

Chapter 1

A Study on the Interaction Between Mainland ASEAN States and China After the Cold War: Centered on the GMS Mechanism

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ABSTRACT

The Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation (GMS) is a key focus for integrating the regional economy of Southeast Asia and an important clue for studying regional integration in Southeast Asia. This chapter aims to explain the causal mechanism behind the development of the GMS, that is, why GMS has been able to withstand the systemic stimuli of different eras and continue to play a role, expand the scope of cooperation, and promote regional integration in Southeast Asia while effectively addressing the development gaps and conflicts of interest among its member countries. This chapter traces the development process of the GMS mechanism in different periods and backgrounds and finds that the degree of economic interdependence, political mutual trust, and the development of ASEAN norms among member countries within the GMS have an impact on their internal cognition and decision-making, thus injecting impetus into the development of the GMS mechanism.

INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, economic interests have been the main driving force for national competition, and the pursuit of economic interests by national groups has become a major feature of international relations after the Cold War. The end of the Cold War eased geopolitical tensions, and the focus of Area studies began

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to shift from “military hegemony”, and “political competition” to “economic competition”. In the practice of international relations after the Cold War, there have been frequent occurrences of “low-level politics” surpassing “high-level politics” in terms of economy, society, and ecology. Its urgency and importance have gradually become prominent, and the concept of “geo economy” has emerged (Luttwak, 1990). Geo-economy means that the state is still the main actor, and for the state, it refers to the opposition between countries or groups of countries mainly in the form of economic, technological, and soft power competition.

On the other hand, it refers to countries or groups of countries seeking diversified cooperation based on geographical location to achieve common prosperity and respond to regional and external shocks. The post-Cold War era is an era of geoeconomics (Loughlin&Rey, 2012; Moisiu, 2018). For countries to excel in global competition, they must combine their economy with geopolitics and global strategy (Demko&Wood, 1990, pp. 10-11), and use geoeconomics as a tool to exert their influence (Solomon, 1992; Nau, 1990, P. 11; Blackwill&Harris, 2016, pp. 1-3). As a result, many scholars have conducted empirical research on geoeconomics (Schlevogt, 2001; Kundnani, 2011; Mastanduno, 2019), and studying regional economic integration after the Cold War has become an important clue to understanding the interaction between countries. The economic cooperation in Southeast Asia, especially the Greater Mekong Subregion, which emerged in the 1990s, is an important case to study this new international political and economic situation.

Although ASEAN, as an important framework for regional integration in Southeast Asia, shapes the way Southeast Asian countries interact, for mainland Southeast Asian countries, the development of the Mekong Subregion is the key to regional economic integration. The Mekong River is known as the Eastern Danube River, and its basin passes through China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, accompanied by extensive political, economic, and social connections.

The Committee for the Coordination of Investments of Lower Mekong Basin (MC), which dates back to 1957, and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), which began with the Asian Development Bank’s central coordination in 1992 to strengthen the economic ties of countries in the subregion and improve the competitiveness of the subregion, The purpose is to promote the common development of the local economy and society (Song, 2021). The GMS mechanism has always been the focus of integrating the regional economy of Southeast Asia, serving as a touchstone for testing Southeast Asian integration.

It has important geopolitical significance and significance for countries both inside and outside the region, as dominating the market of GMS means dominating the markets of Southeast Asia, ASEAN, and even China and India (Soong, 2016). Faced with multiple practical issues such as development disparities, conflicts of interest, and financial crises, the “GMS” geoeconomic model still plays a good cooperative role today, injecting impetus into the economic development of Southeast Asia, which has attracted widespread attention from the academic community.

Komchornrit (2021) proposed using a comprehensive approach of AHP and TOPSIS to strengthen domestic logistics in Thailand through the GMS mechanism, using the GMS Economic Corridor as an economic tool to promote cross-border trade and drive Thailand’s national development. Gerlak (2016) and Williams (2021) focused on water safety and believed that the success of the Mekong River Management Commission (MRC) was due to its human-centered approach, emphasizing a safety framework for water use that meets human needs such as agriculture, energy production, and fisheries.

Although the development prospects of the Mekong River Basin are highly recognized, the future of “GMS” integration still faces many uncertain factors. On the one hand, the relative benefits among GMS member countries still need to be balanced, and the development speed still needs to be coordinated (Weatherbee, 1997). On the other hand, the geopolitical competition between China, the United States,

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