor. It even more or less regards this matter as Indonesia's internal affairs and does not interfere.

Through the comparison of the above two cases, it can be preliminarily deduced that the basis for ASEAN to decide whether to implement the principle of non-intervention is to judge whether the conflict is an internal affair of a certain country concerned. In its view, the inviolability of the internal affairs of countries is protected, and even regional organizations cannot interfere. In the practice of managing regional affairs, ASEAN often refuses to deal with some difficult issues on the grounds of adhering to the principle of non-interference. For example, it did not address the genocide of the 1975-1978 period (Pol Pot) government, expressed only the desire for domestic stability in the Philippines with regard to the "people power" revolution in the Philippines in 1986, and rejected the Western world after the 1990 coup in Burma. Sanctions on Myanmar's demands and so on.

To sum up, the principle of non-intervention in the context of ASEAN is not only a constraint on the behavior of internal member states, but also an external declaration of ASEAN's pursuit of independent diplomacy and non-interference. ASEAN's practice of non-interference is not absolute. When a country's internal affairs endanger other countries or the entire region, limited intervention is also necessary. However, in most cases, ASEAN still tries to avoid directly intervening in the affairs of member states, and conducts regional management based on the principle of non-interference.

## **2. Limited Intervention in the Cambodian Crisis ---Flexible Use of the "ASEAN Way"**

The Cambodian crisis triggered by Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978 was the greatest security challenge faced by ASEAN since its inception. Vietnam's aggression has broken the relative peace that ASEAN has carefully maintained, and tested the increasingly stable internal relations of ASEAN.

### **(1) ASEAN's response to the Cambodian crisis**

After the crisis broke out, ASEAN responded quickly and violently, completely different from its usual gentle and non-intervention attitude. The reasons are roughly as follows: first of all, for ASEAN, Vietnam's invasion has flagrantly violated regional norms such as the principle of non-intervention and non-threat of force, and ASEAN, the sacred defender of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, must respond; second, the ASEAN countries expressed uneasiness over the spread of Vietnamese expansionism. People were generally worried that Vietnam would occupy the entire Indochina, and then ASEAN would once again be dragged into chaotic regional conflicts; finally, as Acharya said, "From the standpoint of ASEAN, the conflict in Cambodia caused by Vietnam's intervention is not just a local conflict, but involved in a wider Sino-Vietnamese, Sino-Soviet conflict." It is precisely because the Cambodian issue is related to the interests of all parties in and outside the region, and only by making a unified voice quickly can ASEAN, as the "representative" of Southeast Asia, take the initiative in this incident. ASEAN has attached great

importance to the sudden regional dispute of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia from the very beginning. For more than a decade before this issue was finally resolved, the Cambodian issue has been the most frequent topic in various ASEAN meetings and consultations. On January 12, 1979, the foreign ministers of the five ASEAN countries held a special meeting on the current political development in Southeast Asia in Bangkok to discuss the situation in Cambodia at that time. After the meeting, the five foreign ministers issued a joint statement, demanding "immediate and complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Cambodian territory"<sup>31</sup>, this is ASEAN's first official response to the situation in Cambodia. Afterwards, ASEAN repeatedly emphasized on diplomatic occasions and multilateral forums that the withdrawal of troops was a prerequisite for resolving the Cambodian issue, which established the main tone of ASEAN-Vietnam relations in the 1980s. Considering its own limitations in resolving regional conflicts, ASEAN is also pursuing the cause of isolating Vietnam on the international stage, adopting collective diplomacy, and trying to submit this issue to the United Nations for discussion. On August 20, 1979, the five ASEAN countries submitted a memorandum to UN Secretary-General Waldheim, requesting that the Cambodian situation be included in the agenda of the 34th UN General Assembly. This session of the UN General Assembly then adopted a draft resolution initiated by ASEAN (Resolution 34/22), "In 1980, a call for a special session on

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<sup>31</sup> Rudolph C. Severino. Exploring the Origin of the Southeast Asian Community: Insights from the Former Secretary-General of ASEAN [M]. Beijing: Social Science Press, 2012:150.

Cambodia was added to the provisions of Resolution 34/22”<sup>32</sup>. Finally, with the efforts of ASEAN, an international conference on Cambodia was held in New York in July 1981, due to the joint boycott of Vietnam, the People's Republic of Cambodia and the Soviet Union, this meeting did not make much progress in seeking a political solution to the Cambodian issue, <sup>33</sup>however, it pioneered the resolution of the Cambodian crisis under the framework of an international conference and laid the foundation for the peaceful resolution of the final crisis. From the 1980s, UN resolutions on the Cambodian crisis were mainly based on proposals made by ASEAN.

From 1977 to 1991, focusing on dealing with the Cambodian crisis, ASEAN started a series of regional activities to promote internal unity and strengthen external contacts. In order to solve the Cambodian crisis and promote regional economic development, ASEAN strives to maintain internal unity, emphasizes "speaking with one voice", and appears on the international stage as a group for the first time. With a series of diplomatic activities such as frequent contacts with external forces and establishment of dialogue relations with some countries and regional organizations during this period, ASEAN played an increasingly important role in the international negotiation arena, and its internal and external cooperation mechanisms were also becoming more and more perfect.

To sum up, from 1977 to 1991, ASEAN's internal cooperation mechanism was

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<sup>32</sup> Bilson Kurus. ASEAN—Interests and Reasons for Existence[J]. Nanyang Data Translation Collection, 1994(1):18.

<sup>33</sup> Amitav Acharya. Building a Security Community: ASEAN and Regional Order[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2012:121.



gradually improved, and it also showed a more obvious tendency towards informality and weak institutionalization. The loose decision-making mechanism and consensus decision-making process adapted to the ASEAN development needs, promoted the unity of the member states, and laid a solid foundation for the settlement of the most serious regional event in this period - the Cambodian conflict.

### **Chapter 3: Development Opportunities and Survival Challenges of the "ASEAN Way" from 1992 to 2007**

The period from the 1990s to the 2010s was a critical period related to the survival of the "ASEAN way". With the gradual deepening of ASEAN regional integration, the applicability of the "ASEAN way" began to become the focus of attention of people from all walks of life inside and outside the region. The "ASEAN way" in this period is facing some opportunities for development, for example, ASEAN will bring the "ASEAN way" beyond the scope of Southeast Asia, it has become a cooperation method that cannot be ignored in the cooperation framework of the Asia-Pacific region, and the shortcomings of ASEAN's conscious change of the "ASEAN way" since 1992. During the same period, the "ASEAN Way" also faced some pressure to survive. The formation of the "Greater ASEAN" increased the pressure on the "ASEAN Way" to adapt to new members and unite ASEAN as a whole. Frequent non-traditional security issues in the region have also posed a huge challenge to the applicability of the "ASEAN Way", and various proposals within ASEAN to change the principle of non-intervention in the "ASEAN Way" have gradually become

popular. In order to eliminate these doubts and increase the effectiveness of the "ASEAN Way", ASEAN began a relatively thorough reform process. The introduction of the "ASEAN Charter" in 2007 provided a new way for the future of the "ASEAN Way". The continuation of the "ASEAN Way" has also promoted the institutionalization and legalization of the "ASEAN Way". The applicability of the new "ASEAN Way" has yet to be verified.

### **Section 1: Challenges Facing the "ASEAN Way" at the Turn of the Century**

After the end of the Cold War, the internal and external environment faced by ASEAN has undergone tremendous changes. With the expansion of member states and the frequent occurrence of non-traditional security issues, it is facing more difficult challenges for survival. Under the impact of the crisis, the limitations of the "ASEAN way" are gradually exposed, and ASEAN's sense of helplessness to the crisis has set off waves of doubts within it.

#### **1. The formation of "Greater ASEAN" and its impact on the "ASEAN Way"**

ASEAN has experienced four expansion processes in history: the admission of Brunei in 1984 was the first expansion of ASEAN, and it was also the smoothest and fastest. Brunei successfully joined ASEAN on the sixth day after it declared independence.

The second expansion was in July 1995. At the 28th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Vietnam officially became the seventh member of ASEAN; in 1997, Laos and Myanmar successfully joined ASEAN, and Cambodia was due to the chaos of the domestic situation. It was postponed until April 30, 1999. Since then, the fourth

expansion of ASEAN has been declared a success, and it has begun to enter the "Great ASEAN" era.

In fact, as early as its inception, including all Southeast Asian countries in its own category is a vision of ASEAN. Article 4 of the ASEAN Declaration in 1967 stated that “the association is open to all countries in Southeast Asia that support the above-mentioned goals, principles and purposes”<sup>34</sup>, alluding to ASEAN's geographic scope requirement, this may have been one of the reasons why Sri Lanka's application for membership to ASEAN in 1972 was shelved.

Before the approaching of the 21st century, ASEAN completed the transition from "ASEAN-5" to "ASEAN-10". It successfully included all Southeast Asian countries at that time, and initially realized the goal of "one Southeast Asia" that it had always claimed before. The increase in the number of member states reflects the substantive progress made in ASEAN's regional integration, it is an important measure for ASEAN to realize regional peace and development. The expansion of ASEAN is beneficial to the regional security order. Bringing all member states into the same negotiation platform will accelerate the formation of a trust system among countries. The newly joined member states expressed their acceptance of the principles and norms in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, which also reduced the possibility of Southeast Asia falling into great chaos again to a certain extent.

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<sup>34</sup> ASEAN. The ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) [EB/OL]. 1967-08-08/2021-10-11.

However, with the entry of new members, both ASEAN and the "ASEAN Way" as a regional norm are facing new pressures and challenges. The four newly joined member states in the 1990s have completely different economic and political attributes from the previous six ASEAN countries. This has made the internal diversity of ASEAN more complicated, and the increase of stakeholders has also increased the difficulty of ASEAN management. "By increasing the scope of regional interactions and seeking to socialize new members into regional communities, the expansion of ASEAN also adds pressure to the 'ASEAN way' in terms of conflict prevention and consensus building" <sup>35</sup>, the impact on the "ASEAN way" mainly comes from within ASEAN. Every expansion of ASEAN is accompanied by the confrontation of interests between old and new member states, which has also triggered discussions on the future of ASEAN and the applicability of the "ASEAN way".

Finally, the formation of the "Greater ASEAN" has also brought many destabilizing factors to other aspects of the "ASEAN way", changes in ASEAN leadership caused by new members could weaken the foundations of the "ASEAN way", "As the leadership of the old member states has changed, the characteristics of like-minded leaders may have changed the quality of interaction among ASEAN elites" <sup>36</sup>, The different political systems and ideologies among old and new member states can also easily increase differences within ASEAN and make it difficult to reach

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<sup>35</sup> Amitav Acharya. *Building a Security Community: ASEAN and Regional Order*. Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Mely Caballero-Anthony. *Regional Security in Southeast Asia*[M]. ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2005, p.225.

consensus. Judging from the actual situation, the "ASEAN way" has not yet formed a powerful way to deal with various crises in the expansion of ASEAN. Judging from the development history of the two, the development of the "ASEAN way" lags behind. It is not ready to face an enlarged ASEAN, nor is it capable of solving various problems during and after its expansion.

## **2. The regional security crisis at the turn of the century impacted the "ASEAN way"**

From the late 1990s to the early 21st century, ASEAN faced a series of regional security threats, which can be divided into two categories—traditional regional security threats and non-traditional regional security threats.

Traditional regional security threats refer to crises in the military and political fields, the traditional security threats in the ASEAN region at this stage mainly include three aspects: regime change crises among member states, disputes over territory and sovereignty among countries, and conflicts outside the region, with the exception of the last aspect, ASEAN has some experience in dealing with these issues. Non-traditional security threats mainly refer to non-military political global issues, including economics, the environment, natural disasters, human rights issues and terrorism, the 1997-1998 financial crisis in Southeast Asia, the regional smog pollution caused by the spread of Indonesian forest fires in August 1997, the terrorist incidents in Southeast Asia after the 9.11 terrorist attacks, the SARS crisis in 2003 and the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, etc., these are the tests that ASEAN will have to

deal with at the turn of the century. In comparison, the non-traditional security threats that were gradually paid attention to at the end of the 20th century are the most critical crisis in ASEAN at this stage. Among these non-traditional, transnational and subnational security challenges, the financial crisis of 1997-1998 hit ASEAN hardest. Under the impact of the crisis, social problems such as credit crunch, decline in economic production, high unemployment rate, inflation, labor migration and political turmoil followed in a short period of time, resulting in economic decline and chaos in the ASEAN region. "Without a unified monetary and financial policy and adherence to the principle of non-intervention, when the crisis comes, it is difficult for ASEAN to effectively control the chaotic economic situation. The fragmentation of member states has also sparked new interstate tensions, for example, Thailand, which was the first to be hit by the crisis, complained about the indifference of other countries.

The phenomenon of ASEAN's insufficient response to these security challenges, not only tests the interaction among member states, it also damaged the group's credibility in the eyes of the public, at this stage, discussions within ASEAN on ASEAN regional mechanisms and norms reached a climax. On this issue, some observers have put forward two points: "The first is that ASEAN lacks or even does not have institutions that can effectively deal with the various problems that arise, and the second problem is that, for many observers, these norms that ASEAN has internalized have become an

obstacle to ASEAN's effective regional response."<sup>37</sup>

As time went on, the criticism of ASEAN's inaction became more and more pointed to its normative hindering effect, and the "ASEAN way" began to come under the pressure of civil forces within ASEAN. Non-governmental organizations turned their attention to regional governance. They, scholars, media and other circles put forward reform requirements for ASEAN's regional norms. Specifically, it includes "demanding to go beyond ASEAN's elitist and state-centered nature, abandon ASEAN's sacred non-intervention norms, and democratize regional governance by creating more channels for participation"<sup>38</sup> etc., the "ASEAN way" which is the basis of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia is facing pressure to revise or even cancel it, and reform seems to be an irresistible trend.

## **Section 2: The Reform Path of the "ASEAN Way"**

At the end of the 20th century, the unease that pervaded the entire Southeast Asia made ASEAN leaders see the urgency of strengthening the ASEAN mechanism and adjusting the regional cooperation structure. They realized that the regional environment and national needs that have shaped the traditional "ASEAN way" have changed. In order to adapt to this change and improve cooperation efficiency, ASEAN needs to change the factors that hinder the development of integration in the "ASEAN

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<sup>37</sup> Mely Caballero-Anthony. Regional Security in Southeast Asia[M]. ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2005, p.195.

<sup>38</sup> Brendan Howe and Min Joung Park. The Evolution of the "ASEAN Way": Embracing Human Security Perspectives[J]. Asia-Pacific Social Science Review, 2017, 16(3), p.7.

way".The specific implementation plans include improving the organizational structure, strengthening the binding force of decision-making agencies, and improving the efficiency of ASEAN cooperation, etc.If the resolution of the 4th ASEAN Summit in 1992 was an attempt to reform the "ASEAN way" that had begun to show its shortcomings, then the promulgation of the "ASEAN Charter" in 2007 was a major breakthrough for the "ASEAN way".The “ASEAN way” of informality and soft institutionalism began to move towards legalization and institutionalization.

In 2007, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN, ASEAN leaders signed the "ASEAN Charter" at the 13th ASEAN Summit held in Singapore on November 20,it is the first document of a constitutional nature in the history of ASEAN, which has changed the operating form of ASEAN relying on informal procedures and personal relationship commitments for more than 40 years, and has a milestone significance.The birth of the "ASEAN Charter" "marks that ASEAN will end its status as a loose quasi-international organization and present itself to the region and the world as a more institutionalized, cohesive, and mature international organization" <sup>39</sup>,its breakthrough contributions are mainly reflected in "new political commitment at the highest level; new and strengthened commitment; new legal framework, legal personality; new ASEAN institutions; more ASEAN meetings; more roles for ASEAN foreign ministers; The newly enhanced role of

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<sup>39</sup> Zhang Xizhen. Interpretation of the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations[J]. Asia and Africa, 2008(1):36.



ASEAN Secretary-General" <sup>40</sup>and so on. The Charter is not only a continuation of the "ASEAN Way", but also a promotion of the institutionalization and legal reform of the "ASEAN Way".

### **Section 3: The "ASEAN way" spreads out of the region**

At the end of the 20th century, the expansion of member states made ASEAN stronger as a collective, it has gradually become an indispensable member of regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, and plays a key role in the construction of the framework for cooperation and dialogue in the entire region. It was also during this period that "ASEAN was determined to become a normative entrepreneur not only within its region but also in its external partnerships" <sup>41</sup>, it not only pursues a leading position in Asia-Pacific multilateral cooperation, but also tries to spread its "ASEAN way" to a wider region. The ASEAN Regional Forum, the "ASEAN+3" process, the East Asia Summit (EAS) and APEC, which were active in the Asia-Pacific region at that time, were more or less branded as the "ASEAN Way".

### **Chapter 4 :The "ASEAN Way" that will continue to function in 2008-2022**

After the "ASEAN Charter" came into effect in 2008, the "ASEAN Way" was not abandoned by ASEAN as some scholars predicted before the Charter was issued. In addition to reforming some of the disadvantages of the "ASEAN way", the Charter

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<sup>40</sup> "Significance of the ASEAN Charter", Association of Southeast Asian Nations, October 19, 2021.  
<https://asean.org/about-asean/asean-charter/>

<sup>41</sup> Laura Allison-Reumann. The Norm-Diffusion Capacity of ASEAN: Evidence and Challenges [J], Pacific Focus, 2017, 32(1), p.6.

also reflects the continuation of the "ASEAN way".

In the period from 2008 to 2022, we can still see the "ASEAN way" play a continuous role, however, due to the different nature of various time periods, the effectiveness of the "ASEAN way" is also different. When dealing with internal conflicts, the internal affairs and sensitive regional affairs defined by ASEAN will be deliberately ignored by ASEAN. This can also explain why ASEAN has done nothing on the Rohingya crisis. In addition, the limited role of ASEAN in the Thailand-Cambodia border conflict shows that the willingness of member states is also an important criterion for whether the "ASEAN way" can play a role. That is to say, the "ASEAN way" is subject to certain restrictions and constraints in its specific application. The period from 2008 to 2022 is also a period of major changes in the international situation, among them, the introduction of the Indo-Pacific strategy of various countries, the deepening of the game between China and the United States, the impact of the new crown pneumonia epidemic, and the situation in Russia and Ukraine have all brought tests to the development of ASEAN and the "ASEAN way". Judging from ASEAN's performance in these important events, the "ASEAN way" can still play a limited role, which mainly depends on the limited voice of ASEAN itself in the international arena. However, the "ASEAN way" is still a very effective and comfortable way of cooperation for today's ASEAN, and it will continue to exert influence on the future development of ASEAN.

### **Section 1 :The "ASEAN Way" Plays a Sustained Role in ASEAN**

Since the promulgation of the ASEAN Charter in 2007 and the Protocol on the Dispute Settlement Mechanism of the ASEAN Charter in 2010, ASEAN has a better and more specific dispute settlement mechanism. In these two agreements, ASEAN formulated many important rules and norms for the peaceful settlement of internal disputes, this positive reform attitude has enabled ASEAN to regain the trust of member states and the international community. The reform has also shaped new changes in the "ASEAN Way" in dealing with internal conflicts. The entire ASEAN has been shrouded in a thriving atmosphere of reform enthusiasm. However, it remains to be seen whether the reformed dispute settlement mechanism and the "ASEAN way" can effectively deal with complex and diverse conflicts within ASEAN. In response to this problem, the following will take typical events such as the Nargis storm in Myanmar in 2008, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, and the conflict at the Preah Vihear Temple in Thailand and Cambodia as examples to explore the characteristics and role of the reformed "ASEAN Way" in conflict resolution.

### **1. Cyclone Nargis and ASEAN's Active Disaster Relief Policies**

In early May 2008, Cyclone Nargis swept over Myanmar after forming in the Bay of Bengal, raided the Ayeyarwady River Delta region of Myanmar, and also affected Myanmar's largest city and most important commercial center - Yangon. "Cyclone Nargis was the worst natural disaster in Myanmar's history and the most destructive cyclone to hit Asia since 1991, killing more than 140,000 people, it also had a devastating impact on the environment in the Ayeyarwady region and Yangon region"

<sup>42</sup>.In the face of this rare natural disaster and large-scale casualties, the Burmese military government not only failed to propose a proper post-disaster treatment method, moreover, they expressed doubts about the disaster relief from the West, and only accepted part of the aid and refused to allow foreign aid organizations and personnel to enter Myanmar. This negative coping strategy and attitude has been condemned by the international community. Judging from the national conditions of Myanmar at that time, international human and financial assistance was obviously indispensable. However, the long-term sanctions policy and humanitarian attacks of the Western world have also made the Burmese military doubt their true intentions. "The disaster relief assistance proposed by the West has become the 'disaster relief dilemma' faced by the Burmese military government" <sup>43</sup>. The stalemate in the "disaster relief situation" made it impossible for the affected areas and victims in Myanmar to receive timely treatment. Amid the chaos and deadlock, ASEAN has taken the lead in breaking down communication and trust barriers in Myanmar that have hindered the flow of international aid workers into the country, it has played an important intermediary role between Myanmar and the international community in its attempt to persuade the military government to accept international humanitarian aid. After the Nargis cyclone disaster, ASEAN changed its usual cautious and wait-and-see attitude, and the member states acted very quickly. "On May 5, 2008, 48

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<sup>42</sup> Learning from Cyclone Nargis – A Case Study [M]. United Nations Environment Programme, 2009, p.4.

<sup>43</sup> He Shengda. "Myanmar in 2008: Nargis Storm, New Constitution Referendum and Political Development Trend." *Across Southeast Asia* 2 (2009): 39-45.

hours after the Nargis cyclone hit Myanmar, the ASEAN member states successfully provided relief assistance to the victims of Cyclone Nargis”<sup>44</sup>. In addition, ASEAN also actively acted as a communication bridge between the Burmese military government and international disaster relief personnel when Myanmar had doubts about Western aid.

Under the leadership of ASEAN, a relatively complete rescue mechanism for the victims of Cyclone Nargis was formed. With the efforts of the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force and the Tripartite Core Group, ASEAN, together with Myanmar and the United Nations, successfully launched the reconstruction and recovery plan after Cyclone Nargis. This is also the first time that ASEAN has presided over a large-scale disaster management and humanitarian assistance work, reflecting the enhancement of ASEAN's internal risk management capabilities. In general, ASEAN's response to the Nargis storm disaster was rapid and effective. In addition to providing normal material and human assistance to the disaster-stricken areas, ASEAN also actively eased the “disaster relief dilemma” of the Myanmar government. Among them, the "ASEAN way" based on consultation and negotiation has played a significant role, laying the foundation for the smooth start of the disaster relief and assistance plan and the successful promotion of post-disaster reconstruction work.

## **2. Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar and ASEAN's Passive Avoidance**

The performance of ASEAN in the Cyclone Nargis disaster is undoubtedly

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<sup>44</sup> A Humanitarian Call: The ASEAN Response to Cyclone Nargis[M]. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2010, p.18.

remarkable, and it once again proved to the world that the "ASEAN way" of consensus can deal with various incidents in the region, including the field of natural disasters that it has not covered, the international community also has many voices of praise for ASEAN's powerful actions. However, the Rohingya crisis that also happened in Myanmar has pushed ASEAN into a vortex of public opinion. ASEAN's passive avoidance attitude towards this matter even obliterated the good international image it had won before. Because relatively speaking, the frequent outbreaks of the Rohingya crisis and the subsequent regional refugee problem are more serious and more critical than the Nargis storm disaster.

In 2012, severe violent incidents occurred in central Rakhine State, and the large-scale displacement of Rohingya people caused serious troubles to neighboring countries. The Rohingya issue has gradually transformed from an internal matter of Myanmar to a regional and international crisis. In 2015, serious military conflicts and violent incidents occurred again in Rakhine State, Myanmar, and Rohingya refugees moved around without a fixed place. In October 2016, some Rohingya organized the Rohingya Salvation Army, which repeatedly attacked the Burmese army, "In August 2017, 150 terrorists attacked Rakhine State, causing many casualties. This triggered the Myanmar government to send troops to clean up the countryside on a large scale to eliminate terrorists, causing about 800,000 Rohingya to smuggle into Bangladesh"<sup>45</sup>. The severe refugee crisis triggered by the Rohingya issue has received widespread

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<sup>45</sup> <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%BD%97%E5%85%B4%E4%BA%9A%E4%BA%BA>, November 20, 2021.

international attention, and their plight in Myanmar has also received sympathy from people all over the world. Western countries and organizations have questioned the Myanmar government's claims of democracy and human rights, and severely condemned the Myanmar government's "persecution" against the Rohingya. The UN Security Council has repeatedly condemned the violence in Rakhine State and said it will pay close attention to "tramples and violations of human rights" in Myanmar.

ASEAN's attitude and response to the Rohingya crisis has been relatively negative, which has drawn criticism from the international community. It failed to stop the violence perpetrated by the Burmese government and failed to deal effectively with the resettlement of Rohingya refugees, it even avoided discussing the Rohingya issue in the formal proceedings. The criticism, however, may not come as a surprise to ASEAN, whose deliberate ignorance of the Rohingya refugee problem has been attributed to its strict adherence to the principle of non-intervention. This malady of being difficult to restrain member states has made ASEAN often condemned by the outside world in history. When ASEAN faced the Rohingya issue, the core principle of the "ASEAN way" - the principle of non-interference in internal affairs once again played a significant role.

Since its inception, ASEAN has avoided meddling in the internal affairs of member states, the Rohingya issue is considered a very sensitive political issue by ASEAN countries. In order to maintain regional peace and stability, no response is the most

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reasonable arrangement in ASEAN's view. It can be said that Myanmar's political stance is a decisive criterion for ASEAN to exercise collective power. On the Rohingya issue, Myanmar's official stance is very clear. It sent a clear message that it would not accept the use of the term 'Rohingya' in any bilateral or multilateral discussions"<sup>46</sup>, This has caused great resistance to ASEAN's use of the "ASEAN way" of negotiation methods. This term has not appeared in ASEAN's official statement, and ASEAN has not held any formal meetings to discuss the Rohingya crisis.

In short, ASEAN is powerless to deal with the frequent Rohingya crises, and the "ASEAN way" with the principle of non-intervention as its core is playing a role, which is also an important reason why it chooses to avoid it passively. The non-confrontational nature of the "ASEAN way" determines that it is impossible for ASEAN to impose force on the Myanmar government, not to mention that the Charter does not give ASEAN the power to impose sanctions and penalties

### **3. The limited role of ASEAN in the Thai-Cambodian Preah Vihear conflict**

Preah Vihear Temple is an ancient Khmer Hindu temple located on the border of Cambodia and Thailand, the ownership of the Preah Vihear Temple has been a point of contention between Thailand and Cambodia since the end of World War II. After the International Court of Hague issued a ruling in 1963 to award the Preah Vihear

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<sup>46</sup> Comparative Study of the Roles of ASEAN and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Responding to the Rohingya Crisis[J]. The Indonesian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 2017, 7(1), p.22.



Temple to Cambodia, the conflict between the two sides eased, but the conflict has not been eradicated. The surrounding area of the Preah Vihear Temple is still the center of contention between the two sides. In 2008, due to the approval of Cambodia's application to list the Preah Vihear Temple as a world cultural heritage, Thailand expressed that it was difficult to accept it, and large-scale protests broke out in the country. The disagreement led to a military deployment between the two countries in the disputed area (near the temple), and relations between the two countries have deteriorated sharply.

This tense situation has attracted the attention of ASEAN, and the Thai-Cambodian Preah Vihear Temple conflict will often appear on the agenda of various ASEAN meetings. In July 2008, following an informal working dinner at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Singapore's Foreign Minister Yeo Eng Boon issued a statement saying: "ASEAN foreign ministers were briefed by Cambodia and Thailand on the situation in the area around Preah Vihear Temple and noted with concern that we urge both sides to exercise maximum restraint and in the spirit of ASEAN solidarity and in the spirit of good-neighborliness, resolve this issue amicably"<sup>47</sup>. In other words, ASEAN's position on the Thai-Cambodian conflict is: it is hoped that both parties to the conflict will exercise restraint and resolve the issue in a peaceful and friendly

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<sup>47</sup> "Transcript of Door-stop Interview by Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo on the Temple of Preah Vihear after the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting Informal Working Dinner, 20 July 2008", Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, December 26, 2021.

<https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2008/07/Transcript-of-Doorstop-Interview-by-Minister-for-Foreign-Affairs-George-Yeo-on-the-Temple-of-Preah-V>

manner and through bilateral consultations, while ASEAN will still act in accordance with the "ASEAN Way" centered on the principle of non-interference, will not take the initiative to intervene in disputes between the two countries. After Thailand became the chair of ASEAN, this dispute gradually faded out of the ASEAN agenda.

In February 2011, the armed conflict between the two armies near the temple escalated, and some heavy military weapons were even used, so the Cambodian side formally sent a letter to the United Nations, accusing Thailand of violating the "United Nations Charter" and the 1962 decision of the International Court of Justice, requesting The United Nations holds an emergency meeting on the Thai-Cambodia border conflict. However, after the United Nations meeting, it was decided to refer the issue back to ASEAN. ASEAN has also begun to pay attention to the escalating border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. The military confrontation between the two sides has violated the principle of ASEAN's internal affairs management. "On February 7 and 8, Foreign Minister Natalegawa of Indonesia, who holds the rotating presidency of ASEAN, made shuttle visits to Phnom Penh and Bangkok respectively, urging the two countries to resolve disputes through bilateral negotiations"<sup>48</sup>. On February 22, the ten ASEAN countries held an emergency meeting of foreign ministers in Jakarta to conduct informal consultations on the Thai-Cambodian border conflict. The meeting reached an agreement on the dispatch of an observation mission by the chairman country Indonesia to the Thai-Cambodian border area. Even so, since

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<sup>48</sup> Chen Liping. A Study on the Dispute between Preah Vihear Ancient Temple Town in Cambodia and Thailand[D]. Fujian: Fujian Normal University, 2014: 37

Cambodia did not believe that ASEAN was capable of handling the dispute, it continued to seek help from the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. ASEAN's role in the Thai-Cambodian conflict was limited, and the crisis ended with the ruling of the International Court of Justice.

To sum up, comparing the responses of ASEAN in the three cases, it can be concluded that the "ASEAN way" has the following important characteristics in alleviating internal conflicts: first of all, the principle of non-intervention is still the core of the "ASEAN Way". It is an important standard for ASEAN to deal with sensitive issues. ASEAN's negative attitude on the Rohingya issue in Myanmar is precisely because of its strict adherence to this principle; Secondly, even when dealing with internal affairs, ASEAN has a very obvious tendency to rely on the United Nations to jointly resolve conflicts, which also exposes its disadvantages that it is difficult to resolve conflicts independently; Finally, when conflicts arise among member states, the "ASEAN way" of following the principle of non-intervention and using bilateral consultation as a means has the upper hand. Whether ASEAN intervenes depends on whether member states have such needs. In the Preah Vihear Temple dispute, Thailand did not want ASEAN to intervene from the beginning to the end, and Cambodia mainly sought help from the United Nations or national courts. Therefore, ASEAN was very passive in this incident, and the "ASEAN way" played a very limited role.

## **Section 2: ASEAN uses the "ASEAN way" to deal with external challenges**

### **1. ASEAN's considerations under the "Indo-Pacific" pattern and its**

### **maintenance of the "ASEAN way"**

In recent years, as the term Indo-Pacific has gradually been applied to diplomatic and security fields by countries such as Japan, the United States, India and Australia, "Indo-Pacific" has begun to transform from a concept of maritime geography into a concept of geopolitics, and the Indo-Pacific region is increasingly inclined to become the center of the global political power game. This change in the situation has also brought new challenges to ASEAN. In the face of the frequent use of the Indo-Pacific concept, the introduction of the Indo-Pacific strategy of various countries, and the expansion of Sino-US competition, etc., ASEAN needs to re-establish a foreign arrangement that is beneficial to itself, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific came into being.

The rise of the "Indo-Pacific" concept and the introduction of the Indo-Pacific strategies of various countries have impacted the ASEAN-centered Asia-Pacific regional framework.

ASEAN is worried that the Indo-Pacific strategy led by the United States will weaken its centrality. From its perspective, the loss of centrality will directly lead to the increase of ASEAN's passivity in international interactions. It will also be marginalized in the great power competition. Only by maintaining the ASEAN-centered regional cooperation framework can the "ASEAN way" be continued and maintained. Therefore, the rise of the "Indo-Pacific" concept has also damaged the external operation of the "ASEAN way" to a certain extent. In addition,

the ideology and confrontation in the US Indo-Pacific strategy also make Southeast Asian countries feel uneasy. The increasingly severe Sino-US conflict situation makes ASEAN face strong pressure to "choose sides". Weakened in the process of the Sino-US game"<sup>49</sup>. In order to maintain its own institutional power and the ASEAN-centered regional framework, and to play a leading role in the new regional cooperation framework, ASEAN published the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" in June 2019, expressing its vision for the Indo-Pacific region, the publication of the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" also marks that ASEAN has accepted the concept of "Indo-Pacific". In June 2019, at the 34th ASEAN Summit, leaders of various countries officially adopted the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific". The "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" envisages the goals, principles, cooperation fields and mechanisms of ASEAN's participation in Indo-Pacific affairs, emphasizes the principle of inclusiveness and the importance of dialogue and cooperation, and decides to continue to use relevant mechanisms led by ASEAN to maintain ASEAN as the center regional structure. It largely shows a continuation of the "ASEAN Way", Noting that ASEAN-led multilateral mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6 and the East Asia Summit will continue to function, ASEAN will not create new cooperation mechanisms and frameworks, instead, the existing regional mechanisms and norms formulated in accordance with the "ASEAN Way" should be extended to the affairs of the

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<sup>49</sup> Guo Yanjun. Today, the value of ASEAN is more prominent [N]. Global Times, 2021-7-12(15).

Indo-Pacific region.

In general, the publication of the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" reflects ASEAN's judgment and response to changes in the regional situation. Faced with the challenge of the Indo-Pacific concept to ASEAN's centrality, ASEAN has proactively formulated an Indo-Pacific vision that is conducive to its own development. Actively maintain its dominant position in the regional cooperation framework and the "ASEAN way" that has spread to the outside world.

## **2. ASEAN's "ASEAN Way" in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic**

At the beginning of 2020, the new crown pneumonia epidemic broke out all over the world. This new type of coronavirus was named "COVID-19" by the World Health Organization. The outbreak it sparked spread rapidly across the globe, causing massive fatality and infection rates. The outbreak has become the most complex and challenging crisis in the world, it is not just an unconventional public health crisis, but also a global crisis that shakes the global order, exposes system flaws, and endangers the development of the world economy. Before the outbreak of the new crown pneumonia epidemic, there was a regional health cooperation mechanism within ASEAN that mainly used meetings and dialogues, and aimed to coordinate all parties to reach a consensus. To a large extent, this way of health security cooperation continues the "ASEAN way", which was formed during the fight against the SARS epidemic in ASEAN countries in 2003, and is also reflected in ASEAN's governance of the new crown pneumonia epidemic. On January 3, 2020, after the health

department of the ASEAN Secretariat received a report of a pneumonia cluster of unknown cause from China, Immediately send a message to the meeting of senior officials of the Ministry of Health and Development, and activate existing regional mechanisms to detect, prevent and respond to the new crown pneumonia epidemic. On February 14, ASEAN held the ASEAN summit on the new crown epidemic and passed (the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19). In the declaration, ASEAN pledged to strengthen cooperation on public health measures, as well as the provision of medicines, medical supplies and equipment, the declaration "provides ASEAN with a unique opportunity to demonstrate its collective care for each other and its ambition to build a people-centred ASEAN."<sup>50</sup> However, due to the limited funds and capabilities of ASEAN in deploying anti-epidemic materials, dispatching expert teams and supervising the implementation of policies, The focus on domestic anti-epidemic has also led to the lack of mutual enthusiasm among member states. At the national level, ASEAN member states have adopted different epidemic prevention policies according to their own conditions. According to the local virus transmission situation, loose or strict isolation and control measures are adopted. Countries independently controlled the epidemic, and there were more dialogues and consultations but less collective action. These are the characteristics of the early ASEAN epidemic prevention and control. In order to compensate for its own

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<sup>50</sup> Frederick Kliem. ASEAN and the EU amidst COVID-19: overcoming the self-fulfilling prophecy of realism[J]. Asia Europe Journal, 2021(19), p.386.

insufficient resources and limited coordination capacity, ASEAN actively seeks cooperation with external countries to fight the epidemic, and uses ASEAN-centered multilateral mechanisms to ease the pressure of the epidemic within the region. During this period, the "ASEAN+3" mechanism of cooperation between ASEAN and China, Japan and South Korea has been quite effective.

Overall, facing the impact of the new crown pneumonia epidemic, ASEAN responded very quickly. It takes the "ASEAN Way" of consultation and consensus as its guiding principle, responds to the epidemic with a positive attitude, coordinates with other countries internally, and strengthens communication and cooperation externally. A relatively effective regional safety and health cooperation path has been formed. In order to curb the epidemic, on the one hand, ASEAN has raised the importance and priority of strengthening the response to the new crown pneumonia epidemic through measures such as holding a health and safety meeting, issuing a joint statement and a special declaration on the new crown pneumonia epidemic. Internally, the pace of anti-epidemic was unified, prompting countries to make corresponding political commitments, and shaping a regional consensus for cooperation in the fight against the epidemic; On the other hand, ASEAN also promptly launched a cross-regional dialogue and coordination mechanism to deal with the epidemic. The ASEAN+3 cooperation mechanism centered on ASEAN is also an important part of the joint fight against the epidemic in the Asian region. All countries agree that cross-border interagency and intersectoral cooperation is necessary to curb the spread of the new



crown virus.

However, due to the limitations of traditional cooperation mechanisms, many agreements issued by ASEAN during this period have not been implemented concretely, and the characteristics of individual countries have always run through the overall epidemic prevention process in Southeast Asia. However, it should not be overlooked that the ASEAN cooperation path in fighting the epidemic under the guidance of the "ASEAN Way" has still made positive contributions to improving the global public health governance structure, breaking through the international anti-epidemic dilemma, and promoting a consensus on cooperation in fighting the epidemic. The prevention and control of the disease provided a rather effective "ASEAN case".

### **3.ASEAN’s attitude towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022 and the “ASEAN way”**

Tensions in Ukraine have continued to escalate since Russian President Vladimir Putin announced recognition of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic. On February 24, 2022, Putin delivered a nationally televised speech, deciding to launch a special military operation in the Donbas region, and the Russian army immediately launched a war to attack Ukraine. Bombed several cities and their defense facilities, including Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. Later, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky declared that the entire territory of Ukraine had entered a state of war, and the war between the two countries broke out in full swing. After the outbreak

of the war, Western society generally condemned Russia's invasion, and many countries imposed unprecedented sanctions on Russia, which triggered the Russian financial crisis in 2022.

ASEAN expresses concern over tensions between Russia, Ukraine. On February 26, 2022, ASEAN foreign ministers issued a statement on the situation in Ukraine. The foreign ministers of various countries first expressed their concern about the situation in Ukraine, and then called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and try their best to conduct dialogue through various channels. And resolve the issue peacefully in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. However, regarding the Russia-Ukraine situation, the positions of ASEAN countries are not unified, and their views and attitudes towards the two sides are also different. Most ASEAN countries remain neutral on the Ukraine issue, calling for a peaceful resolution of the dispute. Singapore and Myanmar have become the two countries with the toughest attitudes in the region: Singapore has imposed economic sanctions on Russia, saying that Russia's behavior threatens international law and the Charter of the United Nations. And this is the foundation of Singapore's survival as a small country; while Myanmar has clearly expressed its understanding and sanctions against Russia, which is inseparable from the close bilateral economic and trade relations between Myanmar and Russia.

It is precisely because of this difference in positions that ASEAN has so far issued two statements on the situation in Ukraine, with an obvious neutral tendency. For

example, in its statement, it did not find clear words such as "aggression", "condemnation" and "sovereignty", but strictly defined the Ukrainian crisis as a "military armed confrontation". And focus on urging all parties to dialogue. Even so, ASEAN has not relaxed its concerns about the situation in Russia and Ukraine. This is a conflict that the entire international community must take seriously. It may make ASEAN countries rethink current international relations and how to get along with major powers as a weak party.

In this situation, the "ASEAN Way" does not seem to have had any impact. The distant regions and the differences in the positions of ASEAN countries make ASEAN have no other response except to emphasize neutrality. However, ASEAN's upholding of international law and the principles of the UN Charter, and its urging of all parties to resolve disputes through peaceful means (dialogue and consultation) all embody the important principles of the "ASEAN Way". In addition, apart from being concerned about the situation in Russia and Ukraine, ASEAN countries also attach importance to their discourse and influence in international security affairs. Since its establishment, ASEAN has formed its own way of maintaining regional security and peace in the process of getting along with and coping with major power competition for a long time, that is, the "ASEAN way". In the situation between Russia and Ukraine, ASEAN's attitude and practices also reflect "The ASEAN Way".

### **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, the "ASEAN way" occupies an important position in the history of

ASEAN's development. It not only maintains peace in the region, but also makes great contributions to ASEAN regional cooperation and the construction of the ASEAN community. It is one of the key reasons for ASEAN's sustainability and success. Since the 1990s, the effectiveness and limitations of the "ASEAN Way" have been the focus of academic discussions, which has led to a large number of "ASEAN Way" research results focusing on a certain case or a limited period of time. The historical context of the formation, development and evolution of the "ASEAN Way" has gradually become blurred. Many scholars admit that the "ASEAN way" is process-driven rather than result-driven, that is to say, the different behaviors of ASEAN at various stages will directly affect the "ASEAN way" at that time, and it will change with the development of ASEAN. It is very necessary to clarify the development context of the "ASEAN Way".

The evolution process of the "ASEAN way" needs to be explored from the history of ASEAN. In addition to examining the integration and differences within ASEAN, it is also necessary to explore the development of ASEAN's external relations and its dialogue and cooperation mechanisms. Based on these histories, the author roughly divides the evolution of the "ASEAN Way" into four stages: the initial formation stage of the "ASEAN Way" from 1967 to 1976; The stages of development and application of the "ASEAN Way" from 1977 to 1991; The challenge, transformation and diffusion stage of the "ASEAN Way" from 1992 to 2007; The stage in which the "ASEAN Way" will continue to function from 2008 to 2022.

Through this study on the evolution of the "ASEAN Way", the author finds that although the scope and framework of the "ASEAN way" are relatively vague, however, its core connotations—the principle of non-interference and the principle of consensus have not changed significantly. Sometimes ASEAN will interpret and apply them flexibly, but there has never been a disruptive change to it.

It can be seen from this that, for ASEAN, the interests of member states and the internal cohesion of the alliance are the important basis for ASEAN to exercise power and use the "ASEAN way". Advancing fundamental changes in the "ASEAN way" is very difficult, because for ASEAN countries, it is impossible for the EU countries to give up part of their sovereignty in Southeast Asia, and the future "ASEAN way" will still play different roles according to the different needs of ASEAN at each stage.

At present, although the "ASEAN way" encourages ASEAN to deal with some controversial issues and avoids these issues from destroying ASEAN's cooperation process, but when it comes to the real solution stage, the role ASEAN can play is still limited, and the interests of member states will also limit ASEAN and the "ASEAN way" to carry out thorough reforms. Therefore, it is unlikely that the "ASEAN way" will undergo drastic changes in the future. However, although there are still many voices criticizing the "ASEAN way" in today's international community, judging from the development process of the "ASEAN way" and ASEAN's strong dependence on this way, in the future, the "ASEAN way" will still play an important role in the history of ASEAN, and there will still be positive interactions and influences between

ASEAN and the "ASEAN way".



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