

Elevating an enduring partnership

Growing Sino-ASEAN cooperation in green energy sectors and AI set to benefit wider world

By **POU SOTHIRAK**
and **HIM RAKSMEY**

The Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China have had enduring relations ever since both sides established a dialogue partnership in 1991. Anchored by a shared commitment to a cordial neighborly relationship and an eagerness to pursue practical cooperation of mutual interest, the relationship between both sides has progressed substantially over the past 35 years.

The depth and breadth of these ties are remarkable and multifaceted, ranging from political security to economic and sociocultural aspects. Given the depth and breadth of the practical cooperation between ASEAN and China, Beijing is poised to be one of the most important natural partners for the region. According to the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute's State of Southeast Asia 2026 Survey Report, since 2019, China has been the most influential political and strategic power, as well as the most influential economic power in Southeast Asia. Based on the Lowy Institute's 2025 Southeast Asia Influence Index, China has the deepest economic relations, the most diplomatic influence, and the most regional engagement in the region.

Built upon extensive cooperation, ASEAN-China ties are currently on an upward trajectory. Both parties have maintained the tradition of focusing on practical cooperation that yields mutually beneficial, tangible results. In fact, as a result of close ASEAN-China relations, several outstanding outcomes have become visible.

On economic integration, ASEAN and China have forged

close relations deeply rooted in robust trade and growing investment. China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner since 2009, while ASEAN has been China's largest trading partner since 2019. Data from China's General Administration of Customs show that in 2025, the China-ASEAN trade volume amounted to about \$1 trillion. In terms of investment, China has been one of the largest investors in ASEAN. It is estimated that in 2024, foreign direct investment from China to the region totaled \$19.3 billion, making China the third-largest source of FDI among ASEAN dialogue partners.

This excellent economic interaction has been driven, in part, by the implementation of key agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Signed in 2020 and entering into force in 2022, RCEP is one of the world's largest free trade agreements, involving ASEAN members, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea. It covers tariff elimination and promotes unified supply chain rules. In addition, the signing of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) 3.0 Upgrade Protocol in October 2025 was a significant step toward bolstering economic integration between both sides. The upgrade includes modernizing the free trade agreement by expanding its scope beyond traditional trade to include the digital economy, green economy, supply chain connectivity and consumer protection.

In terms of regional security, China and ASEAN share a strong commitment to upholding the rules-based regional architecture designed to maintain peace, security and open trade through agreed-upon legal principles rather than raw power politics.

Energy and artificial intelligence have become critically important to the future of ASEAN and China. Collaborative frameworks including the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation and joint AI-related initiatives help both sides manage surging resource demands and technological shifts.

While ASEAN and China have long-standing cooperation in energy, both sides are committed to working even harder in this area in light of the oil price fluctuations arising out of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. At the ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July in Manila, both sides agreed to carry out the exchange of information on energy policy and practical cooperation and to explore the possible establishment of cooperation mechanisms to enhance regional energy security and resilience, thereby contributing to sustainable development in the region. The two parties also pledged to strengthen cooperation in regional power interconnectivity, energy supply chains, clean low-carbon and renewable energy, energy technology innovation, and other relevant areas.

In the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2026-30) adopted last year, the two sides agreed to promote cooperation, primarily on clean energy, through policy exchanges, joint research and dialogue, and to establish a dedicated institution called the ASEAN-China Clean Energy Cooperation Center to support these important undertakings.

With the affirmation of a stronger political commitment built upon existing cooperation mechanisms, the ASEAN-China energy partnership is likely to grow more

substantively in the years to come and yield positive tangible outcomes for both sides.

Collaboration on AI represents another significant area of practical cooperation. Both ASEAN and China regard AI as an important instrument to promote regional prosperity, and seek to develop rules and norms for AI governance and explore opportunities to work together. There has been important progress toward this end. During the 28th ASEAN-China Summit in Kuala Lumpur in October 2025, both sides underscored the importance of strengthening exchanges and cooperation in the field of AI. This political commitment has been translated into concrete actions. The China-ASEAN AI Industry Innovation Center was officially inaugurated in May, while the China-ASEAN Digital Academy is set to be launched within this year.

In addition, the recent establishment of the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO) in Shanghai marks another cooperation opportunity for ASEAN and China, particularly in capacity building. Twenty-nine countries — including five ASEAN members — are founding members of the organization. At the launch of WAICO, Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed the need to adhere to the principles of openness and win-win and boosting innovation-driven development, strengthening risk-awareness and ensuring that AI is secure and controllable, encouraging inclusiveness and promoting mutual learning between civilizations, and advocating solidarity and improving global governance.

In conclusion, the milestones of the 35th anniversary of dialogue relations and the fifth anniversary of the comprehensive strategic

partnership signal a new era of maturity and depth in ASEAN-China relations. The future prospects of ASEAN-China relations look quite promising as we have witnessed the resounding multitude of practical cooperation between ASEAN and China over the past 35 years.

For ASEAN, China is one of the most influential partners, as well as one of the most influential economic powers for Southeast Asia. For China, ASEAN is not only the largest trading partner and a major source of AI application scenarios and potential green energy market, but also a sturdy partner that can jointly uphold the rules-based regional architecture in which China and ASEAN can jointly inject vitality, despite the increased geopolitical rivalries among the great powers and the challenging external environment.

Both sides have been consistently stepping up their existing excellent relations through increased economic integration through trade and upgrading their ACFTA, as well as strengthening regional stability amid a complex global landscape. With increased cooperation in emerging green energy sectors and AI, ASEAN and China can bring mutual benefits to both sides and to the wider world.

Pou Sothirak is a former minister of industry, mines and energy of Cambodia and a distinguished senior advisor to the Cambodian Center for Regional Studies. Him Raksmeay is the executive director of the Cambodian Center for Regional Studies. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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guiding principle of foreign policy at a time when waves of polarization and competition are intensifying, emphasizing its independent foreign policy and calling on the international community to coordinate its efforts to overcome the global challenges that threaten the entire world. Egypt and China have become partners, contributing together to enhancing the role of the Global South in the international system, in a manner that achieves greater justice and fairness for developing countries.

From the same viewpoint, Egypt has undertaken intensive diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the situation in the Middle East and

prevent the escalation and expansion of the conflict, as the region undergoes a dangerous phase of conflicts that threaten regional security and stability and, indeed, threaten international peace and security.

In this context, Egypt and China agree on the necessity of resolving conflicts through peaceful means, taking into consideration the security concerns of all parties, and respecting the sovereignty of states as a basis for the peaceful settlement of conflicts. It is not in the interest of any regional or international party to widen the conflict or exacerbate armed hostilities.

In the same vein, the Nile River has been the foundation of

Egyptian civilization and a vital source of its prosperity throughout history. Egypt and its fellow Nile Basin brothers have benefited from the Nile for thousands of years, with its waters serving as a shared resource and a basis for life, development, and human well-being.

Throughout its history, Egypt has remained committed to supporting the development of the countries of the Nile Basin, particularly in water resource development and dam construction, including in Sudan and Uganda, and, most recently, through its contribution to the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Station mega-project in Tanzania.

Egypt will remain steadfast in

advocating transboundary cooperation in accordance with the principles and rules of international law, rather than unilateral approaches that harm downstream states. Egypt firmly believes that sustainable management of shared water resources can only be achieved through prior notification, consultations, and consensus among riparian states.

In this regard, Egypt highly values China's position affirming its recognition of the vital importance of the Nile River to Egypt as its principal lifeline, and reiterating the importance of refraining from unilateral measures and strengthening collaboration in good faith to achieve win-win cooperation

and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Just as Egypt and China have, over the years, written remarkable chapters in the history of cooperation and friendship between our two countries, we look forward to writing together a new chapter in this enduring relationship, whose roots stretch back thousands of years. We aspire toward many more decades of progress and prosperity for our two friendly peoples, and to a future in which the world enjoys greater stability, security, peace, and development.

The author is the president of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.