EAST ASIA’S POST-COLD WAR SECURITY: THE ROLE OF ASEAN, THE UNITED STATES, AND CHINA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA’S STRATEGIES TOWARDS REGIONAL ORDER

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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It goes without saying that I am solely responsible for the work presented and any remaining shortcomings in this thesis.
ABSTRACT

After the Cold War ended, the international system has shifted from bipolarity to unipolarity with the U.S. emerged as the global dominant power. At the same time, with rapid economic development and military build-up, the rise of China as U.S.'s potential rival in East Asia is perceived by many Southeast Asian states as a threat to regional stability. Given such systemic transformation in the region, this thesis aims to: (1) assess the implications of Chinese and American involvements for East Asia security affairs, (2) evaluate Southeast Asia's policy options in realizing their interests and addressing the problem of regional order, (3) review the role of regional institutions in Southeast Asia's pathways towards regional order. The thesis applies a case study approach of qualitative research method to examine the phenomenon of East Asia power politics. Additionally, the method of "process-tracing" is employed to examine the causal mechanism between independent and dependent variables to produce generalizations of the role of ASEAN, the U.S., and China in Southeast Asia's strategies. As a theoretical framework, Hedley Bull's concepts of the balance of power and international society are utilized to examine and conceptualize Southeast Asia's hedging behaviors and the role of ASEAN in engaging the great powers. From the analyses of relevant empirical evidences, this thesis argues that Sino-U.S. relationships are likely to remain stable in the short to medium term. However, in the long term if the two powers could not attain agreements on a power concert or hierarchical duet type, there will likely be a power transition in East Asia. Therefore, Southeast Asia's pathways to regional order (the balance of influence and major powers enmeshment) play an important role in coping with the possibility of power transition in the region. Additionally, the thesis argues that engagement is the key strategy to supplement Southeast Asia's pathways to regional order. By engaging the great powers, ASEAN has played a major role in maintaining Southeast Asia's stable trilateral relations with the U.S. and China. Through ASEAN-led regional institutions, small Southeast Asian states have enhanced their strategic leverage against the U.S. and China thus allows them to enjoy greater autonomy and bargaining clout in their relations with the great powers. This thesis also holds that with collective ideational power, ASEAN is capable to engage and socialize the great powers in its multilateral frameworks to facilitate Southeast Asia's pathways towards regional order.
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