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The Patron-Client Concept in Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Philippines

Abstract

Over the past few years, bilateral relations between China and the Philippines have changed dramatically; all thanks to the presidential election won by Rodrigo Duterte in mid-2016, who focused on improving relations with China, at the expense of the United States. Given the characteristics of rapprochement between these countries, their bilateral relations will be presented based on an analysis of the patron-client concept. This concept is built on the dyadic relationship between participants with unequal status. A stronger country in economic and military terms, serving as a patron, takes care of a weaker client, in exchange for its broadly understood loyalty. China as an entity with a long civilization dominance in East Asia, one of the largest economies in the world, as well as an actor with growing military potential is part of this assumption. The purpose of this research will be to prove that the Philippines through its political decisions and economic relations with the People's Republic of China appears to be the client.

It should be emphasized that China as the patron of another member state of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), will strengthen its position in the context of negotiations on the final version of the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea. The economic and military support of the Philippines by granting loans and increasing trade, as well as organizing joint military maneuvers, as per clientelism, can result in the subordination of the Manila government to the Beijing authorities, which ultimately may result in greater destabilization of decision-making processes in ASEAN, already hampered by the economic asymmetry of individual member states.

Keywords: China, Philippines, Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Southeast Asia, patron-client, South China Sea

1. Introduction

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, which, contrary to its name, has not left the same mark on all countries, China's position has been strengthening all the time. The expansion of government influence in Beijing is best seen by the example of Southeast Asia, with the Philippines best reflecting the rivalry between China and the United States in the region. Since the Philippines regained independence in 1946, the United States has been the biggest ally of the government in Manila. With the election won by Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, a drastic change has been seen when it comes to the Philippines' main ally. At the heart of the relationship between these three countries is the territorial dispute in the South China Sea, which plays a key role in the economic and energy security of many countries in the world, because the main sea trade routes run through this sea.

The purpose of the article is to analyze China–Philippines bilateral relations based on the theoretical concept of patron-client. The author will refer, among other things, to the definition developed by James Scott, as well as the book by Christopher Shoemaker and John Spanier, who were among the first to use this concept to analyze international relations during the Cold War period (Shoemaker & Spanier, 1984). In the first part, the concept itself will be discussed and four groups of variables will be distinguished. I shall then proceed to a brief outline of the historical relationship between China and the Philippines, where key issues affecting bilateral relations between these countries will be presented. At the beginning of the last part of the article, the change in the way China conducts foreign policy since Xi Jinping took power, which, according to the author, has largely contributed to changing China's position in the region, and has also influenced a new opening in China–Philippines relations, will be introduced. Then, an analysis of bilateral relations is conducted based on three kinds of variables that are distinctive features of the patron-client concept.

Thanks to the analysis, it will be possible to answer a number of research questions, such as: do China–Philippines relations match the characteristics of the patron-client concept? What are the biggest obstacles in forming and maintaining this type of relationship? How will China–Philippines rapprochement affect the future of the territorial dispute in the South China Sea? Given the strategic location of the Philippines in the region and the fact that it will be the state that will hold the presiden-

cy of ASEAN in 2021 when the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea is to be developed, the key issue is whether Manila's main government ally will be Beijing or Washington.

2. Patron–Client Concept

The author of one of the most comprehensive definitions of the patron-client relationship is James Scott, who defined it as a special example of dyadic relations, characterized by instrumental friendship between an actor with a higher socioeconomic status (patron), using his influence and resources to provide protection and/or benefit to the actor with a lower status (client) who repays by offering their support and assistance to the patron (Scott, 1972).

Christopher Shoemaker and John Spanier were the first to describe relations between states in the context of patron-client relations in the book *Patron-Client State Relationship. Multilateral Crises in the Nuclear Age*. They highlighted a number of key elements that are characteristic of international clientele relations. First, there must be a clear asymmetry between the countries involved in military capabilities, with the patron's advantage over the client. Moreover, a state that plays the role of a client cannot have the status of military power over an international or regional arena, and it must also be characterized by a lack of independent capacity to guarantee security. The above conditions prove that the so-called security transfer in the form of arms, training and joint maneuvers is a one-way process, and the flow is from the patron to the client (Shoemaker & Spanier, 1984).

Entities that interact with each other strive to achieve specific goals. It is the same with the patron-client concept, but they differ depending on the position and current conditions in the international environment. In their work Shoemaker and Spanier undertook to distinguish a general set of goals characteristic of both the patron and the client.

Due to the nature of clientelism, the patron seeks to exert influence and gain the greatest possible control over the client. To this end, it can pursue ideological goals by demanding changes in the client's political structure. These types of changes are possible due to the introduction of new economic practices, the reorientation of social customs and the direct takeover of control over the internal and/or external security system. A common example of the ideological goal in the foreign policy of

superpowers in relation to less developed countries – which act as clients – is respect for human rights. In the case of the United States, this is often a prerequisite for starting close economic cooperation. In turn, China does not make its trade cooperation conditional on the respect of human rights in a given country, which is one of the many reasons for China's investment success in many African countries. Evaluating a relationship based on ideological goals is very difficult for the patron, because he is rarely able to clearly determine how much advantage he has gained over his rivals. That is one of the reasons why his involvement in a relationship based on ideological goals will be much smaller than in the case of other relationships.

Another example of what the patron may aspire to achieve is international solidarity. A manifestation of this type of client compliance with the patron is a consistent vote in forums of various types of international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), joint signing of international agreements, mutual visits by top state representatives, as well as open support for the patron's activities on the international stage. Very often, solidarity in this approach is desired by the client, because it is a clear signal to other countries to which block it belongs or – which may be even more valuable – to which it does not belong. From a patron's perspective, international solidarity is all the more valuable when it comes to changing the camp with which the client was previously identified. Contrary to ideological goals, bringing international solidarity enables the patron to gain a much greater advantage over his rivals, so he will be ready to make more sacrifices to the client to maintain this relationship.

The last type of goal on which the country playing the role of patron depends is to achieve a strategic advantage, understood in terms of gaining control over strategic areas (under the authority of the client) to achieve a military advantage over its opponents. In this way, the patron can also gain control over areas rich in natural resources that are crucial for the proper functioning of their opponents. The pursuit of strategic advantage is associated with the patron's demands to the client for access to military bases and other types of infrastructure, as well as broadly understood military cooperation in the form of joint military maneuvers, personnel exchange or mutual visits of various types of units. The relationship based on strategic advantage is the most valuable for the patron, which is why he is able to agree to far-reaching

compromises and concessions, such as giving the client access to his political and military resources.

Due to the lack of sufficient military capabilities, the main goal of the countries playing the role of the client is to gain protection against external threats. The security transfer granted by the patron, however, takes place at the expense of the client's subordination to his will, which may have the side effect of increasing nationalist sentiments.

To sum up, the degree of control that the patron has over his client depends on the type of goals he sets, as well as the client's ability to satisfy them. The relationship created in this way is not permanent, however, because the goals of the patron may change, and thus the relationship with the client will evolve.

3. The Patron-Client Concept in China-Philippines Relations

The Permanent Court of Arbitration in Hague issued a judgment in favor of Manila in the Philippines vs. China on July 12, 2016, in which it undermined the legitimacy of Chinese claims in the South China Sea expressed with the help of the 9-dash lines. The announcement of the judgment, however, coincided with the presidential election in the Philippines, in which former governor of Davaos – Rodrigo Duterte – took over the highest office in the state (Campbell, 2016). After being sworn in as president in June 2016, Duterte decided not to use the court's ruling in his foreign policy against China, which was a clear signal of a new opening in relations between these countries. Considering these circumstances, it can be stated that since then we have been dealing with patron-client relations.

Asymmetry in terms of military capabilities is one of the most important distinctive features of this type of dyadic relationship. The advantage of the PRC over the Philippines is overwhelming, both in terms of the number of soldiers, the quantity and quality of equipment, and defense budget (Table 6.1).

There is also a clear difference between these countries in the size of the economy and trade (Table 6.2), which can be seen from the analysis of data from 2017. According to this information, it can be unequivocally stated that China is the patron in this relationship, while the Philippines, as a country with much lower potential, fits the role of a client.

Table 6.1. Military Comparison

	China	Philippines
Defense budget	228 bln USD (1,9%GDP)	3 bln USD (1.3% GDP)
Active soldiers	2.3 mln	180,000
Tanks	7760	0
Armoured fighting vehicles	6000	672
Total artillery	9726	323
Navy	780	129
Air Forces	4182	219

Source: Military power of China & Philippines, 2019.

The overriding goal in Beijing's relationship with Manila is to secure its influence in the South China Sea, which will allow access to rich deposits of natural resources, as well as gaining strategic advantage in the region by controlling sea trade routes. In accordance with the characteristics of the patron-client relationship given by Shoemaker & Spanier, we can analyze the interactions between the Philippines and China since 2016 and determine to what extent they fit into ideological and strategic goals and building international solidarity.

Table 6.2. Economy Comparison

	China	Philippines
GDP	12,237,700 bln USD	313,595 bln USD
GNI	8,690.00 USD	3,660.00 USD
Import	1,843,793 bln USD	101,889 bln USD
Export	2,263,371 bln USD	68,713 bln USD

Source: Trade Summary of China and Philippines, 2017.

The foreign policy of the new President of the Philippines was largely influenced by the internal situation in the country, and above all promises from the election campaign. The main points must certainly include the promises to fight drug crime and terrorism, and of an extensive infrastructure development program. In these three cases, Beijing's support was expected to play a key role.

The first of them, namely the campaign against drug traffickers, quickly became a topic of debate in the international arena due to reports of the brutality of Filipino law enforcement agencies as well as the grow-

ing number of deaths, not only among criminals but also among civilians. In addition to the brutal fight against organized crime groups, it was proposed to restore the death penalty and lower the minimum age limit for criminal liability from 15 to 9 years. The purpose of the amendment to the act was to discourage criminals from using children in their activities, who, in the event of detention, could not be charged (Baldwin & Marshall, 2017). Rising concerns of public opinion and human rights groups prompted the House of Representatives to amend the law by reducing the maximum age to 12 years. However, the Senate did not reach an agreement and the bill was not adopted.

The ever-growing number of victims of the war on drugs, which, according to some opposition representatives, is the president's tool for eliminating his political opponents, had to meet with the international community's response, with the International Criminal Court (ICC) coming to the fore. The court's attention was first brought to the situation in the Philippines by Filipino lawyer Jude Sabio, who filed a lawsuit against Rodrigo Duterte in April 2017 accusing him of ordering murders while he was still governor of Davao, as well as crimes against humanity through the anti-drug campaign in the country. In February of the following year, the ICC prosecutor announced the initiation of proceedings on combating drug abuse in the Philippines, as a result of which, according to official statistics, four thousand people had already died¹ (Ellis-Petersen, 2018).

The government's response was swift and decisive: a letter was sent to the UN stating that the Philippines would withdraw from the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court with immediate effect. According to ICC regulations, exactly one year later, the Philippines became the second state in history to officially withdrew from the court's jurisdiction (Janvic, 2019). China, as a country with clearly more international influence, sided with the Philippines, both at the beginning of the drug campaign and during the dispute with the ICC, and criticized the court for politicizing human rights issues and using them against legally elected state authorities (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference, 2018). This is a perfect example of building international solidarity, as well as evidence of how seriously Beijing treats the sovereignty of the state, with particular emphasis on the lack of intervention in the internal affairs of the country.

1 According to unofficial numbers, this already exceeds 8 thousand victims.

In addition to the ICC, the case was also dealt with by the UN Human Rights Council following Iceland's motion for a resolution on the situation in the Philippines regarding recent reports of the killing of 5,000 suspected drug traffickers (according to unofficial data over 27,000) during the three years of Duterte's presidency. Resolution A/HRC/41/L.20 received 15 votes in favor, 14 against (both Philippines and China were in this group), and the other 15 abstained (Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, 2019).

From the very beginning of the struggle against drug crime, Beijing has supported the flagship campaign of Rodrigo Duterte on various levels. In addition to political support in the international arena, there was also military assistance. In the second half of 2016, the American Senator Ben Cardin, with the support of the Foreign Affairs Committee, suspended the transfer of 26,000 machine guns for the Philippine army. In this way Washington has made it clear that it will not support human rights violations (Moore, 2016). The President of the Philippines criticized this decision of the Congress and announced that he would seek support from major American rivals, namely China and Russia. The first supply of weapons from China to the Philippines was carried out in July 2017. Machine and sniper rifles and ammunition totaling USD 7.35 million were handed over to Filipino armed forces fighting Muslim extremists in the south of the country in Marawi (Yang, 2017). Furthermore, the Chinese authorities provided financial assistance to victims of fighting in Marawi in the amount of USD 300,000. In this way, Beijing replaced its main rivals as the main advocate in the fight against terrorism in Southeast Asia. This kind of support is obviously not one-sided. It must be remembered that the image of a country fighting Muslim extremists – often active in terrorist organizations – is very convenient for China. The government in Beijing conducts an uncompromising policy in the Xinjiang province, where it effectively limits the freedom and rights of the Muslim ethnic minority, Uighurs, on the pretext of counteracting terrorist attacks and combating religious radicalism. The creation of advanced monitoring systems based on face recognition technology in Xinjiang and the unconditional detention of Uighurs in re-education camps prompted ambassadors of 22 countries, in July 2019, to sign a letter in which they urged the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to intervene in this matter. In turn, a similar letter, but in defense of the Chinese government, was

signed by 37 ambassadors from various countries, including representatives of countries such as the Philippines, Cambodia, Burma and Laos, who are members of ASEAN (Putz, 2019).

The second batch of Chinese armaments in the form of 3,000 CQ-A5b machine guns and ammunition worth USD 3.3 million was transferred to the Philippine police in October 2017 (Yang, 2017). A year later, Beijing donated four 12-meter boats and 30 RPGs to the Philippine services. Of course, compared to American support – only in the years 2013–2018 the Philippines received military equipment worth USD 282 million – this is still marginal, but it is a symbolic change in the trend. Since the 1950s, Manila has relied on weapons almost exclusively delivered by the United States (Mogato, 2018).

The example of President Duterte's drug campaign perfectly illustrates how ideological goals are intertwined with building international solidarity. The pragmatic approach to foreign policy represented by the PRC definitely fits in with Rodrigo Duterte's way of governing the country.

In the era of rapid development of advanced technologies and the pursuit of industrial revolution 4.0, more and more emphasis is put on the construction of new telecommunications infrastructure enabling access to 5G Internet. Some of the main pioneers when it comes to this technology are Chinese telecommunications companies such as Huawei and ZTE, which are negotiating with many countries to become their main provider of 5G infrastructure. The expansion of these companies is hampered because the United States accuses them of committing intellectual property theft and engaging in intelligence activities for the government in Beijing, which poses a threat to both internal and external security. To counteract the alleged threats of cooperation with Huawei or ZTE, the US government has decided to include these companies and all smaller enterprises closely associated with them on a so-called black-list of entities, which means an obligation to obtain consent from the US Department of Commerce to purchase American components and technologies. In addition, in July 2018, the American Congress adopted the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, under which the federal government is prohibited from ordering or obtaining equipment and services from Huawei or ZTE, as well as cooperating with other entities having any connection with the above-mentioned enterprises (John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, 2018).

The authorities in Washington recommended similar actions to their largest allies, making future cooperation dependent on it, for instance, in the exchange of intelligence. American policy towards Huawei has been adopted by Australia, New Zealand and Japan (Tao, 2018). However, a large number of Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines, are keen to cooperate with Chinese telecommunications companies, although they add that their activities will be monitored by state agencies to prevent any irregularities. This is a balanced position aimed at developing cooperation with China, while at the same time signaling to the Americans that their warnings about Huawei and ZTE are being taken seriously. However, this does not change the fact that the Philippine army issued a statement in September 2019 confirming the signing of a preliminary agreement with the consortium Mislattel, controlled by an entrepreneur of Chinese origin Dennis Uy, who maintains close contacts with President Duterte (Petty, 2019).

There are certainly major obstacles which leaders of both countries will have to overcome. The biggest challenge will be to change the perception of the PRC by Philippine citizens who do not trust the Chinese government's declaration. According to a recent survey by PulsAsia Research Inc., in June 2019, only 26% of respondents declared that they trust China, which, compared to the United States, which obtained of 89%, is an extremely bad result (June 2019 Nationwide Survey on Public Trust in Selected Countries and Public Opinion on the Recto Bank Incident, 2019). To better illustrate the situation, it should be emphasized that in the case of China there was a decrease of 13% compared with the results from December 2018. The lack of trust in the PRC is influenced by many factors. Chinese activity in the South China Sea is the most controversial, especially within the exclusive economic zone, where various types of incidents often occur involving ships from both sides. According to data provided by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Tedoro Locsin, from the beginning of the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 to September 2019, 63 diplomatic protests were filed in such situations (Santos, 2019).

The presence of Chinese telecommunications companies in the Philippines is also very controversial. The high level of public trust towards the United States means that American warnings about the espionage activities of Huawei, ZTE and China Mobile are taken very seriously by citizens. Hence, further decline in confidence in Beijing's foreign policy

may result. The growing reluctance of Filipinos towards China may, in the long run, impede or prevent the strengthening of bilateral relations. It is true that, according to a poll conducted in September 2019 by PulsAsia Research Inc., Rodrigo Duterte enjoys exceptionally high support at 78%, but he must consider social sentiment to effectively implement his policy. This is perfectly demonstrated by the President's speech in Congress in July 2019, where he referred directly to critics of his policy towards China, with particular emphasis on the South China Sea. Duterte argued in favor of his balanced policy towards Beijing that China has a crushing military advantage. He also added that immediately after taking the presidency at the first meeting with president Xi Jinping he raised the topic of disputed territories in the South China Sea. He was then assured that an agreement would be reached that would satisfy all parties, on condition that there will be no pressure on Beijing (Gutierrez, 2019).

President Duterte's next step, aimed at weakening his main opponents in the country, was to deprive them of the key arguments used to criticize his foreign policy. This was probably the main reason why during his fifth visit to China, where he met with Xi Jinping, he raised the topic of a favorable judgment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration from 2016 regarding Chinese claims in the South China Sea (Zhang, 2019). As might be expected, the PRC leader strongly opposed the Court's decisions. Xi Jinping, however, proposed to Duterte the possibility of joint extraction of natural resources from the bottom of the South China Sea in a ratio of 60–40 in favor of the Philippines (Petty, 2019). The president of the Philippines not only deprived the opposition of the key argument, but proved that it is possible to cooperate with Beijing on terms favorable to both sides. What is more, during the first visit of Xi Jinping to the Philippines on November 2018 a crucial protocol was signed concerning natural resources. At the end of October 2019, the protocol arrangements were executed by establishing a committee for the extraction of crude oil and natural gas, whose task will be to determine from which areas joint extraction of natural resources in the South China Sea will start (Tomacruz, 2019).

The thread of international solidarity appeared at the beginning of the subsection, where issues related to the drug campaign of President Duterte and reciprocal interactions of China and the Philippines with the ICC and the UN were discussed. However, this topic has not been fully analyzed, as mutual visits at the highest level, as well as the type

and number of bilateral agreements signed, play an important role. The change in the direction of the foreign policy of the Philippines, which is currently more oriented towards China, at the expense of relations with the United States is demonstrated by official presidential visits.

Table 6.3. State Visits

	China	United States	Philippines
Rodrigo Duterte (30.06.2016 – 30.06.2022)	5	0	–
Benigno Aquino III (30.06.2010 – 30.06.2016)	2	7	–
Donald Trump (20.01.2017 – ?)	1	–	1
Barack Obama (20.01.2009 – 20.01.2017)	3	–	2
Xi Jinping (14.03.2013 – ?)	–	4	2
Hu Jintao (15.03.2003 – 14.03.2013)	–	2	1

Source: Author’s own study based on information provided by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of each country.

According to the data contained in Table 6.3, the current President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, had already made five visits to China since taking his position in mid-2016 by September 2019, while his predecessor during his entire six-year term of office was in China only twice, with the second visit related to the 22nd APEC Summit. The difference is even greater in the case of visits of Filipino presidents to the United States, because Benigno Aquino III visited the country seven times, while Rodrigo Duterte did not go there once in three years. After analyzing this set of information, it can be clearly stated that Beijing is now at the center of the Philippines’ foreign policy, which is another argument confirming the thesis about the shaping of the patron-client relationship. It is worth noting that two visits by Xi Jinping to the Philippines, the first of which took place during the presidency of Benigno Aquino III in November 2015 at the 27th APEC summit, while the second on November 2018, were to emphasize the new opening in bilateral relations between China and the Philippines. In this way, a clear message was sent that from now on the Philippines are going to be in the Chinese sphere of influence.

Another form of assessing international solidarity between countries is the number of contracts signed. The number of high-level visits from the end of June 2016 to September 2019 between China and the Philippines is reflected in the impressive number of bilateral agreements signed (Table 6.4). Only the pace of implementation of these agreements raises concerns. Of the 27 documents signed in 2016, China has committed to supporting Manila with investments totaling USD 24 billion and loans totaling USD 9 billion. After two years, Beijing had transferred only USD 73 million for an irrigation system project in the north of the capital and USD 75 million for the construction of two bridges (Koutsoukis & Yap, 2018). Despite numerous declarations made in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is unequivocally identified with the development of infrastructure, in terms of investments in Southeast Asia, Japan is currently dominating this field in spite of China's efforts. According to the data presented in the latest Fitch Solutions report, the value of infrastructure projects implemented by Japan in the region reached USD 367 billion and China's USD 255 billion. In terms of project value, Japan is ahead of China in Vietnam and the Philippines, while China is investing more in Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia (Jamrisko, 2019). Everything seems to indicate that Beijing must intensify its commitment in the Philippines if it wants to comply with the agreements. On the other hand, however, further financial transfers may depend on certain actions that are required from the Manila government, for example in the context of the South China Sea.

Table 6.4. Bilateral Agreements

	China – Philippines	US – Philippines
October 2016 – Rodrigo Duterte's first visit to China	27	–
November 2017 – Li Keqiang's visit to the Philippines	14	–
April 2018 – Rodrigo Duterte's third visit to China	6	–
April 2019 – Rodrigo Duterte's fourth visit to China	19	–
August 2019 – Rodrigo Duterte's fifth visit to China	6	–
November 2017 – Donald Trump's first visit to the Philippines	–	0
In total:	72	0

Source: Author's own study based on media coverage.

Rodrigo Duterte’s foreign policy is not conducive to signing new agreements with the United States, which is certainly influenced by the lower frequency of meetings between representatives of both sides. However, Americans still have extremely important agreements signed with the Philippines regarding military cooperation. The most important are the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 and the Visiting Forces Agreement of 1999. These documents were supplemented in 2002 and 2007 by the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement, and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement from 2014 (Blanco Pitlo III, 2017). From Beijing’s point of view, it should be emphasized that despite the long tradition of US-Philippines cooperation in the field of security and defense, President Duterte has repeatedly suggested withdrawing from the agreement under which American soldiers may stay on the territory of the state (Davis, 2017). American ships continue to enter Philippine ports, where such visits are often accompanied by various types of training, but there is a clear decrease in the number of such events.

Strategic objectives are the third and last group of key goals from the patron’s perspective. China has already achieved a significant strategic advantage in the South China Sea because it controls the largest number of islands, reefs and atolls (Table 6.5). The beginning of China’s expansion dates to 2012, when the Scarborough Shoal was taken over. A year later, intensive land reclamation and the creation of so-called artificial islands started. Firstly, runways and navy ports were gradually built on the islands. After that, anti-aircraft weapons and anti-ship missile launchers were also deployed (Stashwick, 2019).

Table 6.5. List of Islands under Control of Each Country

	Spratly Islands	Paracel Islands
China	7	20
Philippines	9	–
Malaysia	5	–
Vietnam*	21	–
Taiwan	1	–

* Vietnam occupies between 49 and 51 outposts (the status of two construction projects on Cornwallis South Reef is unclear)

Source: Occupation and Island Building, 2019.

Beijing is not content with the gains it has made so far and is constantly putting pressure on countries involved in the territorial dispute in

the South China Sea. In the case of the Philippines, Thitu Island, which Manila has controlled since 1970, enjoys great interest from the Chinese side. It is the largest island under the jurisdiction of the Philippines, which is the subject of dispute, on which there is a runway and a small army contingent, together with civilians. According to reports by the Philippine intelligence services, there are constantly over 200 Chinese fishing boats and coast guard vessels around the island. The unusually large presence of Chinese vessels in this region leads to frequent incidents with Filipino fishermen who report fisheries being blocked near Thitu Island (Dancel, 2019).

China's strategy towards islands in the South China Sea also involves the use of economic mechanisms. During the second Belt and Road initiative forum, President Duterte and Xi Jinping negotiated investments in three Philippine islands worth USD 12.16 billion. Chinese companies are to be responsible for building smart cities along with tourist centers on the islands of Fuga, Babuyan and Batanes (Mangosing, 2019). As the first of these, Fong Zhi Enterprise Corporation has already signed a USD 2 billion deal with the island's owner, Isla Fuga Pacific Resorts. The involvement of Chinese companies in the development of infrastructure on islands of key strategic importance for the security of the Philippines has raised the concern of the Secretary of Defense. This was the main reason why Dolphin Lorenzana pushed through the signing of an agreement on the construction of a Philippine Navy outpost on Fuga Island, thanks to which the interests of the state will be protected, and most importantly, it will allow control of the actions taken by the Fong Zhi Enterprise Corporation (Gotinga, 2019).

In addition to infrastructure investments, Beijing is showing interest in taking over the port at Subic Bay, which was used by the US Navy until 1992. The port that was transformed into a shipyard by the South Korean branch of Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Corp. declared bankruptcy in January 2019 with a total debt of USD 1.31 billion (Woody, 2019). Two Chinese companies (one of them state-owned) submitted their purchase offers, but reports of a possible Chinese takeover aroused objections from the Department of National Defense, and Dolphin Lorenzana proposed the takeover of the facility by the Navy.

Given the nature of the territorial dispute in the South China Sea, cooperation between the navies of individual countries is becoming a key issue. For this reason, the visit of three Chinese Navy ships from April 2017 in the port of the city of Davao should be considered as a serious breakthrough (Wong, 2017), especially since such an event last took place only in 2010. It

was a prelude to the first ever navy drills of ASEAN and China, which were inaugurated off the coast of the Chinese city of Zhanjiang in October 2018. The purpose of the exercises was to develop agreement between the military leaders of China and the ASEAN states, to deepen defense cooperation and strengthen mutual trust. Eight ships were involved in the maneuvers, three helicopters and more than 1,000 soldiers. Their task was to implement various scenarios, including rescue missions (Lim, 2018).

The visit of Chinese ships to the Philippines was not an isolated case, because in April 2019 a return visit took place. This time, the Philippine Navy received an invitation to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army Navy in Qingdao. The ceremony was attended by BRP Tarlac (LD-601), one of the largest naval ships in the Philippines, along with a crew of 400 sailors.

Of course, military interactions between these countries cannot yet be compared to similar cooperation between the Philippines and the United States, which take part in the Balikatan maneuvers initiated in 1991.² This is related to the much longer history of cooperation between these countries in the field of security, initiated by the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty. In case of a continuation of the current trend of China-Philippines relations, it is very likely that China will also implement a regular naval exercise program with the Philippines, which will certainly strengthen the relationship between patron and client. A significant role in this context is played by the great activity of Chinese politicians at the highest level, which was visible during the last ASEAN summit. Most likely, the attitude of the current US President, Donald Trump, to the countries of Southeast Asia contributed to the situation in which the United States takes part in the first joint military exercises at sea with members of ASEAN a year after the analogous exercises with the People's Republic of China (Johnson, 2019).

4. Conclusion

The analysis carried out in the article clearly shows that such key features for the dyadic patron-client relationship as large economic and military asymmetry occur in the case of China and the Philippines, with the Chinese People's Republic having much greater potential in both these

2 In 1995, the exercises were suspended and resumed in 1999 as a result of a dispute between the Philippines and the US regarding the terms of the Visiting Forces Agreement.

spheres. Hence, China can be identified as the patron who, through Xi Jinping's introduction of a more assertive approach in foreign policy, seeks to subordinate the Philippines, thereby taking over the position of the United States. Undoubtedly, ideological goals are connected with the leaders of both countries. They have a similar attitude to human rights and the intervention of international organizations in internal affairs of the state. Understanding at this level clearly strengthens bilateral relations. However, the biggest threat turns out to be the perception of China by Philippine society and representatives of the military with the Department of National Defense at the helm. The high level of distrust compared to the exceptionally high confidence in the United States will result in difficulties in increasing Chinese investment in the Philippines. In addition, any allegations against Beijing, such as accusations of Chinese telecommunications companies of espionage activities will be meticulously used by the opposition to further antagonize Filipinos against China.

The international activity of the Philippines and China is evidence of mutual support, and, thus, there is international solidarity for these two countries. China strongly supports President Duterte's drug campaign, as well as his decision to leave the ICC. In turn, the Philippines is on the side of China due to controversies regarding the treatment of the Muslim ethnic minority in Xinjiang. This support is expressed not only by signing a letter of support, but even in an official vote at the UN. This is a clear signal for the United States, but also for other countries in the region, about Beijing's growing influence in the Philippines.

Achieving a strategic advantage turns out to be the least explicit issue. On the one hand, the Philippines did not effectively use the judgment of The Permanent Court of Arbitration regarding Chinese claims in the South China Sea, and the passivity of the United States and other parties to the dispute allowed China to take over the vast majority of the islands in the South China Sea. However, controlling these areas is not enough to start effective extraction of natural resources. That is why the effects of the further development of the agreement on the joint extraction of China-Philippines raw materials are so important, not only for the future of bilateral relations, but also for the entire situation in the South China Sea. The advantage of the United States in the context of the navy's combat capabilities over China is still very large, which is why Beijing cannot arbitrarily start extracting raw materials from the exclusive economic zones of other countries. China must increase its commitment to military cooperation with the Philippines, if it is important for them to strengthen the

patron-client relationship. Defense treaties between the United States and the Philippines still provide Washington with an advantage in this area. Security, protection and arms transfer are the pillars of clientelism, which is why Beijing must strive to deny an American presence in the Philippines. However, given the lack of confidence among Filipinos, this process may prove lengthy. Therefore, Xi Jinping, as the president of China, must use cooperation with ASEAN to change the PRC image in the region.

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