Overview of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations

Introduction

ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations commenced when H.E. Qian Qichen, the then Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of China, attended the opening session of the 24th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in July 1991 in Kuala Lumpur as a guest of the Malaysian Government in which he expressed China’s keen interest to cooperate with ASEAN for mutual benefit. Subsequently, China was accorded full Dialogue Partner status at the 29th AMM in July 1996 in Jakarta, Indonesia.

2. The relationship between ASEAN and China was elevated to a higher plane with the signing of the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity at the 7th ASEAN-China Summit in October 2003 in Bali, Indonesia. The first and second Plans of Action to implement the Joint Declaration (POA) were concluded in 2010 and 2015 respectively. The third POA with a timeframe of 2016-2020 was adopted ad-referendum in November 2015 by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and China.

3. China appointed its first resident Ambassador to ASEAN and established its Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta in September 2012.

4. The ASEAN-China Centre in Beijing was launched at the 14th ASEAN-China Summit in November 2011 in Bali. The Centre is a one-stop information centre to promote ASEAN-China cooperation in trade, investment, tourism, education, and culture. The virtual centre can be accessed at http://www.asean-china-center.org/. Eight meetings of the Joint Council of the ASEAN-China Centre (ACC) have been held in Beijing since 2011.

5. 2016 marked the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-China dialogue relations. ASEAN Member States and China held a series of activities to commemorate this milestone. A Commemorative Summit was held back-to-back with the ASEAN Summit in September 2016 in Vientiane.

6. 2018 marked the 15th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership and to commemorate the anniversary, a strategic partnership vision 2030 was issued at the 21st ASEAN-China Summit to Commemorate the 15th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership.

Political and Security Cooperation

7. ASEAN and China continue to enhance political-security dialogue and cooperation through various ASEAN Plus One mechanisms including summit, ministerial and senior officials' meetings, as well as in broader ASEAN-led frameworks such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus).

8. China was the first Dialogue Partner of ASEAN to accede to the TAC in October 2003. China’s accession to the TAC has contributed to the stature of the TAC as the code of conduct for inter-state relations in the region. China was also
the first Nuclear Weapon State (NWS) which expressed its intention to accede to the Protocol to the SEANWFZ.

9. ASEAN and China signed the Declaration on the Conducts of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in November 2002 in Phnom Penh. ASEAN and China adopted the Guidelines to implement the DOC on 21 July 2011 in Bali, Indonesia. A Joint Statement by Foreign Ministers of ASEAN Member States and China on the Full and Effective Implementation of the DOC issued on 25 July 2016 reaffirmed the commitment of ASEAN Member States and China to ensuring the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety.

10. The 19th ASEAN-China Summit to Commemorate the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations the Leaders held on 7 September 2016 in Vientiane adopted the Joint Statement on the Application of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) in the South China Sea, and the Guidelines for Hotline Communications among Senior Officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of ASEAN Member States and China in Response to Maritime Emergencies in the Implementation of the DOC. At their meeting on 6 August 2017 in Manila, the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN Member States and China adopted the framework of the Code of Conduct. At the 20th ASEAN-China Summit in November 2017, ASEAN Member States and China officially announced the launch of the COC negotiations.

11. ASEAN and China have been cooperating under the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) since it was established in 2010. The ASEAN-China Defence Ministers’ Informal Meeting have been held nine times. The 9th ASEAN-China Informal Defence Ministers’ Meeting was held on 19 October 2018 in Singapore, at the sidelines of the 12th ADMM.

12. Annual consultations are held between ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) and China and between the ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and China to promote their cooperation in combating transnational crimes and other non-traditional security issues. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ASEAN and China on cooperation in the field of non-traditional security issues was signed in 2004 and renewed in 2009. The succeeding MOU was signed at the 5th AMMTC + China Consultation in Manila on 21 September 2017.

13. In combatting illicit drug trafficking, ASEAN and China cooperate under the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD)+China Consultation since 2012. The 4th ASEAN-China Coordination Meeting held in Ha Noi in 2018 adopted the Terms of Reference of ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs (ACCORD).

Economic Cooperation

14. ASEAN-China economic relations continue to thrive. China is currently ASEAN’s largest trading partner, third largest external source of foreign direct investment (FDI). Merchandise trade between ASEAN and China, reached USD 441 billion in 2017, accounting for 17.1 per cent of ASEAN’s total merchandise trade.
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from China to ASEAN amounted to USD 11.3 billion in 2017 accounting for 8.2 per cent of total ASEAN’s FDI.\(^1\)

15. The Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation was signed in November 2002 to establish the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA). The ACFTA was realised on 1 January 2010 and took full effect on 1 January 2015. In line with the mandate given by the Leaders to upgrade the ACFTA, the “Protocol to Amend the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Co-operation and Certain Agreements thereunder between ASEAN and the People’s Republic of China” (ACFTA Upgrade Protocol) was signed on 21 November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, at the sidelines of the 27th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits. The Protocol, which entered into force on 1 July 2016, is expected to bring ASEAN and China closer to realising their twin goals of two-way trade and investment of US$1 trillion and US$150 billion respectively by 2020.

16. The ASEAN-China EXPO (CAEXPO), an event which showcases products from ASEAN and China, has been organised and hosted by China on an annual basis in Nanning, China since 2004. At the margin of the CAEXPO, an ASEAN-China Business and Investment Summit (CABIS) is also held to bring government and the private sector together to exchange views on matters affecting the economy and businesses of ASEAN Member States and China. The 16th CAEXPO is scheduled for 20 to 23 September 2019 with the theme, “Promoting Friendly Cooperation through Implementation of the BRI and International Industrial Production Capacity with the ASEAN-China Region and Beyond”. Indonesia will be the “Country of Honour”.

17. ASEAN and China also agreed to expand cooperation to the area of production capacity cooperation. ASEAN and China adopted a *Joint Statement between ASEAN and China on Production Capacity Cooperation* at the 19th ASEAN-China Summit to Commemorate the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations in September 2016.

18. ASEAN-China cooperation in agriculture focuses on enhancing cooperation in human resource development through a series of training courses on agricultural technologies to help train agricultural technicians and officials of ASEAN Member States. The MOU between the ASEAN Secretariat and the Ministry of Agriculture of the People’s Republic of China on Agricultural Cooperation (2007-2011) was renewed on 27 September 2013 for a period of five years.

19. ASEAN and China continued to strengthen their cooperation in Information and Communication Technology. ASEAN and China in November 2013 signed an MOU on cooperation in ICT, which covers the areas such as promoting industry, human resources and infrastructure development, as well as cooperation in new technologies and information exchange. The 13th ASEAN Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers Meeting with China (13th TELMIN+China), held on 6 December 2018 in Bali, Indonesia, endorsed the 2019 ASEAN-China ICT Work

\(^1\) ASEAN Trade Statistics Database; ASEAN FDI Database as of 25 May 2018, ASEAN Macroeconomic Database as of June 2018 and IMF World Economic Outlook Database as of April 2018
Plan which covers activities for information exchange and cooperation in the areas of ICT development and regulatory policies, emergency communication technologies for disaster prevention and mitigation, network security industry development, and emerging ICT technologies and applications, among others.

20. ASEAN and China signed an MOU on Transport Cooperation in November 2004 in Vientiane. The MOU aims to promote medium and long-term cooperation. ASEAN and China signed two agreements on transport, namely i) ASEAN-China Maritime Transport Agreement (AC-MTA) signed on 2 November 2007 and ii) ASEAN-China Air Transport Agreement (AC-ATA) signed on 12 November 2010. The 16th ASEAN and China Transport Ministers Meeting (ATM+China) held on 12 October 2017 in Singapore welcomed the signing of the MOU between the Authorities in charge of Aircraft Accident Investigation of ASEAN Member States and the Civil Aviation Administration of China on Cooperation relating to Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation, which aims to further strengthen cooperation in the safety investigation of aircraft accidents and incidents, investigation training, and sharing of safety information between ASEAN and China.

21. On tourism, China has become a major source of tourists for ASEAN. In 2017, the total number of tourist arrivals from China to ASEAN was 25.2 million, an increase of 24.3% compared to 2016. In 2016, the number of ASEAN tourists to China was recorded at 10.34 million, an increase of 57.8% from the previous year. Since the implementation of the ASEAN-China Air Transport Agreement and its protocols in early 2017, 37 cities in ASEAN have been connected with 52 cities in China through nearly 5,000 direct flights per week. 2017 was designated as ASEAN-China Year of Tourism Cooperation. The Joint Statement between ASEAN and China on Tourism Cooperation was adopted by the Leaders at the 20th ASEAN-China Summit in November 2017, in which the Leaders agreed, among others, to establish a high-level cooperation mechanism between relevant tourism authorities, to be convened on a regular basis.

22. On cooperation in quality inspection, two MOUs on Strengthening Sanitary and Phytosanitary Cooperation (SPS) and Strengthening Cooperation in the Field of Standards, Technical Regulations and Conformity Assessment (TBT) between ASEAN and China were signed on 20 November 2007 and 24 October 2009, respectively. To implement the MOUs, ASEAN-China Ministerial Meeting on Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine on SPS and TBT was established and held alternately every year. The 6th ASEAN-China Ministerial Meeting on Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine was held on 12 October 2018 in Ha Noi. The Ministers adopted the Plan of Action for 2019 - 2020, covering the area of food safety, plant and animal inspection and quarantine.

23. Cooperation in science and technology has made notable progress in the implementation of the ASEAN-China Science and Technology Partnership (STEP) Programme including building ASEAN-China joint laboratories, ASEAN-China Remote Sensing Satellite Data Sharing and Service Platform, ASEAN-China technology Transfer Centre, and Talented Young Scientists Visiting China.

24. 2018 was designated as the ASEAN-China Year of Innovation (YOI). To commemorate the YOI, a Joint Statement on ASEAN-China Science, Technology
and Innovation Cooperation was issued at the 21st ASEAN-China Summit, and a series of activities were organized throughout the year to mark the YOI.

25. On connectivity, ASEAN and China have agreed to synergise common priorities in the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as part of efforts to synergise the various connectivity strategies in the region in a manner that would be mutually beneficial. At the 20th ASEAN-China Summit held on 13 November 2017 in Manila, the Leaders adopted a Joint Statement between ASEAN and China on Further Deepening the Cooperation on Infrastructure Connectivity.

Socio-Cultural Cooperation

26. A number of activities have been carried out in the areas of public health, education, culture, labour and social security, local government and people-to-people exchanges, environment, media, youth, social development, and poverty reduction.

27. The Ministers on Health of ASEAN and China signed an MOU on Health Cooperation at the Fourth ASEAN-China Health Ministers Meeting (AC-HMM) on 6 July 2012 in Phuket, Thailand. To operationalise the MOU, yearly priorities of collaboration are agreed by ASEAN and China through the ASEAN China Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development (AC-SOMHD) and the ASEAN China Health Ministers Meeting. The 9th AC-SOMHD held on 4 April 2019 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, agreed on concrete actions and mechanisms in the conduct of the priority areas of collaboration between ASEAN and China between 2019-2020.

28. ASEAN-China cooperation on education continues to make good progress. The China-ASEAN Education Cooperation Week (CAECW) has been held annually since 2008 in Guiyang, China. The 9th CAECW, which was held on 1–4 August 2016, adopted a Joint Communiqué on the Development of ASEAN-China Education Cooperation. As a follow-up to the Joint Communiqué, the Plan of Action for the ASEAN-China Cooperation on Education 2017-2020 was announced at the 10th CAECW in July 2017. The 12th CAECW, themed “Enhancing Pragmatic Cooperation and Sharing Development Achievements”, will be held on 22-26 July 2019.

29. Programmes and activities to strengthen youth exchanges and cooperation between ASEAN and China are held regularly. These include China-ASEAN Youth Camp, GMS Youth Friendship Programme and the ASEAN Young Leaders Training Program. The activities aim to promote the mutual trust and understanding between the Chinese and ASEAN young people and contribute to the regional economic development and social cooperation.

30. Cooperation in culture is pursued through the implementation of Plans of Action on ASEAN-China Cultural Cooperation. The year 2014 was designated as the ASEAN-China Cultural Exchange Year with various activities undertaken in ASEAN Member States and China. At the Third ASEAN Plus China Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA-China) Meeting on 25 August 2016 in Bandar Seri Begawan, the ASEAN Ministers expressed their interest to continue cooperation with China in the areas of culture and the arts, cultural industries, cultural heritage safeguarding, public cultural service system, culture and technology
development, and creativity across China, including Hong Kong and Macau. At the 4th AMCA+China in Yogykarta, Indonesia in October 2018 the Ministers adopted the ASEAN-China Work Plan on Cooperation in Culture and Arts 2019-2021. The ASEAN-China Cultural Forum continue to be held annually, with the 13th Forum held on 12-13 September 2018 in Nanning, China.

31. Cooperation in environment is guided by the ASEAN-China Environmental Protection Cooperation Strategy papers. Implementation of activities under the action plans of the Cooperation Strategy is coordinated with the China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Centre (CAEC), which was established in Beijing on 17 March 2010 and officially inaugurated on 24 May 2011. The first Cooperation Strategy paper covered the period 2009-2015 and after its conclusion, the succeeding Cooperation Strategy for 2016-2020 was endorsed by ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN) and China. To operationalise the second Cooperation Strategy, the ASEAN-China Environmental Cooperation Action Plan (2016-2020) was adopted by the 14th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment which was held on 12 September 2018 in Brunei Darussalam.

32. On disaster management, an MOU between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and ASEAN on Disaster Management Cooperation was signed on 6 October 2014. With the total committed grant assistance of RMB 50 million, the MOU aims to support the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme, the operationalisation of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), and the ASEAN Secretariat’s capacity building programmes on disaster management.

33. ASEAN and China continue to strengthen cooperation in the media and information sector. The Fifth Conference of ASEAN Plus Three Ministers Responsible for Information (5th AMRI+3) on 10 May 2018 in Singapore endorsed the new ASEAN-China Work Plan on Enhancing ASEAN-China Cooperation through Information and Media (2018-2020).

34. 2019 is designated as the ASEAN-China Year of Media Exchanges. A number of events organised by relevant ministries and institutions in ASEAN and China have been/will be held to commemorate the Year.