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DIGITAL TRADE FACILITATION UNDER AHKFTA

**Barriers, Opportunities,
and the Path toward Digital
Integration**



Digital Trade Facilitation under AHKFTA: Barriers, Opportunities, and the Path Toward Digital Integration

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Abstract

The ASEAN–Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) holds considerable potential to deepen regional integration and promote trade facilitation. Yet, its utilization has remained limited, particularly in the area of digital documentation and the issuance of electronic Certificates of Origin (e-CoO). This paper examines the barriers and opportunities for enhancing AHKFTA utilization, with a focus on digital trade facilitation. Drawing on findings from the ITD project alongside secondary data analysis, the study identifies four key categories of challenges: low incentives to use AHKFTA preferences due to Hong Kong’s zero MFN duties, legal and procedural restrictions such as the requirement for hardcopy CoOs, technical constraints including limited system interoperability and data security concerns, and capacity and awareness gaps among traders and authorities.

At the same time, the study highlights opportunities for ASEAN and Hong Kong to strengthen collaboration through regulatory harmonization, capacity building, and digital platform integration. The paper argues that the absence of a jointly agreed roadmap has hindered progress and stresses the need for ASEAN and Hong Kong to establish a digital roadmap to guide implementation. While the detailed roadmap remains confidential, its importance lies in providing a structured framework for advancing digital integration, fostering greater compliance, and unlocking the full potential of the AHKFTA.

By emphasizing the role of digitalization in trade facilitation, this study contributes to ongoing policy discussions on how ASEAN and Hong Kong can move beyond tariff liberalization

toward a more efficient, transparent, and cooperative framework for regional economic integration.

Introduction

ASEAN was formed by the countries of Southeast Asia with the aim of enhancing economic cooperation and strengthening regional collaboration within the region. As a result of its establishment, the ASEAN Declaration outlined approximately seven objectives, with a particular focus on promoting economic growth, social progress, and cultural development through accelerated joint efforts, as well as maintaining close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations. (ASEAN, 2025)

Given its objectives in promoting economic growth and fostering regional and international cooperation, ASEAN has established Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with several countries. According to the ASEAN database, there are currently seven FTAs in place: ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand, ASEAN-China, ASEAN-India, ASEAN-Japan, ASEAN-Korea, ASEAN-Hong Kong, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). (Department of Trade Negotiation [DTN], 2025; and Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN], 2025)

The ASEAN–Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) is particularly noteworthy, as Hong Kong was ASEAN’s sixth-largest trading partner in 2019 with a trade value of USD 111 billion—accounting for 3.9% of ASEAN’s total trade. (ASEAN, n.d.), Major merchandise trading partners within ASEAN include Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand, which in 2022 collectively accounted for 13.7% of ASEAN’s trade with Hong Kong, followed by Mainland China (Legislative Council of the HKSAR, 2023) This positions Hong Kong as one of the strategic trade partners for ASEAN countries. In addition, Hong Kong actively promotes both domestic and international investment through attractive policies such as the Branding, Upgrading, and Domestic Sales (BUD) Fund, which provides up to HK\$1 million to support SMEs in expanding overseas and developing e-commerce business in China. Hong Kong also promotes tourism and offers incentives such as property tax exemptions to facilitate investment by both permanent and non-permanent residents. (Department of International Trade Promotion [DITP], 2025). These measures highlight Hong Kong’s economic potential, which ASEAN countries can leverage

by making full use of the ASEAN–Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) signed on 12 November 2017.

However, the utilization of AHKFTA among ASEAN members remains limited for various reasons. One major factor is the divergence in national regulations, which can hinder the effective implementation of the agreement, and Hongkong and China import duty is free under the MFN basis, including its digital trade facilitation components. Moreover, academic studies on AHKFTA remain scarce. This paper seeks to address this knowledge gap by examining the barriers and opportunities in AHKFTA utilization within ASEAN, with a specific focus on digital trade facilitation. It also presents the findings from the ITD project and the proposed roadmap for enhancing AHKFTA utilization. The research adopts a qualitative approach, using a document-based case analysis, as well as secondary data from various academic papers and reliable reports from international organizations.

This study will be valuable for stakeholders interested in improving the utilization of AHKFTA and understanding the challenges associated with regional or multilateral trade agreements. Moreover, the insights gained can inform efforts to overcome implementation challenges in other multilateral agreements, thereby contributing to the advancement of ASEAN and broader regional economic cooperation.

Literature Review/ Conceptual Framework

The ASEAN–Hong Kong, China Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA), signed in 2017, has the potential to serve as a highly beneficial tool for promoting regional trade within ASEAN, particularly in the area of trade facilitation, which enables trade flows to move seamlessly with minimal barriers. Digitalization is a key component of trade facilitation, as reflected in Chapter 4 of the AHKFTA, which covers customs procedures, documentation requirements, the single window system, and the electronic submission of import documentation. This paper focuses primarily on these digital trade facilitation aspects. This section begins with a review of the relevant literature to assess whether ASEAN and Hong Kong have the necessary tools in place to support trade digitalization, and to explore how existing studies have addressed these issues.

Trade Facilitation Agreement by World Trade Organization (WTO)

We found that the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), agreed upon by WTO members and entering into force in 2017 following negotiations at the Bali Ministerial Conference, aims to modernize and harmonize export and import processes. The agreement includes provisions on digital trade facilitation in several of its articles.

Article 7, titled *Release and Clearance of Goods*, emphasizes how digitalization can enhance trade facilitation through electronic processes. For example, paragraph 2 requires each member state to adopt and allow the option of electronic payment. Meanwhile, paragraph 1 addresses the pre-arrival process, allowing the lodging of electronic documentation.

We observe a strong emphasis on electronic procedures in Article 10 across various paragraphs. For example, paragraph 2 of section 2.1 addresses the acceptance of copies and reaffirms that member states must accept electronic documentation. This underscores the importance of digitalization in facilitating trade within the TFA. Similarly, paragraph 4 of the TFA highlights digitalization by requiring member states to maintain a single window system for document submission, notifications, and related processes. (World Trade Organization, 2019) The World Trade Organization also states that the implementation of the TFA, which incorporates digitalization, can reduce trade costs by 14.3 percent (World Trade Organization, 2017). This demonstrates that digitalization within the Trade Facilitation Agreement has gained significant attention from member states and serves as an important factor in reducing trade costs, improving speed and efficiency in trade facilitation, and providing a regulatory framework for countries to implement.

Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and The Pacific (CPTA) by the United Nations

Within the broader framework that emphasizes digitalization in trade facilitation, the United Nations' Cross-Border Paperless Trade (CPTA) framework is particularly relevant. It is essential to examine how this framework outlines the obligations and recommendations for countries to implement digital solutions in trade processes.

The core objective of the CPTA is to promote paperless trade. To achieve this, it emphasizes the need to enable the exchange and mutual recognition of trade-related data and documents in electronic form, as well as to facilitate interoperability among national and subregional single windows and other paperless trade systems. These measures aim to make international trade transactions more efficient and transparent while enhancing regulatory compliance. This underscores that single window systems and electronic platforms are not only crucial but are also actively promoted within broader international trade facilitation frameworks as essential components for achieving full digitalization.

Looking at the definition helps clarify the scope of the CPTA. Cross-border paperless trade under the CPTA covers import, export, transit, and related services, all conducted through electronic communication, including the exchange of trade-related data and documents in electronic form. This indicates that paperless trade under the CPTA inherently reflects a digitalization approach, particularly when considering the single window system. As introduced in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), the single window is defined as a facility that allows parties involved in a trade transaction to electronically submit data and documents through a single entry point. It is important to note that the single window system is referenced in various international agreements and is regarded as a crucial tool for advancing digitalization in cross-border trade facilitation. This aspect will be further examined in the analytical chapter.

Investigating the contents of the CPTA, that such a provision in digital promotion and trade facilitation are discussed in various article.

Article 6, which addresses the national policy framework, clearly states in paragraph 1 that the parties shall endeavour to establish a national policy framework for paperless trade. Furthermore, paragraphs 2 and 3 specify that the parties shall establish the necessary legal systems and committees to support electronic paperless trade.

Similarly, Article 8, which addresses the single window system, highlights in paragraph 1 the requirement to provide mutual recognition of trade-related data. Paragraph 3 further states that parties may enter into bilateral or multilateral arrangements to operationalize cross-border mutual recognition of trade-related data and documents in electronic form. This demonstrates that the framework not only emphasizes the establishment of digital systems but also promotes

interoperability and cooperation among parties to facilitate cross-border paperless trade. (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [ESCAP], 2016)

ASEAN Various frameworks related to Trade facilitation and digitalization

Given the importance of digitalization in trade and trade facilitation, it is crucial to examine how ASEAN has established frameworks to prepare for and utilize digital tools in trade facilitation. Upon exploring this, we found relevant technical frameworks presented by ASEAN, indicating that ASEAN complies with broader international frameworks and is prepared for digitalization.

ASEAN Trade In Goods Agreement (ATIGA)

The ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA), in force since 2010, encompasses key elements of trade facilitation, particularly the use of digital tools. Its primary objectives are to strengthen ASEAN as a single market and production base, promote the free flow of goods within the region, and minimize trade barriers in order to reduce business costs.

Reducing trade costs can be achieved through various means, and one of the most effective in the current era is the use of technology. The World Trade Organization (2021) highlights that technological change contributes to trade growth, estimating that global trade could increase by up to two percentage points as a result of digital technologies. This evidence underscores the role of technology as a catalyst for trade expansion. Consistent with this, Bellucci, Rubínová, and Piermartini (2023) demonstrate that a 10-percentage-point increase in digital connectivity is associated with approximately a 2 percent reduction in trade costs in both goods and services. This indicates that digital connectivity and technological utilization have a significant impact on reducing trade costs.

Within ATIGA, the use of technology is recognized as an essential component of reducing business costs and enhancing trade facilitation. Chapter 5, Article 46, within the scope of the ASEAN Trade Facilitation Work Programme, highlights initiatives such as the establishment of the ASEAN Single Window and improvements in customs procedures. Similarly, Article 49 refers to the ASEAN Single Window and National Single Windows. These provisions demonstrate ATIGA's commitment to leveraging technology to facilitate trade across the region.

Agreement to establish and implement the ASEAN Single Window

The Agreement was introduced as a complement to ATIGA in promoting trade facilitation through digital tools. While ATIGA called for the establishment of the ASEAN Single Window (ASW), this Agreement provides the legal framework to operationalize the ASW and to ensure the fulfillment of ASEAN's regional commitments. Article 5 specifically obliges member states to develop and implement their respective National Single Windows (NSWs) as a foundation for the regional ASW. This demonstrates that ASEAN's approach to digital trade facilitation is embedded both in ATIGA and in the Agreement dedicated to its implementation.

AHKFTA and the Provision in Technology and Trade Facilitation

Having examined ASEAN frameworks on digital trade facilitation, this section turns to the AHKFTA to assess how its provisions support the use of digital tools. Under Chapter 5, Article 9 ("Use of Information Technology Systems"), the Agreement specifies that (1) the customs administration of each party shall apply information technology, and (2) each party shall endeavour to establish and operate a Single Window system to enable traders to submit documentation electronically. These provisions demonstrate that both AHKFTA and ASEAN frameworks incorporate regulations supporting digital trade facilitation through the Single Window mechanism. Notably, AHKFTA also makes explicit reference to electronic documentation, underscoring its readiness to promote the utilization of Single Window systems in practice.

Despite the provisions on digital trade facilitation under both AHKFTA and ASEAN, the practical utilization of AHKFTA—particularly the issuance of electronic documentation and certification—still faces several challenges. One key challenge is the lack of system interoperability, which will be further examined in the next chapter.

Findings from Document Review and Analysis

Barriers to Effective Utilization of AHKFTA Provisions

Having explored the regulations and the context under the AHKFTA and ASEAN, we can see that everything seems to be smooth in facilitating trade under AHKFTA as everything is in place. However, there are still barriers that delay the implementation process. The study by

Pham et al. (2024) examined the trade creation and trade diversion effects and found that trade policy between Hong Kong and ASEAN has performed well in promoting intra-regional trade growth. Nevertheless, trade policy between Hong Kong and ASEAN should be maintained to achieve deeper economic integration within the region, and the AHKFTA should broaden its focus beyond tariff barriers. This demonstrates that there are gaps in the implementation of AHKFTA, which is consistent with the project findings, as the focus should extend beyond tariffs to include regulatory compliance within ASEAN countries, where members have encountered policy inconsistencies between member states.

The findings from the document review exhibit a trend consistent with those of the study. The identified barriers are classified into four categories: FTA Utilization, Legal and Procedural Aspects, Digitalization and Technical, and Capacity and Awareness—as presented in the table below.

Category	Specific Barrier	Explanation
FTA Utilization	Zero through Most Favored Nations (MFN) duties in Hong Kong, China	ASEAN exporters have little incentive to use AHKFTA preferences as almost all imports to Hong Kong are already duty-free
	Rules of Origin (RoO) Non-Qualification	Hong Kong, China utilizes some exports under the FTA, but most items are just traded through third countries and thus do not qualify for rules of origin
Legal and Procedural	Hardcopy CoO requirement	Although exporters are allowed to file certificate of origin applications electronically, the AHKFTA does not allow the issuance of e-CoO (only hardcopy form) under Rule 7 of Annex 3-1 stipulates that the CoO shall comprise one original and two copies and shall be in hardcopy.
	Varying Documentary Requirements	Differences among state parties in documents required for CoO issuance

		and imports. This leads to inconsistent processing times.
	Lack of Digital Exchange for SPS/TBT	The AHKFTA does not specify the issuance and transmission of SPS and TBT certification electronically
Digitalization / Technical	Lack of robust online systems	While ASEAN members successfully use e-CoO for ATIGA, they still lack a robust online system to process cases electronically for all other FTAs, including AHKFTA
	Technical Capacity and Funding Gaps	Key challenges identified included the lack of fund and IT-skilled human resources
	System Complexity & Training	Digital platforms are often complicated and require significant user training.
	Data Security & Authentication	Concerns over privacy, verification, and system trust reduce adoption.
	Receiving Port Readiness	The uncertainty on whether the receiving port can process e-CoO is a challenge for issuing authorities
	Dependence on Hardcopy Documentation	The loss of hardcopy of CoO creates a longer procedure to obtain duplicate copy
	Customs System Integration Issues	System downtime, misconfiguration, and lack of interoperability hinder digitalized clearance
Capacity & Awareness	Trader Awareness & Skill Gaps	Traders are not well aware of rules and procedures or well equipped to submit documents electronically, which leads to delays in processing their cases
	Need for Capacity Building	There is a widespread need for capacity building of various agencies and traders to enhance their digital skills and understanding of the complexities of rules of origin

	Difficulty in Verification	Customs face challenges verifying accuracy and authenticity of CoO and other documents.
	Compliance & RoO Knowledge Gaps	Issues include ensuring consistent compliance with RoO provisions to determine the origin of the product, especially when the exporter or trader does not know where their raw materials came from, or when they are unable to provide the required Form AHK for raw materials sourced from the FTA party

Based on these barriers, it can be concluded that AHKFTA utilization still faces various challenges, including technical issues, regulatory constraints, and limitations in capacity and awareness. The need for harmonization among member countries, as well as the adoption of digital solutions, must be addressed to enhance the effective use of the AHKFTA. Existing platforms, such as the ASEAN Single Window, should also be considered for integration. Furthermore, while digitalization is crucial to facilitating trade and investment, the AHKFTA member states have not yet finalized a digital roadmap. This project has brought stakeholders together to draft a final digital roadmap aimed at improving the issuance of e-certification.

The next chapter will present the opportunities identified through the project, along with policy recommendations derived from its implementation and the findings of the document review. These insights will help illustrate how AHKFTA can serve as a strategic opportunity for ASEAN.

Opportunities for Strengthening AHKFTA Utilization: Policy Alignment, Digital Platforms, and Capacity Building

Hong Kong is an important trading partner for ASEAN, ranking as its sixth-largest trading partner. Data from Trademap (2024) further indicate that Hong Kong accounts for 3 percent of global imports. Its strategic location, particularly through Mainland China, plays a central role, with 59.1 percent of Hong Kong’s exports directed to the mainland. Within ASEAN, Viet Nam and Thailand also emerge as significant export partners. This is also consistent with the study by Fan

et al. (2024), which highlights that Hong Kong is one of the world's most important trading ports, actively contributing to the innovative development of international economic and trade rules and governance. The study also emphasizes Hong Kong's advantages in trade and logistics, stemming from its central location in Asia and highly developed infrastructure that facilitates international trade.

In 2024, ASEAN and Hong Kong also strengthened their economic ties. ASEAN ranked as Hong Kong's second-largest trading partner, with total merchandise trade amounting to HKD 1,289.6 billion, representing 13.6 percent of Hong Kong's global merchandise trade. Furthermore, ASEAN was Hong Kong's second-largest supplier of goods in 2024, with exports from ASEAN entering Hong Kong tariff-free. These trends demonstrate significant opportunities for ASEAN to further leverage its trade process with Hong Kong. (Trade and Industry Department, 2025)

Building on these opportunities identified in various studies, ASEAN and Hong Kong should also address the challenges in the utilization of the AHKFTA, particularly through the adoption of digital platforms for trade facilitation. The findings from the project indicate that the key challenges lie in regulatory harmonization and the absence of a robust plan to ensure compliance. The key opportunities identified from the findings are demonstrated below.

Digitalization and Regulatory Alignment as Opportunities for Enhancing AHKFTA Utilization

Through the project's findings, it became evident that the preferential utilization of the AHKFTA remains minimal, largely because Hong Kong, China maintains zero import duties under the MFN basis. Nonetheless, participants widely recognized that shifting toward the digital exchange of data for FTA procedures could serve as a valuable learning experience for all parties. In particular, digitalization was identified as a key opportunity to enhance AHKFTA utilization.

The provisions of the AHKFTA already acknowledge the role of information technology—for instance, Chapter 4, Article 9 highlights the use of electronic procedures in customs, while Chapter 9 on Economic and Technical Cooperation underscores the importance of capacity building and technical assistance to create new opportunities for trade and investment. However, the agreement still contains restrictive provisions: Annex 3-1, Rule 7, for example, explicitly requires the issuance of a hard copy of the Certificate of Origin. This contrasts with

ASEAN's progress under the ASEAN Single Window (ASW), which facilitates electronic exchange of trade-related documents.

To advance AHKFTA utilization, it is therefore essential to strengthen digitalization efforts and foster closer integration between Hong Kong and ASEAN, particularly through the alignment of regulatory frameworks and enhanced compliance mechanisms. Such efforts would demonstrate the potential of ASEAN–Hong Kong cooperation in leveraging digital trade to improve efficiency and competitiveness.

Digital Platform Integration and Policy Harmonization as Drivers of AHKFTA Utilization

Based on the project outcomes, barriers to AHKFTA utilization stem not only from regulatory misalignment between ASEAN and Hong Kong, but also from inconsistencies within ASEAN itself. Despite the relative success of ATIGA, many ASEAN members still lack robust online systems to process cases electronically, which contributes to delays in both AHKFTA utilization and broader trade facilitation. The variations across member states are summarized below.

ASEAN Country	Digital Solution/Platform Used	E-CoO Application/Issuance Status (AHKFTA)	Capacity Issues Identified
Brunei	Single Window (BDNSW)	Does not issue e-CoO under AHKFTA	System is too complicated to use and manage
Cambodia	Automation system (www.co.moc.gov.kh), Microsoft.Net, AXWay (via ASW for e-Form D)	Issues e-CoO, but only has experience with ATIGA e-Form D	Digital solutions are effective but too complicated to use and manage. Challenges in enhancing capacity of frontline officers and sustaining the system
Indonesia	e-SKA, Indonesia National Single Window (INSW)	Does not issue e-CoO under AHKFTA	Uncertainty on whether the receiving port can process e-CoO is a challenge.

			System sometimes has downtime period
Lao PDR	National Single Window ASYCUDA Plus (NSWA+)	Issues e-CoO and allows electronic application	Lack of fund and IT-skilled human resources are major challenge
Malaysia	Electronic Preferential Certificate of Origin System (ePCO System)	Issues e-CoO (electronically), but still uses printed CoO for AHKFTA	Concerns about data security and privacy, authentication and verification, and capacity-building and training. Not yet ready for e-CoO for FTAs other than ATIGA
Myanmar	Tradenet 2.0, Myanmar Automated Cargo Clearance System (MACCS)	Issues e-CoO and allows electronic application	Current system is not well operating for some components (e.g., data reporting format)
Philippines	E-CoO Portal (ATIGA Form D)	Does not issue e-CoO Form AHKFTA, although they issue e-CoO Form D (ATIGA)	Need to add a provision for issuance of electronic CoO form AHKFTA in the agreement
Singapore	MS-Excel with preset formula (for RVC calculation)	Does not issue e-CoO under AHKFTA	Need to develop a robust system to issue E-CoO under AHKFTA
Thailand	SMART C/O system by DFT	Issues e-CoO and allows electronic application (fastest issuance at 15 minutes)	Lacking digital skill for application form AHK and lacking human resource in using digital system

Vietnam	Electronic C/O system (ECOSYS)	Issues e-CoO and allows electronic application	Digital solutions are effective but too complicated to use and manage
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The document findings reveal that even within ASEAN members, significant challenges remain in the issuance and use of electronic Certificates of Origin (e-CoO), which has slowed the overall utilization of the AHKFTA. For instance, Thailand issues e-CoOs at the fastest pace, yet capacity gaps in digital skills persist. At the same time, countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Brunei do not currently issue e-CoOs under the AHKFTA. Interestingly, several of these members already have experience with electronic Form D under ATIGA, yet this practice has not been extended to the AHKFTA framework. This highlights the importance of initiating structured discussions between ASEAN and Hong Kong to design a joint roadmap aimed at strengthening digital trade facilitation and ensuring more effective utilization of the AHKFTA.

Capacity building for both authorities and traders is essential to improving AHKFTA utilization. Chapter 9 of the AHKFTA explicitly underscores the importance of technical assistance and capacity building, recognizing their role in fostering trade and investment opportunities. Likewise, the World Customs Organization (WCO) emphasizes that without an efficient and effective customs administration, governments cannot fully achieve their policy objectives, particularly in relation to trade facilitation. Strengthening the knowledge, skills, and institutional capacity of both public and private stakeholders is therefore a necessary condition for realizing the potential of the AHKFTA and for unlocking new opportunities to deepen ASEAN–Hong Kong economic cooperation.

Roadmap is needed for Digital Integration under AHKFTA

Having examined both the barriers and potential opportunities for enhancing AHKFTA utilization, this paper finds that many of the challenges ultimately arise from the absence of a clear, jointly agreed roadmap between ASEAN and Hong Kong. To address this gap, the paper emphasizes the need for member states to collaboratively develop a digital roadmap, informed by survey findings and stakeholder consultations. The underlying consensus is that digital integration represents a critical pathway for overcoming existing obstacles.

The adoption of a clear digital roadmap, developed through collaborative efforts and endorsed by AHKFTA member states, marks an important step toward improving the utilization of the agreement and expanding opportunities through digital integration and closer cooperation. If effectively implemented, this roadmap will not only increase the efficiency and transparency of trade under the AHKFTA but also serve as a model for advancing digital trade facilitation across ASEAN and beyond.

Conclusion

This study examined the utilization of the ASEAN–Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA), with a particular focus on digital trade facilitation. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research was grounded in a document-based case analysis. Secondary sources including academic literature, international reports, and regional policy documents.

The study reviews a unique opportunity to assess both barriers and opportunities in advancing digital trade under the AHKFTA. Findings revealed that despite existing provisions in the agreement supporting digitalization, the actual utilization of AHKFTA remains limited due to several persistent challenges. These barriers fall into four categories: (1) FTA utilization—where Hong Kong’s zero import duties reduce incentives to use AHKFTA preferences; (2) legal and procedural constraints—most notably the requirement for hardcopy certificates of origin; (3) digitalization and technical issues—including system interoperability, funding gaps, and data security concerns; and (4) capacity and awareness limitations—reflecting knowledge gaps among traders and institutional actors.

In response to these findings, this paper argues that developing a jointly agreed digital roadmap between ASEAN and Hong Kong is essential to strengthening the utilization of the AHKFTA. Such a roadmap should provide a structured approach to regulatory harmonization, capacity building, and the integration of digital trade systems, thereby addressing the barriers identified in this study.

The call for a roadmap marks an important step forward, signaling the need for ASEAN and Hong Kong to move beyond tariff liberalization and embrace digital integration as a driver of trade facilitation. If pursued effectively, a digital roadmap would enhance the efficiency, transparency, and reliability of cross-border trade, while also serving as a scalable model for

future ASEAN free trade agreements. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that the pathway toward stronger AHKFTA utilization lies in harmonizing regulatory frameworks, investing in digital capacity, and fostering regional cooperation.

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