

# REPORTAGE AROUND ASEAN-RELATED ISSUES

a tip  
sheet



Johanna Son

‘[Reportage Around ASEAN-related Issues: A Tip Sheet](#)’ was written by Johanna Son.

Its layout was done by Winnie Dobbs. It is also available in translations in several ASEAN languages - Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Vietnamese and Thai.

It is the second knowledge output produced under the CLMV Integration Series 2018-9 of the Reporting ASEAN program. The first one is ‘How Do Newsrooms Handle Coverage of ASEAN-related Issues? Views from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam’, which is the report on the results of a survey conducted by Reporting ASEAN.

The [Reporting ASEAN](#) program’s organizational host is [Probe Media Foundation Inc.](#)

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## FOREWORD

In July of 1992, I assumed the position of Secretary of Foreign Affairs in Manila after three years in Brussels as Philippine Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and Commission of the European Communities. The 25th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, had just concluded in Manila. There, Philippine President Fidel V Ramos called for “a common vision of regional security and enhanced economic cooperation for its own sake, for a better life for ASEAN peoples and for greater political stability”.

This was the first time I was exposed to ASEAN. Since my work involved constant interaction with the EC headquarters in Brussels, I had assumed that transitioning to ASEAN was going to be easy. That is when I discovered that it had far different antecedents and goals. “Europe” was a concept that existed long before the nations that comprised it agreed to form the Community. ASEAN had no historical antecedent, but merely a shared vision by countries whose differences were part of its construct. It was in some ways what others have referred to as an “imagined community”, one that would only be realized its citizens embraced an ASEAN identity.

The media have a critical role to play in fostering this sense of identity and in popularizing ASEAN issues, but this will require journalists to think beyond national borders.

Johanna Son was one of the pool of reporters assigned to cover the Department of Foreign Affairs during my tenure. Since then, she has made herself one of the most knowledgeable practicing Filipina journalists on ASEAN. She gets it - and so, sharing her experience is commendable. I hope that this effort is useful in developing more ASEAN-specialized journalists, which we currently lack.

**Roberto R Romulo**

Chairman, Board of Trustees, Carlos Romulo Foundation and  
Former Foreign Secretary, Philippines



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What  
this is  
all about

## **A DEEP (NEWS) DIVE INTO ASEAN ISSUES**

ASEAN. Journalists and editors might love it, hate it – or flee from being asked to work on stories related to it. But regionalism in the ASEAN region is a running story of public interest that is here to stay, so we might as well know the beast better, so to speak.

This tip sheet is an invitation to do just that, and take a deep dive into issues around ASEAN.

There are many news and professional reasons for thinking regional and understanding ASEAN better in order to analyze it independently, break it down into digestible stories, and translate what it does (or does not do) into everyday language.



Regional (and global) is increasingly local, given the expansion of the collective public spaces we interact in, not least in online ones. As journalists, we have seen how the difference between local, and regional as well as international, has shrunk sharply even just over the last decade. Indeed, we have become global citizens.

A knowledge of history, the dynamics of foreign policy and the value of 'knowing how the other half lives' are thus indispensable journalism skills in today's news environment.

For the ASEAN constituency - our audience - ASEAN's role in shaping policies at the regional and national level has been growing especially after it stepped up its transition into a community in 2015. Governments' policies today can no longer be contained in purely domestic silos, and have increasingly become election issues as well.

How ASEAN's experiment in regional integration plays out is a news beat by itself. But while the ASEAN story will not go away, ASEAN often appears faceless, opaque and distant to ASEAN citizens - and to many journalists as well.

This tip sheet is an independent, media-friendly tool that aims to be useful to different users - be it those who are new to ASEAN-related news to those who want to get past ASEAN jargon and get a better handle on what I call 'ASEANSpeak'.

This media tool looks at ‘ASEAN stories’ beyond ASEAN the organization and its alphabet soup of acronyms and meetings, meetings and more meetings. I define ‘ASEAN stories’ as stories around the idea of an ASEAN, even if it were not called ASEAN. These are stories that connect our communities to a collective of some kind, beyond the real and imagined borders of our nation-states.

For this tip sheet, I revisited the insights that come from over three decades of following ASEAN and Southeast Asian issues. I have also tried to address the storytelling challenges that journalists say they face in regional reporting, pulling from mental notes gathered from years of commissioning and editing news and feature stories, running skills-building workshops and hands-on training with journalists.

I hope that ‘Reportage Around ASEAN-related Issues: A Tip Sheet’ contributes to encouraging, and challenging, more journalists from within the region to specialize, and invest in, in foreign policy reporting and doing independent analyses – and break the habit of leaving ASEAN stories to external news providers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Johanna'.

**Johanna Son**

Editor and Founder, Reporting ASEAN

Bangkok, Thailand

December 2019



## SECTION 1

# 10 TIPS FOR SURVIVING (AND ENJOYING) REPORTING ABOUT ASEAN

Here are tips for framing reporting around ASEAN issues - and enjoying the storytelling too:

## 1 **Redefine 'ASEAN news'.**

ASEAN summitry is a magnet for media coverage, but it's only one facet of the story. In a sense, summits are the easiest events to cover – and one wonders how useful it is to be locked in the media room anyway, to watch a summit on closed-circuit TV.

Look beyond ASEAN events such as high-profile summits, the (mostly) men in suits there, and state pronouncements. While summit-shaped stories are needed, the meetings' impact (or lack of such) are to be seen and felt outside the

airconditioned summit venues. Frame a story by asking what audiences need to know, instead of getting stuck only in what the heads of governments said. Go beyond the staid stuff like the slogans ASEAN likes to have, understand its quirks, and explore the sidelines too. Tell us not only what happened, but answer the questions 'so what?' and 'what does this mean?'

ASEAN-related stories aren't only for foreign-policy junkies. As ASEAN regional integration covers everything from labor mobility to plastic waste, it no longer falls exclusively in the diplomatic beat. It has become a multi-beat story – it can be a labor rights story, a culture story, a political story, or a mix of several angles. ASEAN issues cross the traditional division of news in newsrooms.

# 2

## Whose ASEAN?

This isn't a rhetorical question, but a news one.

ASEAN stories are dominated by the voices of heads of states, ministers or diplomats, but lack those of citizens. Broaden the mix of voices and views, which add color and texture, make stories more well-rounded and more fun to produce. They can acquire more of a human face and capture the voices of the marginalized – and contribute to holding ASEAN and its member states accountable at the everyday-life level.

If ASEAN's ultimate goal is the improvement of its citizens' lives, we should hear from those who are meant to reap the dividends of integration. Bring in economists, individual citizens, scientists, young people, activists, artists, business people, women, men, LGBTQ and other gender identities.

# 3

## Break ASEAN down.

Say 'ASEAN story' and journalists often say, 'where do I start?' As a news topic, it is not possible, pragmatic or desirable, to cover all of ASEAN or the ASEAN Community in one go. So, collapse ASEAN's work or declarations and action plans into digestible chunks - particular aspects of, or commitments under, the ASEAN Community, such as the slow implementation of agreements that were supposed to allow the much-trumpeted 'movement of skilled labor' in the region.

Take time to do research and narrow the angle down to a story your audiences can bite into, and spice it up with detail - look, feel, sound. Does it work to pinpoint and analyze an ASEAN policy, point of disagreement, committee, document, action plan and how it plays out in daily life? That may lead to a newsworthy story, told in a different way, instead of reporting solely on a document.

# 4

## Avoid getting swallowed by the news pack.

The bustle of events at ASEAN ministerial meetings and summits has a way of making journalists feel they are being scooped if they don't go to every briefing or be part of as many ambush interviews.

Some of the information and soundbites from these will indeed be very useful and make the headlines, but do get back to the center of your journalistic being, stay focused and grounded in the angles you came to develop.

Take a break from the din of soundbites and examine what's different, what changed from the past, what disappeared or was added onto an ASEAN document, what trend is taking shape, or identify what could be a story to follow up after summits.

There are 'attendance stories' that are a must in ASEAN events, but there are also angles journalists can target to develop in the middle of event chaos.

# 5

## Translate ASEANSpeak.

Media's stories bridge policy and everyday lives. The most effective ones relating to ASEAN and foreign policy are able to translate diplomatese, ASEANSpeak and big concepts into everyday language that is both accurate and faithful to their nuances. Some examples are 'ASEAN centrality' and 'regional economic integration' (see Section 3). Remember too that over the decades, documents like the ASEAN foreign ministers' joint communique have grown from a few pages to a bulky 46 pages (and 217 clauses) in 2017. (The 2019 communique was 23 pages with 78 clauses.)

Develop this 'translation' skill to not only relay to your audience what other people or sources said, but to provide perspective and explain the reasons for, and implications of, ASEAN-related issues, decisions or actions by ASEAN or its members, and ASEAN processes. And no, producing stories peppered

with acronyms, which ASEAN has a taste for, does not impress or automatically make your story a good one.

# 6

## **Know what ASEAN is - and isn't.**

Junk the misperceptions about ASEAN and the ASEAN Community that have led many a journalist astray.

ASEAN is an association and grouping of nation-states and governments. Thus, it cannot be different from the states that comprise it. It is regional but not supragovernmental or supranational; it is not an Asian United Nations and does not pass judgement on, or rate, member states.

From its creation in 1967, and under the ASEAN Charter that entered into force in 2008, ASEAN was not meant to formally settle inter-country disputes - although ASEAN does carry political weight among its members (and that in itself is a good story to dig into). Comparisons with the European Union are useful to a certain point, but the EU is not the ASEAN model and was never meant to be.

Beware the pitfall of holding ASEAN up to a 'role' it was not meant to do and then criticizing it for its 'failure' in that area.

# 7

## **Avoid relying on the ASEAN bureaucracy for your ASEAN-related story.**

It is far from second nature for the ASEAN bureaucracy and member states, and even their offices that are tasked to engage the public, to tell journalists what the media want or need to know to relay to their publics. They are not your typical external communications or information offices. They might not even say much even if you wanted to give them space. This is part of why the ASEAN secretariat does not have a spokesperson, and will never have one. (In fact, senior secretariat officials have needed coaching in interacting with the media.)

So while ASEAN can be a good source of information and background - and sometimes quite needed - cultivate other sources in your foreign office

and other ministries, as well as researchers and think tanks, analysts, activists, statistical centers. ASEAN.org has a statistics page that is useful, although the data tend to be the usual development indicators.

## 8 **Read, read and read.**

A journalist needs to know something well enough to tell a story about it, and the same goes for ASEAN issues. Follow news about ASEAN and Southeast Asia as a habit, much like your morning dose of caffeine, whether it is from news outlets or through social media (use your social media accounts to follow authoritative regional and international news and analyses).

Do choose to follow quality, sound publications and websites, journals, discussion groups, research organizations and think tanks, universities within the region and beyond. Learn too how to read and interpret the ASEAN documents that matter – yes, even those ASEAN

Community blueprints in order to identify concrete story angles or verify information. With this degree of confidence comes the ability to pick up the scent of a story and put in a fresh angle, ask better questions and generate sound analyses beyond spot news reporting.

Covering ASEAN is an investment over time, and does not come from a few ASEAN meetings and documents. (A word of caution: Google cannot do your analyses for you. No shortcuts there.)

## 9 **ASEAN is fair game for public discussion by the media; there is no need to have a 'script'.**

Journalists from ASEAN countries are citizens of the ASEAN Community too. From that larger viewpoint, ASEAN matters are not just news stories one can parachute in to do and then leave, or stories that are unrelated to ASEAN journalists as individuals. In some ASEAN countries, however, the large role that states naturally play

in ASEAN discussions has tended to create expectations that their media must therefore assume that ASEAN is a good thing when they produce news. (In truth, ASEAN officials themselves talk about the association's quirks and weak points.) But being of ASEAN does not mean journalists need to push a script in their stories - whether it is to endorse ASEAN and its role as necessarily being completely beneficial to member countries and peoples, or dismiss it wholesale as useless.

ASEAN isn't good or bad; it just is - and it is located firmly in the space of public conversation. Avoid falling into the trap, especially in today's noisy media and online environment, of portraying issues in black and white - the greys are often much more interesting.

# 10

**Think regional,  
even if you're  
local.**

Producing a story with a regional lens, including on ASEAN issues, does not always have to mean travelling

overseas. An ASEAN story discusses an issue that is connected to being in this cross-border space. In this sense, an ASEAN-related story is not just about ASEAN as a geographical set of countries.

Thinking regional is a valuable storytelling skill that is cultivated also by making use of opportunities to attend conferences and seminars - even if these do not always lead to stories. (Sitting through entire sessions does wonders for building stock knowledge, and can reward you with story ideas. Just attending the press conference doesn't work.) Gobble up good research papers or analyses of foreign policy and/or development issues.

You can be regional in mindset even if local in physical location, by producing stories that inject regional context and connections. Regional flavor can also come from talking to or interviewing sources overseas (what is today's online technology for?) as well as locally based resource persons who have expertise in regional matters. More and more universities in Southeast Asia and beyond have ASEAN studies departments and courses these days.

## SECTION 2

# 5 QUESTIONS ON THE STORYTELLING TRAIL

Here are some 'road signs' that journalists can use on the reporting trail – in order to develop potential stories and relevant analyses relating to ASEAN or regional issues:

**1** **What is new about this issue,** debate or document? How has it changed and what history or context can be weaved in to make it more useful than a one-day, he said-she-said report?

A first-time read through an ASEAN communique can leave a newcomer scratching his or her head. But context and knowledge make the newsy parts jump out and acquire depth, much like a photo with a meaningful background.

**2** **What is an angle, or aspect,** that is forgotten, under-reported or even misreported?

**3** **Is this event, issue, statement,** remark or incident related to a trend, pattern, whether across certain communities

or countries? Can it be put in the context of several events over time, or does it deviate from these? In the context of ASEAN issues, is it indicative of movement on an issue or not, and how?

**4** **What are the competing,** changing, conflicting interests that had roles in an event, issue or discussion?

**5** **What are the causes behind** this event, trend, remark or decision, statement? What could be its consequences to countries and stakeholders beyond governments? What are the reactions from those it affects? Are there interesting follow-ups that can be done?

## SECTION 3

# ASEANSPEAK

## A (Cheat) Glossary of 10 Useful Concepts and Terms

### 1

#### **ASEAN's annual meetings and related meetings, and summits**

These refer to ASEAN's menu of annual high-level meetings, from ministerial to head-of-government level, involving various issues and different geographical compositions across the overlapping discussion venues that the regional association is at the center of.

While ASEAN holds meetings throughout the year, the annual meetings and summits are where the most public actions of the organization take place and pronouncements issued, and seen by the public.

ASEAN foreign ministers have met annually since the organization was created, making the 2019 edition of the 'ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Related Meetings' the 52th one. These are held in late July. They hold informal retreats in January to discuss the year's agenda. The ASEAN Chair may also call special ministerial meetings. ASEAN began holding leaders' summits later in its history, first once a year and twice each year (April and November) after the ASEAN Charter came into force in 2008. The 2019 Summit, called 'ASEAN Summit and Related Summits', was the 35th one.

ASEAN's annual meetings start internally among its member states, followed by external meetings with counterparts from partner countries.





## ASEAN centrality

This describes ASEAN's role as a fulcrum in the mix of overlapping networks, political spaces and processes that are participated in by its member countries and by external powers with interests in Southeast Asia.

Some examples of these venues, which are key to the regional architecture for the peace and stability of Southeast Asia, are the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus, the East Asia Summit, and meetings among ministers, prime ministers and presidents of ASEAN countries plus a combination of some, or all, of ASEAN's external partners. ASEAN's convening role is central to its political and strategic weight, requiring a balancing act to claim, maintain or push its centrality while being buffeted by shifting external pressures.

The 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation is a pillar of ASEAN centrality. Forty non-ASEAN nations have acceded to it as of November 2019.



## ASEAN Community

This is the regional community that ASEAN launched on 31 December 2015 to widen and deepen integration among its 10 member states, across the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres (which ASEAN calls the 'three pillars').

This step marked the transition by ASEAN countries from being co-members of an association to a community (meaning not just governments) with enough shared interests, attitudes, identity and goals, built through a stepped-up process of integration, to bind them as a unit.

ASEAN's integration process, however, is different from the typical definition of regional integration, given its member states' firm adherence to national sovereignty. In short, ASEAN has its own flavor of integration. The ASEAN Community is regional but not supranational. The ASEAN Economic Community or AEC is often used in

media articles interchangeably with the ASEAN Community, but they are not the same. Often, journalists mean the whole community, of which the AEC is just one part of.



### **ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific**

This refers to ASEAN's vision of the part of the world it is at the core of, widened in scope to bridge the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions (thus 'Indo-Pacific') in a regional architecture it would like to see.

ASEAN's position on the Indo-Pacific - a term also used by other countries but with varying nuances - is in the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' document that ASEAN adopted in June 2019 after Indonesia and Thailand took the lead in discussions to develop it. In the Outlook document, ASEAN sees itself as providing collective leadership in shaping cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and being an "honest broker"

in an environment of competing interests.

The United States' 'version' of the Indo-Pacific has the adjectives "Free and Open" describing the region and is often seen as being targeted against China, apart from being more military and security in nature. In contrast, ASEAN has taken pains to infuse its ASEAN-centric Indo-Pacific policy with the word 'inclusive' and situated it within the context of a much wider framework of cooperation. The other countries in the Indo-Pacific region - including Japan, India and Australia - put their own touches to this concept.



### **ASEAN Vision 2025**

This is the roadmap in place for the ASEAN Community, called 'ASEAN Vision 2025: Forging Ahead Together'.

Leaders of ASEAN member states put out this vision in a document at the same time they issued a declaration making ASEAN a community in

November 2015. It spells out how they envision the Community to be during the first 10-year period beyond its 2015 launch - thus expressing a commitment to pushing the next phase of ASEAN's evolution.

Meantime, there are efforts underway to look further ahead. As ASEAN Chair in 2019, Thailand took the lead to commission an external, comprehensive report that proposes initiatives toward "a vision of an ASEAN" able to secure its position in the region and the world. 'ASEAN Vision 2040: Towards a Bolder and Stronger ASEAN Community' was produced by the Jakarta-based Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia.



## ASEAN 4.0

This describes an ASEAN that is undergoing digital transformation to speed up the development of its member countries and make them

capable of making the best use of Industry 4.0, or the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Discussions continue around how ASEAN member states, having different levels of development, can adapt to make Industry 4.0 and its disruptive technologies (those that significantly alter how businesses or consumers operate), work better for their development goals.

The Asian Development Bank defines the Fourth Industrial Revolution thus: "a set of highly disruptive technologies, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, blockchain and 3D printing, that are transforming social, economic and political systems and placing pressure on leaders and policy-makers to respond."

Two concepts that come up in relation to ASEAN 4.0 are: artificial intelligence - the use of computer technology to do tasks that human beings do; and smart cities - cities that use information and communication technologies (ICT) to improve a mix of urban services ranging from transportation to energy, with the goal of better sustainability.

# 7

## Code of Conduct of Parties on the South China Sea

This is the document under negotiation among ASEAN member states and China that would be a set of commonly agreed norms in the South China Sea. Its waters are the site of competing territorial claims and China's building of structures and artificial islands that has caused international concern over the years.

The issue of the lack of an institutional mechanism for managing the tensions in the South China Sea has been a long-running story in ASEAN. It has played out over nearly three decades, dating back to 1992, when ASEAN first issued its ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea. In 2002, ASEAN member states and China issued the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, which mentions drafting a Code of Conduct for use in this area. In 2017, the 50th anniversary of ASEAN, ASEAN and China agreed to start discussing a framework for

what goes into the Code. This has since moved on to actual negotiations on the provisions of the Code, using an agreed single text of the draft document. ASEAN countries and China continue to hold negotiations through senior officials' meetings.

There are differing opinions on the utility of the CoC, which will not settle territorial claims.

# 8

## Consensus and consultation

These are ASEAN's core ways of working, through the accommodation of each member state's comfort level about the issues at hand, rather than making decisions by voting. Consensus and consultation are a trademark of ASEAN-style diplomacy. They are part of the 'ASEAN Way'.

Consensus as ASEAN's decision-making process has been faulted for making the organization settle for the lowest common denominator or succumb to the 'tyranny of one', where one member state's non-acceptance

can prevent a shared decision. At the same time, ASEAN's consensus habit is credited for holding together its diverse group of member states since 1967.

Suggestions continue to be discussed now and then – among foreign policy experts to some officials within ASEAN countries – for ASEAN to adapt to today's realities by introducing innovations to the consensus habit. These include taking a majority vote when consensus is not possible, and using the principle of 'ASEAN minus X' in selected areas such as economics, technical or institutional issues.



## Economic integration

This is a process that typically involves the adoption by a set of states of common institutions, policies and rules that reduce or eliminate barriers among them.

The common cultivation of this interconnectedness leads to different phases and degrees of integration - from a preferential trading area,

a free trade area, a customs union, a common market all the way to complete economic integration.

Economic integration is a major part of the ASEAN Community, and is at the core of the ASEAN Economic Community in particular. ASEAN has been taking steps toward more integration over decades - for instance, its free trade area became reality long before the launch of the ASEAN Community.

Subsequently, the creation of the ASEAN Community and its AEC marked the next big step in the organization's integration project. ASEAN, in fact, officially describes the AEC as "a single market and production base". However, this does not mean ASEAN will be moving toward a customs union or a common market, or EU-style integration. ASEAN diplomats call ASEAN's type (and language) of economic integration a 'process' toward becoming "single market and production base" rather than a fixed destination point.

# 10

## Partners

This refers to the mix of countries and organizations that ASEAN has different types of external cooperative relationships, and holds regular discussions, with, including at the annual ASEAN meetings and summits.

ASEAN has relationships with dialogue partners (countries, organizations it has consultative relationships with), sectoral dialogue partners (countries that ASEAN has a more limited form of consultative relationship with - in issue-specific areas), and development partners (those that ASEAN discusses development cooperation and capacity building with). A higher level of partnership is a 'strategic partnership' with ASEAN.

ASEAN's has 10 dialogue partners - Canada, China, United States, European Union, Russia, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. ASEAN decided to finally upgrade ties with the EU to a strategic partnership in early 2019, and this process is underway.

Including the EU, ASEAN would have strategic-partnership relations with all of its dialogue partners except Canada.

ASEAN's sectoral dialogue partners are Pakistan, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. In 2019, Chile became a development partner, in addition to Germany.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Johanna Son** is the Bangkok-based editor/founder of Reporting ASEAN, a media-based venue for in-depth reportage and capacity-building around the coverage of ASEAN regionalism.

A journalist who has covered regional/ASEAN issues for three decades, Johanna writes analyses for the 'Bangkok Post', among others, and has also contributed to the 'Nikkei Asian Review'.

For 22 years, she was with IPS Asia-Pacific news service, first as regional correspondent and editor and then regional director for 18 years.

She is also a consultant/trainer with the Fojo Media Institute, working with media training groups and journalists in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. She has edited 17 journalism-related books and publications on Asia.

Johanna studied journalism (magna cum laude) from the University of the Philippines, and was Philippine winner of the Citibank Pan-Asia Award in 1992.

## ABOUT THE TRANSLATION TEAM

The team of translators is made up of:



**Khmer edition - Koam Chanrasmey** is a supervisor at a communications company based in Bangkok, Thailand. His background in journalism and television work includes having been video production manager with the 'Phnom Penh Post' and before that, a reporter for a youth TV show in Cambodia. .



**Lao edition - Vannaphone Sitthirath** is co-founder/producer with Lao New Wave Cinema Productions in Vientiane. She has produced a range of work in film and media as a journalist, media consultant, documentary filmmaker and media strategist. Kino used to work with Lao National Television.



**Burmese edition - Zin Linn** is a senior editor and translator based in Yangon, Myanmar. He was newsroom editor at Burma News International from 2013 - 2019, where he also translated Burmese news into English. Zin Linn translated UNESCO's 'Handbook for Journalists' from English to Burmese in 2009.



**Vietnamese edition - Nguyen Thi Ngoc Huyen** is a journalism lecturer from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam. Huyen has translated journalism books into Vietnamese, and has hosted news literacy workshops in southern Vietnam.





**Thai edition - Jessada Salathong** is the Assistant to the President for International Affairs and lecturer at the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. He is also a part-time news anchor and radio host for MCOT Public Co Ltd in Bangkok. Jess holds masteral and doctoral degrees in international studies from Waseda University, Japan.

## ABOUT REPORTING ASEAN

Reporting ASEAN is an independent media venue for the discussion of current news and issues around ASEAN regionalism, including the development and social issues these raise for the nearly 650 million people in this region. A homegrown space for training and doing regional news, the program focuses on strengthening skills in storytelling, reporting and analyses of ASEAN-related issues, as part of encouraging greater editorial investment by the region's media in the larger story of regional integration.

[Reporting ASEAN](#) has three components: a feature series on [www.reportingasean.net](http://www.reportingasean.net), media fellowships/training and a media forum/ conference series. It works on developing practical resources that journalists and communicators can use to better understand and report on ASEAN issues, including in local languages. Reporting ASEAN has worked with nearly 50 journalists from ASEAN countries as of 2019.

The program was created in 2014 by Bangkok-based journalist/editor Johanna Son. From 2016 to 2019, Reporting ASEAN was hosted by the Philippines-based [Probe Media Foundation Inc.](#)

Founding support for Reporting ASEAN was from the [Rockefeller Foundation](#). Past partners have included the [Asia Foundation](#), [Canada Fund for Local Initiatives](#), [ASEAN CSR Network](#), [ASEAN Foundation](#)/Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund/[Bangkok Bank](#).

The pilot project that led to the creation of Reporting ASEAN was the 'Reporting Development in ASEAN' program, supported by the [International Development Research Center \(Canada\)](#).

For information:

[reportingasean@tutanota.com](mailto:reportingasean@tutanota.com);

[reportingasean@gmail.com](mailto:reportingasean@gmail.com)

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## FEATURES

### Southeast Asia Puts Local Flavor in News Literacy Efforts



The number of initiatives to push news and media literacy, as well as to counter fake news and disinformation, are growing fast. ASEAN countries are putting their own local flavor into a menu of approaches to 'treat' this 'illness' in today's digital spaces, explains **Uyen Diep** of Vietnam's *Thanh Nien News*.

### ASEAN's Role on Rakhine: Big Outside, Little Known in Myanmar



ASEAN has been testing its non-intervention habit in ways never done before, playing what is to date its biggest, most active role in relation to Myanmar's handling of the Rohingya issue. But ASEAN's role is little known or cared for inside the country, where the mainstream attitude is usually apathy or hostility to this minority community. **Aung Zaw Min** looks into why this is, in this feature for the *Reporting ASEAN* series.

[Thinking ASEAN, Studying in ASEAN](#)  
[Vietnam, ASEAN and Free Trade Pacts](#)

[For Young Vietnamese, ASEAN is A Workplace](#)  
[Thailand Puts Its Spice Into ASEAN 2019](#)

## VIEWS AND POINTS

### ASEAN Identity: Imagined or Real?



Next year, 2020, is the 'Year of ASEAN Identity'. But 52 years after its creation, ASEAN's identity markers have been confined to bureaucratic circles instead of seeping into the public, popular sphere. How far can having an ASEAN flag, emblem go? **Kavi Chongkittavorn** explains in this commentary for the *Reporting ASEAN* series.

### From Laos to Bangladesh: Notes from A Rohingya Refugee Camp



For Lao film producer **Vannaphone Sithirath**, a two-hour visit to the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh leads to reflections about the gift of having options in life, and questions about practices like polygamy. She shares these thoughts in this article for the *Reporting ASEAN* series.



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Telling the ASEAN story. An independent feature series and media training programme that looks into ASEAN regionalism and integration, and the impact of these processes on the region's constituency.

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"This little book is a magic key with which to open all the doors to better reporting and understanding of ASEAN."

*-Kavi Chongkittavorn, senior fellow at the Institute of Security and International Studies, Thailand and columnist, 'Bangkok Post'*

"This is an essential primer on ASEAN for understanding what the Association is or is not, and what it can or cannot do. It is even more essential as an aid for all those who wish to write about and discuss ASEAN intelligibly and intelligently."

*-Moe Thuzar, fellow, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore*

ASEAN. Whether you love reporting on it, or would rather flee from it, the ASEAN Community will continue to stay within the news radar of Southeast Asia's media and journalists.

In fact, ASEAN integration is the region's biggest running story, not least in an interconnected world where what is regional is local too, and where media audiences need more contextualized, explanatory news and analyses than ever.

'Reportage around ASEAN Issues: A Tip Sheet' takes journalists – as well as students and followers of foreign policy, media and development, or anyone who needs to get past ASEAN's jargon – down a media trip consisting of tips and concepts to demystify ASEAN issues, as well as minefields to avoid.



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