



United States and China's Interests on Green Geopolitical Strategy in Southeast Asia

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Abstract. This study analyzes the dynamics of US-China competition in Southeast Asia and emphasizes ASEAN's crucial role in balancing external influences while advancing regional sustainability goals. The research employs the Theory and concept of Green Economy and Development, utilizing a qualitative methodology with data collected through library studies. The findings reveal that the United States, through the Clean EDGE Asia initiative, focuses on promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency, and regional partnerships, while China leverages the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to develop green energy infrastructure, including hydropower, solar, and wind projects. This competition enhances investment opportunities but also poses challenges for Southeast Asian countries, such as the risk of dependency and increased geopolitical tensions. In conclusion, while US-China competition accelerates the green energy transition, it also complicates the geopolitical landscape in the region. This study provides insights for ASEAN to navigate these challenges and optimize the benefits of green economic development.

Keywords: United States, China, Clean Edge, Belt and Road Initiative, Green Economy.

1 Introduction

International relations continue to evolve with the increasing complexity of global challenges, particularly in environmental and sustainability issues. One emerging strategic approach is the concept of green geopolitics, which integrates political, economic, and environmental interests into a country's foreign policy [1]. In Southeast Asia, the United States and China are competing in implementing green geopolitical strategies to expand their influence. The United States promotes clean energy transition through initiatives such as Clean EDGE Asia, while China directs green energy investments through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These initiatives reflect China's commitment to addressing global issues such as peace, development, governance, and environmental and human health concerns. China's rise and the implementation of BRI challenge the current

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rules-based global order dominated by the United States and its allies. However, China's goal is not hegemony but the creation of a multipolar world where universal values coexist with the principle of peaceful coexistence, including non-interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states.

Rasshyvalov et al., (2024) highlights how geopolitical risks, including international conflicts, political changes, economic sanctions, and natural disasters, disrupt global supply chains and transportation networks, creating significant trade challenges [2]. This issue is particularly relevant when examining the green geopolitical strategies of the U.S. and China in Southeast Asia, where both nations compete to expand their influence through renewable energy initiatives [3]. Binh et al. (2022) emphasize Southeast Asia's strategic role in this rivalry, noting that the U.S. promotes energy partnerships through programs like the Asia EDGE Fellows Program, which fosters clean energy development and knowledge-sharing, while China utilizes the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to strengthen regional economic dependence through green infrastructure investments [4, 5]. Li et al., (2024) further elaborate on BRI's role in advancing China's dominance in global renewable energy transitions, aligning with its long-term energy security goals [6]. As both superpowers enhance their energy strategies, their competition in Southeast Asia increasingly intertwines with broader geopolitical interests, shaping regional sustainability policies and economic alignments.

The United States launched Clean EDGE Asia (Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy) in December 2021 to accelerate the clean energy transition in the Indo-Pacific region. This initiative relies on cooperation between the U.S. government, the private sector, international financial institutions, and partner governments to promote sustainable energy growth in the region. Through this program, the United States aims to strengthen energy resilience, diversify energy sources, and expand access to clean energy in Southeast Asia. Additionally, Clean EDGE Asia seeks to boost U.S. exports of clean energy products and services, enhance energy security, and create a more open and efficient energy market.

On the other hand, China adopts a more flexible approach by emphasizing investments and green infrastructure development through the Green Belt and Road Initiative (Green BRI). Although BRI does not exclusively focus on clean energy, many of its projects include energy infrastructure development. China has played an active role in infrastructure development in Southeast Asia through BRI, with various projects aimed at enhancing connectivity and economic cooperation in the region. These investments reflect China's efforts to strengthen economic ties with countries in the region through the development of strategic infrastructure.

This study aims to analyze in greater depth the interests of the United States and China in implementing green geopolitical strategies in Southeast Asia and their impact on the regional balance of power and sustainable development policies. The research employs a qualitative analysis with a case study approach, utilizing secondary data from various reliable sources to understand the interaction patterns between the two countries in shaping the direction of energy transition in Southeast Asia. It is expected that this study will reveal the interaction patterns between global actors and how countries in the region can leverage available opportunities without becoming overly dependent on either of the world's major powers [7].

2 Literature Review

Ding & Beh (2022) examine Indonesia's potential in transitioning to a green economy as part of ASEAN's commitment to addressing climate change [8]. Using the Green Economy Index (GEI), their study finds that while Indonesia's poverty rate remains a challenge, its GNI per capita has steadily increased, and its land cover remains well-preserved, supporting sustainable policies. This research is relevant as it highlights Indonesia's strategic role in the green economy transition, which is also a key factor in the geopolitical competition between the U.S. and China, particularly in investment and environmental cooperation. Further research conducted by Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2017) analyze China's contradictory approach in Southeast Asia, balancing economic cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with territorial assertiveness in the South China Sea [9]. Their study highlights Southeast Asia's strategic importance for China's economic, security, and diplomatic interests, leading to both cooperation and conflict. This research is relevant as it provides insight into China's geopolitical strategy, which extends beyond economics and politics to include environmental and sustainable energy policies, a key aspect of US -China competition in the region.

Xinyi Chen (2024) in a journal entitled *The Economic Reasons Behind the Policy Game Between China and the United States in Southeast Asia* triggered by the shift in economic power [10]. Since 2009, China has surpassed the US in trade volume, prompting the US to respond with policies such as the Asia-Pacific Rebalancing and IPEF. This study shows that China excels in manufacturing and energy, while the US is more dominant in consumer goods exports. This research is relevant because this trade competition also influences green geopolitical strategies, where China uses the BRI for green energy projects, while the US seeks to balance its influence in the region.

Kuik, (2021) examine the mixed reactions to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Southeast Asia, highlighting both opportunities and concerns [11]. While BRI offers infrastructure development and investment benefits, issues such as debt-trap diplomacy, economic inequality, and potential Chinese influence raise caution among ASEAN countries. Their study is relevant as it explores the geopolitical and economic implications of BRI, shedding light on the balance between economic opportunities and political challenges in the region.

Nguyen Tuan Binh, Bui Thi Thao, and Le Minh Chinh (2022) examine the strategic competition between the US and China in Southeast Asia, where China relies on economic diplomacy through the BRI and infrastructure investment, while the US focuses on security alliances and strategic partnerships [4]. Both have also begun to compete in renewable energy and sustainable projects. Gong (2019) examine the impact of OBOR on the geopolitics and economy of Southeast Asia, showing that large-scale infrastructure projects such as ports and railways strengthen China's regional dominance and increase the economic dependence of recipient countries [12]. In addition, OBOR becomes a soft power tool to control regional trade routes and diplomacy. Both studies are relevant because they highlight how economic and infrastructure strategies are used by the US and China to expand their influence in Southeast Asia, including in the energy and sustainability sectors.

The International Trade Administration (2022) in its report on the Clean EDGE Asia Business Development Mission outlines the United States' strategy to promote a green economy in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Vietnam, by facilitating the export of clean energy technologies and services [13]. This initiative involves trade missions that strengthen partnerships between US companies and local governments and businesses to improve energy security and accelerate the adoption of green technologies. The report also highlights leading sectors such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and smart grid technologies, where the US has a competitive advantage, and emphasizes the importance of technical assistance and training for local stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of the energy transition. This study is relevant to the author's research because it illustrates the role of international trade strategy in green geopolitics and how US green economic policy can be a diplomatic tool in global competition in the Southeast Asian region.

3 Methodology

In this study, the researcher applied a qualitative approach using a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to examine the green geopolitical strategies of the United States and China in Southeast Asia. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of motivations, interests, and power dynamics shaping their policies. Data was collected through a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed journals, government reports, books, and official documents, prioritizing credible sources such as ASEAN, the World Bank, and official US and Chinese agencies. For analysis, content and thematic analysis were used to identify key themes, including economic strategies, environmental diplomacy, and regional influence. This methodology allows for a contextual and comparative analysis, offering insights into the interplay between geopolitical, economic, and environmental factors. The descriptive-analytical method ensures a structured examination of patterns and trends, helping to assess the impact of US-China competition on Southeast Asia's sustainable development.

4 Discussion

4.1 Strategies and Steps Implemented by The United States in Encouraging Green Economic Development in Southeast Asia

The United States is leveraging the Clean EDGE Asia initiative to accelerate the transition to a green economy in Southeast Asia by enhancing energy security, deploying renewable energy technologies, and fostering partnerships. Key strategies include sending trade missions to countries like Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, exemplified by the Clean EDGE Asia Business Development Mission launched in June 2022, which connects U.S. companies in renewable energy sectors with regional policymakers. This initiative aims to expand energy access, create competitive markets, and support countries in meeting their climate goals.

Additionally, the U.S. is building bilateral partnerships to facilitate the green energy transition, particularly in Indonesia, where USAID collaborates with PT PLN (Persero) to decarbonize the electricity sector and reduce fossil fuel reliance. The U.S. government is also involved in the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) to mobilize investments for clean energy projects. Furthermore, the Clean EDGE Asia conference in January 2024 will gather stakeholders to develop policy recommendations for clean energy, while the initiative promotes energy efficiency and smart grid technologies in Vietnam. The U.S. aims to increase exports of clean energy technologies to Southeast Asia, fostering trade relationships in solar, wind, and hydrogen sectors [5].

4.2 Strategies and Steps Implemented by China in Promoting Green Economic Development in Southeast Asia

China is promoting green economic development in Southeast Asia through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), making significant investments in renewable energy projects in Indonesia, such as hydropower and solar power, including the Batang Toru hydro-power plant. These initiatives aim to meet Indonesia's energy demands and support the government's greenhouse gas reduction goals. In Vietnam, BRI investments focus on infrastructure for renewable energy, including wind and solar facilities, which are vital for diversifying energy sources and phasing out coal, thereby enhancing regional sustainable development [14].

The BRI provides substantial benefits to Thailand by emphasizing green projects and energy efficiency, aligning with the country's sustainable development objectives. China has contributed to solar power facilities and electric vehicle infrastructure, facilitating Thailand's transition to cleaner energy. In the Philippines, BRI projects encompass renewable energy initiatives and sustainable infrastructure investments, crucial for enhancing the country's renewable energy capacity and creating jobs, thus fostering green economic development and strengthening bilateral ties in the renewable energy sector.

4.3 Challenges Faced in Implementing a Green Economy Strategy, Including the Dynamics of Competition Between the United States and China in the Southeast Asia Region

Innovation in the green economy plays a crucial role in addressing climate change and environmental degradation while also providing economic benefits. However, Southeast Asian countries face various challenges in implementing green strategies, particularly regarding energy dependence, geopolitical risks, infrastructure limitations, and socio-cultural factor. Geopolitical uncertainty, particularly the growing tension between the United States and China, further complicates this transition. The US is increasingly pushing for "de-risking" strategies to reduce dependency on China for critical minerals, while China continues to dominate the global supply chain for electric vehicle (EV) batteries and other key components.

The ongoing geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China significantly influences the green economy landscape in Southeast Asia. China's control over strategic minerals and battery production gives it an upper hand, while the US is actively

reshaping supply chains to reduce reliance on China through alliances with friendly nations. This competition places Southeast Asian countries in a difficult position, as they must navigate between these two economic powers while securing investment and technology transfer for their green transition.

Beyond technical and geopolitical challenges, social and cultural factors also hinder the green transition. Many communities still rely on traditional resource management practices, necessitating education and public awareness initiatives to drive behavioral change. Additionally, regional disparities in economic and infrastructure development create imbalances in green technology adoption. Remote areas often struggle to access the necessary resources for clean energy integration, further widening the development gap. Inclusive policies, such as investment incentives for underdeveloped regions and regional cooperation, are essential to ensuring equitable access to sustainable energy [15].

For Southeast Asian nations, balancing geopolitical interests while maintaining economic sustainability and resource sovereignty is a critical challenge. To successfully transition to a green economy, countries must strengthen their industrial capacity, diversify investment sources, accelerate green technology adoption, and implement regulations that support long-term sustainability. With an integrated approach that combines policy, investment, and community participation, Southeast Asia can develop a more inclusive, resilient, and globally competitive green economy.

4.4 The Superiority of The United States and China in Green Economic Development in Southeast Asia, and in Which Aspects They are Superior

The superiority of the United States and China in the development of the green economy in Southeast Asia reflects differences in their strategic approaches and economic interests in the region. The United States seeks to expand its influence through the Clean Edge Asia initiative, which aims to increase access to net energy, strengthen energy security, and accelerate the adoption of green technology. This program encourages exports of American clean energy technology, such as solar power, wind, hydrogen, and the development of intelligent electricity networks. In addition, the US approach prioritizes cooperation with the government and the private sector, including partnerships with PT PLN (Persero) in Indonesia to support the transition of net energy. Washington is also active in economic diplomacy by holding a trading mission that brings together US renewable energy companies with business partners in Southeast Asia [16].

Conversely, China emphasizes its investment in the development of green infrastructure through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Large investments have been disbursed for green energy projects, such as the Toru Batang Water Power Plant in Indonesia and the Wind and Solar Project in Vietnam. Another advantage of China is its dominance in the supply chain of raw materials for green energy, such as nickel in Indonesia and Rare Earth in Myanmar, which is important for the battery industry of electric vehicles and other clean energy technology [10].

The Chinese funding approach is more flexible than the US makes its investment more attractive to Southeast Asian countries. In addition to green energy, China also built sustainable transportation infrastructure, such as the Jakarta-Bandung fast train

and Chinese-Laos railroad tracks. Although the US approach is more focused on long-term energy technology and security, its limitations of funding make access to Southeast Asian countries on US investment more limited. Conversely, China offers an easier financing scheme, although there are concerns related to economic dependence and the risk of debt traps. The competition between the US and China in the green economy has a significant impact on sustainable energy development in the region.

4.5 Prospects for Green Economy Development in Southeast Asia and ASEAN's Role in Regional Sustainability

Southeast Asia holds significant potential for green economy development amid the growing global demand for clean energy. However, this transition faces several challenges, including dependence on fossil fuels, infrastructure limitations, and geopolitical competition between the United States and China. Both countries compete through investments and policies in the green energy sector, positioning the region as a strategic battleground for economic and energy dominance [4]. In this context, ASEAN plays a crucial role in ensuring a fair and sustainable energy transition.

With abundant natural resources, Southeast Asia has the potential to become a global hub for green energy. Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines present substantial opportunities in solar, wind, and hydrogen energy development. However, investment constraints remain a major obstacle to transitioning to clean energy [7]. The rivalry between the United States and China also influences regional energy policies. The United States promotes the Clean EDGE Asia initiative, while China leverages the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to expand strategic infrastructure projects in the region [17, 18]

Although this competition offers investment opportunities, it also poses political and economic risks that must be carefully managed. ASEAN must develop strategies to avoid over-reliance on any single investor country. As a regional organization, ASEAN coordinates green energy policies through the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC), which promotes technological collaboration, increased investment, and regulatory harmonization among its member states.

One of the primary challenges for ASEAN is the varying levels of readiness among its member states in adopting green energy. While some countries have supportive policies and infrastructure for the energy transition, others still heavily rely on fossil fuels. Therefore, accelerating policy harmonization, diversifying investments, and strengthening infrastructure and technology—such as smart grids and energy storage systems—are essential for a successful transition [19].

Beyond technological advancements, shifting industry and societal mindsets is also crucial in facilitating the transition to clean energy. Education, workforce training, and public awareness campaigns must be intensified to encourage widespread adoption of renewable energy solutions. Additionally, ASEAN must maintain a strategic balance amid geopolitical competition, ensuring that incoming investments maximize benefits for the region's green economic development [3, 16].

If these strategies are effectively implemented, Southeast Asia has the potential to emerge as a global green economy hub, strengthen ASEAN's position in international

energy policy, and establish the clean energy transition as a foundation for sustainable and inclusive economic growth [1, 15].

4.6 Strategies and Steps Implemented by The United States in Encouraging Green Economic Development in Southeast Asia

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5 Conclusion and Recommendation

The United States and China have both played an active role in promoting green economic development in Southeast Asia through various initiatives and investments. The US is using the Clean EDGE Asia program to promote renewable energy, energy efficiency, and regional partnerships, while China is using the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to build green energy infrastructure such as hydropower, solar, and wind. However, the competition between the two countries creates geopolitical challenges and dependencies for Southeast Asian countries. ASEAN plays a key role in coordinating green energy policies, promoting regional cooperation, and ensuring a just and sustainable energy transition. To achieve the full potential of the green economy, policy harmonization, investment diversification, infrastructure strengthening, and changing the mindset of society and industry are needed. With the right strategies, Southeast Asia can become a global green economy hub that is inclusive and sustainable.

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