

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2024-06-07

Deposited version:

Publisher Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Seixas, P., Mendes, N., Lobner, N. & Lam, K. (2023). Disputing centralities amidst Covid-19: The triangular relationship of ASEAN, China and Timor-Leste. In Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes, and Nadine Lobner (Ed.), *The paradox of ASEAN centrality: Timor-Leste betwixt and between*. (pp. 157-182).: Brill.

Further information on publisher's website:

10.1163/9789004522923_009

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Seixas, P., Mendes, N., Lobner, N. & Lam, K. (2023). Disputing centralities amidst Covid-19: The triangular relationship of ASEAN, China and Timor-Leste. In Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes, and Nadine Lobner (Ed.), *The paradox of ASEAN centrality: Timor-Leste betwixt and between*. (pp. 157-182).: Brill., which has been published in final form at https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004522923_009. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Disputing Centralities amidst Covid-19: The Triangular Relationship of ASEAN, China and Timor-Leste

*Paulo Castro Seixas, Nuno Canas Mendes and Nadine Lobner
in Collaboration with Kaian Lam*

1 Introduction

As Covid-19 has grown into a pandemic marking 2020, international relations dynamics find themselves steeped in a significant rearrangement of previous power constellations. In this research, we want to explore the building (and reorganization) of regional centrality in the midst of a pandemic crisis, looking at ASEAN and China and their longstanding silent dispute about their geostrategic and international power dynamics (Kuok, 2020). This dispute, as we propose, should be analyzed through Timor-Leste as a middle-ground of negotiation/middleman between global powers, understanding, on the one hand, the small country's long history with ASEAN while standing on the threshold of the grouping as a member yet to be and, on the other hand, its bilateral relations with China which have been strengthened since Timor-Leste's independence in 2002.

We want to explore this issue of the rise of new regional dynamics in the midst of a pandemic crisis through two main narratives (the Western narrative and the Chinese narrative), through which we aim to understand regional centrality construction and negotiations from a new perspective. We ask if there might be a 'straw man fallacy' (Walton, 1996) prevailing in the struggle for power positioning between ASEAN and China through Timor-Leste as the middleman. A straw man fallacy draws on the potential arbitrary controversy that is built towards the opposite position, which we propose to be the case of these two global actors through the allegedly 'invisible' entity of Timor-Leste. The straw man, unlike a 'real' actor, cannot respond to differentiated objections (or even reject them), which is the case in considering the small country's fragile position within the regional as much as the world context.

This issue emerges primarily through the relationship between Timor-Leste and ASEAN, which the small country neither officially belongs to, nor is officially excluded from. In the protracted struggle to join the grouping (officially

since 2011), several narratives have discussed why no decision has been made by ASEAN yet, as the supposedly central actor in Southeast Asia. In these debates, the argument of ASEAN's fear of China's economic power in the region (and globally) is gaining ground. When following former discourses on this complex issue (Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019), it appears to be what is understood through the 'straw man fallacy' outlined above: Timor-Leste's ongoing membership as one of the last threads for preventing a centrality clash within the region (and perhaps on a global scale).

Understanding that the roles of regional power actors (such as the case of ASEAN and China) are being questioned now more than ever, amidst a pandemic, we target this issue from the perspective of bilateral and multilateral relations. We understand Timor-Leste as a relevant case study which stands in a complex relationship with both actors based on several interwoven indicators, such as economic, political and sociocultural. These relations we pinpoint through **a.** *ASEAN's centrality in Southeast Asia, considering Timor-Leste's positioning within (or outside) the grouping;* **b.** *the question of China's growth dynamics and its bilateral relations with Timor-Leste for reinforcing its regional/international presence.*

As the spread of the pandemic opens up a new interpretation realm, we raise a set of questions: Is Covid-19 creating new international relations dynamics in Southeast Asia? Is the return of sovereignties making the pace of bilateral relations prevalent over multilateral ones? Is Covid-19 showing new evidence in the dispute between ASEAN and China? To what extent do the triangular relations between Timor-Leste, China and ASEAN present evidence for addressing these questions?

We intend to discuss this framework through the current state of the art on Covid-19 with Timor-Leste as a 'golden link' in the chain between ASEAN and China's economic and geopolitical power positioning. This research is based on a literature review and netnography, aimed at exploring and interpreting two opposing perspectives: the western language literature domain (English, Portuguese) and the Chinese language literature domain. We propose that cultural translations of the ecumene are needed at the crossroads of both narratives. Our aim is to contribute to an up-to-date discourse on the dynamics of regional-international centrality construction (the building of different ecumene) reinforced through a global crisis.

This chapter is built in three parts: first, we present the current western state of the art on centrality dynamics in SEA, which primarily considers:

- i. ASEAN and Chinese centrality dynamics in SEA
- ii. its links to Timor-Leste and
- iii. the current Covid-19 scenario.

Next, we present the crossroads of China's perspective, which focuses on its bilateral relations with Timor-Leste. Finally, we will analyze the Western narrative in comparison to the Chinese narrative in order to understand what the latter may imply for the former and vice versa.

2 Centrality Dynamics in Southeast Asia: A Crossroads Perspective

As regional centralities, amidst a pandemic crisis, are being called into question now more than ever, we are using this research to bring the growing relevance of ASEAN and China into our research focus. In recent years, the quest for ASEAN's centrality has been increasingly debated through the grouping's fear of China's rapid growth within the region (and further on, globally). Considering this issue through a specific case, Timor-Leste, we understand that the small country is often used as a (possibly strategic) middleman between both global players, bearing in mind that Timor-Leste's protracted membership procedure seems, on the ASEAN side, to be increasingly dependent on the country's ties with China (Chongkittavorn, 2019; Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019). Understanding that China itself is seen as a major economic counteractor with rapid regional growth, ASEAN's objections to admitting Timor-Leste as its 11th member state increase. It is expected that if the small country joins the grouping, China's global influence through its strong presence in, and close ties to, Timor-Leste will also increase (Ortuoste, 2019). But how does this western perspective stand in opposition to the Chinese one? As we understand this as a relevant domain yet to be tackled, we will analyze these two narratives based on the literature we reviewed through a comparative analysis, demonstrated through a new emergent perspective: Covid-19 and its effect on regional centrality clashes.

2.1 *The Western Narrative: A Quest for Centrality in a Triangular Relationship*

Considering the state of the art, we first explored the quest for ASEAN's regional centrality role, a pressing issued in international relations debates of recent years. ASEAN, understood as a core regional (/global) actor, has been continuously questioned in terms of its power positioning, leadership role and economic strengths and weaknesses (He, 2006; Sudo, 2006; Leviter, 2011; Frost, 2013; Caballero-Anthony, 2014; Croissant, 2016). More recently, the regional grouping has been explored from the perspective of its sociocultural interplay and centrality construction through the case of Timor-Leste on its threshold (e.g. Acharya, 2017; Arifuddin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Raksaseri & Boonlert, 2019;

Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). Literature continues to be produced on the quest for ASEAN's centrality construction as a counterpart to other strong presences of regional-international actors in Southeast Asia, as is the case with China's growing influence in the region (Natalegawa, 2018; Ortuoste, 2019; CSIS, 2020).

When considering the latest debates on the quest for centrality in Southeast Asia, the pandemic context gains prominence. Sovereignties seem to return, which creates new consequences such as the rise of (economic) rivalries between global powers (CSIS, 2020; Saramago, 2020; Kloet, Lin & Chow, 2020). As we are pinpointing this issue through a case study, Timor-Leste, literature on the relationship between ASEAN and the small country was being exponentially produced in the pre-Covid-19 era, analyzing the grouping's relevance and strength as a central actor when dealing with regional-international issues (Siapno, 2014; Strating, 2019; Hooi, 2019; Arifuddin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019; Branco, 2019; Chen, 2020; Seixas, Mendes & Lobner, 2019). In the past few months, this issue has been increasingly discussed through the emergence of a new perspective: Covid-19, a renegotiation of geostrategic centrality dynamics visible through the case of Timor-Leste (Wight, 2020; Mulakala & Ji, 2020, Zhang, 2020).

More and more attention is being paid to ASEAN's challenging relationship with China in scientific discourses, considering the different efforts made by both actors to fight the pandemic regionally (and globally) (Jianguo, 2020; Dermawan, 2020; Rakhmat, 2020; Mulakala & Ji, 2020; Baretto Soares, 2020). As literature is expanding, there seems to be a consistent narrative on China's support in fighting the Covid-19 outbreak within a far-reaching domain, analyzed through several approaches, including the argument that China's soft power strategy and 'mask diplomacy'/health diplomacy remain in the forefront (Chen & Molter, 2020; Zhang, 2020).

Our proposal is that the issue of a regeneration of regional-international centrality between ASEAN and China, amplified through Covid-19, can be demonstrated through the case of Timor-Leste. We have created two sub-narratives within the western umbrella narrative on the triangular relationship between ASEAN, China and Timor-Leste:

- i. ASEAN's centrality role in a Covid-19 context: the case of Timor-Leste
- ii. China's foreign diplomacy to fight the pandemic/Bilateral relations with Timor-Leste

As the debate on this issue has only arisen since the beginning of 2020, with the outbreak of Covid-19, we have, up to the current state of the art, found 36 articles on this domain, mainly in online newspapers (e.g. The Diplomat;

Lowy Institute; Observador; etc.) and international report platforms/forums (WHO; ASEAN; USAID; Asian Development Bank; Chinese Observatorium). Next, we will present both narrative sets in order to continue with our comparative analysis.

2.1.1 ASEAN's Centrality Role in a Covid-19 Context: The Case of Timor-Leste

In the first cluster, 'ASEAN's role in a Covid-19 context: the case of Timor-Leste', the prevailing narrative is that the grouping does not have the major resources and capacities needed to expand its foreign aid (Neves, 2020; Wight, 2020). Timor-Leste is a rather absent indicator within these debates, where it seems that the small country is rarely considered in the grouping's support and efforts to fight the pandemic. Rather, ASEAN is acting exclusively within the group, while also receiving partnership aid from the USA and China (OECD, 2020). Ongoing discourses are framing ASEAN's centrality role within the pandemic context as rather weak decision-making dynamics. These debates have shown that Covid-19 only seems to increase the lack of collective actions and responses by the grouping for strengthening regional coordination and efforts (Koh, 2020; Kuok, 2020). This may have a direct influence on Timor-Leste's positioning on the threshold of ASEAN, implying that there most likely will not be a final answer to its inclusion in the near future (considering that it has never been one of the grouping's core priorities) (Neves, 2020). On Timor-Leste's side, the absence of ASEAN centrality during the pandemic crisis may well play a role in the priority of regional relationships.

These flashpoints call the grouping's geostrategic dynamics into question, bearing in mind that ASEAN's next steps will come under scrutiny at a time when its regional effort is needed more than ever. To understand this context through the grouping's current emergency approach strategies, we can take a closer look at what has been done so far within regional parameters. As ASEAN invoked its 'centrality' for strengthening cooperation ties within a global context, there was an ASEAN Special Summit on Covid-19 (April 14) in which the coordination with 'dialogue partners' such as China, Japan and South Korea (ASEAN + 3) was enhanced (Dermawan, 2020). An additional cooperation network was launched linking the ASEAN Emergency Operations Center, the ASEAN Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Center, the ASEAN Bio-Diaspora Virtual Center and the ASEAN Center for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management. Furthermore, an ASEAN-EU Ministerial Conference (March 30) and a special meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers on Covid-19 were held in order to strengthen regional cooperation. An environment of a

multilateral 'dialogue' has been praised in contrast to the tendency towards isolationism, although the difficulty is above all in the coordination legislation and in the sharing of information. (Saramago, 2020; Dermawan, 2020; Kuok, 2020).

Going back a few years in time, in 2003, the SARS virus hit the region hard. For this reason, ASEAN created an institutional device for coping with health emergencies at that time (network for public health emergencies/Malaysia, Regional public health laboratories network/Thailand, ASEAN Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Center and others). With this institutional establishment of 2003, there is already some degree of preparedness for coping with the pandemic outbreak (Koh, 2020; Green, Searight, Buchan, et al., 2020). Despite these previous preparations, the grouping seems to hold its leadership role rather in the background, considering the seemingly absent interventions as seen in media. This reinforces the issue of its actual centrality role, which is well demonstrated through the case of Timor-Leste, considering that ASEAN remains absent in the support for the small country on its threshold.

2.1.2 Chinese Foreign Diplomacy to Fight the Pandemic

The second cluster, 'Chinese foreign diplomacy to fight the pandemic: the case of Timor-Leste' discloses the narrative that China is on the forefront of global actors providing aid to the small country for fighting Covid-19. Considering its strong foreign aid strategies for supporting its neighbors (and beyond) through financial aid, human resources and medical health devices, China is by now understood as the main global partner in fighting the pandemic (Zhang, 2020; Jianguo, 2020; Dermawan, 2020; Rakhmat, 2020; Mulakala & Ji, 2020; USAID, 2020). This discourse is demonstrated as based on diplomatic bilateral and multilateral relations on one side, and an attributed soft power strategy called 'health diplomacy' on the other, through which the country seems to be aiming to reinforce its ties with several nations on an international scale.

As the debate around 'health diplomacy' further reveals, there is a widespread western opinion about China's strategic use of the pandemic for its own ends, through strongly reinforcing its foreign aid and diplomatic relations in order to strengthen its ties on a global scale (Kloet, Lin & Chow, 2020; Zhung, 2020). This is in contrast to ASEAN's rather weak efforts and resources for establishing a similar endeavor to fight the pandemic beyond its own borders. In these discussions, the relationship between China and Timor-Leste comes to the fore, revealing that China is Timor-Leste's most committed foreign aid partner in the fight against the pandemic (as the first country that provided a response for building on a strategy to fight Covid-19 in the small country

[Baretto Soares, 2020]). This gives rise to a significant western perception of China using the current crisis as a new diplomatic opportunity, meaning that the challenges established through the crisis seem to offer new chances for a power and influence competition between ‘traditional and new players’ (Zhang, 2020). Nevertheless, what remains as core within western debates is that China provides intense internal as much external aid in order to boost its economic power positioning on a global scale (Kloet, Lin & Chow, 2020).

This issue is heavily emphasized in the debates on ASEAN’s absent support to its member yet to be (Timor-Leste), whilst China is continuously strengthening its relationship with the small country through its effective cooperation and aid in the fight against the pandemic. As the deputy chairman of the Chinese international development cooperation agency said, China’s pandemic assistance overseas is the country’s ‘most concentrated and wide-ranging emergency humanitarian action’ in history, ‘offering such support ... is crucial for China to ... live up to the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind’ (Boqing, 2020 in Zhang, 2020).

2.1.2.1 *China, ASEAN and Timor-Leste: A Triangular Relationship*

When looking at the centrality debate within Southeast Asia in a Covid-19 context, we propose Timor-Leste should serve as a relevant case to be observed. As the small nation has officially been trying to become ASEAN’s 11th member state since 2011 (and unofficially, since 1975), its relationship with ASEAN has been discussed more intensively in recent years. This issue has been attracting more and more attention due to the small country’s diplomatic relations with China, which happens to be an obstacle for its ASEAN membership (Ortuoste, 2019). Significantly, in recent years ASEAN has shown its constraint towards Timor-Leste through its fear of China’s growing influence in the region (Chongkittavorn, 2019; Tobin, 2019; Ortuoste, 2019). As China already has a strong presence in the region, Timor-Leste might well be the ‘straw that broke the camel’s back’ for opening the doors for China’s major economic and geopolitical rise.

2020 has brought a new dynamic into this triangular relationship. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, China’s strong foreign aid during the current pandemic crisis may lead to a balancing of powers within the region. To shed more light on this case, we will present a brief outline of what has been narrated so far in western discourses on Timor-Leste’s triangular positioning within the current pandemic context.

As the relationship between China and Timor-Leste is strongly emphasized in the most recent literature on the pandemic context and centrality in SEA

(Horta, 2020; CSIS, 2020), ASEAN remains silent on the matter of foreign aid to support the small country, where, as outlined earlier in this chapter, China remains in the forefront. Besides the aid of China, Timor-Leste has been receiving minor support from its neighbor Australia, slightly more help from the European Union, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations and the United States (USAID) (ADB, 2020; EEAS, 2020; Galloway, 2020; USAID, 2020). Timor-Leste's own capacity in terms of financial and human resources is seen as comparatively weak for fighting the pandemic, even though case numbers seem to remain low in comparison to its Southeast Asian neighbors and the global scale (specifically Indonesia, which has the highest number of cases in the region) (Agencia Lusa, 2020; Horta, 2020).

Although most sources narrated the Covid-19 situation in the small country as rather controlled at the present moment, important economic consequences are arising for the small nation. According to *The Diplomat* (Li-Li-Chen, 2020), 'The Timorese economy will also go into recession due to its high dependency on oil and trade'. Considering a statement from an Asian Development Bank (ADB) report, the per capita GDP growth in Timor-Leste is expected to be -3.7 percent in 2020 (ADB, 2020). Such outcomes will most likely have a major impact on the country's aspirations for future partnerships and its already critical assigned inclusion in ASEAN. Despite the global systemic effects of this crisis and the urgent need to rethink all the institutional logics within the region, the context is not auspicious for Timor-Leste being admitted to the grouping in the near future. As Covid-19 has spread drastically in the past year, it has also become a crucial turning point for ASEAN's regional dynamics. As the literature shows, the pandemic scenario is just another source of major concern for the grouping's centrality dynamics, which are, within the western narrative, seen as the opposite to how China has been dealing with the pandemic outbreak. China is increasingly portrayed as using Covid-19 as a source for strategic growth and expansion through its foreign aid dynamics, in order to gain regional-international centrality (Zhang, 2020, Kuok, 2020).

2.1.2.2 *Discussion*

The western narrative takes a close look at the divergent approaches from both ASEAN and China in the fight against the pandemic. Whilst China seems to be clearly in the forefront in foreign cooperation and aid, ASEAN remains in the background of the discourse. Nevertheless, when considering the role of ASEAN in dealing with the pandemic regionally (and globally), its multilateral approach and cooperation with international players for a regional pandemic force strategy attracts more attention (Saramago, 2020). Yet, bearing in

mind that Covid-19 has highlighted the differences between ASEAN member states and stressed the need for cooperation within the group, its centrality is being tested. Its capacity to give an effective regional answer to the immediate, predictable and unpredictable problems caused by the pandemic continues to come under heavy criticism in the ongoing discourse (LUSA, 2020; Son, 2020; Saramago, 2020). This is in line with its preexisting critical conditions of human development, political affairs, poverty and economic instability (despite Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia's high ranking [UN human development index, 2020]). Considering these pre-Covid-19 circumstances, it comes as no surprise that if ASEAN does not have the capacity to stabilize its own member states, foreign aid measures to other countries cannot be provided (Son, 2020). This brings China's role into the fore again, particularly its general assertiveness during this period (portrayed as *mask diplomacy/health diplomacy*), which is a major challenge for the grouping's centrality role (Chen, 2020; Dermawan, 2020).

Despite these existing discussions, we see relevance in asking what the practical results of the current crisis are going to look like in the context of ASEAN's regional constitution, where China is in the center of the debate. Hence, as the predominant data from the current discourse reveal, there is a widespread assumption that China aims to bring about the balancing of powers within the region, thus widening its sphere of influence over ASEAN's member states (Kuok, 2020). A relevant indicator within this issue is to what extent individual reactions of ASEAN states will impact a 'new hierarchy' of powers within the region. It needs to be understood how far the citizens of the member states trust or consider ASEAN to be a valuable resource during a global state of emergency and whether its political and economic perspectives remain centered on the elite (Dermawan, 2020).

We also ask how far the reactions of each actor towards the pandemic could impact a new 'hierarchy of powers' and regional asymmetries. As mentioned earlier, ASEAN's multilateral cooperation and mechanisms for fighting the pandemic have been reinforced, yet its responses remain weak in comparison to Chinese dynamics (Saramago, 2020; Horta, 2020). This is clearly in play in the case of Timor-Leste, considering that ASEAN's expression of support for the country on its threshold seems to be predominantly absent. As the impacts of the crisis remain to be evaluated, ASEAN's integration dynamics also continue to come under question and criticism (Hayat, 2020). Considering that Timor-Leste's membership has never been on the top of the grouping's agenda, this scenario of new priorities reinforces the shift away from responding to this longstanding issue. This is problematic when considering that effective

regional and international aid is essential for the small nation state at a time of a global pandemic. However, this matter provides new (and mounting) grounds for the silent dispute between ASEAN and China, considering the grouping's fear of China's geopolitical and economic growth.

Next, we will present the Chinese narrative on its bilateral relations with Timor-Leste with a focus on the pandemic context, for the ensuing analysis of both centralities (ASEAN and China) in the region.

2.2 *Chinese Narrative*

In an era of 'major country' discourses,¹ Timor-Leste, despite its strategic geographic location, is an unlikely heavyweight player in international relations. Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, Timor-Leste finds itself straddling ASEAN and China, the former representing multilateralism and the latter symbolizing bilateralism. According to Chinese reports, different foreign country leaders have expressed high regard for Chinese actions, through which China has demonstrated its 'sentiment and commitment as a responsible major country'.² Referencing recent Chinese press releases and media reports, we review the actions and words from the Chinese side with regard to Timor-Leste. We also raise important questions that western scholarship may have missed due to linguistic or cultural barriers. Chinese texts have been translated to facilitate comprehension. We seek to understand the propaganda and media perspective on bilateral relations as, after all, China is said to have achieved three 'first places' in Timor-Leste: China was the first country to establish diplomatic ties with Timor-Leste, Timor-Leste signed its first joint diplomatic announcement with China, and the two countries celebrated the first economic technologies cooperation agreement with one another.³

1 In high-level diplomacy, officially commissioned Chinese-English interpreters avoid using the expression 'world power', instead, they say 'major country'. This is because the PRC considers itself a 'major country', and 'major countries' like itself and the United States should take on more responsibilities on the international stage and set an example that is worthy of that particular position.

2 '外国政党政要高度评价中方积极支持其他国家抗击疫情 [Foreign political parties and dignitaries highly appreciate China's active support to other countries to fight epidemic]; Xinhua Net, March 20, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2020-03/20/c_1125744148.htm (accessed October 4, 2020).

3 '东南亚，飘起一面新国旗：中国在东帝汶创造了三个'第一' [In Southeast Asia a new national flag rises: China creates three 'firsts' in Timor-Leste]; Global Times, May 27, 2002, <http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/paper68/6304/621938.html> (accessed October 4, 2020).

Since the start of 2020, there have been at least three major operations by China to donate materials to Timor-Leste,⁴ not all of which were directly initiated by state entities. Business interests from mainland China and Chinese companies based in Timor-Leste were involved. It is known that Chinese private/semi-public companies in the Southeast Asian country at some point received information from China about taking part and contributing. We ask then, how do we qualify Chinese intervention? Does mere instruction count? Do the efforts of private companies with state encouragement count?

For example, according to a Xinhua report,⁵ the Ma Yun Charity Foundation and the Alibaba Charity Foundation donated medical face coverings and gloves, protective clothing, reagent kits, forehead thermometers and ventilators, etc. These were ceremoniously received on May 26 at the airport by the then Timorese Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Dionísio Babo Soares (2018–2020), and by representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Timor-Leste. Thanking the two Chinese charity foundations, the Chinese Ambassador to Timor-Leste, Xiao Jianguo (2018–present), emphasized that it was ‘an act of love’ that showed the ‘deep friendship’ that the Chinese people have always had for the Timorese. He also announced at the time that more help was on the way. Then, Timorese Minister Dionísio Babo Soares assured that his country would continue to cooperate with China, to ‘develop relations with China’ and ‘consolidate the traditional bilateral friendship’. Similarly, the Association of Chinese Enterprises in Timor-Leste, set up in May 2016, was active in the aid campaigns. It donated money to Timorese hospitals in April⁶ and medical supplies to the health authorities in September.⁷

4 ‘驻东帝汶大使尚建国在东主流纸媒发表《中东携手 共克疫情》的署名文章 [Ambassador to Timor-Leste Xiao Jianguo publishes a signed article in mainstream Timorese print media entitled ‘China and Timor-Leste work together to fight against COVID-19’]; Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, May 29, 2020, <http://tl.china-embassy.org/chn/sgdt/t1784065.htm> (accessed October 4, 2020).

5 ‘一批中方捐赠抗疫物资运抵东帝汶 [One batch of Chinese donated medical aid to fight epidemic arrived in Timor-Leste]; *Xinhua Net*, May 27, 2020, http://www.xinhua.net.com/world/2020-05/27/c_1126036860.htm (accessed July 19, 2020).

6 ‘东各界感谢中国援助第二批防疫物资 [Different sectors of Timor-Leste thank China for second batch of pandemic combat aid]; Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, April 29, 2020, <http://tl.chineseembassy.org/chn/ddwrzgg/t1774855.htm> (accessed October 4, 2020).

7 ‘驻东帝汶使馆经商参赞耿协威出席中资企业协会向东国家疾控局捐赠口罩仪式 [Mr. Geng Xiewei, Economic and Commercial Counsellor of the Embassy in Timor-Leste, attended ceremony of donation of masks by Association of Chinese Enterprises]. Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, September 4, 2020, <http://easttimor.mof.com.gov.cn/article/todayheader/202009/20200902998773.shtml> (accessed October 4, 2020).

The official discourse is uniform and clear, based on analysis of public Chinese-language sources. Essentially, China is reciprocating verbal solidarity with material help. China, as a ‘responsible major country’ (often used tactically by the PRC to distinguish itself from the USA), promptly responded to Timor-Leste’s request for help. On the Timor-Leste side, it is understood that there is recognition of the solid and longstanding relationship with China. The Chinese side prefers to emphasize friendly and good neighborly relations of a social, cultural and historical nature that extend from the past to the present. We therefore ask if China has been a consistent bilateral relations player, if the current pandemic has enabled us to see more clearly how bilateral ties between China and Timor-Leste are overriding other multilateral commitments and if China is in fact continuing with its ‘longstanding health diplomacy’.⁸

In the speech by Ambassador Xiao Jianguo at the ‘Handover Ceremony of China-aided Medical Supplies to Timor-Leste’,⁹ for instance, there were several usages of Chinese historical mottos and classical references. The speech in English was given at the time of the gifting of the second batch of much needed supplies. The corresponding Chinese text (officially a ‘translation’¹⁰) was also available.¹¹ The ambassador took the opportunity to thank the China Overseas Engineering Group (a subsidiary of China Railway Group Limited) and Shanghai Construction Group for having offered substantial logistical help. He also respectfully acknowledged that Timor-Leste had officially and formally sought help from China. Then Minister Dionísio Babo Soares had written twice to China for that purpose. The following compares the official bilingual versions:

-
- 8 Tang Bei, ‘A Brief History of Chinese ‘Health Diplomacy’’, Sixth Tone, May 20, 2020, <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005687/a-brief-history-of-chinese-health-diplomacy> (accessed October 4, 2020).
- 9 ‘Ambassador Xiao Jianguo’s Speech at the Handover Ceremony of China-aided Medical Supplies to Timor-Leste’, Embassy of the PRC in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, May 1, 2020, <http://tl.china-embassy.org/eng/xwtd/t1775584.htm> (accessed October 4, 2020).
- 10 Conventionally, important official speeches are first written in Chinese and checked for their accuracy and correctness. It is only after this that the speeches are translated into English.
- 11 ‘驻东帝汶大使肖建国在援东第二批医疗物资交接仪式上的讲话 [Speech of Ambassador Xiao Jianguo at Handover Ceremony of Second Batch of Medical Supplies to Timor-Leste]’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, May 1, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/dszlsjt_673036/t1775568.shtml (accessed October 4, 2020).

CN: 投桃报李是中国的传统美德。

EN: It is a Chinese tradition to return a favor with a favor.

The actual Chinese expression used is '*toutao baoli*', literally, receive a peach and return a prune. It comes from 'the Classic of Poetry' (*Shijing*), prescribing the right way to reciprocate.

CN: 作为东帝汶的好邻居、好朋友、好伙伴，中方始终密切关注东疫情形势，同东民众感同身受。

EN: As a good neighbor, friend and partner of Timor-Leste, we are closely following the epidemic situation in Timor-Leste and feel at one with its people.

China defines itself as a 'neighbor', 'friend' and 'partner'. This is a modern, western way of self-presentation, also a sign of accommodation to the other side.

CN: 患难见真情，中方将始终本着人道主义精神，毫不犹豫同东政府和人民站在一起.....

EN: Friends should help each other in times of difficulties. Based on the humanitarian spirit, China has no hesitation in standing with the Timorese Government ...

One Chinese idiomatic expression used is '*huannuan jian zhenqing*', which means true friends emerge from sharing difficulties. The humanitarianism that is mentioned must not be confused with simple human rights or humanitarian aid. Rather it should be thought of as a central principle regulating human dealings from the Chinese perspective.

CN: '中国援助' 和之前已有名气的 '中国制造' 为各国抗疫提供了有力支持，充分展现了中国的负责任大国形象.....

EN: 'Aid from China', together with the already well-known 'Made in China' label, has provided a steady driving force for the global efforts in the fight against the pandemic, which clearly portrays China as a responsible major country.

As discussed above, 'major country' is a Chinese concept with specific meanings and messages. By highlighting this, the Chinese Ambassador to Timor-Leste was firmly positioning his diplomatic missions in the greater field of Chinese international relations.

The above usages are not exclusive, nor are they exhaustive. In fact, the same expressions tend to be repeated along very consistent rhetorical and international 'politics-cum-policy' lines. For instance, when Ambassador Xiao Jianguo entitled a particular newspaper piece on collaborative Covid-19 combat efforts 'Friends Help Each Other in Times of Difficulties', he was clearly inferencing one of the traditional Chinese good practices mentioned above:¹² As the proverb says, a true friend is known in the day of adversity. At the critical moment when China was fighting the virus, the Timorese government and its people expressed their solidarity and support to China in many ways, which was taken to heart by the Chinese people. As the number of confirmed cases has been increasing recently, China is closely following the situation in Timor-Leste and empathizes with the Timorese. China highly praises the Timorese Government for taking citizens' health and safety as a priority and adopting a series of decisive measures against the epidemic; it appreciates the unity of the Timorese people while facing the difficulties and impact caused by the epidemic in Timor-Leste. As a good neighbor, friend and partner of Timor-Leste, China has no hesitation in standing with the Timorese Government and its people, fighting against the epidemic, and contributing to Timor-Leste within its capacity.

Following state recommendations, Chinese entrepreneurs on the ground should take every opportunity to cooperate positively with Timorese social media to promote a good Chinese image in that country and do their utmost to expand Chinese cultural influences abroad:¹³

中国传统文化是世界优秀文化花园中的一朵鲜花，随着中东双方经济文化交流的不断深入而受到当地人民的关注和了解，不少当地人注意学习汉语，以会说汉语为荣。中国企业在当地开展投资合作过程中，应注重弘扬中国传统文化，增进当地人对中国文化的了解。

12 'Signed article on fighting COVID-19 by H. E. Xiao Jianguo, Chinese Ambassador to Timor-Leste, published in *Suara Timor Lorosae*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, April 27, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1773855.shtml (accessed October 4, 2020).

13 '对外投资合作国别（地区）指南 [Guidelines on external investment and cooperation in specific countries (regions)]', Institute of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Commerce/Economic and Commercial Counsellor, Chinese Embassy in Timor-Leste/Department of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Commerce, 2019 version, p. 61.

Chinese traditional culture is a fresh flower in the garden of the world's outstanding cultures. With the continuous intensification of China-Timor-Leste economic and cultural exchanges, many local people are paying attention and seeking to understand such traditions. They are learning the Chinese language and are proud to speak it. In the process of enabling regional investment and cooperation, Chinese enterprises should emphasize promoting traditional Chinese culture and increasing local people's understanding of it.

The Chinese definition of 'culture' is very broad and encompasses the manner and etiquette of responding to requests for help from Timor-Leste.

According to the official press release, with the approval of the Central Military Commission, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) provided prevention aid such as masks and protective clothing to the armies of Russia, Mongolia and Timor-Leste on May 22 and 24, adding that the PLA will continue to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic and to contribute positively to the building of a healthy community for humankind.

It is worth saying that apart from public health relief, China is providing military help. To take an example, the Timor-Leste Council of Ministers agreed to receive 'free military assistance' from China in June 2020.¹⁴ For this particular deal, the Timorese Executive authorized the Ambassador of Timor-Leste in Beijing, Abrão dos Santos, to sign the agreement. It is also known that China donated logistics materials to the Timorese Army in August 2019 to demonstrate its willingness to support Timorese military modernization.

Effectively, with regard to Timor-Leste, China is mainly committed to building infrastructure and reinforcing public action capacity in areas such as defense, healthcare, agriculture, and food security. Because of the new infrastructural bases, China was able to send the materials successfully and quickly in the fight against the pandemic. Likewise, it was due to the active cooperation of Chinese business groups (established locally), using the infrastructure they had built themselves, that China was able to continue with its rapid response policies in non-violent bilateral relations.

14 '中國向東帝汶提供軍事援助 [Timor-Leste agrees to accept a gift of military aid from China]; Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese Language Countries (Macao), June 29, 2020, <https://www.forum.chinapl.org.mo/timor-leste-agrees-to-accept-gift-of-military-aid-from-china/?lang=tw> (accessed October 4, 2020).



FIGURE 7.1 “Bons amigos compartilham o mesmo barco e a mesma travessia [Good friends share the same boat and the same crossing]”, Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China, May 25, 2020, http://www.mod.gov.cn/action/2020-05/25/content_4866055.htm (accessed October 4, 2020)

3 Comparative Discussion

Throughout the previous sections, we presented two main narratives in the regional centrality discourse on Southeast Asia: the Western narrative and the Chinese narrative in the context of Covid-19, with Timor-Leste as a case study. What we have reached through this data presentation is a scale between a hollow, formal regionalism on the ASEAN side and open bilateralism on the Chinese side.

Considering this issue more closely, we can first look at the problems of ASEAN. As can be seen from the data we collected, ASEAN seems to have no direct, effective answer for dealing with a major crisis beyond bureaucratic, formal dynamics. This becomes clear precisely through the case of Timor-Leste, which is not a formal member of ASEAN, but a partner, one that ASEAN does not seem to engage with by providing help to the small country in any way whatsoever. This gives the impression of a hollow regional construct with narrow multilateralism as standard. The grouping does not show the strength needed to cope with the constraints that its member states are facing amidst a

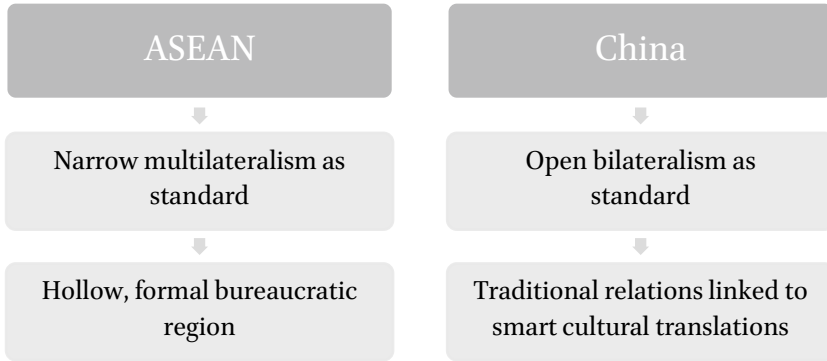


FIGURE 7.2 ASEAN-China dichotomy

pandemic. Rather, a bureaucratic base has been established, through creating a variety of missions and ‘boards’.

Looking at the other end of the scale, i.e. China, it is clear that the country is following a very different dynamic of centrality construction: amidst a global crisis, it relies on its open bilateralism standards strengthened by linking ‘traditional’ relations with smart cultural translations. Talking about ‘smart cultural translations’ in the case of Timor-Leste, we are speaking more precisely about the country’s internal promotion of the friendship and responsibility narrative. Using this form of narrative (‘behaving as a major responsible country’) in relation to countries where clientelism is strong demonstrates a very accurate understanding of deep societal organization structures. This fits well with the clanic and familiar patterns embraced, mixed with bureaucratic ones (as the indicators of language, ‘friendship’, and ‘responsibility’ reinforce).

Within these extremes, there are certainly several possibilities: multiple ways of creating ecumene (as spaces of meaningful cultural exchange). We propose that future research should tackle the possibilities of cross-cutting ecumene within specific regional contexts: a typology of ecumene as ‘Typologies of Cultural Translations’. We are all (citizens, countries and the international community) involved in ways of translating different traditions (clanic, tribal, national, international) as a means of creating ecumene that will always be diverse and in translation amongst themselves. Although there may be pressure for exclusivity, there is no reason for mutual exclusion; on the contrary, the richness of the region is the polylogue of the ecumene.

When considering our case study of Timor-Leste, the small country has a long history of being a platform for the translation of traditions. Long before European arrival, Timor-Leste was already the arena for encounters between civilizations: the Malay/Austronesian and the Papua/Melanesian layers

transformed Timor Island into a clash of cultures from around 3,000 BC to 1,000 BC. (Seixas, 2005, p. 154). As literature demonstrates, the 'Wallace Line', which was established in the 19th century, was probably the first conscious evidence of these inhabitations. The Wallace Line, which competes with Darwin's work, proposed a territorial division between the Malay and the Melanesian peoples which went through the island of Timor (Scoville, 2020). Before the arrival of the Europeans (16th century), Timor was almost a single territory with Waiwiku-Wehale as the main center (nowadays in the western part of the island). Waiwiku-Wehale was the center of power and a bridge between two large provinces, Servião and Belo (nowadays in the eastern part). This division was still evident in the early 20th century (Seixas, 2005, p. 158). As a result, the diarchic relations that were and still are evident in Timor through 'the people from the land/mountains' and 'the people from the sea/coast', 'the insiders and outsiders', express a conscious culture of translation which is still clear in wedding and funeral rituals, for example. Within such rituals, a diversity of family traditions from different regions are translated.

Followed by the arrival of Portuguese in 1515, Timorese people gained two more social strata, particularly on the eastern part of the island (Timor-Leste): the European and the African ones. Furthermore, specifically in Timor-Leste, the universe of more than thirty languages and dialects evidences a polyphony and the need for translation. Besides that, 'language' became consciously instrumental: a local language, a vehicular language, a commercial language, a bureaucratic language, an international language.

This brief and rather encapsulated narrative of the history of Timor should serve as an argument to propose that Timor-Leste, probably more than many other countries, has a deep understanding of culture as continuous translation. We propose that Timor-Leste's cultural core is 'translation as continuous negotiations amongst a diversity of traditions' (Seixas, 2007 & 2009). Taking this argument, the relationship between Timor-Leste and the global realm takes its ever-present cultural pattern from translation. As a result, Timor-Leste negotiates a diversity of ecumene (international regional cultures) in dispute, considering the mission of the country to be within them and to incorporate them all.

Hence, what we have achieved through the dialogue presented above is a scale between two extreme poles, which helps to understand the different ways of coping with a crisis (in a macro-context). In the course of reaching these two opposites, we found the building of several ecumene was in the forefront. As we see a dialogue (and clash) between centralities within the SEA region by ASEAN and China through Timor-Leste as a predominant negotiator, we propose the small country's position as a kind of a 'David' in a game

between Goliaths. Furthermore, as Timor-Leste is in the center between these two major geopolitical 'players' (ASEAN & China), it could act as a kind of 'test' for centrality. This shows that ASEAN does not seem to be 'regional enough' in comparison to China.

Understanding this issue through the complexity of the construction of international regions, we need to consider the ecumene concept more closely. As we discussed in a previous study (Lobner, 2020), the ecumene represents an international space of meaningful cultural exchange, a middle ground of action between the top-down and the bottom-up approaches (the people and the state, the global and the local). We believe that there are many ecumene in this construction, which need to be understood in their multiple dimensions. In many cases it is assumed that ecumene are based on multilateralism (Hannerz, 1989; Mintz, 1996; Pina-Cabral, 2010). Yet, we propose that this does not always need to be the case, specifically when we consider China and its open bilateralism standard. Considering the case of China in our research approach more closely, the country's narrative (as presented in an earlier section) reveals that China defines/translates itself as a 'neighbor', 'partner', 'friend'. As this is demonstrated as a western way of self-representation on the one hand, and a sign of accommodation on the other, we see a strategic dynamic for building an ecumene through Timor-Leste as the middleman. China relies on its cultural translation skills, which are clearly promoted through expressions such as 'true friends emerge from sharing difficulties'. This is precisely where the ecumene is constructed, in the middle ground between bottom-up and top-down approaches: 'The humanitarianism that is mentioned must not be confused with simple human rights or humanitarian aid. Rather it should be thought of as a central principle regulating human dealings from the Chinese perspective'. Furthermore, evidence of the ecumene in the making is that the Chinese definition of 'culture' is a very broad one which outweighs the etiquette of responding to requests for help from Timor-Leste (as outlined in the Chinese narrative section). What is relevant here is that when looking more closely at an international relations context, they are to a certain extent built upon the use (or construction) of an 'international etiquette', which we see as being the basis of the ecumene.

This may be understood through a strategic 'change of behaviors', as has been closely analyzed by Elias (1982). As part of his debates on 'the civilizing process' of the western world, it is interesting to show a certain output through our research. Considering the 'etiquette' of responding to Timor-Leste's request for help in a manner much different from ASEAN's visible approach, China offered its aid during the pandemic through an amity-partnership-neighborhood approach. This, as outlined earlier, may be understood as a conscious

cultural translation most suitable for the context of a clientelism state such as Timor-Leste. Hence, as Elias demonstrated in his analysis of changing behavioral patterns in western civilizations (during the rise of the modern nation states), maintaining power over civil society was a form of 'competitive politeness'. For the 'nobles' to remain in a noteworthy position, they had to establish a new way of setting themselves apart from the emerging bourgeois in order to convince everyone of their valid 'superiority' (Elias, 1982; Leithart, 2011). As this behavioral transformation is, for Elias, at the core of the political centralization of the West¹⁵ (and its forces), we see it through a similar lens in the case of China: whilst maintaining (/applying) a mode of 'diplomatic relations with friends/partners/neighbors' in times of a major crisis, unlike the ASEAN response, the possibility for its power centralization and recognition in the region (and perhaps globally) may increase.

Hence, what we have tried to do in this paper is to provide evidence for the multiplicity of ecumene in translation: the dialogue between two centralities and how they problematize several configurations of the building of international regions. We continue to ask if a typology of the ecumene might be prevailing. Our proposal is an open research path towards understanding several ecumene in a crosscut with multiple layers. Considering the first column in our scale presented above, ASEAN, the predominant ecumene is a formal, narrow and bureaucratic one, while the other ecumene (built by China) is based on smart cultural translations – open bilateralism. Therefore, we have found two ecumene layers: one through the western narrative and another, in opposition to the western one, through the Chinese narrative.

The big picture that we have arrived at throughout our data analysis is that a regional impasse is involved: nowadays, the world is facing a wide variety of options, starting with economic groupings, bilateralism, multilateralism and unilateralism with certain political strands and geographically separated regions. Usually, we assume that there is a need to choose one organizational strand, but what if we are no longer forced to do so? What if several layers can be used? This is what seems to be the case in Timor-Leste: a player with several possibilities for international relations.

Hence, our interpretation shows that several layers are in play in any given region, which enables different ways of creating platforms of cultural translations in the world as a whole. What we tried to do with our dialogue-research was to problematize this theme of cultural translations: internationalism with its complex reciprocal layers.

Timor-Leste served as a relevant case study to represent this issue through ASEAN and China, understanding that the small country fosters several

¹⁵ In the early modern period.

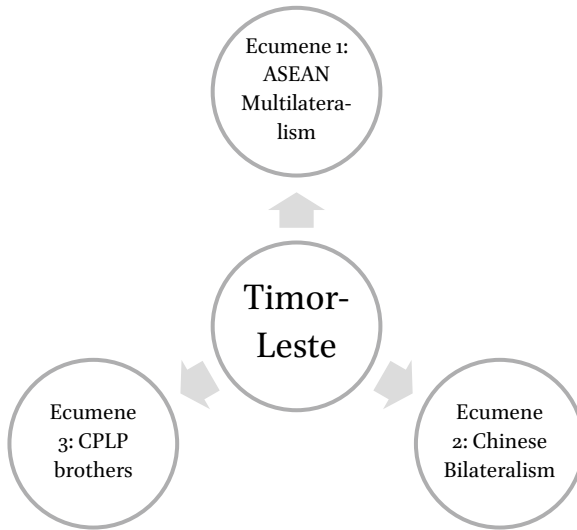


FIGURE 7.3 Internationalism through reciprocal layers

international-regional links through the idea of a middleman/negotiator. Its ‘negotiator’ position can be seen as the basis for a conscious cultural translation tool. Finally, we will end with open questions that remain for further research, clearly understanding that the complex scientific avenue of the building of international regions is far from being at an end:

- Which countries are more likely to play a relevant role as middleman/negotiator between international players?
- How can the center-periphery context support this issue?
- Do postcolonial contexts have a significant influence on these complexities?
- How can different ‘traditions’ be translated?

We propose that anthropology and international relations are a complementary research field in the quest for the construction of different ecumene. We understand that the ecumene itself serves for translating global interrelations, even though ecumene undergo continuous translations: the world’s regions are to be seen as a polylogue of different ecumene.

References

- Acharya, A. (2017). The Myth of ASEAN centrality? *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 39(2), pp. 273–279.
- ADB Grant to Help Ensure Food Security in Timor-Leste Amid COVID-19. (2020). *Asian Development Bank*. <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-grant-help-ensure-food-security-timor-leste-amid-covid-19>.

- Agencia Lusa. (2020, April 19). Timor-Leste regista 19 casos de Covid-19. Uma pessoa recuperou da doença. *Observador*. <https://observador.pt/2020/04/19/timor-leste-regista-19-casos-de-covid-19-uma-pessoa-recuperou-da-doenca/>.
- Agencia Lusa. (2020, June 29). Covid-19: governo timorense executou 60,4% do Fundo Covid-19 até meados de junho. *Observador*. <https://observador.pt/2020/06/29/covid-19-governo-timorense-executou-604-do-fundo-covid-19-ate-meados-de-junho/>.
- Arifuddin, M. (2019, December 18). Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership: To Be or Not To Be? *ASEAN studies center*. <https://asc.fisipol.ugm.ac.id/2019/12/18/timor-lestes-asean-membership-to-be-or-not-to-be/>.
- Aleixo, M. (2020, May 27). Covid-19. Timor-Leste debate renovação do estado de emergência. *RTP Noticias*. <https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/covid-19-timor-leste-debate-renovacao-do-estado-de-emergencia1232099>.
- ASEAN – Japan Economic Ministers' Joint Statement on Initiatives on Economic Resilience in Response to the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak (2020, April 2020). *ASEAN*. <https://asean.org/storage/2020/04/AJ-EM-Joint-Statement-on-Economic-Resilience-in-Response-to-COVID-19-FI...pdf>.
- ASEAN policy brief. (2020). *Economic Impact of Covid-19 Outbreak on ASEAN*. https://asean.org/storage/2020/04/ASEAN-Policy-Brief-April-2020_FINAL.pdf.
- Branco, C. (2019). Foreign policies of small States: Exploring Different Perspectives of Power – The case of Timor-Leste. In K. Peng, F. J. Leandro & D. Afonso-Henriques, *Challenges, Development and Promise of Timor-Leste*. University of Macao.
- Caballero-Anthony, M. (2014). Understanding ASEAN's Centrality: bases and prospects in an evolving regional architecture. *The Pacific Review*, 27(4), 563–584.
- Chen, A. & Molter, V. 2020. Mask Diplomacy: Chinese Narratives in the COVID Era. *FSI News Stanford*. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/covid-mask-diplomacy>
- Chen, L. (2020, April 27). Rethinking Timor-Leste's Covid 19 State of Emergency. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/rethinking-timor-lestes-covid-19-state-of-emergency/>.
- Chongkittavorn, K. (2019, May 21). Admit Timor-Leste to the Block Now or Never. *Bangkok Post*. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1681204/admit-timor-leste-to-bloc-now-or-never>.
- Covid-19: Timor-Leste sem novos casos há três semanas e cinco ativos (2020, May 13). *Mundo Ao Minuto*. <https://www.noticiasominuto.com/mundo/1477538/covid-19-timor-leste-sem-novos-casos-ha-tres-semanas-e-cinco-ativos>.
- Covid-19 crisis response in ASEAN Member-States. Policy Responses to Covid-19. (2020, May 4). *OECD*. <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-crisis-response-in-asean-member-states-02f828a2/>.
- Covid-19 in emerging Asia: Regional socio-economic implications and policy priorities. (2020, April 27). *OECD*. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=130_130765

- idjokqfnuf&title=COVID-19-in-Emerging-Asia_Regional-socio-economic-implications-and-policy-priorities.
- COVID-19: China pode incluir US\$ 2 bilhões a ASEAN. (2020). *Observatorio da China*. <http://www.observatoriodachina.org/index.php/en/37-solidariedade-chinesa-na-pandemia-covid-19/908-covid-19-china-pode-incluir-us-2-bilhoes-a-asean>.
- Croissant, A. (2016). *Die Politischen Systeme Südasiens. Eine Einführung*. Springer.
- Dermawan, R. (2020, April 17). At a time of crisis, ASEAN centrality matters. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/at-a-time-of-crisis-asean-centrality-really-matters/>.
- Elias, N. (1978). *The civilizing process*. New York: Urizen Books.
- European Union scales up its response to COVID-19 in Timor-Leste to ease hardships faced by the most vulnerable (2020, June 17). *European Union External Action*. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/81002/european-union-scales-its-response-covid-19-timor-leste-ease-hardships-faced-most-vulnerable_en.
- Frost, F. (2013). ASEAN and Regional Cooperation: recent developments and Australia's interests. *Parliament of Australia*.
- Galloway, A. (2020, May 28). Australia's \$4b aid program refocused to deal with COVID-19 recovery. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australia-s-4b-aid-program-refocused-to-deal-with-covid-19-recovery-20200528-p54xd5.html>.
- Green, M., Searight, A., Buchan, P., et al. (2020). Powers, Norms and Institutions: The Future of the Indo-Pacific from a Southeast Asia perspective. *CSIS*.
- Hayat, R. (2020, May 19). How Covid-19 will impact ASEAN: Deep recessions and a weak discovery. *Rabobank Research*. <https://economics.rabobank.com/publications/2020/may/impact-covid-19-asean-recessions-and-weak-recovery/>.
- Hannerz, U. (1989). Notes on the Global Ecumene. *Public Culture*, 1(2), 66–75.
- He, K. (2006). Does ASEAN Matter? International Relations Theories, Institutional Realism, and ASEAN. *Asian Security*, 2(3), 189–214.
- Hooi, K. (2019, August 1). What will it take to admit Timor-Leste to ASEAN? *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/what-will-it-take-to-admit-timor-leste-into-asean/>.
- Horta, L. (2020, July 10). US foreign policy and COVID-19: a Timorese perspective. *DevpolicyBlog*. <https://devpolicy.org/us-foreign-policy-and-covid-19-a-timorese-perspective-20200710/>.
- How Timor-Leste is dealing with the Covid-19 Outbreak. (2020, May 29). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/timor-leste/how-timor-leste-dealing-covid-19-outbreak>.
- Jianguo, X. (2020, April 27). Signed article on fighting against Covid-19. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1773855.shtml.

- Joint Statement of the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19). (2020, April 14). *ASEAN Plus Three Summit*. <https://asean.org/storange/2020/04/Final-Joint-Statement-of-the-Special-APT-Summit-on-COVID-19.pdf>.
- Kloet, J., Jin, J. & Chow, Y. (2020). 'We are doing better': Biopolitical Nationalism and the COVID-19 virus in East Asia. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, 4, pp. 635–640.
- Koh, T. (2020, June 6). ASEAN's response to Covid-19: A report card. *Straitstimes* <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/aseans-response-to-covid-19-a-report-card>.
- Kuok, L. (2020, June 4). Will Covid-19 change geopolitics of the Indopacific? *IISSESS* <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/06/geopolitics-covid-19-indo-pacific>.
- Leithart, P. (2011). Norbert Elias and Etiquette. *Etiquipedia*. <http://etiquipedia.blogspot.com/2014/06/norbert-elias-and-etiquette.html>.
- Leviter, L. (2011). The ASEAN Charter: ASEAN Failure or Member Failure? *International Law and Politics* 43, 159–210.
- Lobner, N. (2020). *The Relevance of the Ecumene in Beyond Border Narratives: A Timor-Leste case study from the anthropological library and the field*. Master Dissertation, March 2020. ISCSP, Universidade de Lisboa.
- Mintz, S. (1996). Enduring substances, trying theories: the Caribbean region as Oikoumene. *Journal of the royal anthropological institute* (2), 289–293.
- Mulakala, A. & Ji, H. (2020, April 29). Covid-19 and China's Soft Power Ambitions. *The Asia Foundation*. <https://asiafoundation.org/2020/04/29/covid-19-and-chinas-soft-power-ambitions/>.
- Natalegawa, M. (2018). *Does ASEAN Matter? A View from Within*. ISEAS.
- Neves, G. (2020, April 3). Timor-Leste: The consequences of Covid-19. *The Interpreter*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/timor-lestes-consequences-covid-19>.
- Neves, G. (2020, June 30). Timor-Leste's Covid-19 Response. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/timor-lestes-covid-19-response/>.
- OECD. (2020, June). *Economic Outlook*. <https://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/june-2020/>.
- Ortuoste, M. (2019, September 28). Timor Leste's ASEAN membership limbo. *Eastasia Forum*. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/09/28/timor-lestes-asean-membership-limbo/>.
- Pina-Cabral, J. (2010). Lusotopy as Ecumene. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 25(74), 5–20.
- Pinheiro, M. (2014, February 12). Timor Leste's Road to ASEAN. *Asia, Weekly Insights and Analysis, The Asia Foundation*. <https://asiafoundation.org/2014/02/12/timor-lestes-road-to-asean/>.
- Rakhmat, M. Z. (2020, May 20). Amid COVID-19, Indonesia should stop prioritising the economy: lessons from other. *MenaFN*. <https://menafn.com/1100190566/Amid-COVID-19-Indonesia-should-stop-prioritising-the-economy-lessons-from-other-countries>.

- Ramos-Horta, J. (2019, June 20). Timor-Leste, from conflict to reconciliation and peace. *Wallstreet Magazine*. <https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/56118-timor-leste>.
- Raksaseri, K & Boonlert, T (2019, June 24). Sights set on Indo-Pacific. <https://www.bangkokpost.com>, 24 JUN 2019.
- Salter, I. (2020, April 10). COVID-19: PNG, Timor Leste four times more at risk than Australia. *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/covid-19-png-timor-leste-four-times-more-risk-australia>.
- Saramago, A. (2020, June 9). ASEAN's multilateral diplomacy answer to COVID-19. *Diplomacy*. <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/aseans-multilateral-diplomacy-answer-covid-19>.
- Scoville, H. (2020, January 14). What is the Wallace Line? *Thoughtco*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-wallace-line-1224711>.
- Seixas, P. C. (2005). Firaku e Kaladi: Etnicidades Prevalentes nas Imaginações Unitárias em Timor-Leste. *Trabalhos de Antropologia e Etnologia* 45(1–2). SPAE.
- Seixas, P. C. (2007). Timor-Leste. A Tradução como Cultura. In R. Bizarro (Ed.). *Eu e o Outro. Estudos Multidisciplinares sobre Identidade(s), diversidade(s) e Práticas Interculturais*. Areal Editores.
- Seixas, P. C. (2009). Translation in Crisis, Crisis as Translation. In C. Cabasset-Semedo & F. Durand, Frédéric (Eds.). *East-Timor. How to Build a New Nation in Southeast Asia in 21st Century?* Irasesc – Institute de Recherche sur L'Asie du Sud-Est Contemporaine/CASE.
- Seixas, P., Mendes, C. N. & Lobner, N. (2019). The “Readiness” of Timor-Leste: Narratives about the Admission Procedure to ASEAN. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 38(2), 149–171.
- Siapno, J. A. (2014). Timor Leste's preparation for accession into ASEAN: public participation, production of knowledge, comparative histories, and perspectives from below. *Asian Studies*, 50(2), 108–118.
- Southeast Asia Covid-19 Tracker. (2020). *Center For Strategic and International Studies*. <https://www.csis.org/programs/southeast-asia-program/southeast-asia-covid-19-tracker-o>.
- Strating, R. (2019). *The Post-Colonial Security Dilemma: Timor-Leste and the International Community*. ISEAS.
- Timor-Leste agrees to accept gift of military aid from China. (2020, June 29). *Permanent secretariat of forum for economic trade and co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (Macao)*. <https://www.forumchinapl.org.mo/timor-leste-agrees-to-accept-gift-of-military-aid-from-china/>.
- Sudo, S. (2006). ASEAN: Significance of and issues at the First East Asia Summit. *Yearbook of ASEAN Affairs*, 15–24.
- Timor-Leste Covid-19 threads: red-cross prioritizes border areas. (2020, August17). *Reliefweb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/timorleste/timor-leste-covid-19-threats-red-cross-prioritizes-border-areas>.

- Timor-Leste vai avaliar diplomacia pós-covid-19, reforçando cooperação - nova MNE. (2020, June 27). *Lusa*. <https://www.sapo.pt/noticias/atualidade/timor-leste-vai-avaliar-diplomacia-pos-covid-5ef4853495fd5a36396a24d3>.
- Tobin, M. (2019, August 3). Chinese money enough to keep East Timor out of ASEAN? *This Week in Asia*. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/3021219/chinese-cash-enough-keep-east-timor-out-asean>.
- United States commits \$1.1 million to help timor-leste fight covid-19. (2020, April 8). *USAID*. <https://www.usaid.gov/timor-leste/press-releases/apr-8-2020-united-states-commits-11-million-help-timor-leste-fight-covid-19>.
- Walton, D. (1996). The straw man fallacy. J. Bentem (Ed.), *Logic and Argumentation* (pp. 115–128). Verhandlingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse.
- WHO leads Timor-Leste's immediate response to Covid-19. (2020, May 21). *World Health Organization*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-leads-timor-leste-s-immediate-response-to-covid-19>.
- Wight, A. (2020, June 21). What helped this Asian country to keep covid-19 deaths at zero? *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewwight/2020/06/21/what-helped-this-asian-country-to-keep-covid-19-deaths-at-zero/#39b4bf6b747a>.
- Zhang, D. (2020, May 27). China's Covid-19 Pacific diplomacy. *Devpolicy Blog*. <https://devpolicy.org/chinas-coronavirus-covid-19-diplomacy-in-the-pacific-20200527-1/>.
- #TeamEurope is supporting Timor-Leste's Most Vulnerable During Covid-19: EU and UNDP put the Spotlight on gender-based violence. (2020, September 29). *European Union External Action*. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-home-page/81164/teameurope-supporting-timor-leste%E2%80%99s-most-vulnerable-during-covid-19-eu-and-undp-put-spotlight_en.