

Chapter 5

Blue Governmentalities and Blue Economy Development: Leveraging Small State Economy With China via the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

Izni Azrein Noor Azalie

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0616-3241>

Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei

ABSTRACT

China's emergence as Asia's new economic powerhouse presents new regional economic cooperation and integration opportunities, especially for ASEAN. Being a coastal nation with a rich history in marine food production, consumption, and trade, Brunei Darussalam is well-positioned to modernise its marine economy, particularly in fisheries and related industries, in collaboration with China under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) framework. Under RCEP's blue economy initiatives, China's plan to revitalise its coastal cities in Guangdong and Hainan Provinces offers new opportunities for Brunei to upgrade its marine industries in line with these developments. This paper aims to identify potential regional development pathways and strategies for Brunei as it re-evaluates and enhances its current position. Using Foucault's governmentality theory, the term 'blue governmentality' is proposed to analyse the current rationalities and governing technologies that the country employs as it connects with international markets and seeks to create and grow new industries.

INTRODUCTION

The economic and trade linkages between Southeast Asian traditional polities and historical China have existed since the first century, with ceramic archaeological findings dating back to the Han Dynasty (Richards, 1995). Linkages with Borneo were first recorded in the writings of a Chinese traveller, Fa Hsien (Bilcher, 2005) and later with Brunei in numerous Chinese historiographies in various dynasties (Melayong, 2012). The role of the historical maritime Silk Road was vital in sustaining the network and buzz surrounding Southeast Asian trade, and this provides grounding for the modern Belt and Road

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Initiative (BRI) introduced in 2013 (Hoon & Zhao, 2023). Free trade agreements and early multilateral agreements that predate the BRI, such as the China ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), laid the foundation for more ambitious Chinese regional-to-global projects of deepening economic and trade integration under the umbrella called The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It was officially initiated by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2012 and only ratified in 2020 after extensive deliberations and discussions regarding its scope, coverage, tariff reduction, elimination of trade barriers, and standard harmonisation, among other issues. The RCEP comprises ASEAN member states (AMS), China, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. While initial analyses of the RCEP may categorise it as “just another free trade agreement” (Hamdan et al., 2023), a recent examination of the RCEP's provisions revealed its extensive coverage beyond typical trade agreements. The RCEP's legal text comprises 20 chapters, outlining six (6) key themes that represent the core areas of focus for the partnership: i) Trade in goods, (ii) trade in services, (iii) movement and mobility of persons, (iv) regional investments (both inter and intra RCEP members), (v) development and enhancement of the business environment, and (vi) the establishment of general provisions and dispute settlement mechanisms. Analysis of the subthemes under each major category can be found in the diagram below:

Figure 1. Categories of activities covered under the RCEP

Category	Chapter	Topic
Initial Provisions	1	Initial provisions and general definitions
Trade in Goods	2	Trade in goods
	3	Rules of Origins (RoO)
	4	Customs procedure and trade facilitation
	5	Sanitary and phytosanitary measures
	6	Standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures
	7	Trade remedies
Trade in Services	8	Trade in services
Movement of Persons	9	Temporary movement of natural persons
Investment	10	Investment
Business Environment	11	Intellectual property
	12	Electronic commerce
	13	Competition
	14	Small and medium enterprises
	15	Economic and technical cooperation
	16	Government procurement
General Provisions and Dispute Settlements	17	General provisions and exceptions
	18	Institutional provisions
	19	Dispute settlement
	20	Final provisions

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