

Rethinking Asia in World Politics

edited by

Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska



Contemporary Asian Studies Series

 WYDAWNICTWO
UNIWERSYTETU
ŁÓDZKIEGO

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Łódź 2023

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Introduction

Asia, the largest continent in the world, holds a pivotal position as a global crossroad, connecting various regions and playing a crucial role in international trade and shipping. Its vast landmass and expansive coastline make it an essential hub for economic activities and a strategic link between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The growing economic and military power of Asian nations has resulted in heightened competition for influence on political and economic issues, significantly impacting global security and stability.

In recent years, the entire Asian continent has experienced a notable re-evaluation of its standing in global affairs. While previously considered primarily as a recipient or observer, Asia is increasingly recognized as a central player shaping regional and global dynamics. This transformation is evident across various international organizations, where Asian countries are actively engaging in decision-making processes and contributing to regional cooperation and integration.

Among these organizations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plays a critical role in promoting unity and addressing common challenges across the diverse – especially Southeast – Asian nations. Additionally, other regional bodies and initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), highlight Asia's multifaceted engagement in shaping regional and global agendas.

Asia's strategic location has made it the focus of global attention, particularly due to territorial disputes and the influence of powers such as China and Japan. The South China Sea territorial disputes, in particular, have garnered significant international interest, reflecting the broader

geopolitical competition in the region. China's rising economic and military power has led to increased competition for influence with the United States, while Japan has been actively strengthening political and economic ties with Asian nations as part of its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy.

Moreover, Asia is also confronted with several ongoing conflicts and challenges. For instance, it faces separatist movements in places like Myanmar and southern Thailand, as well as humanitarian crises such as the Rohingya refugee situation. These issues have far-reaching implications for regional stability and have attracted attention from the international community.

The reconsideration of Asia's role in international relations stems from its growing economic and political importance, vibrant societies, and strategic location. As Asia continues to play a central role in shaping regional and global dynamics, it becomes increasingly imperative for the international community to consider its interests and perspectives in its engagement with the region.

Taking these diverse factors into account, the authors of this publication have delved into the changing political, economic, and social dynamics across the Asian region. The monograph primarily focuses on analyzing the redistribution of power in 21st-century Asia and its implications for the development of relations between Asian and European countries. By examining the evolving perceptions of Asian countries and the challenges they face, this publication aims to provide valuable insights into the multifaceted landscape of Asia's role in the global arena.

The monograph is composed of four thematic blocks. The first part analyses the international discussions on security issues in Southeast Asia. David Arthur Jones raises the topic of the endless rivalry of powers in the SEA region. The author points out that today we are witnessing a changing balance of power, because both militarily and economically, this region is characterized by great interest from the old and new, Asian, American, and European powers. The author wonders whether in the current situation it is possible to bring Western countries closer to China, and what would be the consequences. Adrian Rafał Szumowski analyses the development of sea power-related tools and strategies that have been created to manage and use during stalemate and potential conflict in the region. The author emphasizes the specificity of Southeast Asia for the deployment of naval forces, and shows the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions of the region and their importance for

building maritime power. He explores potential changes in naval power strategies and tools and outlines scenarios for the future. The topic of security in SEA is also dealt with by Anna Voloshina, who discusses the issue of Taiwan. The author presents the crisis situations that took place in the Taiwan Strait over the first two decades of the 21st century and indicates that in recent years the situation around Taiwan has been moving towards increased turbulence. The text discusses the key factors that have a destabilizing effect on the relations between the three main players – Taiwan, the People’s Republic of China, and the United States.

The second thematic block of this book relates to historical, economical, and social issues. The chapter prepared by Bart Dessen raises the problem of historical analysis of China’s cultural influence in the region of today’s Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan) and in the Xinjiang autonomous region. Using historical texts, the author examines the strategy of successive Chinese authorities in relation to Central Asia. The author points to the importance of building, also metaphorically, the Great Wall and emphasizes the contemporary status of the development of economic and political relations between China and the countries of the region. An interesting comparative analysis is also presented in the text prepared by Michał Lubina. The author focuses on contemporary Myanmar and its long-time leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Her political achievements, however, are subjected to exegesis, taking into account the achievements and legacy of her important Burmese predecessors – especially U Thant. Economic issues are raised in the text written by Elżbieta Majchrowska. She looks at the increasing role of regional organizations in response to the declining role of the World Trade Organisation. The author believes that, in particular, the European Union is interested in maintaining lively economic relations with the countries of Asia and the Pacific. The text presents moreover a synthetic analysis of the agreements already concluded between the EU and individual ASEAN member states or the status of negotiations of agreements. This theme is continued by Burcu Ermeýdan. The content of her chapter also concerns free trade agreements. The author points out that in Asia and the Pacific there is no single regional organization covering all the countries of the region, which results in the creation of the so-called “overlapping regionalism” paradox, meaning a situation with many fragmented regional groups, most of which geographically overlap due to multi-membership. The author outlines an analytical framework for the study of overlapping regionalism, presents specific examples

and critically examines the determinants of the emergence of these initiatives in the East Asian context. The next chapter by David Arthur Jones presents the relevant issue of sports diplomacy, and specifically the importance of the rivalry of countries on the Olympic arena. The author asks a number of questions, including the ones regarding the goals of the Olympics (i.e., sports, media, political or financial), concerning the significance of sanctions applied to countries but also to specific athletes, as well as relating to appearing under a “false flag” by taking advantage of the possibility of adopting different citizenships. An attractive research perspective is also presented by Elena Burova, who analyses the agricultural market in countries located in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The author shows what agricultural evolution this region has undergone in recent years and what opportunities and challenges it faces in the coming time.

The third thematic part of this monograph focuses on the position of Japan and its historical and contemporary questions. The text prepared by Karol Żakowski analyses the process of dialogue between Japan and the countries of the SEA region. It points to the international and domestic factors behind Japan’s rapprochement with countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. The author claims that a deep reconciliation with ASEAN countries was a part of Japan’s foreign policy strategy. In the next chapter, Maciej Pletnia discusses the use of game theory to investigate the decision-making process. The starting point is the analysis of the visits of Japanese prime ministers to the Yasukuni shrine. The idea of the text is to construct a model enabling the evaluation of previous visits to the sanctuary and the assessment of the likelihood of such visits in the future. The author considers that the use of game theory allows for a better understanding of rationality in the analysis of visits to the Yasukuni shrine. In contrast, Zachariasz Popiołek deals with the unique issue of Koenkai – an individual support group for Japanese politicians. The author presents the historical development of individual support groups, makes a detailed analysis of public opinion polls and financial reports, and as a result, tries to answer the question whether the function of distribution of Koenkai funds postulated in the scientific literature remains valid. The next chapter is prepared by Clémence Schantz and Pascale Hancart Petitet. The authors discuss the issue of prenatal care conditions, maternal health issues as well as birth ideologies and practices in Japan and SEA countries. They indicate that in the countries of Southeast Asia there is a broad discussion regarding the humanitarianization of childbirth. The text, based on many years of

ethnographic research, discusses political, cultural, and social controversies by analysing reproductive health initiatives implemented as part of Japanese cooperation with Southeast Asia. The final text in this section addresses the issue of violence and ontological security. Edoardo Pieroni discusses the Japanese religious ethos and shows how the normative framework that underlies it contradicts the individualistic principle on which the humanitarian interventionism of Western countries is based. The text presents ontological theories of security in international relations and analyses their applicability to the case of Japan and its controversial approach to humanitarian intervention.

The last section in this book focuses on the relations between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and countries in Asia. Lukáš Laš conducts a thorough review of diplomatic missions between the countries forming the Visegrad Initiative (V4) and countries belonging to ASEAN. The author paints a picture of political, economic, and cultural interactions between the countries of both regions on the vertical and horizontal level, looking for opportunities for the development of their interactions in the future. On the other hand, the text by Bartosz Kowalski in a synthetic way presents an interesting case study of the relationship between the University of Łódź in Poland and educational and scientific partners in China. The analysis shows that the quality and intensity of contacts did not depend so much on the involvement of academic entities but was largely determined by political relations between Poland and China.

This publication is of a scientific nature, although some chapters are of a research nature and others are more analytical. The book attempts to synthesise the current challenges and conditions highlighting the importance of Asia in world politics and in the policies of regional powers. Due to the many threads it deals with, several important research hypotheses can be found in the text. They focus on the following points:

- The growing economic and military power of Asian nations has resulted in increased competition for influence on political and economic issues, impacting global security and stability.
- The re-evaluation of Asia's role in global affairs has led to its recognition as a central player in shaping regional and global dynamics.
- Regional organizations like ASEAN play a critical role in promoting regional cooperation and integration in Asia.
- The territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the influence of major global powers in Asia, such as China, the United States, and Japan, have heightened geopolitical competition in the region.

- Asia's strategic location, vibrant societies, growing economic and political importance contribute to its evolving role in international relations.

These hypotheses provide a basis for further investigation and analysis of the changing dynamics in Asia and its implications for regional and global interactions.

The methodology employed in this publication encompasses a range of research methods and data collection techniques. To analyze the changing political, economic, and social dynamics in the Asian continent and the implications for Asian-European relations, a comprehensive research approach was adopted, including:

- literature review – a thorough review of existing literature on Asian politics, economics, and social trends was conducted by all the authors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This involved reviewing scholarly articles, books, reports, and other relevant publications;

- data collection – quantitative and qualitative data were collected to provide a holistic analysis. Statistical data, such as trade figures, economic indicators, and demographic information, were obtained from reliable databases and official sources. Qualitative data, including expert opinions, and case studies, were also incorporated to capture nuanced perspectives and insights;

- case studies – in-depth case studies were conducted on selected countries and specific issues within the Asian continent. These case studies provided valuable contextual information and allowed for a deeper exploration of key dynamics and their implications. Primary and secondary sources were utilized to gather data for the case studies, including government reports, academic studies, and media sources;

- comparative analysis – comparative analysis was employed to identify commonalities, differences, and patterns across various Asian countries and their interactions with European counterparts. This approach facilitated the examination of regional dynamics and the impact of different factors on international relations;

- interdisciplinary perspective – to capture the multidimensional nature of the subject, an interdisciplinary perspective was adopted. Drawing from fields such as political science, economics, sociology, and international relations, this approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the changing dynamics in Asia.

The combination of these research methods and approaches provided a robust foundation for understanding the evolving landscape of Asia's

role in global affairs and the implications for Asian-European relations. By employing mixed methodology, this publication aims therefore to offer an insightful and well-rounded analysis of the subject matter.

At this point, I would like to thank the authors of all the chapters whose efforts have contributed to this publication, which is an important input to the interdisciplinary debate on the political, economic, and social situation in Asian countries and presents the status of these countries' relations with European partners. I believe that this book will contribute to strengthening the discussion on current developments in Southeast Asia and their impact on the international scene.

International Discussions on Security Issues in Southeast Asia

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Empires Old, New, Reincarnated and Imaginary: Economic Build-ups in Eurasia, China and Russia in Afghanistan Naval Build-ups in the South China Sea Region – Their Forecasted Outcomes

Abstract

Maritime friction among powers, great and small, has escalated in the “Near Seas” region, including East China, Yellow, and South China Seas, largely because China has militarized that region by constructing artificial islands, and then fortifying them. United States warships repeatedly have conducted “Freedom of Navigation Operations” (FOPs) in the region, as have British, Indian, and Japanese warships, with France joining that list in early 2021 also. At the same time, China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” streams economically across Eurasia, with rising debt. This paper will address the objectives of China, the West, and neighbouring Asian countries in terms of increasing, decreasing, or replacing tensions in the region, as “empires” old, new, reincarnated and imaginary converge to participate in this fray. Inevitably, risk prevails, opportunities do also, as once-proud empires such as Britain, France, Russia, and Japan join in to confound if not deter China in its transparent effort as a rising power to control shipping and land transportation in this strategic but fragile corridor that connects Europe and the Middle East with Asia, vital to transporting raw materials, particularly energy, Eastward, and finished products, especially electronics and solar panels, Westward. Crucial issues emerging at a critical time require immediate but careful rethinking of Asia in world politics. Although a pandemic has altered and delayed the course of trade in 2020 and 2021, this may be both blessing and curse, a blessing in the sense that emerging power houses in Asia as well as Oceania have endeavoured to commit

more resources toward augmenting the traditional Western powers, motivating them to become stronger Allies of the West. On the other hand, a curse, to the extent the opportunity for conflict increases as it has unfolded in Afghanistan over the summer of 2021. Perhaps this will inspire a rapprochement with China and instil in China a realistic expectation of achieving economic growth in moderation over a gradual time in contrast to a growth spurt in the short term that would lead to conflict and set China back much as Japanese aggression before 1945 led to warfare ending in Japan's defeat and Allied victory. A desired outcome such as this may be unlikely, however, given China's reported inroads into Afghanistan, rising threats to Taiwan.

Keywords: *Maritime policy, China, Russia, Afghanistan, South China Sea*

1. Introduction

Pandemic became the watchword of the year 2020, the Coronavirus began late in 2019 in China then spread elsewhere globally before receding at least tentatively in 2021, largely on account of competitive vaccines that may or may not remain effective for very long against emerging variants that have reduced efficacy from 91 to 66% over eight months (Fowlkes, Gaglani, Groover, These, Tyner, Ellingson, 2021; Lee, B., 2021). This might have harkened greater worldwide cooperation among nations, but unfortunately it signalled heightened tensions. Maritime friction among powers great and small escalated in the region of the "Near Seas" including the East China, Yellow, and South China Seas, largely because China militarised that region by constructing artificial islands then fortifying them in a transparent effort to assert the global leadership role it craves but lacks currently. United States warships repeatedly have sailed through the region, conducting "Freedom of Navigation Operations" (FONOPs), as have British, Indian, and Japanese warships, with France joining that list in early 2021 also. While China is complaining about Allied FONOPs, China itself is deploying 3,000 tonne sand dredging ships as close to Taiwan waters as possible, with 3,987 expulsions in 2020, more than six times as many as the 600 expulsions in 2019 (Lee, Y.N., 2021), apparently to harass Taiwan. Immediately following the fall of Afghanistan, China sent an "ominous warning" to Taiwan, advising the United States would not protect Taiwan should China invade (O'Donnell, 2021). This author fears the sand dredging ships could turn into a fleet of "Trojan Horses" to conceal then deploy assault troops in

a Normandy Beach-style amphibious invasion of Taiwan, possibly at the same time dredging sand and silt to alter the Strait of Taiwan, reducing depth in places to facilitate an amphibious invasion on the ocean surface, confound Allied submarine manoeuvrability, increasing depth elsewhere to enhance Chinese submarine manoeuvrability. Is this part of China's "wolf warrior" diplomacy in its quest to become the "empire" it is not, alienating one country after another, jeopardizing China's world trade image in the process, as hypothesised (Lee, Y.N., 2021)?

This chapter will address the objectives of China, the West, and neighbouring Asian countries in terms of increasing, decreasing, or replacing tensions in the region, as "empires" old, new, reincarnated and imaginary converge to participate in this fray. Britain, France, Russia, and Japan are "old" Empires and India was a part of the British Empire, with Britain persevering at present. France, China, and Russia hope to reincarnate their empires lost to history, and the United States of America has been forming what one may term a "new" empire, although most Americans deny that nomenclature, with American withdrawal from Afghanistan pointing (hopefully inaccurately) to a collapsing American empire (Ackerman, 2021). On the other hand, China is at best an *ersatz* "empire," lacking global support required for that role and in fact, facing diminishing instead of accelerating global cohesion for its "China Dream" as it calls that vision (Whyte, 2021). Imaginary is the word that comes to mind in assessing China's imperial role in the 21st century's third decade, with China, as some have observed, being a "paper dragon" (Frum, 2021).

Inevitably, risk prevails, but opportunities do also, as once-proud empires such as Britain, France, Russia, and Japan join in to confound if not deter China in its transparent effort as a rising power to control shipping in that strategic but fragile corridor that connects Asia with Africa for raw materials including the energy required for Chinese manufacturing, connecting Europe through the Middle East Suez Canal with Asia, vital to transporting finished products such as electronics and solar panels Westward. Part of the current problem originated from the West's ineffectual reconstruction of Asia following World War II, as Spector characterised in *The Ruins of Empire* (2007). Over the past half-decade, at least but probably longer, China has declined in its effort to stay afloat as the "Factory to the World," with many international investors relocating to India, the ASEAN Bloc, and elsewhere when Chinese labour cost structure and regulations escalated sharply. It seems that China endeavours to be "Shipper to the World" by controlling international commerce as it moves

in both directions from the Suez Canal to most of Asia, then back, from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan as well as from Mainland China itself. In fact, by expanding Chinese military and naval bases across the Indian Ocean, China appears to be making an effort to “cancel” India, to even change the Indian Ocean into a “West China Sea” by itself, although it does not hold any territory abutting that important waterway, unlike India after which that Ocean is named rightfully. In fact, China’s behaviour in 2021 is rather similar to that of Japan 80 years earlier: In his speech as prime minister of Japan, delivered to The Assembly of Greater East-Asiatic Nations at Tokyo on 5 November 1943 (“Tokyo Summit”), General Hideki Tojo called for “world peace” but stated Japan’s determination to establish what would become known pompously as the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (GEACPS), intended to unite all Asian nations together, then to divide them from the West (Bix, 2001). In the 1940s, Japan struggled to fabricate itself as the world’s dominant empire. It failed, now China is bent on the same objective that will fail also.

Crucial issues emerging at a critical time require immediate but careful rethinking of security strategies, alliances, trading partners, trade routes. Included among these issues will be the role to be played by countries of South and Southeast Asia together with East Asia and Eurasia in world politics. Although a pandemic has altered or delayed the course of trade in 2020 and 2021, this may be both a blessing and a curse, in the sense that emerging power houses in Asia as well as Oceania have endeavoured to commit more resources toward augmenting the traditional Western powers, enabling them to become stronger Allies of the West and among themselves. Perhaps this will inspire a *rapprochement* with China and instill in China a realistic expectation of achieving economic growth in moderation over a gradual time period by productive example of outreach and influence, instead of abruptly by force of arms. Care should be taken not to underestimate what is known as the “Gerasimov Doctrine,” a tool of the Russian Federation predicated upon a 2013 speech by Marshal Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian Federation general staff, in which he encouraged a foreign policy of cyber warfare, psychological operations, and denial and deception campaigns, activities that evolved from a Soviet military concept known as *maskirovka* that embraced physical denial and deception in military operations (Bartles, 2016).

None other than confirmed Leftist M.I.T. Professor Noam Chomsky has conceded that China does pose a threat to the West, Western Allies, and China’s neighbours:

China does confront U.S. power – in the South China Sea, not the Atlantic or Pacific. There is an economic challenge as well. In some areas, China is a world leader, notably renewable energy, where it is far ahead of other countries in both scale and quality. It is also the world's manufacturing base, though profits go mostly elsewhere, to managers like Taiwan's Foxconn or investors in Apple, which is increasingly reliant on intellectual property rights – the exorbitant patent rights that are a core part of the highly protectionist "free trade" agreements (Douliery, 2021).

Whether China's confrontation of Western, not merely American, power is limited to "Near Seas" and absent in the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans is debatable, probably tenuous. Certainly, China exerts a huge presence in the Indian Ocean that is indistinguishable from the Pacific, except in name, with China's purpose in the Indian Ocean being to secure its African supply chain management and to ensure that India does not outmanoeuvre China in Asia or Europe. In fact, in the 21st century, India may be China's primary target as China asserts its return to "empire" across Asia, appears to be coupling with Pakistan, motivating India to turn to Europe, particularly France, for modern fighter aircraft (Brimelow, 2021d), evidencing an emergence of new empires reincarnated from older ones.

Countries, sometimes acting through trading blocks such as the European Community, articulate then implement strategies intended to advance their own geopolitical interests globally (Wilezol, 2021), in regions, at "opposite borders" or next-door neighbours (Boesche, 2003, p. 18).¹ This becomes and remains true whether nations pursue neoliberal or neo-real strategies, meaning whether they strive for cooperation or prepare for conflict. They may do both, and profess to follow one path, actually pursue another. Little doubt exists but that neo-real strategies have replaced neoliberal strategies in the aftermath of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic, both in the context of relations with adversaries and of relations with allies or states sought after to become allies, whether they ever will be. An example has been the changing posture of Pakistan as it has come to rethink the range of economic preferences such as tax concessions it has extended to China in exchange for the latter's construction of highways, railways, ports, power plants, related infrastructure (Anderlini, Sender & Bokhar, 2018; Hussain, 2019). Mistrust of China, meaning current

1 "Doctrine of Opposite Borders" also is known as the Mandala Doctrine included in The *Arthasāstra*, a Sanskrit treatise from the 3rd century B.C.E. by Chanakya, also known as Kau ilya or Vishnugupta, an Indian teacher, philosopher, economist, jurist and royal advisor to the Emperor Chandragupta Maurya (r. 321–297 B.C.E.). R. Boesche (2003), Kautilya's Arthasāstra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India, *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 1, pp. 9–37 at p. 18, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40432>

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership, is at the root, compounded from 2020 by China's calculated delay in reporting the Coronavirus outbreak before it became a global pandemic, making China less than reliable as a supplier of products. With the United States exiting Afghanistan abruptly, China is moving into that state, bypassing Pakistan, poised to collect more American military technology inexplicably left behind unguarded, much as China did in the former Yugoslavia that prompted President William J. ("Bill") Clinton to bomb the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on 07 May 1999, to destroy stealth technology China had collected from wreckage of a United States F-117 Nighthawk stealth bomber on a United Nations peacekeeping mission shot down by Serbia on China's payroll days earlier (Greenfield, 2021). That is the reason Chinese military want access to the USD 60 billion in military infrastructure the United States left behind, including Black Hawk helicopters, 600,000 rifles, secret night vision goggles (Brown, 2021). Former President Trump has urged the United States to recapture that materiel or recapture it by bombing (Deese, 2021). He is entirely correct. Western countries cannot contribute to the rise of totalitarian empires in Asia. None of that excuses the NATO pullout from Afghanistan or the internal division between United States and its "special" ally United Kingdom over which country delayed departure the longest (Quinn, 2021), two legitimate empires wrestling to save face, not surprising when the British Parliament voted to censure both their own Prime Minister Boris Johnson and American President Joe Biden over the debacle in Afghanistan (James & Piper, 2021).

Unreliability of China has been made worse by emerging evidence that China lied about the actual cause(s) of the COVID pandemic that appears to have originated in a Wuhan laboratory (Piplani, Singh, Winkler, Petrovsky, 2021) as documented *Scientific Reports*, a prestigious *Nature* journal publication of which was delayed inordinately, apparently in response to pressure from Chinese authorities, according to an investigation by *The Wall Street Journal* (Hinshaw, Page & McKay, 2021). That China is seen as a less than reliable partner is evident in Eurasia, among Eurasian states themselves, between "Great Powers" and Eurasian states, between and among "Great Powers" themselves, forming what has been labeled "the New Great Game in Central Asia" (Caruso, 2020). At once, players have remained constant and changed, sometimes changing only cosmetically. In the 19th century, the original "Great Game" was between the British Empire and Imperial Russia, 1856–1907 (Hopkirk, 1992; Sergeev, 2013; Morrison, 2021). In the 21st century, currently, the Russian Federation

has returned, this time joined by China as its “Frenemy” (erstwhile friend, potential enemy), the European Community with the United Kingdom in the lead arguably, the United States *visibly* in the background, plus Japan, India, Turkey, with Iran and Saudi Arabia *invisibly* in the background. Turkey is eyeing an opportunity to recreate a Caliphate across the Middle East and Eurasia, itself nominating a Caliph spiritually plus a Sultan temporally. Both Japan and India consider China to be an existential threat, requiring them to delay, ultimately defeat, China’s advances into Eurasia alongside with what China labels as its “Belt and Road” or “New Silk Road” that is anything but smooth. Russian Federation leaders consider themselves to be the rightful successors to the Soviet Union, entitling them to preclude any other powers from controlling the Eurasian “supercontinent.” Fundamentally, United States interests conflict with those of this cast of countries: America prefers Eurasia to be comprised of autonomous, economically prosperous, sovereign nation states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (“C5”), each to be governed as democratically as possible (Bureau of South & Central Asian Affairs, 2020), however undemocratically that may be in practice, predicated upon each country’s long experience with authoritarian rulers, culminating with the Soviet Union until it collapsed.

Flashpoints involving Chinese expansion across parts of Asia, Eurasia and South Asia have varied, remaining calm predominantly with periodic flareups, most recently in Afghanistan. Frequently, disputes arise along the oceanic waterways of Southeast Asia, in part at least because of so many conflicting territorial claims to the maritime region by at least six sovereign states: Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam as Figure 1 below reflects, with China exerting the lion’s (dragon’s?) share of those claims encompassing 90% of the area, although its recognized territorial waterways abutting its land territory are the furthest away. Late in 2019, the British Royal Navy deployed ships to join the United States Seventh Fleet forces in the region, including the amphibious transport dock assault ship H.M.S. *Albion* and guided missile cruiser H.M.S. *Argyle*, prompting rebukes from China’s communist party officials. Early in his administration, U.S. President Joe Biden confirmed through “core government officials” that “the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty applies to the South China Sea” (Chen, 2021), eliminating doubt China may have harbored on that.

Afghanistan is the pivotal point where East and West collided before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became the site of Western conflict with

China in 2021. Rather evidently, countries worldwide have overly relied upon the United States, Afghanistan included, although policy enunciated directly and indirectly by both Democratic and Republican leaders in America has been warning countries such as Afghanistan to become more self-reliant. In a March 2021 article, *Time* Magazine said that the way to solve conflict in Afghanistan is with “The Quad” Alliance, meaning the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with Australia, India, Japan, United States, although as *Time* reported “The Quad” is different from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): the “Quad in reality bears no resemblance to NATO,” it is “ambiguous” (Chowdhury, 2021a). *Time* warned that the administration of President Joe Biden has “abandoned Afghanistan” (Chowdhury, 2021b). It is not entirely quite that simple. That Afghanistan became over-run by the Taliban is the fault of Afghanistan, primarily with its series of corrupt leaders who reportedly began to sell out their country to the Taliban once the Doha Agreement was signed early in 2020 (Weber, 2021). Suppose there is blame shared by United States officials, same as for the COVID-19 pandemic. In that case, it is with American intelligence agencies that failed to detect the problem at its inception and thereafter, or, if they detected it, with policy makers who failed to take decisive action. It has been alleged that President Biden downplayed the pace of a Taliban takeover, when intelligence officials warned it would be fast (Crane, 2021). Problems festered, then those problems worsened. Corruption in Afghanistan is documented to contribute to the country’s high poverty rate (Costa, 2019), among the world’s highest. Corrupt officials have taken salaries owed to “ghost soldiers,” demoralizing their military’s will to fight, with the Afghan army selling Western material to the Taliban (Shoaib, 2021). The inability of countries to manage their affairs is a quiet invitation for external nations searching to build empires to transform them into neo-colonies.

Former Soviet President Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev’s assessment of the Taliban’s “victory” in Afghanistan does bear truth in hindsight: the American campaign was a “failed enterprise from the start” (Snodgrass, 2021). However, the Soviet Union went into Afghanistan before the West, although before Gorbachev’s leadership. That was a perfect example of the clash of two empires. That the Soviets withdrew was not because they gave up on Afghanistan or on their own quest for empire: they ran out of steam and will. An interesting viewpoint is that China’s “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) redefines our perception of influence, away from convention state or territory, toward configuration by “corridor” leading

to “connectivity” and, ultimately, toward “reconfiguration of political space” (Mayer & Zhang, 2020), but that avoids recognition of territory across which corridors extend, and the fact that territories have been politicised by the state(s) that control them. Then, the question arises, is “reconfiguration of political space” a synonym for empire? Another question is whether a corridor including China’s OBOR is an enterprise doomed to failure from its inception if, in retrospect, Western efforts to develop Afghanistan were as futile as President Gorbachev contends?

Feckless European “Allies” have no standing to gripe that NATO wasted its time with its two decades or longer presence in Afghanistan, German officials from Angela Merkel’s camp labeling it “NATO’s ‘biggest debacle’” (Afghanistan takeover, 2021), when as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg argued Germany consistently failed to meet its financial obligations to NATO (Suciu, 2021). If any countries wasted time in Afghanistan, it would be the United Kingdom, United States, Poland, countries that expended vast resources to prevent Taliban takeover, seemingly in vain. Chinese opportunism is evident from the Chinese media “ominous warning” to Taiwan to not rely upon the United States to defend it (O’Donnell, 2021), when no comparison is proper between Afghanistan and Taiwan in relation to the security of the United States or the West. Taiwan is situated strategically between Mainland China and Japan, along the Taiwan Strait leading to the “Near Seas” where shipping between Asia and Europe can be bottlenecked by China, and Taiwan is the Republic of China that possesses some legal right to retake Mainland China given the right conditions in the future. Afghanistan has none of those qualifications, that comparison is inapposite. Also, China assumed facts not in evidence by forecasting *ex cathedra* that, upon Mainland invasion, “the island’s defense will collapse in hours” (Evans, 2021) when, in fact, Taiwan is more heavily defended than Afghanistan. Besides, Afghanistan was overrun by competitive internal insurgents including the Taliban and ISIS-K, entirely absent in Taiwan.

Alternative courses of action remained open in Afghanistan in August 2021, with Taliban forces converged around Kabul in open formation, an option being to eliminate them with drone or conventional air strikes when they were sitting targets. Exercising that option would have reduced likelihood of terror strikes elsewhere, although to be sure that option would be unlikely to improve the governance of Afghanistan: United States forces have not been able to construct new governance in Iraq, for example, and this would be harder to accomplish in Afghanistan once Afghan President

Ashraf Ghani and other leaders fled the country when the Taliban advanced, as they were reported to have done with a helicopter loaded with cash, according to Russian Embassy observers (“Afghan President,” 2021), eradicating leadership credibility. Chinese and Iranian leadership has been significant in tearing Afghanistan apart, as forecasted (Mustafa, Ahmed & Junaid, 2020), although in ways different from what one might have expected, at least from China: each provided covert assistance to the Taliban, really proving they are not Russian Federation allies, only Eurasian disrupters. To presume the Taliban will stabilise Afghanistan is a folly, documented by their treatment of women historically, depriving them of basic human rights including the right to work, to education, to leave home without a male escort (“The Taliban & Afghan Women,” n.d.). Be it remembered that the Islamic “State” of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (or of Iraq and the Levant [ISIL]) was defeated largely by armies of Kurdish females fighting to form their own Kurdish state, against Turkish soldiers who are less motivated to fight, lacking commitment to a cause for which to fight (“Commander of all-female Kurdish unit,” 2021). It will be likely that Afghan women will rise up to defeat the Taliban even without support from the West, or with covert aid therefrom. That stands to happen in East Turkmenistan (Xinjiang), Iran, and elsewhere where gender suppression exists, possibly even in Mainland China itself. United Nations Secretary General António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres, Jr, G.C.C, G.C.L., urged the Security Council to take action to stop the creation of an “Islamic Emirate” in Afghanistan, obtaining a unanimous vote of 15:0 in the Security Council opposing creation of that form of governance, hostile to women’s and girls’ rights (U.N. Chief Urges Taliban Restraint, 2021). Separately, it is reported the Secretary General expressed hopes the “Troika” would achieve Taliban restraint when China, Pakistan, and the United States planned to meet on 11 August 2021 (Roy, 2021). Russian Federation Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated in consultation with United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken that the Russian Federation is concerned with Afghanistan stability plus law and order, obviously essential to Russia with countries that were provinces of the former Soviet Union bordering Afghanistan: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Stability of Eurasia is essential to Russia. Destabilisation of Afghanistan, although in South Asia, could signal destabilisation of Eurasia then of the Russian Federation itself. Regardless of nomenclature such as “Eurasia,” these countries are part of the same region. In fact, Russian leaders may even conclude that the United States allowed the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in order to destabilise that

country first, Eurasia next, then the Russian Federation eventually. If in fact that plan was part of a strategy, more likely it would have been concocted by China or Iran than by European powers or the United States.

Although the Biden administration has endeavoured to draw France, Germany, United Kingdom back into the equation, some European observers have characterized the goal the Americans and the Chinese share is “dominance” (McGregor, 2021). Rather evidently, dominance is the Chinese objective across the maritime routes of Southeast Asia and across the land routes of Eurasia. From U.S. President (Thomas) Woodrow Wilson’s “14 Points” articulated early in the 20th century, the United States has denied any territorial enlargement objectives. At the same time, America has unequivocally urged global Freedom of the Seas, notwithstanding international politics (Cheever, 1984). At the Group of 7 (“G7”) meeting held on 12 June 2021, President Biden and G7 Leaders announced their launch of what they labelled a “Build Back Better World Partnership” shortened to the acronyms “B3W” as competition to China’s BRI (President Biden, 2021). Arguably, one shortfall of the G7 is the absence of participation by the Russian Federation, and one pitfall of its B3W is the apparent absence of participation by the Russian Federation. Much depends upon the objectives and purposes of the B3W, as China has articulated: will it complement or compete with China’s OBOR? (Abdollahpour, 2021). If it becomes complementary, both B3W and BRI will contribute to the developing territories they serve. If they become staunch competitors, each may destroy the others and the developing countries hosting them in the process. Said differently, do they represent two different “empires” or can their goals converge?

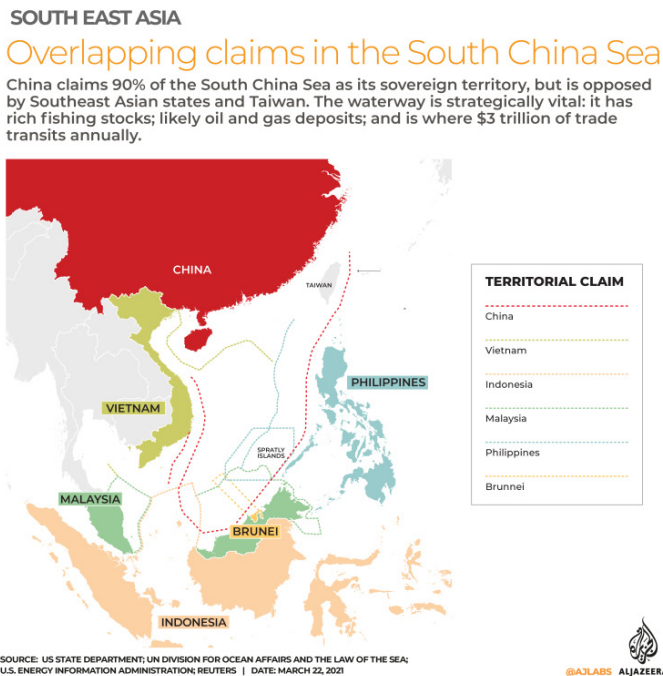
2. Research Questions

This chapter addresses several Research Questions in relation to capabilities and objectives of countries involved in behaviour of international “gamesmanship” that include the following: 1) Do countries that once were or were a part of a dissolved empire seek to rebuild that alliance of states?; 2) Do countries that experience rising economic prosperity seek to turn that prosperity into “empires” by exercising control over other nations?; 3) Do countries that happen to have international corridors on land or sea tend to succumb to the temptation of blocking other countries from crossing those territories?; 4) What will be the likely outcome of “empires” building by countries that lack the resources to maintain an empire?

3. Conflation of Land and Maritime BRI

Issues related to China’s maritime BRI overlap issues related to the Overland BRI, in several respects, both internal Strengths and Weaknesses and external Opportunities and Threats. In this context, internal Strengths and Weaknesses relate to China and its BRI partner states, whereas external Opportunities and Threats pertain to the impact on BRI that foreign states and alliances may exert positively or negatively on BRI, China itself, other BRI participating states. China’s BRI has Strengths in terms of its “connectivity” across territorial boundaries, its primary Weakness is debt. Opportunities abound and include economic development, faster transportation of goods between Asia and Europe, whereas Threats include intervention by foreign governments fearful of China building an “empire” as well as of neighbouring countries jealously torpedoing the BRI.

Figure 1. Claims in the South China Sea



Source: Philippines protests China’s ‘illegal’ South China Sea presence (2021), *Aljazeera.com*, 29 May, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/29/philippines-protests-chinas-illegal-south-china-sea-presence>. This posture was restated as recently as 2015 with the United States Asia-Pacific National Security Strategy (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). It is as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar.

4. Internal Strengths and Weaknesses

China's BRI has some Strengths, most notably in that participating nations receive infrastructure, largely in railways and highways, sometimes in seaports and factories. Another Strength is the movement of manufactured goods from Asia to Europe, much more than from Europe to Asia. Debt is the Weakness, pure and simple, and that debt burgeons as time elapses, becoming difficult for indebted nations to service, impossible to repay completely. As a consequence, countries overly indebted to China become or feel compelled to transfer ownership of their sovereign infrastructure to Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), compromising independence, possibly also security, relinquishing valuable national assets. Sooner or later, this will cause the fall of the governments that compromised sovereignty of their states, leading to domestic instability, much as has happened already in Afghanistan. Countries through which BRI passes will come to recognise neo-colonialisation once they notice that any "value added" from the BRI is shared by shippers and receivers of products in Asia and Europe respectively, because little manufacturing or consumption is taking place in BRI host nations across Eurasia.

Figure 2. Planned Areas of Infrastructure Construction



Source: R. Karimpour (2021), *Maritime Polar Silk Way, The Motorways of the Sea*. <https://www.onthemosway.eu/maritime-polar-silk-way/?cn-reloaded=1>

5. External Opportunities and Threats

Leaders of the Group of 7 (“G7”) Countries announced at Carbis Bay, Cornwall on 12 June 2021 their proposal known as “Build Back Better World: “An Affirmative Initiative for Meeting the Tremendous Infrastructure Needs of Low- and Middle-Income Countries” as competition for China’s BRI. This BBBW or “B3W” proposal is touted as being:

- Values-Driven
- Good Governance and Strong Standards
- Climate-Friendly
- Strong Strategic Partnerships
- Mobilize Private Capital Through Development Finance
- Enhancing the Impact of Multilateral Public Finance (Abdollahpour, 2021).

By utilising private capital through developmental finance, the G7 in 2021 seems to be paralleling “Dollar Diplomacy” of the years 1909–1913 during the American Presidential Administration of William Howard Taft, although Taft’s “Dollar Diplomacy” focused heavily on Latin America (Scholes & Scholes, 1970). It is workable, effectively mustering private investment in partnership with governmental foreign economic policies. It does foster at least the impression of an American or of a European “empire,” depending upon what exactly investors will expect to be their rightful Return On Investment (ROI). Chinese and Russian academics have voiced opinion the American withdrawal from Afghanistan will enable the West to re-direct funding away from that futile effort and toward better uses including the B3W plan, with China facing problems including a hoard of refugees from next-door Afghanistan, coupled with drugs and terror they may bring into China (Trofimov & Page, 2021). The flip side of the coin is that China’s expansion into South Asia may be its hedge against the “Malacca Dilemma” or China’s networked security architecture used to alleviate its fear the West may choke import of energy supplies as they pass through the Near Seas, particularly the Strait of Malacca near Singapore, one justification for its militarisation of that maritime region (Mudunuri, 2020).

6. Conclusions

Empires old and new, reincarnated or imaginary, struggle at the beginning of the 21st century's third decade as collectively they plot to tear each other apart, themselves in the process. Beginning in Soviet times, Russia and the West fought to subdue Afghanistan, then lost. China's BRI or OBOR is extending across South Asia and Eurasia, only to be checked by the West's new B3W that itself faces a precarious future with the United Kingdom and United States dividing, each playing the blame game. Russian Federation interests are jeopardised more by China's entry into Afghanistan than by NATO's presence.

The answers the Research Questions looks therefore as follows: 1) Do countries that once were or were a part of a dissolved empire seek to rebuild that alliance of states? Some do; 2) Do countries that experience rising economic prosperity seek to turn that prosperity into "empires" by exercising control over other nations? Some do, with the Russian Federation being one example; 3) Do countries that happen to have international corridors on land or sea tend to succumb to the temptation of blocking other countries from crossing those territories? Some do, with the People's Republic of China being one example; 4) What will be the likely outcome of "empire" building by countries that lack the resources to maintain an empire? Inevitably, their effort to gain global status will fail, and in the process their domestic economies will suffer decline.

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Sea Power in South-East Asia

Abstract

At the beginning of the 21st Century, South-East Asia is gradually becoming one of the major hubs for international tensions and conflict on a global scale. With surge of People Republic of China capabilities connected with Soft and Hard Power, and re-igniting interest of remaining global players, this region is witnessing adaptation of new strategies and tools not only for war, but also for political and economic expansion. The main aim of this paper is to examine development of tools and strategies associated with sea power, which were developed to manage and exploit during standoff and potential conflict in the region. New quality of international environment is introducing change and evolution to the classical concept associated with classical understanding of sea power – how it is produced, measured, and exploited in contemporary situation. Main hypothesis of this paper will state, that with surge in cost and sophistication of sea power platforms, the primary users are devising new avenues to project their influence in disputed areas of South-East Asia. However, its final usefulness still needs to be tested in real-space entanglements. The paper will be subdivided on four separate parts. First will be devoted to original concepts of Sea Power, according to its founders, such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, Julian Corbett and John Fisher, whose created foundations of what is contemporary known as a Sea Power. Second will embrace the specifics of South-East Asia as a particular region for deployment of Sea Power. It will investigate its political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes and their ties to Sea Power. Third will investigate the potential change in the nature, strategies and tools associated with Sea Power. And fourth part will encompass possible scenarios for Sea Power implementation in the South-East Asia conflict zone.

Keywords: *Sea Power, South China Sea, aircraft carrier, People Republic of China, United States*

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of human history seas, oceans and large bodies of water played tremendous role for humanity in many various roles, stretching from inspiration of human mind, through avenue for traffic and trade to source of wealth and Power. It was second part of geopolitical space to be tapped and conquered by human political entities. First evidence of those activities may be first recorded naval engagement was Battle of Delta in 1175 BC, when Egyptian navy under command of pharaoh Ramesses III decimated attacking ships of unrecognized coalition labeled as a Sea People (Emmanuel, 2013, pp. 14–27). Since then, there could be observed rising surge of importance of sea for political processes and following that process were theoretical recollections (Warming, 2019, pp. 99–124) only recently framed in the schematics of science.

Since that time there could be observed three particular and supplementing each other patterns of development. First is the growing dependency on technological megatrend in producing more effective and bigger however much more costly and demanding platforms. Second is the extension of range in which Sea Power can be effectively projected. From the offshore platforms used in Ancient Times to the open ocean's battleships and nuclear propelled aircraft carriers. From surface combatants to submersibles, which developed various and specialized platforms stemming from common ancestor which were ancient galleys (Pryor, 1995, pp. 101–116). Third is changes within the mechanics of display of Sea Power which basically is becoming much more indirect, mainly due to extension of range of engagement and change in attitude toward platform which become more directed toward preserve those assets.

What need to be mentioned is that this evolution is far from concluded. Moreover, what has to be emphasized, evolution of Sea Power is accelerated by particular events in International Relations associated with conflicts and crises. Recently, the situation which may direct this process emerged in the South East Asia region, with the standoff between US and China and few minor powers.¹ The main objective of this paper is to assess the changes within the Sea Power, which were caused by the crisis within this region of world. The main research question of this paper is the question on effectiveness of Sea Power in late-Westphalian

¹ Emphasis could be given to Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malesia, Phillipines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, which articulated naval national interests.

International Environment, based on case study of South East Asia. How much of the content and context of this phenomena changed under the influence of environment which creates framework for its application? What are modern advantages and vulnerabilities of Sea Power and Actors which wield it? And above anything else: what are contemporary conditions for obtaining success in international relations based on contemporary Sea Power? These procedures will be guided by two hypotheses. First points out that whole process of Sea Power evolution is part of a cycle of developments in International Relations. Changes within the disposition of Power, particularly in a dimension of Sea Power are causing International Relations conflicts and tension up to a level of breaking points of International System. And subsequently, this context affects distribution of Power. It is nearly impossible to distinguish those two elements of evolution. Second hypothesis states, that in general, development of Sea Power resembles general tenets of evolution of Power, which became softer, more indirect and transnationalized. This reflects shift within the international environment from its Westphalian iteration toward post-Westphalian one. Second one assumes that despite its specifics, Sea Power is following the major developments of Power itself, which could be understood as a dematerialization, subjectification and transnationalization of it.

The structure of this paper will be composed of three parts, representing the past, contemporaneity, and future development of Sea Power. Those notions will be supplemented with examples provided by emerging conflict point located within South China Sea, when due to geographical constrains confrontation between major and minor Powers need to be conducted predominantly basing on Sea Power tools.

2. Sea Power as a classical concept

Sea Power as a concept to was formed predominantly in 17th century, when the first genuine warships emerged. Before that, despite occurrence of various naval battles and navies funded and equipped by various political entities, the division between merchant vessels and military vessels were not clearly defined. Single platforms could play both of those roles without meaningful loss of efficiency, which was proven during battle of Oliwa in 1627, when Swedish Navy was defeated by hastily assembled squadron of merchantmen assembled on behalf of Commonwealth (Krwawicz, 1995).

Since 17th century, there could be observed a rise of genuine warships, where cargo space was sacrificed for additional weapon systems, armor and drive systems.² These developments, coupled with growth of knowledge-demanded for operating those vessels effectively demanded creating new principles and models, which could be labeled as a Sea Power.³

Extended operating range, new offensive and defensive capabilities and growing specialization within the branch of warships, stretching from frigates to ships of the line in 18th century to various strains of corvettes, frigates, destroyers, cruisers, aircraft carriers and submarines – included nuclear-powered in the late 20th century. Furthermore, there are numerous examples of various hybrid and experimental forms of warships to which there are clear misconception within contemporary academic and military community.⁴

Within the Westphalian international environment there were created few strains and conceptions how to apply Sea Power. They were diversifying on three separate levels. First is the dependence on development of technological megatrend, which could be understood as capabilities to construct bigger, more effective, and sophisticated naval vessels, technical capabilities of crews to operate those platforms efficiently and accumulated strategic experience, insight and analytical skills. Second is the range of operation in relation to shoreline. And third is the relation to other tools of military Power, such as Land Power and Air Power. Therefore, there could be labeled at least three major patterns of navy construction: brown-water navy, green-water navy and blue-water navy.

First and foremost is the so-called brown-water navies, which are essentially ancient lore supplemented with cutting edge technologies. Vessels applied within this organization are low-cost platforms, ill-fitted for conducting operations far from coastline. In fact, most navies constructed along this pattern are used in bodies of fresh water, such as lakes and rivers. Furthermore, those platforms are dedicated predominantly to serve as a subservience system for army and air components. In fact, even most

2 In this case Sea Power was based on the natural forces to propel combatant, such as maritime current and winds.

3 Referred also as command of the sea, control of the sea control.

4 Particular emphasis should be given to mainstay of blue-navy vessels – the aircraft carriers. Ships with similar capabilities are labeled as fleet carriers, amphibious assault ship, helicopter destroyer, multi-purpose destroyer, landing platform dock, landing helicopter dock. Those cognomens are assigned to vessels which main armament are aerial manned vehicles.

of the crews were soldiers (Rankov, 1995, pp. 78–80), which resembles idea of Roman navy, dedicated to transport legions to battlefield, and in certain conditions: to create battlefield for legions (Cassons, 1995, p. 121). Moreover, this iteration of navies do not possess individual tactics and strategies, as they are subservient to other branches of armed forces, and constrain to relatively small bodies of water and in most cases landlocked. Therefore, there is not much to be given about the strategy and tactics of their development and deployment.

Second tier of Sea Power is associated with construction of so called green-water navies. With this notion, there could be associated name of Sir Julian Stanford Corbett (1852–1922) (Handel, 2000, pp. 106–124). His life and work were associated with opposition toward his American counterpart – Alfred Thayer Mahan – which was pronounced mainly in principles of acquiring so called naval control. According to this resolution, crucible of it is the accessibility of coastline, which meant that navy need to be constructed to efficiently operate in shallow basins adjunct to the shores in order to secure vital national interest and prevent / enable conducting amphibious operations aimed at reaching the vital national areas located still on land. Therefore, main aim of the navy is to project power through numerous armadas of light to medium sized vessels (cruisers). Their main assets were multi-purposes, which could be applied in offensive and defensive operations, speed of deployment, and capacity to efficiently cooperate with other branches of armed forces, especially with air forces and artillery, or recently missile forces, as could be seen in case of China ballistic missiles dedicated to ship-killing missions (Chang, 2021). However, there could be pointed out that size of those platforms made those navies vulnerable for two challenges: operative range and vulnerability. When it comes to the former, there need to be pointed out, that those vessels relative size may cause major challenges for traversing large bodies of water to project Sea Power in different parts of world. Furthermore, idea behind those vessels do not require application of cutting-edge technologies,⁵ which could extend their usefulness. Especially that smaller size means less cargo space for commodities and munitions, and that means tremendous reliance on network of supply depots and bases. It was proven by troublesome cruise of Iranian navy detachment on Atlantic Ocean (Dura, 2016). When it comes to the latter, there could

5 Predominantly in scope of Command and Control Capabilities, nuclear propulsion and redundant systems.

be also mentioned that those vessels are particularly vulnerable within the hostiles littoral spaces subjected to A2/AD activities (Johnson, 2017, pp. 271–288).

Third tier of Sea Power is composed of the blue-water navies. This notion is associated with the name of Alfred Thayer Mahan, which is allegedly more skilled in PR skills than naval history (Crowl, 1986, pp. 444–480), but he became an anchor for those ideas. The focus of this idea is naval control understood as control over major sea lanes and choke points, such as straits, passages, and recently channels. This objective is achieved primarily with major weapon platforms, created with extensive investments of national resources and cutting-edge technologies. This presence is utilized into physically removing enemy presence from the areas of global ocean designated as strategically vital and denying further access to them. The primary platforms used for this purpose were the biggest and most powerful available, labeled as battleships, dreadnoughts, and superdreadnoughts, recently also aircraft carriers and nuclear propelled fleet carriers. Those vessels could be described within three major parameters. First among them is nearly unlimited range, especially in times of fission power. In most cases their performance relies on extensive network of logistic support composed of naval bases, depots, and support of allies, which provides constant flow of required commodities, but their internal volume could provide space for large quantities of fuel, food, munition, and fresh water to extend their range beyond the limits of green-sea navies. Second is demand of resources which need to be taken from national economy to produce this navy, in form of commodities and material, and production capacities, but also particularly skilled manpower (sailors), which beyond knowledge requires also an experience of merchant navy. Therefore, creation and maintenance of blue-water navy are available to dwindling number of global Powers. And third is that despite their tremendous survivalability there could be destroyed. And this loss is devastating in terms of loss of resources, as well as in terms of prestige. Hence, with blue sea navies could be observed a certain paradox: the more sophisticated and efficient those vessels became, governments tend to remove them from harms way. No major surface combatant was lost in battle since 1982, which saw standoff between Royal Navy and Argentinian Navy.⁶

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6 Royal Navy lost two destroyers and two frigates. Argentina lost one cruiser.

With those challenges, there were adopted two supplemental ideas. First of all there is idea of admiral John Fisher (1841–1920) (Lambert, 1999), who is responsible for Royal Navy modernization program which produced famous fast battleship HMS *Dreadnought*. Second idea is notion of *fleet in being* (Hattendorf, 2014, pp. 42–60), which coined in late 17th century, were honed and applied during Second World War. When it comes to former, the major invention of that idea is to diversify structure of navy to perform given functions cost effectively. In this context the new strain of battleships were designed and constructed in order to deploy concentrated Sea Power in distant regions, which were described as a fast battleship and battle cruisers. This branch of Royal Navy was tasked with offensive and aggressive missions. It was particularly visible during missions called *gunboat diplomacy* (Cable, 2016). Other example may be engagement of battle line in hunting for hostile surface vessels around world. The defensive was conceded to more numerous, smaller vessels operating in flocks and cooperating with air forces, coast artillery and submarines, which main task was to bury hostiles crossing the Channel with numerical superiority. This reform was never completed before demise of admiral Fisher but gained tremendous momentum in International Environment (Horowitz, 2010, pp. 134–165). One of the most important one was the resetting naval arms race – already won by Royal Navy, which was one of the major albeit indirect reason to ignite First World War.

Second idea which could be considered as a response to resource consumption of contemporary navies is creating particularly designated forces which need to meet certain conditions. Firstly, the relatively smaller forces need to contain warships which are identified as a major combatant, thus which could be perceived as a genuine threat to national interest. Secondly, the fleet need to be located in relative vicinity of national vital interests of a hostile power. In the times on Second World War for Germany Navy it was Norway, which was located in vicinity of a convoy route between United Kingdom and Soviet Union (Mann, 2012, pp. 12–35). Thirdly, fleet need to be stationed in a so called “stronghold” or “guerilla bases” (McCormick, 1999, p. 27). Sanctuary is an area of space which is strategically remote and controlled by entity applying strategy of *fleet in being* which limits capacity of hostile powers of deploying weapon system able to destroy those vessels. It is very paradoxically, that battleships like *Tirpitz* were secured by layers of anti-aircraft and anti-ship defenses which were not penetrated by Allied forces before fateful operation *Catechism* on November 12th, 1944, when giant ship capsized (Forsgren, 2014). The

main purpose of application of this strategy is to create strategic imbalance in order to divert resources of opponent to neutralizing challenges. Since that moment, there could be observed growing popularity of this term.

Wrapping up this part of section, there is a need to underline that development of Sea Power was in most cases dependent on technological megatrend, which offered better quality of Sea Power projecting vessels at expense of their growing specialization and interdependence with other areas of quantum field of Power projection,⁷ such as economic performance and prestige, which magnified their level of fragility and vulnerability. Therefore, new models of Sea Power application need to be coined and tested. One of the most important test beds for them are hubs of tensions and conflicts. Among the most prominent is crisis within the South China Sea.

3. Sea Power in South East Asia – application and evolution

Southeast Asia is a region centered around large body of water which is labeled as a South China Sea, which encompass surface over 3.500.000,00 km² and average depth of 1.024,00 m. Sea is located between Asian Mainland and first chain of islands, stretching from Taiwan in the north, through Philippines Archipelago to Borneo and Sumatra in the south (LaFond, 2021). This composition creates interesting on a field of international law (Zhao Suisheng, 2018, pp. 1–15). There are two sets of valuable commodities located within those boundaries. First is the international trade, which is serviced by sea lanes passing through Malacca, Lombok and Sunda Straits in and out major ports of China and Japan. This trade appeases hunger of those economies for energetic resources and is the fastest routes toward secondary markets in Europe and Africa. Through South China Sea passes around half of global merchandise, and half of that (around 94.000,00 vessels annually) passes through Malacca Strait, which in the narrowest place has width around 3,00 km and 25,00 m of depth. That makes biggest Asian economic extremely vulnerable to any disturbances in the region like surge in piracy activity. Second are the energetic resources in a form of natural oil deposits (estimated between 11 and 28 billion of

7 This is major element of theory of Dynamics of Power in late-Westphalian International Environment.

barrels) (Shu-yuan & Wang, 2013), natural gas deposits (estimated 29,60 trillion m³) (Shu-yuan & Wang, 2013) and methane hydrates, which China claims to possess technology to efficiently extract from sea floor (China claims breakthrough in mining 'flammable ice', 2017). This situation is supplemented with nutrient waters which supports large population of fish.

The political and geopolitical situation began to deteriorate since 2011, when People Republic of China started adopting more aggressive stance toward territorial disputes with ASEAN concerning possession of Natuna, Spratly and Paracel Islands and Scarborough Reef (McDorman, 2010, pp. 507–535). However main axis of conflict is legal interpretation of so-called nine-dash line (Gao & Jia, 2013, pp. 98–123). The crucial part of this argument is possession of those uninhabited islands, which were used to redraw national waters and exclusive economic zones which will allow to exploit seabed and fisheries. There are two major coalitions involved. On the one hand, there is a People Republic of China, which claims that nine dash line need to be interpret as a national border and thus, People Republic of China is to be considered a sovereign of South China Sea (Fravel, 2011, pp. 292–319). On the other hand, the other coalition constructed on basis on ASEAN nations, which is supported by United States and United Kingdom claims that freedom of navigation needs to be observed in South China Sea which means that nine-dash line is insignificant and need to be redrawn according to principles of international law (Brands & Cooper, 2018, pp. 12–32).

The tensions between both coalitions can be seen on three different fields of international relations, to some extent related to Sea Power. What is more important there could be observed acceleration of evolution of Sea Power, which is stemming from rivalry between China and US with naval assets, with China attempting to construct contemporary blue-sea navy with crucial element of developing carrier warfare capabilities (Horowitz, 2010, pp. 65–97) and US attempts to keep edge over remaining naval forces, which is key element for their hegemony. Within those fields they are: naval arms race between US and China; international law and international tribunals coupled with declaration of intentions; and finally there are development of A2/AD capabilities by both coalitions with application of various military branches and alliances networks.

First of all, there could be observed that People Liberation Navy is entering into final stages of development of aircraft carrier program, which begun with laying keel of first nuclear propelled fleet carrier of indigenous

construction, similar in parameter to *Ford* class (Sutton, 2021). However, there need to be pointed out having a carrier (as it is in case of nations like Brazil, France, Italy, Spain, Russia or Thailand) is not equal in developing knowledge – stretching from maintenance, through tactical and strategical guidelines for their deployment to manual of conducting complex flight operations – which could be labeled as a carrier warfare, requires serious investments of time and resources which United States made since late 30. of 20th Century, when first vessels were constructed. And albeit at that time, at least three powers displayed similar capabilities: Great Britain, Japan and United States, only US was able to continuously develop this line of vessels over other challengers. Even construction and equipment of those vessels consume more resources, that was for backbone of blue-water navy before Second World War – superdreadnought strain of battleship cost between 250.000.897 JPY (approximately 35.000.000,00 USD) (Kwiatkowska & Skwiot, 2006, pp. 74–81) of *Yamato*-class and 100.000.000,00 USD for unit of *Iowa*-class (Newhart, 2007, p. 92). Compared to that, the current top fleet carriers of *Nimitz* and *Ford* classes costs 6.200.000.000,00 USD (Aircraft Carrier Named the USS George H.W. Bush Commissioned 2009) and 12.998.000.000,00 USD (O'Rourke, 2017). Which means that on average, nuclear fleet carriers are almost 143 times more expensive than biggest of battleships. And that do not include manpower cost, technologies consumed and prestige. Furthermore, USS *Nimitz* was commissioned in 1975, which means that it was before People Republic of China acquired her first carrier which was decommissioned Australian HMAS *Melbourne* (1985). That is priceless advantage in knowledge and information in effective operating those vessels.

Having said that, the People Republic of China manage to acquire vessels from different sources, and through education system and espionage (Nakashima & Sonne, 2018) accumulated enough knowledge and information not only to refurbish older carriers such as *Liaoning* (former *Kuznetsov* class *Varyag*, a conventional carrier) and construct new ones (*Shandong*, enlarged version of *Liaoning*) and carriers Type 003 and 004, which should resemble *Nimitz* class in size, nuclear propulsion system and EMALS.⁸ Furthermore, the supplement for those vessels there

8 Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System, which applies to launching carrier based aircrafts with linear induction motor instead of steam pistons. System employed by United States in 2017.

is also programs for support vessels, naval aviation and more. Summing up, the start of assertive expansion within the region. However, creating so demanding in terms of material and information state of art warfare technology severely limits its usefulness at battlefield as loss of a warship of this magnitude would be destructive to general Power potential of engaged nations. Therefore, Sea Power evolution will be guided toward *fleet in being* principles, which assumes, that the most precious combatant will be kept in relatively safety of controlled waters. This means, that naval engagements even in times of war, as those vessels will be placed under close supervision and in mostly friendly waters.

That will be applied to Chinese as well as American carriers. Those vessels will be considered as a symbolic value, and thus will not be engaged into events which may result in their destruction. At least deliberately. It is mainly due to huge consumption of national resources in the process of their construction as well as time needed to replace them after destruction. This could be visualized by fire which consumed USS *Bonhomme Richard*, *Wasp*-class amphibious assault ship (aircraft carrier in all but name) between July 12th and 16th, 2020 (USS *Bonhomme Richard* fire: Suspect identified as 20-year-old Navy sailor 2020). As a result, ship was assessed damaged beyond repair as reconstruction would cost between 2.5 and 3.2 billion USD and last between 5 and 7 years (Browne, 2020) and decommissioned. Thus, security of those vessels is crucial, and it compromises vast strategies, in countering them – as Chinese program to develop ship killing ballistic missiles (Gertz, 2010) – as well as move them out of harms way – as American program to extend range of naval aviation⁹ or replace air group with UAVs (Pawlyk, 2021). Both are designed to move carriers beyond effective range of countermeasures with little to no loss in their own effectiveness.

Second issue which could be observed during standoff on South China Sea is the issue of international law which is strictly observed by parties engaged in tensions. One of the most important examples is arbitration between People Republic of China and Republic of Philippines in front of Permanent Court of Arbitration, which was held between 2013 and 2016 (Korkut & Kang, 2017, pp. 425–463). In this case more important than actual ruling of the court, indicative for development of Sea Power might be three other factors. First, legal dimension is becoming gradually more important factor in strategic value of certain

9 Introducing of Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II into naval aviation.

points in geopolitical space. This could be seen in particular choice of places to install military facilities, not only to secure new capabilities along particularly important sea lanes but also legal justification to achieving objectives without compromising international law principles. Therefore Sea Power becomes translated into domain of soft Power when naval activities serves purposes outside their original utilities. Second, whenever Sea Power is applied the legal justification is required in order to create safe havens by cooperation with smaller entities such as smaller nations¹⁰ and international organizations.¹¹ In most cases, due to their privileged position as a hyperpower (Nossal, 1999), United States usually applied freedom of navigation as a dominant reason for projection of Sea Power in international environment. In opposition to that, counterparts of United States are affixed to the notion of sovereignty understood as a uncompromised control over designated geopolitical space. Therefore, Sea Power were designated purely into fulfilling these functions. However, with the advent of deterioration of geopolitical *status quo* in South China Sea, there is a shift in legal standing within international law. People Republic of China started to dispute role of protector of freedom of navigation aiming at replacing United States in regional dimension, and to this end, new capabilities, stretching from development of expeditionary forces (aircraft carriers) to creation of network of military installations (Ashraf, 2017, pp. 166–181), which serves this purpose. Third and final dimension of legal layer of Sea Power is the act of creation of legal acts which contributes to development of international law by generating additional acts, in forms of bilateral treaties which recognized and sanction changes in Sea Power distribution within the region. This sphere for now at least limited into bilateral relation between major contestants of South China Sea standoff, as People Republic of China is expanding its relations in South and South-East direction, mainly in the Indian Ocean Basin (Holmess & Yoshihara, 2008, pp. 40–60), whereas United States are investing in development of relations with ASEAN nations, such as Vietnam and Philippines (Banloi, 2021, pp. 117–133). As for now, there is no attempts to create multilateral treaties related to Sea Power, similar to mechanism placed in Naval Treaties of Interwar Period: Washington 1922

10 In this case particular emphasis should be given to nation of ASEAN, Japan, Korea and Australia.

11 In this case particular emphasis should be given to ASEAN as an international organization.

(Washington Naval Treaty, 1922), London 1930 (Treaty for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 1930) and London 1936 (Treaty for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 1936) which main goal was to establish Naval Arms Reduction mechanism. Situation where predominant and only naval Power which were United States, there is only little demand to establish this kind of mechanism, but with growing Chinese naval capacities and more assertive attitude in International Relations in the region of South China Sea may be essential to establish legal parity. It will be much more difficult, because classical issues present within the arm reduction negotiations (like national egoisms) will be supplemented with issues associate with qualitative differences which are playing bigger parts than in former century, and which are extremely difficult to assess and even more to execute those restrictions.

And finally, third trend in development in Sea Power may be observed in a form of its *hybridization*. In essence this process originated from attempts made to analyze and comprehend conflict on the eastern oblasts of Ukraine of 2014, but those mechanisms may be applied to other conflicts as well. In essence this strain of warfare reverses civil-military relations known from historical instances of war. In this case, military logic and strategy sketched by authors such as Carl von Clausewitz (Clausewitz, 1995) becomes subservient to media and propaganda effects, which are politically most demanded. Rather than actual battles and confrontation, it's their interpretations that has the biggest impact on International Reality. Therefore, even operation which are completely pointless from military point of view, are conducted, because their value lies in effect they produce.

The similar effect can be observed in Sea Power. Especially that concept *fleet in being* is largely recognized and often applied by various entities. However recent developments in South China Sea, that this idea reached higher levels of attractiveness. In essence instead of factual engagements, there could be observed that simple deployment can be portrayed as hostile and effective operation. There could be identify even, that key role played in this conflict belongs to press releases, official declarations and sometimes rumors, which often are replacing more conventional Sea Power operations as a factor determining strategy and perception of International Environment. Therefore, announcement of for instance, Fourteenth Five-Years Plan, which was drafted in October 2020 (Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan [2021–2025] for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035 of the People's Republic of China, 2021) and embraced future for development and deployment plans

for Sea Power. Those declaration, as well as unconfirmed rumors and leaks are becoming point for changes and evolution for naval strategies of surrounding entities. It is also countered by individual narrative which projects feedback with the Chinese narratives. The standoff within the South China Sea, which is becoming more of a clash of narratives rather than actual strategic operation. Effectiveness of implementation of those tools will be determined by capacity to supplement and replace actual naval actions, which will be crucial to broad and thorough adaptation of modernized *fleet in being* concept.

Summarizing, South China Sea tension hub could be considered a focal point of evolution of Sea Power for post-Westphalian International Environment. Depending on actual outcome of various activities involved, particularly igniting actual warfighting, this evolution, which is also part of general changes in Power composition. Power becomes more transnational and virtual, relying mostly on the qualitative factor. The complexity, sophistication, and extreme price of primary carriers of Sea Power, despite strategic approach to this issue – it is applicable to green-sea navies as well as to blue-sea navies, makes entities wielding those capabilities extremely vulnerable to losing them in combat situations. Navy assets, despite their capabilities are in most cases protected rather than utilized according to their designation. Despite those drawbacks, naval vessels are still desired by various nations aspiring to ascend to higher echelons of International Community, for instance aircraft carriers and other vessels similar to them (Axe, 2021).

Instead of classical naval engagement, there could be observed introduction of developed strategies basing on indirect approaches with most widely adapted idea of *fleet in being*, which aim is at preservation of major naval assets, even for a price of avoiding confrontation. Instead of this, there are instance when Sea Power are applied in softer form, as legal treaties are used and applied in order to secure adjunct to national waters and lower the cost of operations. In case of China, it could be observed in form of *string of pearls*, although admittedly this initiative is less strategically important but more visible in case of *soft* and *normative Power* (Manners, 2006, pp. 182–199). In case of United States are strengthening ties and naval cooperation with Japan (Kotani, 2020, pp. 7–17), Philippines (De Castro, 2020, pp. 1–29) and Vietnam (Simón, Lanoszka & Meijer, 2021, pp. 379–381). The other application of Sea Power, which could be witnessed in South China Sea standoff it is the hybridization. This process could be understood as limiting the

use of actual naval capacities and exploit them in creating narratives often exceeding actual capacities. Instead of naval activities there could be observed conflicts where declarations, announcements, and programs (Jennett, 2020). To some extent there could be spotted rumors, unfortunately without clear clarification of their origins. This could be seen on the examples of Chinese carrier programs, in terms of scaling up (Lague & Lim, 2019) and scaling down (Roblin, 2021) their capabilities.

4. Conclusions and perspectives of Sea Power

The situation within the South China Sea is far from conclusion. However now it can be observed that it already accelerated the evolution of Sea Power. The question remains: in which direction it will take place in the future? There could be identified some major threads which were highlighted among arguments mentioned above. However, there will be left few doubts, which enforce limiting the level of certainty assigned to those features which allow to label them only scenario.

First and foremost, Sea Power will still be connected with major naval vessels however their application will be more indirect than ever before. Sheer complexity, size, manpower demands, and expensiveness makes their loss particularly devastating for national economy, population, and national prestige. There could be observed attempts to move them out of harm's way, for instance by extending range of weapons systems carried by them, like for instance new generation of warplanes. By replacing multirole fighters Boeing F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet with multirole fighters Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II, which means extending combat range from 722 km to 1.093 km (on internal fuel tanks) (Hellyer, 2019), which could remove carriers from effective range of coastal defenses. This effect might be supplemented with application of combat drones (the top five drones deployed by the US Navy 2020) rendering those vessels to operate on secure waters while carried crafts conduct carrier operation over hostile territory. Summing up, the conflict on South China Sea may effect in rise of application of technologies with will result in rise of range of weapon systems involved in order to secure major naval assets and deny opposition advantage of A2/AD approach. What is more important, there is some likelihood that application of unmanned systems air-based and sea-based. To some extent even submersibles. The confrontation, assuming it will eventually take place, will rely on more distanced battles

to limit burden on national potential, especially in demographic terms, which Western powers only recently defined as vulnerability will become bigger challenge in the future. Therefore, even Sea Power will rely on robotic replacements. At first crafted and improvised, and only after scoring major accomplishments, those devices will be mass produced in more sophisticated forms, but this is the issue for more advanced forecasts.

Second issue which could be observed in tensions around South China Sea are conducted not by single entities, but rather by coalitions. There could be observed at least two major blocks on nations involved in the standoff. On one hand there is being constructed network of alliances of China, which is constructed with outcast regimes of South Asia, such as Myanmar, Pakistan, and other loosely associated nations, united rather by national interests rather than shared values, with potentially of expanding on Philippines, but it is forecasted rather than feasible option. The main purpose of this coalition is to cooperate to limit and manage involvement of hyperpower – the United States – in their areas of vital interests. Second coalition is focused on ASEAN nations with informal support of Japan and United States. This coalition is dedicated to support certain values and ideas which are beneficial for mutual development of international community, with particular emphasis given to freedom of navigation. Therefore, primary objective of those nations is to limit and manage asymmetry of relations in region, even with external assistance. Third coalition only recently formed (Clarke, 2021) is focused around two segments: northern tier with embrace Republic of Korea, Japan and United States, and southern tier which embrace Australia, United Kingdom and United States. The contemporary hyperpower is a centerpiece of this coalition, and its main aim is to bolster its capacity to project and protect American interests in the area. The mutually confessed values are considered subservient to this aim. Moreover, main challenge for American interests may be understood Chinese A2/AD capabilities. All mentioned above coalitions members were rarely operate individually, at least when it comes to minor partners. In the coming years, this cooperation will rarely be avoided even by major partners, as cost – economically as well as in terms of prestige – will be beyond capacity to endure by all participants of South China Sea standoff.

Third and final trend in evolution in Sea Power is its dematerialization. It is reflection of a general tendency in Power evolution, which embrace growing application and effectiveness of non-material components of Power, particularly associated with creating and propagating narratives.

Therefore, elements of hybrid warfare will become more important part in application of Sea Power. Basic idea within this notion is that even during war times, war activities, stretching from complex strategies, atrocities to characters involved is only fraction of actual conduct. Most issues are translated to transnational space and shaped to exploit benefits and failures of military activities and aims at creating and propagating certain point of views. It is already identified, but this situation will be escalating in the future. It may turn out, that instead of major naval engagements, Sea Power will embrace struggle with narratives, such as declaration, deployment schedules, developments plans and strategic announcements, which are met with counter-announcements. Moreover, there are growing gap between audacious declaration and more conservative actual actions within the Sea Power components. This avenue is creative development of *fleet in being* concept and rely heavily on subjective interpretation of feasible actions. In fact, it may turn out that Sea Power application will be possible only with minimal engagement of naval vessels or even without them.

Summarizing this paper, there could be made assumption that evolution is interconnected with the evolution of international environment as well as redefinition of Power itself. This triangle, as Sea Power is very specific as it is the most developed tenet of Power which operates in more hostile space of global ocean, which requires reliance on the products of available technologies, when it comes to its survivability and capabilities. Therefore, Sea Power is extremely susceptible on changes in International Environment as well as within the framework of Power. It is particularly visible in the framework of focal points of international evolution, where change became artificially accelerated as it is in case of South China Sea standoff, there could be seen three major tendencies to reformulate Sea Power. First is the change of role of heavy combat vessels from actual combatants to symbols of power and prestige, which means that neither navy will be interested in placing them outside protective shell of countermeasures and security nets, often shore based. Hence, preference of ranged weapon systems will grow in time. Second, due to a cost of naval activities, the cooperative mechanisms will be introduced to greater extent than before. It may be particularly visible in a form of unprecedented involvement of international courts as a tool of Sea Power. And third, absence of naval engagements will be filled with cases of application of immaterial tools of Sea Power. In fact, the current mode of operation may be understood as a logical extension of *fleet in being* notion into direction of *hybrid warfare*. Whether those changes are permanent

change or just political evolutionary dead end, time will tell. But of one issue most of the scholars on international relations may be certain: next focal point involving Sea Power will be completely different from its historic counterparts.

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Troubled Waters: the Taiwan Issue since the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis

Abstract

Over the last seventy years the Taiwan Strait has been widely seen as a place where the next major conflict between the great powers could start. The last time when Asia found itself on the brink of war over the future of the island nation was the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996. In this article, the author examines the crisis background, events and consequences and suggests that the confrontation marked the emergence of a new status quo in the strait area, the one of a structural deadlock. This paper provides an analysis of the three subsequent periods (2000–2008, 2008–2016 and since 2016 until the present) in the evolution of that status quo. The author argues that in the recent years the situation in the Taiwan Strait has been shifting towards increased turbulence. The study identifies the major factors that are eroding the “pillars” of the status quo and, thus, have a destabilizing effect on the relations between Beijing, Washington and Taipei. As such factors are of a structural nature the author concludes that the room for maneuver for each side of the triangle is becoming increasingly narrow. It enhances the risk of a structural deadlock escalating into an armed conflict.

Keywords: PRC, Taiwan issue, cross-strait relations, crisis, USA, status quo

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and the retreat of the Kuomintang leadership of the Republic of China (ROC) to Taiwan the cross-strait reconciliation has been one of the main priorities of the Communist Party of China (CPC). In the

report delivered at the 20th CPC National Congress Xi Jinping stated that “resolving the Taiwan issue and realizing the complete reunification of the motherland are a historic mission and an unshakable commitment of the Party, a shared aspiration of all Chinese people, and an essential requirement for realizing national rejuvenation” (Xi, 2022).

However, it has proved to be a difficult task for the several generations of the CPC leadership to complete. Due to the United States’ active involvement in the cross-strait affairs the Taiwan issue has never been confined to Beijing and Taipei only. Different interest and strategies of the players in the PRC-ROC-US triangle, fluid and tricky domestic politics, mutual suspicion, and misperception of each other have determined the long-term conflict dynamics in the Taiwan Strait area (Sheng, 2001, p. 2). It has led to the outbreak of several serious crises there over the past seventy years. After the military clashes between Beijing and Taipei over the Jinmen (Kinmen or Quemoy), Mazu (Matsu) and Dachen (Tachen) island groups (in 1954–1955 and 1958), the crisis of 1995–1996 once again brought the region to the brink of war. Those events marked a critical turning point in the PRC-ROC-US relations and had far-reaching consequences for the situation in the Taiwan Strait and the regional security architecture.

The purpose of this chapter is to look back at this crisis, identify what forces brought it to life, and examine its impact on the situation in the Taiwan Strait while tracing the dynamics in the PRC-ROC-U.S. triangle over the years.

The hypotheses of the paper are the following. Firstly, the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis is seen as a by-product of the emergence of a new *status quo* in the PRC-ROC-U.S. triangle, a process which had started since the beginning of 1990-s. A large number of authors agree that in the first half of 1990-s Taipei and Washington substantially revised their policies, which eventually led to the PRC’s harsh backlash in 1995–1996 (Chen, 1996, pp. 1055–1060; Porch, 1999, pp. 16–18; Ross, 2000, p. 88; Sheng, 2001, p. 2). Associate of the Fairbank Center at Harvard University Steven M. Goldstein (2002, p. 85), professor of the William & Mary College Tun-jen Cheng and senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute Vincent Wei-cheng Wang (2002, p. 241) share the view that the post-1996 situation in the Taiwan Strait became a new type of a *status quo* which can be defined as “structural deadlock” (or “structural stalemate”).

Secondly, this *status quo* has turned out to be a dynamic phenomenon due to the ambivalence of policies pursued by each player of the China-Taiwan-U.S. triangle. But the set of internal and external pressures has

created somewhat “check-and-balances” system for Beijing, Taipei and Washington that has helped to preserve the very foundation of the post-1996 *status quo* over the years.

Thirdly, in the recent years the new factors have come in play, which are eroding the pillars of the fragile equilibrium that has existed since 1996. This process has serious negative implications for the stability in the Taiwan Strait area and creates preconditions for the outbreak of a new crisis.

For the purpose of this study the following methods of political science and interdisciplinary analysis have been used: historical, comparative and process-tracing methods. This article also draws on the neorealist theory to identify new factors which could erode the equilibrium that has existed since 1996 and have a destabilizing effect on the situation in the Taiwan Strait area. Based on the works by the pre-eminent American scholars and international relations theoreticians Kenneth Waltz, David Singer, and Robert Gilpin, the approach gives the opportunity to examine the issue through the three levels of analysis – the system, the state, and the individual – which helps to get better understanding of the current dynamics in the Taiwan Strait.

2. The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996 and emergence of a new *status quo*

The pretext for the crisis was the visit of a sitting Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui to America on 7–11 June 1995, which became an unprecedented protocol deviation given the break of formal relations between the U.S. and Taiwan in 1979. Lee attended the alumni reunion at his alma-mater, Cornell University, where he gave a speech “Always in My Heart.” He praised Taiwan’s transformation into a democracy and stated the determination to break out of the diplomatic isolation. “The world will come to realize that the Republic of China on Taiwan is a friendly and capable partner for progress,” he said (Taiwan Today, 1995). Lee’s repeated use of the terms “Republic of China on Taiwan,” “country” and “nation” and emphasis on Taiwan’s determination to play an active role on the international arena could not go unnoticed by Beijing. The mainland saw those statements as a direct challenge to the “one China” principle. It turned Beijing’s deep distrust of Lee into a conviction that he was going to lead Taiwan towards eventual official independence from China.

The mainland responded with a series of missile tests and life-fire drills in the waters surrounding Taiwan. The two of vast military exercises took place right before the island's legislative elections of December 1995 and the presidential election of March 1996. The drills in March were conducted in three stages, which included ground-to-ground missile tests close to Keelung and Kaohsiung, Taiwan's two most important seaports, a live-ammunition military exercise, and a large-scale simulated amphibious invasion.

As Warren Christopher (1998, p. 427), who served as the U.S. Secretary of State at the time, later recalled, "although neither we nor the Taiwanese leadership believed that these actions were precursors to invasion, they were dangerously provocative. In a tense environment of mutual hostility and deep distrust, the Administration was concerned that a simple miscalculation or misstep could lead to unintended war." In December 1995, Washington sent the aircraft carrier Nimitz and four escort vessels through the Taiwan Strait. In March 1996, President Clinton ordered to deploy two aircraft carrier battle groups to the area near Taiwan to monitor China's exercises. Thus, in March, there were fourteen American navy ships and three nuclear-powered attack submarines deployed to Taiwan in total, which had become the largest show of force in the strait since the 1950s.

Despite the tense situation, Taiwan held its first direct presidential election which Lee Teng-hui won with 54% of the popular vote. Two days later China's military exercises ended, and the confrontation began to ease.

This crisis was over but the forces that had brought it to life did not go anywhere. In our point of view, the crisis became a culmination of the undergoing emerging of a new in the Taiwan Strait in the 90-s.

The main driver of this process became Taiwan's democratization which had started since the late 80-s. The Taiwanese people became an influential force in determining their own future. In 90-s their participation in politics was constantly growing. They were enfranchised to elect the Taiwanese legislative bodies and the president. New parties that represented the interests of various groups of the island population emerged on Taiwan's political scene. Influential pro-independence force was the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Founded in 1986 and legalized in 1989, it turned into the major opponent of the Kuomintang (KMT). The Taiwanese representation in the KMT itself had increased. Between 1952 and 1993, the proportion of the KMT members of Taiwanese origin increased from 26.1 to 69.2%; members of the ruling Central Standing

Committee of the party from 0 to 57.1%; and members of the cabinet from 5 to 45% (Goldstein, 2015, p. 72). The first Taiwan-born president Lee Teng-hui became the symbol of those changes.

The democratization and “Taiwanization” of the island’s politics had dramatic effect on its policies toward mainland China and the international community. The Taiwan issue was mainly the matter of U.S.-China relations previously, but since 1990-s Taipei has become an equal player in the PRC-U.S.-Taiwan triangle, and the growth or decline of tensions in the Taiwan Strait would largely depend on the policies of the elected administration.

As a result, Taipei turned into the most proactive player in challenging the *status quo*. The democratization made Taiwan revise its stance on its status and a unification issue. Under Chiang Kai-shek’s (1949–1978) and Chiang Ching-kuo’s (1978–1988) rule, there was a consistent position that the ROC was the government of entire China, and the mainland was the part of the country temporary occupied by rebels. Under Lee Teng-hui, it was replaced by the assertion of the ROC as a sovereign country *de-jure* governing all of China, but *de facto* ruling only territories of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu. In 1991, the Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion were repealed. The ROC’s lack of authority on the mainland was officially recognized that effectively severed the lingering political bond between Taipei and Beijing (Campbell & Mitchell, 2001, p. 15). On the one hand, the KMT did not challenge the “one China” principle *de jure* and it let the so-called “1992 Consensus”¹ emerge (which Beijing sees as the foundation for the cross-strait relations). On the other hand, assertion of *de-facto* separation gave birth to Lee’s constructs as “one China, two governments,” then “one China, two entities,” followed by “one China, two equal entities,” “one China, two equal political entities,” “one China, two legal entities in the international arena,” then “two equal political entities” without mentioning “one China” (Sheng, 2001, p. 99). In 1999, Lee (1999, p. 12) put forward even more radical notion of the cross-strait ties as a “special state-to-state relationship.”

1 The exchange of statements from non-governmental organizations of the PRC and ROC on their positions regarding the “one China” during the 1992 consultations. Beijing sees it as a confirmation that the cross-strait relations are within the framework of “one China” and not of a state-to-state nature.

From the point of view of Beijing, these changes and the unrealistic pre-conditions for unification set by Taipei, which included political and economic reforms in the PRC, demonstrated that Taiwan had embarked on the path of separation from the mainland.

The role of the U.S. in shifting the *status quo* in the early 1990s was also significant. In the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident and collapse of the Soviet Union that led to the disappearance of a common strategic threat to Washington and Beijing, the U.S.-PRC relations rapidly deteriorated. The decision to issue Lee a visa was just an episode in the U.S. revision of its China and Taiwan policies that had already been underway. The prominent examples were the Bush administration's sale of 150 F-16 fighters to Taiwan in 1992 and the Clinton administration's decision to formally upgrade its relations with Taiwan in 1994.

As for the former case, in 1992, the U.S. government disclosed sales of F-16 jet fighters and some other equipment to Taiwan for a total of 6.5 billion USD (Reuters, 2010). The move was a violation of the U.S. pledge to reduce the quality and quantity of its arms sales to Taiwan, which was given in the 1982 Joint Communiqué, one of the three Communiqués seen by China as the Sino-U.S. political foundation for handling the Taiwan issue. The trend toward reversing the ban on sales of advanced weaponry continued in the Clinton years with transfer of Hawkeye early-warning aircraft and renting frigates to Taiwan in 1993.

As for the second case, in 1994, the Clinton administration launched a major Taiwan Policy Review, the first of its kind since Washington shifted recognition to Beijing in 1979. The policy adjustments allowed visits of high-level officials from U.S. economic and technical agencies to Taiwan; visits of officials from Taiwan, other than the President, the Vice President, the Premier and the Vice Premier, to the U.S; and meetings in an official setting. Taiwan's office in Washington changed its name from the nondescript "Coordinating Council for North American Affairs" to the more specific "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office" (Lord, 1994). But it was the decision to allow Taiwan's leader to enter the U.S., which happened despite private reassurances of Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen that Lee would not be granted a visa (Kissinger, 2015, p. 504), that became a wake-up call for the PRC.

Beijing, who sees Taiwan as an unalienable part of the PRC territory and itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Chinese people, used its military force to halt unfavorable shifts in the policies of both Taipei

and Washington. In Beijing's eyes, one of the major problems with Lee's visit was that if China failed to react strongly and express its determination to defend its territorial integrity, it could lead to the "domino effect" in erosion of "one China" principle. Other countries would follow the U.S. steps and review their policies towards Taiwan. Lee Teng-hui had already been actively pursuing his "practical diplomacy" to bolster ties between Taiwan and other countries. Only a few days after Lee's United States visit, the ROC premier Lien Chan visited three East European countries, which had no diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and met their leaders (Sheng, 2001, p. 202). The PRC was especially worried by the U.S. stance. As Deng Xiaoping (Deng, 1988, pp. 28, 111) once argued, "the ruling circles of the United States have never given up the attempts to create "two Chinas" or "one-and-a-half China" while seeing Taiwan as an American immovable 'aircraft carrier' and as a sphere of American influence." Chinese leaders had long considered the U.S. involvement to be the major obstacle on the way towards the cross-strait reunification. The impressive arms sales and the Clinton administration's renewed support of Taiwan's authorities were a definite proof for Beijing that the U.S. was encouraging Taiwan's separatist sentiments to contain China's rise.

Thus, the 1995–1996 confrontation became the product of the emergence of a new *status quo* in the strait area. The PRC, Taiwan and the U.S. were not able to solve the problems that had caused the confrontation, and in the wake of the crisis they found themselves in the situation of a "structural deadlock."

Beijing could not make Taipei change its stance on unification to the pre-1990 state. China had to deal with the changed, democratized Taiwan. As the results of the 1996 presidential election showed, the islanders were not ready to give in to coercion – 75% of the popular votes went to the candidates who were opposed to the unification with the communist mainland.²

Taiwan, in its turn, found itself in non-state limbo. Developing a stronger sense of its national identity and being eager to play an active role on the international scene, it was not able to become a "normal" state.

The United States, on its part, had to perform a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, in order to keep Taiwan in the orbit of its influence Washington continued supporting Taiwan in the framework of its Taiwan

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 2 Lee Teng-hui won 54% of the popular vote, while the DPP candidate received 21%.

Relations Act (TRA) and “Six Assurances.” After 1996, the Pentagon expanded the military ties with Taiwan to levels unprecedented since 1979. Taiwan received 15.4 billion USD in arms in 1997–2000 (and 5.6 billion USD in 1993–1996, for comparison). The broader exchanges encompassed discussions over strategy, training, logistics, command and control. On the other hand, the growing economic, political and military weight of the PRC made Washington cautious about the risk of its involvement into armed conflict with Beijing. Its position became clear when during the 1998 visit to China Bill Clinton stated his “three no’s” policy: the U.S. does not support independence for Taiwan, or “one China, one Taiwan,” or “two Chinas,” or its membership in any international bodies whose members are sovereign states.

The unique nature of the stalemate which the PRC, Taiwan and the U.S. found themselves in was in ambivalence of the policies pursued by each player. This feature is well explained by Steven M. Goldstein (Goldstein, 2002, p. 87). Beijing, Taipei and Washington faced a set of internal and external pressures, somewhat “check-and-balances” system, that could make them reverse the policies they pursued at some moment of time.

For example, Beijing’s use of peaceful and patient tactics in dealing with Taipei would improve relations with Taiwan and the United States as well as its international image. However, at some moment of time pursuing this policy could jeopardize the other PRC’s interests. The international community might start thinking that Beijing was satisfied with the existing *status quo* or ready to accept Taiwan’s independence aspirations. The image of the Chinese leadership within the country would be affected as well. The opposite is also true. On the one hand, the “big stick” policy would deter Taipei from declaring official independence, but, on the other hand, it would affect the attitudes of Taiwan’s population towards the mainland and have a detrimental effect on Beijing’s international standing.

Taiwan faced a similar contradiction. Promoting dialogue with the mainland would have a positive impact on the cross-strait relations, it would reduce tensions in the region, bring benefits to the business community and give the sense of security to the island population. However, pro-Beijing policy might cause concerns of Taiwanese population over the deepening dependence on the mainland and eventual Taiwan’s absorption. Such public sentiments would put pressure on the government to adjust the policy. Taiwan’s pro-independence agenda and expansion of the international space could get the support of some Taiwanese, but majority

of population who prefer *status quo*, as well as Chinese and American authorities would pressure the island to reverse this policy.

America also faced the need to find a balance between the sets of contradicting interests. On the one hand, closer U.S.-Taiwan ties and demonstration of Washington's readiness to defend Taiwan's democracy under the TRA would confirm the strength of American security obligations and reassure the allies' concerns over Washington's commitment to the region. Playing the "Taiwan card" could be strategically useful: instability in the strait area would divert a great share of China's strategic attention from its development tasks. However, such policy would also have a detrimental impact on the relations with the PRC and might encourage Taiwan's reckless actions, which could lead to conflict escalation. The possibility of being drawn into a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait was the one that the U.S. would like to avoid. A decision not to provoke Beijing on the Taiwan issue would improve Sino-American relations and help the U.S. to make Beijing compromise in the other areas of interest. However, this policy might make Taiwan and regional states raise concerns about the U.S. getting "too cozy" with Beijing and eventually undermine their confidence in American security guarantees. Thus, the U.S. has chosen the strategic ambivalence as a core element of its approach to the Taiwan issue. America did not make explicit security guarantees for Taiwan and tried to balance keeping the "Taiwan card" in its strategic toolbox with developing its relations with the PRC.

This ambivalence of the policies and contradictory objectives of all the players of the China-Taiwan-US triangle have determined the dynamic and cyclical nature of the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait. Further we will examine the relations within the China-Taiwan-U.S. triangle over the years to understand how the *status quo* has evolved.

3. China-Taiwan-USA triangle in 2000–2008: movement towards conflict

The period of 2000–2008 is a demonstration of how the *status quo* can shift towards conflict. That happened mainly due to the risky political moves of Chen Shui-bian, the first non-Kuomintang president of the ROC. A native Taiwanese and early member of the DPP, he had devoted a large part of his career to the struggle for establishing statehood for Taiwan.

In his campaign for the presidency, he stressed the importance of Taiwan's national identity but tried to avoid provoking another controversy in the relations with Beijing and thus de-emphasized the independence/unification issue. In his inaugural speech he put forward five pledges, also known as "five no's" policy: not to declare independence, not to change the national title, not to push forth the inclusion of the so-called "state-to-state" description of the cross-strait ties in the Constitution, not to promote a referendum to change the *status quo* regarding independence or unification, and not to abolish the Guidelines for National Unification and the National Unification Council (Xinwen, 2000). Chen tried to balance sending Beijing and Washington a signal about his readiness to maintain stability in the Taiwan Strait, on the one hand, with keeping the support of his party's grassroots, on the other hand. He did not recognize the "one-China" principle and "1992 Consensus." Instead, he proposed an ambiguous concept of "1992 Spirit," which was defined as the spirit of dialogue, exchanges and "reconciliation by agreeing to disagree" (Wang, 2002, p. 100), and stated that "the leaders on both sides [of the Taiwan Strait] possess enough wisdom and creativity to jointly deal with the question of a future "one China" (Xinwen, 2000). But Beijing did not find those statements acceptable to resume the cross-strait consultations which had been suspended since 1999.

However, in the summer of 2002, it became clear that Chen Shui-bian had decided to abandon his conciliatory rhetoric in favor of assertion of a separate Taiwanese identity. In August 2002, Chen stated that there was "one state on each side of the Taiwan Strait." President Chen, in fact, adopted the tactics of "creeping separatism": he was taking one step after another to somehow emphasize Taiwan's statehood (Larin, 2014, p. 231). Those steps were the promoting of an idea of creating a new constitution; the abolition of the National Unification Council and the National Unification Guidelines in 2006; the campaign for entering the UN under the name "Taiwan"; as well as the assertion of Taiwan's sovereignty and efforts to solidify the island's sense of separate identity. The belief that such an agenda would let him score more political points at home and President Bush's initial strong support for Taiwan boosted Chen Shui-bian's confidence. But his policy was putting the existing *status quo* in jeopardy and was unacceptable for both the PRC and the United States.

The Chinese leadership acted on several fronts. In 2005, it adopted the Anti-Secession Law which legitimized the PRC's right to "employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's

sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Xinhua, 2005). By doing this Beijing aimed to set the clear red line for Taiwanese authorities. At the same time, according to the "principle of placing hope on the Taiwan people" (China Daily, 2013) the mainland actively sought to establish and build up the contacts with the DPP opposition and with different groups of Taiwanese society. This policy was a success, it led to the establishment of a platform for regular contacts between the CPC and the KMT, which, in turn, laid the foundation for improving cross-strait relations after the DPP's defeat in the 2008 presidential elections.

In response to Chen Shui-bian's actions the United States also made adjustments to its Taiwan policy. At the first two years the Bush administration showed a lot of support for Taiwan. It treated the island as a "major non-NATO ally" for selling certain types of weapons, further expanded military ties with it and let Chen Shui-bian make numerous transits stops in the United States. However, by 2003 the priorities of the American leadership had changed significantly. The U.S. started Afghanistan and Iraq wars and launched a "global war on terrorism" campaign. There was an incentive for cooperation with the PRC and the last thing Washington wanted was to let Chen's risky moves draw it into a military conflict with Beijing in the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, the American administration preferred to make its position clear: at a press conference in December 2003, President Bush openly criticized Chen Shui-bian for his "comments and actions" that "indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the *status quo*, which we oppose" (The U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2003). In 2007, Thomas Christensen (Christensen, 2007), Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, explicitly stated that America "does not recognize Taiwan as an independent state, and... [does] not accept the argument that provocative assertions of Taiwan independence are in any way conducive to maintenance of the *status quo* or peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

Thus, the "checks-and-balances" described above came into play: Chen Shui-bian's policy which was shifting the *status quo* came into conflict with the interests of China and the United States and even ones of Taiwanese population. The DPP's failure to establish constructive cross-strait relations as well as poor economic performance and a number of corruption scandals led to its defeat in the 2008 legislative and presidential elections.

4. China–Taiwan–USA in 2008–2016: *détente*

The victory of the KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou in the 2008 Taiwan’s presidential elections changed the atmosphere in cross-strait relations and led to a vigorous intensification of cooperation.

Normalizing relations with the PRC was one of the central promises of Ma’s political platform. He offered the “three no’s” formula for maintaining the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait: “no unification, no independence, and no use of force.” He embraced the KMT version of the “1992 Consensus” and on that basis Beijing and Taipei were able to restore the consultations between the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait and the Straits Exchange Foundation, the two sides’ semi-official organizations. As the result, by the end of 2008, the two parties had established “three links”: direct air, sea transport and postal services across the Taiwan Strait; they had launched a mechanism for discussing food safety issues; and tourists from the mainland had been allowed to visit Taiwan.

In June 2010, the parties signed the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, which cut tariffs on more than 500 Taiwanese exports to China and more than 250 Chinese exports to Taiwan (Chen & Cohen, 2018, p. 26). In total, during Ma’s presidency the mainland and Taiwan managed to conclude 23 agreements, mainly on economic issues.³

Beijing sought to convert these breakthroughs into progress in the cross-strait political consultations. As Xi Jinping (2014, p. 316) stated in 2013, “the longstanding political differences between the two sides must eventually be resolved step by step and not passed down from generation to generation.” On the one hand, Beijing and Taiwan succeeded in bringing the consultations to their highest level. In 2014, the heads of the Mainland Affairs Council and the Taiwan Affairs Office exchanged visits. On 7 November 2015, President Xi Jinping and President Ma Ying-jeou met in Singapore, which had become the first meeting of the leaders from both sides of the Taiwan Strait since 1949. On the other hand, those consultations did not produce any substantial results. The Ma Ying-jeou administration was under strong pressure from the DPP and other forces, opposed to the development of closer ties with the

3 However, two of them, the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement and the Cross-Strait Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Enhancement of Tax Cooperation, have never been approved and have not gone into effect.

mainland. The manifestation of it was the Sunflower Movement (SFM) of 2014. The SFM, that consisted mainly of students and members of civic groups, attempted to block the ratification of the Cross-Strait Services and Trade Agreement of 2013. The protesters shared discontent with the Ma administration's "behind-closed-doors" politics (the president tried to minimize the opportunity for legislative review of the new cross-strait agreements) and concerns over political consequences of Taiwan and mainland China's increasing economic interdependence.

The SFM and the KMT's major defeat in the local elections in November 2014 became a wake-up call for the CPC, which highlighted the need to "proactively create conditions for expanding contacts between people from all walks of life on both sides of the strait, communicate face to face, heart to heart and constantly improve understanding and reduce psychological distance" (Xi, 2014, p. 332). The Chinese leadership launched a number of initiatives, aimed at Taiwanese small and medium businesses, people with middle or low income, populace in Central and Southern Taiwan and Taiwan's youth ("*san zhong yi qing*" policy). Beijing believed that through the expansion of exchanges and offers of economic benefits to these groups of Taiwanese population it would drum up more local support for its agenda.

The changes in the cross-strait relations in 2008–2016, however, did not mitigate the U.S. and China strategic differences over Taiwan. Washington continued to support Taipei and provide it with weapons. Moreover, the residents of Taiwan were included in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, the level of officials visiting Taiwan increased.⁴ At the same time, trying to develop constructive relations with China, Washington avoided openly provoking Beijing on the Taiwan issue and did not play the "Taiwan card" in the framework of its "rebalancing" strategy. The arms sales authorized in 2010 (6.4 billion USD), 2011 (5.9 billion USD) and 2015 (1.83 billion USD) did not cross Beijing's bottom line that the United States should not include F-16 C/D fighter-jets or attack submarines into the sales packages. Moreover, before its arms sales to Taiwan in 2011, the United States had consultations with China, despite Reagan's "Six Assurances" to Taiwan (Liu et al., 2015, p. 48). This led to Congress's pressure on the Obama administration to confirm its commitment to the

4 In April 2014, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy visited Taiwan, which became the highest-level U.S. government visit in 35 years.

Taiwan Relations Act and “Six Assurances” as a cornerstone of American policy towards Taiwan.

America’s decision not to play the “Taiwan card” was noted by the Chinese side. For example, after the talks with Secretary of State John Kerry in September 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi confirmed that “the Taiwan issue is under control” (Takungpao, 2013).

Thus, the situation in the Taiwan Strait did not evolve into a new *status-quo*, as “checks-and balances” mentioned before again came into play. The SFM demonstrated considerable anxiety in Taiwan over the future of cross-strait relations. Taiwanese public and the continued involvement of the United States in the cross-strait relations were the factors that brought the situation back to a *status-quo* of “structural deadlock.” In the 2016 elections, the KMT suffered a crushing defeat. The DPP formed a legislative majority, and their candidate Tsai Ing-wen became the ROC president with more than 56% of popular votes.

5. China–Taiwan–USA since 2016: a return to the structural deadlock?

Since 2016, the cross-strait relations have again been locked at a tension-riddled stalemate. Although in her inaugural speech of 2016 Tsai Ing-wen resorted to rhetorical ambiguity, after two and a half years she unequivocally refused to recognize the “1992 Consensus” and emphasized that “Taiwan absolutely will not accept ‘one country, two systems’” (Office of the President, 2019). Tsai put forward the “four-musts” for the positive development of cross-strait relations: China must face the reality of the ROC (Taiwan) existence; it must respect the commitment of the 23 million people of Taiwan to freedom and democracy; it must handle cross-strait differences peacefully, on a basis of equality; and it must be governments or government-authorized agencies that engage in negotiations. In her 2021 National Day address President Tsai stressed that the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China should not be subordinate to each other, which Beijing called an “open propaganda of ‘two Chinas’ theory.”

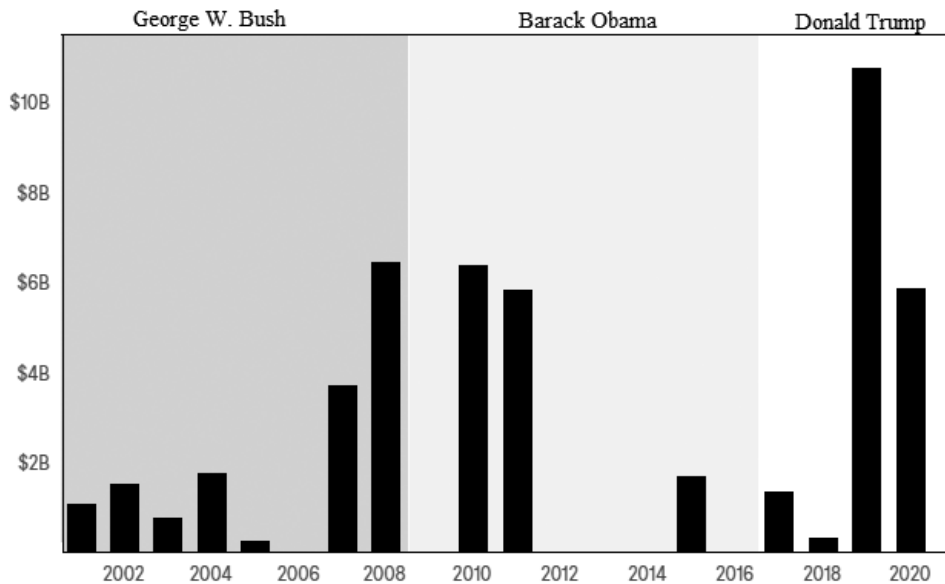
The political foundation for cross-strait interaction has been destroyed, and the mechanisms of consultations between the two sides have stagnated. Beijing has adopted a selective approach towards the implementation of the cross-strait agreements, which were signed in 2008–2015 (Chen & Cohen, 2019, p. 25).

To deal with this situation China applies the “carrots-and-sticks” approach. On the one hand, it increases the number of air and naval exercises in the Taiwan Strait area and takes steps to reduce Taiwan’s international space. Since 2021 the Chinese authorities have imposed several rounds of personal sanctions on some DPP officials as well as trade restrictions on Taiwanese imports, which mainly applied to fishing and agriculture products. But on the other hand, Beijing demonstrates readiness for dialogue with Taiwan’s opposition and continues promoting the cross-strait economic and social integration. For example, in 2018, in the framework of its Taiwan’s people-oriented policy (“*yi dai yi xian*”) Beijing launched a package of 31 measures (adding 26 measures in 2019) to expand the business, employment and education opportunities for Taiwanese in the mainland. The Chinese authorities rolled out 11 measures to support the development of Taiwan-funded enterprises and advance Taiwan-funded projects in the mainland amid the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, and 22 measures to support Taiwan-funded enterprises development in agriculture, forestry in the mainland in 2021. In March 2021, during his visit to Fujian, Xi Jinping urged officials to explore new paths of crossstrait integration and economic development. In May 2023, at the Work Conference on Taiwan Affairs China’s top political advisor Wang Huning stressed that cross-strait exchanges should be restored and expanded step by step, and friendship with people from all social strata in Taiwan should be cultivated.

Beijing and Washington’s ties have also experienced a dramatic deterioration. The Trump administration (2017–2021) radically rethought the U.S. approach to China. The strategy of “engagement” with Beijing was rejected in favor of the paradigm of “strategic competition” with the Taiwan issue being used as a lever by Washington. Taiwan’s security role was expanded in the framework of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. The 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (Department of Defense 2019) released by the U.S. Department of Defense indirectly designated Taiwan as a country and stated that “as democracies in the Indo-Pacific, Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Mongolia are reliable, capable, and natural partners of the United States.” Meaningful actions showing the U.S. support to Taiwan were frequent transition of American naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait and the U.S. aircraft operations in the area. In the Trump’s years the U.S. authorized more than 18 billion USD worth of arms to be sold to Taiwan (Figure 1). The arms sales became annual and included sensitive for Beijing items. The Taiwan’s purchase of 66 F-16s, which

was finalized in August 2020, had marked the first U.S. sale of advanced fighter-jets to Taipei since 1992. In the autumn of the same year, the U.S. announced the sale of 135 AGM-84H SLAM-ER missiles (a range of about 270 km), 11 HIMARS M142 Launchers, and 64 Army Tactical Missile Systems (a range of nearly 300 kilometers). This had been the first sale of weapons systems with offensive capabilities since 1979.

Figure 1. U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan (2001–2020)



Note: Includes sales of defense equipment of \$14 million or more, defense articles or services of \$50 million or more, and design and construction services of \$200 million or more.

Source: Council on Foreign Relations (www.cfr.org).

The support of the U.S. Congress for Taipei was evident in laws, such as the Taiwan Travel Act of 2018, which allowed senior U.S. officials to travel to Taiwan and vice versa, the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018, reaffirming U.S. commitment to Taiwanese security and containing provisions supporting closer U.S.–Taiwan relations, and the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act of 2019, which encouraged states in the Indo-Pacific to strengthen, enhance or upgrade relations with Taiwan and called for calibrating Washington’s economic, security and diplomatic relations with other nations depending on how they treat Taiwan.

The Biden administration has continued a “salami-slicing” upgrade of its relations with Taiwan. It has already authorized 3.5 billion USD

worth of arm sales;⁵ 10 billion USD in security assistance and fast-tracked weapons procurement; and up to 2 billion USD of military grant assistance for Taiwan per year from 2023 through 2027. The U.S.–Taiwan military contacts are being strengthened. In March 2021, the two sides reached an agreement on the establishment of a coast guard working group. In October 2021, the Taiwanese authorities for the first time spoke publicly about the presence of the U.S. military personnel on the island (nearly 40 people). Within 2023, the number of troops is planned to increase up to 200 people. The level of military exchanges is also increasing: in the second half of 2023, the first battalion-level unit of the Taiwanese army is scheduled to be sent to the United States for training.

The contacts between U.S. officials and their Taiwanese counterparts are expanding. In August 2022, Taiwan was visited by then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the third-ranked person in the U.S. political hierarchy. In February 2023, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China Michael Chase made his trip to the island. The level of bilateral contacts on the U.S. soil is also increasing. Taiwan’s de-facto representative to the U.S., Hsiao Bi-khim, has become the first envoy to represent the island at the U.S. presidential inauguration since 1979. In February 2023, Joseph Wu visited the greater Washington area, which made him the first Taiwanese Foreign Minister to do so since 1979. Tsai Ing-wen’s meeting with the House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in April 2023 was the first meeting of a Taiwanese president with an official of this level on the U.S. soil after the severance of diplomatic relation between the two sides.

To expand the contact between their government officials, the U.S. and Taiwan are currently working on the details of the Taiwan Fellowship Program which would allow U.S. federal employees to study and work in Taiwanese government agencies for up to two years.

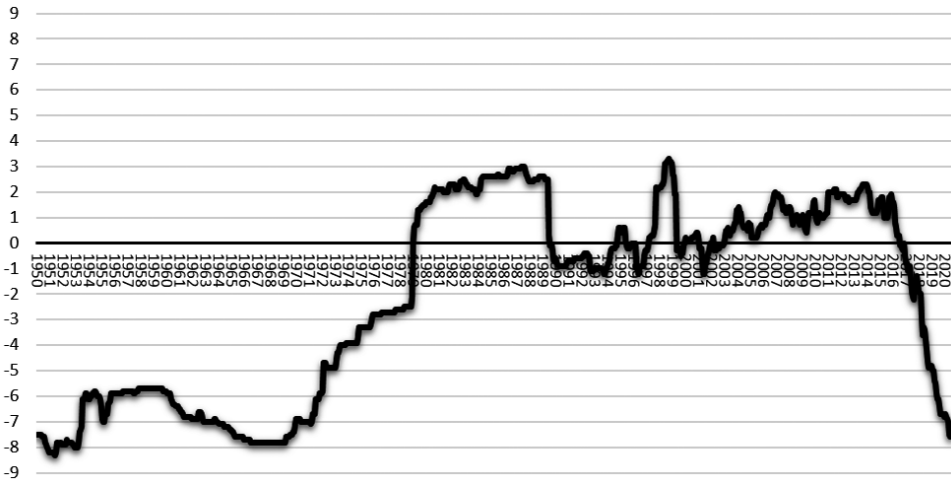
In addition, Washington helps Taiwan to raise its “visibility” in the international arena, supports its “meaningful” participation in the international organizations, the UN system in particular, and mobilizes its allies and partners to pressure Beijing and to prepare to joint actions in the event of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

The analysis above reveals that the situation in the Taiwan Strait is shifting towards increased turbulence. It seems that some “pillars” that tended to preserve the *status quo* have eroded and are likely to continue to erode. To identify the key factors that are affecting the relations in the

⁵ As of May 2023.

PRC-ROC-U.S. triangle we will apply the neorealist approach and look at the situation through three levels of analysis (system, state, and individual levels). At system level the main factor is the shifting balance of power in the international system resulting in the growing competitive trends in Sino-American relations. To visualize the distress of the current U.S.-China relations we can turn to the research on the quantitative assessment of China's bilateral relations conducted by the scholars of Tsinghua University (Figure 2). According to the research methodology the relations can be "antagonistic" (-9 to -6), "tense" (-6 to -3), "discordant" (-3 to -0), "normal" (0 to 3), "good" (3 to 6), "friendly" (6 to 9).

Figure 2. Sino-American relations (1950-2020)



Source: compiled by the author with the use of the database on China's relations with major powers, Tsinghua University (www.imir.tsinghua.edu.cn).

The graph shows that these bilateral relations have hit the lowest point in their development for the last 50 years, coming to a confrontational state close to the times of the Korean and Vietnam wars. Taiwan is gaining strategic and economic value in the eyes of both Beijing and Washington. As Neil Ferguson put it, losing Taiwan will mark the end of the American Empire: "[It] would be seen all over Asia as the end of American predominance in the... Indo-Pacific. It would confirm the long-standing hypothesis of China's return to primacy in Asia after two centuries of eclipse and "humiliation." It would mean a breach of the "first island chain" that Chinese strategists believe encircles them, as well as handing Beijing control of the microchip

Mecca that is TSMC... It would surely cause a run on the dollar and U.S. Treasuries. It would be the American Suez" (Ferguson, 2021). Thus, the U.S. is more incentivized to provide support to Taiwan and less incentivized to respect Beijing's "red lines" on the Taiwan issue. The sign of the changes in the U.S. approach to the Taiwan issue has become the shifts in its decades long policy of "strategic ambiguity" when President Biden made several statements about the U.S. obligations to protect Taiwan.

These changes are worrisome because since the mid-1990s the main constraint to independence-focused policies of Taiwanese authorities has been pressure on Taipei by Washington (Culver & Hass, 2021). Thus, one of the main pillars of the "check-and-balances" system in the discussed *status quo* is eroding.

The PRC's emergence as a great power with growing capabilities to defend its interests by military means and alter the regional strategic landscape to its liking has also shifted the *status quo*.

At the second level of analysis, the important factors are changes in the public opinion and the strengthening of national identity in Taiwan, and the impact of these processes on the political parties' platforms. In 2022, 2.7% of Taiwanese residents identified themselves as "Chinese" (17.6% in 1996), 32.9% – "both Taiwanese and Chinese," while the number of people identifying themselves as "Taiwanese" increased to 60.8% (24.1% in 1996). Although the majority of Taiwanese are in favor of maintaining the *status quo* and making a decision on independence/unification later (28.7%) as well as maintaining the *status quo* indefinitely (28.5%), the number of people who are in favor of the *status quo* now, and then moving towards independence, has increased dramatically – to 25.4% in 2022 (from 9.5% in 1996) (Guoli Zhengzhi daxue xuanju, 2022). These processes have affected the KMT standing, causing disagreements within the party about its direction. In 2020, trying to appeal to the Taiwanese public the younger wing of the KMT urged for reassessment of the party stance towards the cross-strait relations and calling the "1992 Consensus" a "historical description" of cross-strait interactions. Although this proposal was criticized by the party heavyweights and the KMT's commitment to the "1992 Consensus" was reaffirmed in the 2021 political platform, this trend needs to be taken into account.

Thus, with Taiwan shifting further away from any form of unification under any timeline, another pillar of the "check-and-balances" system is also eroding.

At the individual level of analysis, the important factor is the leaders' perceptions and judgements that play crucial role in decision-making. At present it does not seem that the players of the China–Taiwan–U.S. triangle would like the military conflict scenario to come true. Xi Jinping's words that political differences between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait "should not...be passed down from one generation to the next" are widely cited, and as Bonnie Glazer and Matthew Funaiole presume, "these statements indicate that Xi has the ambition to set in motion an irreversible trend toward reunification and wants to make progress toward this goal during his term in office" (Glazer & Funaiole, 2020). There is no clear evidence, though, that top Chinese leadership has abandoned "the peaceful development of cross-strait relations" guideline and fundamentally altered their strategy. As Michael Dalzell Swaine reasonably argues, there is "no indication that this view [about the urgency of a military attack on Taiwan – A.V.] has reached some kind of clear consensus within [Chinese] leadership circles. The political, economic, and military disincentives and uncertainties involved in a Chinese attack on Taiwan, of whatever kind, remain extremely high" (Swaine, 2021).

Despite its increasingly pro-Taiwan stance, the U.S. leadership also emphasizes the need for Beijing and Washington to manage their competition responsibly, establish the "guardrails" to prevent their tensions from veering into armed conflict.

Taiwan's administration, on its part, is also unlikely to push for formal independence any time soon if it does not want to lose the grassroots support – as it has been mentioned, the majority of the Taiwanese population would like to live in a conflict-free *status quo*.

6. Conclusion

The escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Strait is the recurring problem of the East Asian region, which, if mismanaged, could potentially lead to catastrophic conflict with the involvement of the two nuclear powers. Although the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, unlike the confrontation in 1954–1955 and 1958, did not result in an armed collision, it had a major impact on the development of the strategic situation in the Taiwan Strait.

This crisis became a culmination of the undergoing formation of a new type of *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait in the 90-s. The democratization

and “Taiwanization” of the island’s politics made its authorities revise the stance on Taiwan’s status and cross-strait relations, which had dramatic effect on Taiwan’s policy toward mainland China and the way it carried out its diplomacy in the international community. Against the backdrop of Taiwan’s declining interest in unification, the U.S. undertook a major revision of its Taiwan policy which manifested in the renewed support of Taipei, the decision to formally upgrade its relations with the island and impressive arms sales. Beijing’s military muscle-flexing in the Taiwan Strait in 1995–1996 was meant to halt unfavorable shifts in the policies of both Taipei and Washington and prevent a “domino effect” of erosion of the “one China” principle in the international arena.

However, the problems that had caused the confrontation were not solved and in the wake of the crisis Beijing, Washington and Taipei found themselves in the situation of a “structural deadlock.” The special feature of this *status quo* was the ambivalence in policies of all the three players. Their need to balance divergent goals created the set of internal and external pressures, somewhat “check-and-balances” system, which, as the analysis above has shown, made this *status quo* dynamic but rather sustainable, at least for the next twenty years.

Since 2016, the China–Taiwan–U.S. triangle has again been locked at a tension-riddled stalemate. However, some of the “pillars” that tended to preserve the post-1996 *status quo* are increasingly eroding which makes the situation in the Taiwan Strait more turbulent and unpredictable. The contributing factors are the shifting balance of power in the international system resulting in the heightened U.S.–China strategic competition and the changes in the U.S. policy towards the Taiwan issue; the PRC’s growing capabilities to defend its interests by military means and alter the regional strategic landscape to its liking; intensification of a sense of separate identity and declining interest in unification among the Taiwanese.

These forces are of a structural nature and will not disappear anytime soon. The new realities make the room for manoeuvring for each side of the triangle much narrower. At present it does not seem that the players of the China–Taiwan–U.S. triangle would like the military conflict scenario to come true, but there is a tangible risk that the structural deadlock will escalate into an armed conflict due to accidents and communication mishaps. The current situation requires the three sides to accurately determine their strategic goals and think of the possible costs of the decisions they make.

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Development of Asian Economies
Evolution of Societies

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China, Central Asia and a Changing Global Order

Abstract

The following paper addresses the issue of presenting the historical significance of China's cultural influence in the region of the contemporary Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, and in the contemporary Autonomous Region Xinjiang. Using historical texts, the author analyses the place of the Central Asia issue in the thought and strategic plans of successive Chinese authorities. The author points to the importance of building, including metaphorically, the Great Wall and highlights the contemporary importance of developing economic and political relations between China and the countries of the region.

The paper emphasizes that the Great Wall did not prevent cultural influences from the north entering China and was a 'border,' not a 'limit,' in the same way that also the Silk Roads that cut into China's western borders were channels of intercultural exchange. The text concludes that in the contemporary period, the Central Asian region could and should become a region of intercultural exchange in a constantly changing global order.

Keywords: *China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Xinjiang, Great Wall, Belt and Road Initiative, Silk Road*

1. Introduction

Looking back in history, China's cultural influence – its 'international clout' – in the region of the contemporary Central Asian republics Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, as

well as in the contemporary Autonomous Region Xinjiang Weiwuerzu (*Xinjiang Wuweierzu zizhiqu*) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) dates back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), when the Chinese ruling house sent Zhang Qian (195–114 BCE) as an envoy to Central Asia with the order to look for allies to deal with the constant threat of the nomadic forces to the north of the Chinese empire. This threat was also the reason why, under China's first emperor (reigned 221–210 BCE), the individual defence walls that had been erected earlier in order to protect the pastoral domains in the north of Chinese territory against incursions of nomadic hordes, were connected with each other, thus forming the famous Great Wall (I will return to the Great Wall at the end of this contribution). Zhang Qian arrived in Bactria, the region of the Amu Darya (= Oxus), in 128/127 BCE, but his mission was not a military success. Through his mission, however, the Chinese knew of the produce and handicrafts of the Central Asian region. This opened important commercial possibilities and led to the creation of the so-called 'Silk Road' (*sichou zhi lu*).¹

After China's relations with Central Asia had become less important during the period of disunity of the empire that followed the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, these relations were renewed in the Tang dynasty, the period in Chinese history starting in 618 when Li Yuan (566–635) dethroned Sui Yang You, the ruling emperor of the preceding short-lived Sui dynasty (589–618) (Lewis, 2009, p. 13). The importance of Li Yuan's usurping the throne is that, at that moment, Sui Yang You was only 13 years old. This enabled the new Tang rulers to narrate the usurpation as Yang You's act of Confucian filial piety. The narrative that Yang You 'yielded the throne' to the new ruling house allowed Li Yuan to build his prestige not only on his military skills, but also on his Confucian virtue. This explains the name he chose for his reign: Wude, i.e., 'Military Virtue' (Skaff, 2012, p. 110). This narrative can also be understood against the ethnic background of the Li clan. The Li clan was a minor Chinese clan that had, in the middle of the sixth century, belonged to a garrison the Tuoba people of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–535) had established near contemporary Datong (Shanxi Province). The Wei

1 For a historical account of Zhang Qian's mission: see Sima Qian, 1976, pp. 3157–3158. For a translation and study of the *Shiji*, the classical work in which Zhang Qian's mission is narrated, see Hulsewé, 1975. It can be noticed that before that time, the Central Asian region had been predominantly oriented towards the West as it was inhabited by descendants of the Hellenic culture that had moved there during and after the conquests of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE).

dynasty was one of many short-lived dynasties that ruled over Northern China after the fall of the first Confucian dynasty of the Han – the dynasty after which the Chinese still call themselves: the people of Han. These Tuoba were a Turkic/Xianbei (Sārbi) ethnic group. Because the Li clan had intermarried widely with the non-Chinese aristocracy of the region of Datong, Li Yuan was to all probability a member of the mixed Chinese/Turkic/Xianbei aristocracy of Northwest China (Wechsler, 1979, pp. 150–151). This peculiarity also helps to explain the following event in which Tang Taizong, the second emperor of the Tang (reigned 626–649), portrays himself as Confucian protector of the Central Asian Turkic people: when, after an unsuccessful attempt to subdue the Turkic people with which there were recurring territorial conflicts, the – to use the Chinese phrasing of Chinese official history writing – “chiefs of the four *yi* (barbarians)” (*si yi junzhang*) went to the palace in 630 CE and ritually requested that the emperor take the title of Heavenly Qaghan (*tian kehan*),” Tang Taizong is reported to have replied that he, as “the Son of Heaven of the Great Tang” would also “attend to the affairs of the Heavenly Qaghan” (*Wo wei Ta Tang tianzi, you xiaxing kehan shi hu*) (Sima Guang, 1956, p. 6073; Wang Pu, 1957, p. 1312; Pan, 1997, pp. 133–138, 166, 171–176; Lewis, 2009, p. 148; Skaff, 2012, p. 120). This recording portrays the emperor as having acknowledged that the empire encompassed both Chinese and nomads and shows his will to accommodate the non-Chinese in his empire (Lewis, 2009, p. 150). This interpretation is corroborated by the following recorded statements, attributed to Tang Taizong: “The central territories (= China) are like the root and stem, the four *yi* (barbarians) are like the branches and leaves” (*Zhongguo ru ben gen, si yi ru zhi ye*) (Sima Guang, 1956, p. 6073), and “Since olden times, all [emperors] have valued the central Chinese culture and have depreciated the *yi* and *di* (= barbarians); only I view them as equal. That is why they all rely on me as if I were their father and mother” (*Zi gu jie gui Zhonghua, qian yi, di, zhen du ai zhi ru yi, gu qi zhongluo jie yi zhen ru fumu*) (Sima Guang, 1956, p. 6247; Pan, 1997, p. 182; Pulleyblank, 1976, pp. 37–38). These statements testify of the multicultural awareness of the Tang elites, an attitude which I have termed ‘benign pluralism’ in a previous publication (Dessein, 2016, p. 26).

It is further important to note that this attitude *vis-à-vis* the Central Asian Turks is, apart from the emperor’s personal convictions, likely also the result of the fact that his reign roughly coincides with the formation of Turkic empires in Central Asia. This development must have filled the

Turkic groups with a sense of wealth and power, as is illustrated in the Kül Tegin Inscriptions, two memorial texts written in Old Turkic in the 8th century that relate the legendary origins of the Turks. We read:

Hear these words of mine well, and listen hard! Eastwards to the sunrise, southwards to the midday, westwards as far as the sunset, and northwards to the midnight – all the peoples within these boundaries [are subject to me.] (...) If the Turkish kagan rules from the Ötükän mountains there will be no trouble in the realm. I went on campaigns eastwards up to the Shantung plain; I almost reached the ocean. I went on campaigns southwards up to Tokuz-Ärsin; I almost reached Tibet. Westwards I went on campaigns up to the Iron Gate beyond the Pearl River, and northwards I went on campaigns up to the soil of Yir Bayırqu. I have led [the armies] up to all these places. A land better than the Ötükän mountains does not exist at all! The place from which the tribes can be [best] controlled is the Ötükän mountains (Tekin, 1968, quoted through Moses, 1976, pp. 83–84).

The pastoral nature of the economies of the Turkic empires explains why they were eager to establish economic and diplomatic contacts with Tang China, a phenomenon in which the partly Turkic descent of the ruling Li house of the Tang dynasty must have been conducive. Starting from the middle of the eighth century, however, the importance of China's relations with Central Asia diminished dramatically. This was the direct result of a 755 revolt against the Tang ruling house, staged by An Lushan (703–757), a general from Sogdian-Turkic descent. It is in these circumstances that, under the Caliphates of the Umayyads and the Abbasids, Islam was introduced in the region, replacing Buddhism as dominant religion. This added a new important element to regional identity. After a period of cultural and economic orientation towards the East, Central Asia was, under the Abbasids, again reoriented westward, as it was included in an economic and political-economic zone that extended to the Mediterranean (Dessein, 2022, p. 18).

The Central Asian region again changed identities when the Mongols included this region and China in their Yuan dynasty (1271/1279–1368). In this period, the region was not only part of the Mongol empire, but was also Europe's transit zone to the Far East – the Yuan dynasty, it may be reminded, was the period when Franciscan friars went to China and when also Marco Polo allegedly was active in China.² It is during this Mongol rule over Central Asia that the Uyghurs became vassals of the Mongols, and that the Turkic Kyrghyz ended up in their present home area in the

2 For the discussion whether or not the famous Marco Polo ever reached China or had his knowledge about China only second-hand: see Vogel, 2013.

aftermath of the Mongol conquests. While some of the Qipchag-Mongol nomadic tribes under khan Abūl'qāir – who bore the title *ōzbeḡ* or 'true leader' – were later referred to as 'Uzbeks', some other Qipchag tribes who had not recognized the leadership of Abūl'qāir, were later called 'Kazachs,' derived from the Qipchak-Turkic word for 'freebooter'. The current map of Central Asia was further shaped in the second half of the sixteenth century, when the Turkic Karluk tribes and yet another nomadic entity who were descending from Turkic Öguz formed the Turkmens. Turkic Qipchaqs and Mongols are also at the basis of the later Kazaks and Tatars (De Cordier, 2012, pp. 83–99).

With the 1716 expedition of Tsar Peter I the Great (reigned 1682–1725) to the heartland of Central Asia in search of a passage between the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, yet another predominantly westward oriented phase in the history of the region began. By the nineteenth century, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan had become the territory to which both Russia and Western Europe tried to expand their influence. The formation of the Soviet Union that brought the Central Asian region into the Russian sphere of influence, also laid the foundations for the creation of the five Central Asian republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the contemporary period, the Central Asian region has, once again, become the zone of competition for influence between the great powers.

2. The rediscovery of Central Asia

The historical importance of the Central Asian region and of the Silk Roads as a zone of connectivity between the Western world and East Asia was, in contemporary times, perhaps first mentioned by then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in a speech she delivered on 20 July 2011 in the Indian city of Chennai. In this speech, she shared her vision of a new Silk Road, "Linking markets in South and Central Asia, with Afghanistan at its heart" (U.S. Department of State, a.). She more precisely stated:

Historically, the nations of South and Central Asia were connected to each other and the rest of the continent by a sprawling trading network called the Silk Road. Indian merchants used to trade spices, gems, and textiles, along with ideas and culture, everywhere from the Great Wall of China to the banks of the Bosphorus. Let's work together to create a new Silk Road. Not a thoroughfare like its namesake, but an international web and network of economic and transit connections. That means

building more rail lines, highways, energy infrastructure, like the proposed pipeline to run from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan, through Pakistan into India (U.S. Department of State, b).

On 22 September 2011, on the occasion of the ‘New Silk Road Ministerial Meeting’ in the German House in New York City, she partly repeated these words in the presence of Minister Zalmai Rassoul, Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister from January 2010 to October 2013:

For centuries, the nations of South and Central Asia were connected to each other and the rest of the continent by a sprawling trading network called the Silk Road. Afghanistan’s bustling markets sat at the heart of this network. Afghan merchants traded their goods from the court of the Pharaohs to the Great Wall of China (Clinton, 2011).

In the speech ‘Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future’ he held on 7 September 2013 at the Nazarbayev University in Astana (now Nur-Sultan), Kazakhstan, and in which he announced the ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR; *Yi dai yi lu*) initiative, also Chinese State President Xi Jinping observed that “the world is going through faster economic integration and regional cooperation is booming,” and he stipulated five steps “to forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation and expand development space in the Eurasian region”: stepping up policy communication, improving road connectivity, promoting unimpeded trade, enhancing monetary circulation, and increasing understanding between the people (Xi, 2013a).

In what follows, I will discuss the importance of the Central Asian region for China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (*yi dai yi lu changyi*; BRI), as the original ‘One belt One Road’ is now referred to, as part of the People’s Republic of China’s long term international policies and against the background of Central Asia’s historical identity as a ‘land in between’ Europe and the Far East, a transit area through Eurasia. I will hereby also give some considerations on how this initiative has fostered Central Asian regionalism, and on what the role of the European Union (EU) in further shaping this regionalism can be.

3. China’s ‘periphery policy’ (*zhoubian zhengce*)

In a context in which the Western world recognized the Guomindang government on Taiwan as the legitimate successor to the Chinese empire, PRC foreign policy had, at the beginning of the country’s existence, been

preoccupied with the country's recognition as a sovereign nation state by the international community. This situation changed fundamentally when the United Nations changed its recognition to the government of the PRC in 1971. It is arguably the radical change this implied for the country's position on the international stage that enabled Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) to rise to power, and to implement his open door policy (*gaige kaifang*) aimed at economic development to cope with the devastating economic situation Maoist policies had brought the country into. One aspect of these policies is the concept 'periphery policy' (*zhoubian zhengce*) launched in the 1980s. The rationale behind the 'periphery policy' was that economic development of the region at the country's westernmost frontiers, i.e., the region bordering the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, would, on the one hand, keep this region that is, apart from Uyghurs, also inhabited by kinsmen of these Central Asian republics, within the Chinese polity and, on the other hand, would testify of China's benign attitude towards these non-Han citizens. Also in Soviet times, this policy thus had to foster goodwill *vis-à-vis* China among the elites and citizens of the Central Asian republics. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 had a double effect on China. It on the one hand confronted the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with its own vulnerability (Shambaugh, 2016, pp. 104–105, 107–110), but it, on the other hand, also opened important geostrategic and geo-economic opportunities for China. That is to say that the birth of independent republics in Central Asia may have incited the fear of the possibility that rising ethno-nationalism in the Central Asian republics might lead to some form of pan-Islamism or pan-Turkism to which also China's western regions might feel attracted (Kellner, 2014, p. 217), but this at the same time also convinced China's leadership that stabilising political and economic ties with the five Central Asian republics before other powers that were perceived as potentially hostile to China such as the United States did so, was urgent (Kellner, 2011). The need to do so was further exacerbated by the hostile attitude of the international community towards China in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis.

It is also these circumstances that explain the creation of the 'Shanghai Five' in 1996. This first ever international organization created by China, a collaboration of China with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, had to ensure border stability and counter drug-trafficking and terrorism in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This collaboration structure in the domains of border control and national

security was, with the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, renamed as the ‘Shanghai Cooperation Organization’ (*Shanghai hezuo zuzhi*; SCO). The Association’s anti-terrorist vocation has, in 2004, been further enhanced with the establishment of the ‘Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure’ (RATS) that is headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. RATS operates within the SCO structure and has to facilitate cooperation among the SCO member states and with other international institutions (Lal, 2006, p. 7). This enhanced aim of contributing to stability and cooperation in the Central Asian region was to portray the PRC as a responsible power and had to lay an important foundation for further economic and political cooperation. And, indeed, the SCO has gradually also developed to be an instrument extending its functions into the political and economic domains (Bossuyt, 2015, pp. 111–113). That also India and Pakistan joined the SCO in 2017 and Iran joined in 2023 further shows the degree to which the weight that China has acquired in Central Asia has come to symbolize “its growing global power” (Kellner, 2014, p. 216).

4. The Belt and Road Initiative as natural continuation of the ‘periphery policy’

After the Central Asian republics had first been affected by China’s so-called ‘periphery policy’ launched in the 1980s (Zhao, 1999, p. 335–336), and after the attempt to address common security challenges had become addressed through the establishment of the SCO, the latter initiative, as has just been stated, gradually also developed into an instrument of economic policies. That the BRI can in this sense be seen as a natural continuation and extension of these earlier two initiatives is corroborated in a speech Xi Jinping delivered on 25 October 2013 during China’s ‘Work Forum on Diplomacy to China’s Periphery’. He stated that China:

[s]hould focus on maintaining the peace and stability of its *periphery* (...). It should promote win-win and mutual benefits. It should actively participate in regional economic cooperation; accelerate interconnectivity of infrastructure and establish the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ and ‘the 21st Century Maritime Silk Route’ (Xinhua, 2013; emphasis mine).

With mentioning the ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Route’, Xi Jinping repeated the statement he did in the Indonesian parliament on 2 October

2013 and that can be considered as a follow-up speech to the one he delivered in Kazakhstan referred to earlier. He said:

China will strengthen maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries to make good use of the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund set up by the Chinese government and vigorously develop maritime partnership in a joint effort to build the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century (Xi, 2013b).

For China, the launching of the BRI in 2013 was arguably inspired by three elements that testify of the at once national and international character of the initiative, as has also been suggested in the literature: 1) an attempt by China to sustain its economic growth by exploring new forms of international economic cooperation with new partners in circumstances in which the country's heavy industries that produce investment goods are suffering from very high overcapacity rates and in which some new competitive industries are emerging in both industry and service sectors; 2) an attempt to assert greater international influence and contribute to the international economic architecture; and 3) an aspect that goes beyond the economic realm, and includes elements such as policy dialogue, financial support, and people-to-people exchange (Huang, 2016, pp. 315–316). While the first of the above mentioned aspects may, according to Avery Goldstein (2000, p. 186) be of primordial importance, this does indeed not exclude that the BRI also is an expansion of China's growing international footprint, a development that set in with former President Jiang Zemin's call at the turn of the century for China's businesses to 'go out' (*zouchuqu*).

It is hereby to be noted that it was not before 2014 that the BRI narrative also included the rest of Asia, Europe, and Africa, and only beginning from 2015 that 'all countries' were included (Zeng, 2017, pp. 1169–1170). In this respect, the 2015 document titled "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," e.g., declares that the aim of the land connections and the sea connections is:

[i]mproving connectivity throughout Asia, Europe and Africa through a policy of financing and building transport infrastructure across Eurasia, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean (Xinhua, 2017).

It is this enlarged scope of the OBOR/BRI project – a "grand blueprint for China's ambitions to connect three different continents, namely Asia,

Europe, and Africa" (Stahl, 2015, p. 17) – that helps to explain why, in their Clingendael Policy Brief "One Belt, One Road', An Opportunity for the EU's Security Strategy" Jikkie Verlare and Frans-Paul van der Putten (2015, p. 2) assess the just mentioned 2015 document as "the closest thing so far in terms of an articulated 'grand strategy' coming from the Xi Jinping Administration." The judgment of whether the BRI is indeed part of a Chinese 'grand strategy' is partially influenced by the assumption that China's geopolitical strategy is like the Asian board game 'Go'. Tanguy Struye de Swielande (2014, p. 176) has in this respect characterized Western strategic culture as favoring games like chess, "where the confrontation is direct and the objective is the defeat of the adversary." Asian culture, on the other hand, would then be characterized by a preference for an indirect approach. He explains:

In the Game of Go, the actions are at first glance not related. The logic of the actions reveals itself at a later stage. Success is not the result of one shot, but rather of multiple actions in the service of one grand strategy, and the emphasis is more on strategies of relations and less on strategies of confrontation.

The seeming absence of a clearly defined strategic goal in China's international relations is also voiced in the assessment of the outcome of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, made by Thierry Kellner (2014, p. 216). He noted that when,

[o]bservers evoked the international actors deemed likely to play a role in Central Asia, the People's Republic of China (PRC) seldom came to mind (...) in most analyses, authors essentially privileged the future role of Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

This assessment was based on overall historical and cultural arguments: linguistically speaking, Central Asia belongs to the Turkic and Iranian world, and Russian has become an important language in the domain of politics and economy; religiously, the region predominantly belongs to Sunni and Shia Islam, and Orthodox Christianity (Kellner, 2014, p. 216; De Cordier, 2012, pp. 9–10); and politically speaking, the region is linked to imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. It was, however, indeed China that further enhanced its influence in Central Asia through the BRI. This is evident from the following figures: total trade of the Central Asian countries with China increased from 17.5 billion USD in 2008 to 27.2 billion USD in 2018, making China, alongside the EU, the major partner in the Central Asian region (Falkowski, 2022, p. 150).

5. Great power rivalry and the importance of Central Asian regionalism

The BRI also brings us to one of the paradoxes of the Xi Jinping era. The above mentioned call by President Jiang Zemin for China's businesses to 'go out' and the country's growing economic and political clout has gradually developed into China's self-portrayal as a norm/system shaper rather than as a norm/system taker (Zeng, 2017, p. 1164). This has, to refer to Dominique Moïsi (2009) incited a feeling of 'fear' in the West. Aggravated by the still ongoing COVID-crisis and the still ongoing war in Ukraine, this 'fear' has manifested itself in a rhetoric that the world is evolving towards a dichotomy between the democratic countries on the one hand, and the countries with an authoritarian political system on the other hand, i.e., the rhetoric that a new bipolar world order that somehow resembles the situation of the Cold War (the United States and Europe against Russia and China) is taking shape. Xi Jinping's foreign policy has indeed incited key economic partners to reconsider their engagement with China, and the current crises have strengthened the existing trend of increasing rivalry between the great powers. This threatens to hasten a decoupling process, as Western economies have been painfully confronted with the negative impact of their economic dependence on China. For China, the danger of being excluded from advanced Western technology that a decoupling could bring about, is that this could impede the country's economic growth and jeopardize its national unity. The paradox that has ensued thus is that while China has, on the one hand, come of age as an economic and increasingly also political and military great power, the growing international concern about China's rise and doubt concerning its true intentions are also fostering homeland insecurity (Khan, 2018, p. 211). China's international stature also encroaches on what it calls its 'core interests' such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, the South China Sea, and, relating to the topic of this contribution, the country's 'western regions'. With a Chinese population that is not only increasingly demanding towards its leaders on economic welfare, but that also wants to be treated respectfully in the international system, Beijing's policies with respect to its 'core interests' may prove counterproductive.

All these developments have fundamentally changed the international position of the now independent Central Asian republics. China's economic presence in Central Asia through the BRI has downplayed Russia's influence in that field whereby Russia appears to have hereby

accepted China's growing role in the Central Asian economies, including the energy sector, as an inevitable development and arguably a 'lesser evil' than Western influence. Along with China's economic importance – it can be noted that Russia remains the first trading partner of some of the Central Asian countries, while for some other countries, China is the main trading partner (Bossuyt, 2015, pp. 211–213) – it has moreover become clear that China's investments in the framework of the BRI are indeed not only intended to create new markets, but are also conducive to China's gaining a lot of political influence, including in the domain of foreign policy orientations of other states (Biscop, 2019, p. 61). Be that as it may, China has so far not challenged Russia's preeminent security role in the region – as was evident in the Kazakhstan political protests of January 2022.³ Also in domains such as cultural products and education, Russia has been able to capitalise on historical legacies and Central Asian populations' language fluency. Russia has also increasingly invested in Commonwealth of Independent States-whole initiatives, in an attempt to 'Eurasianize' a broader regional space centred around Russia; in the Russian language as a 'natural' instrument for inter-ethnic communication; and in framing a common historical path, in which narratives of the common victory in the Second World War play an undisputable role (Valenza, Boers & Cappelletti, 2022).

Central Asia thus appears to become a zone of contest between great powers. In these circumstances, although basically welcoming Chinese initiatives in the economic domain, the Central Asian countries have become increasingly concerned that they might become economically and financially dependent on China, and that also their cultural traditions would be impacted by the Chinese presence, this despite the fact that, e.g., the SCO's charter emphasizes that the organization respects the sovereignty of its member states and rejects any interference in their internal affairs. To again refer to Dominique Moïsi, the 'fear' is thus that the BRI would comprise an expansionist claim. In historical terms, the perceived threat is that the Central Asian region would become the 'periphery' of China once again.

As much as this was the case for some periods in the past, also today's relations of Central Asia with other powers threaten to make the region a 'land in between.' Different from the past, however, is that

3 That also the ongoing war in Ukraine may have important effects on a Chinese-Russian geopolitical and geo-economic competition in the Central Asian region is increasingly becoming evident.

where the Central Asian 'land in between' traditionally divided the East Asian (Chinese) world from Europe, industrial development since the nineteenth century and the globalization of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries have importantly complicated the nature of this 'land in between.' Central Asia has become the terrain of economic, political, and geopolitical contest between different major players on the contemporary world scene, with Russia viewing Central Asia as within its 'traditional' sphere of influence, China increasing its economic presence in the region, and the European Union making some progress in the region, but not yet having crafted a unified strategy toward the region (Rakhimov, 2018, p. 126). To these three powers, also the influence of Turkey and the United States should be added. As this was the case in the past, further, inasmuch as imperial China's perception of Central Asia developed from a Chinese/non-Chinese dichotomy to a concept of benign pluralism, also today, the contending powers in the Central Asian region will have to overcome mutual mistrust and develop tailored cooperation. For the sake of a more cooperative international and regional environment and for maintaining 'one world,' there is therefore a growing need to defuse the rising tensions between the Western and the non-Western powers.

The EU may here be in a unique position to balance both competition and cooperation (Biscop, 2020, p. 1013) and may, in this respect, be perceived as a viable alternative by the Central Asian countries. That is to say that a growing new self-identity of the Central Asian region in a context of great power rivalry in the region can give the EU a unique opportunity to take leadership in building a more productive dialogue with the Central Asian region as a whole. This EU may in this way play a conducive role in further shaping Central Asian regionalism. Indeed, the role of the EU in Central Asia has significantly evolved from almost invisible in the early 1990s to a strategic player by the late 2000s. This change can largely be explained by the following: immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU's primary concern were the Central and Eastern European countries that wanted rapprochement with and inclusion in the Union. The Central Asian countries with which historical ties were far less strong and which were of little interest to the EU were only of minor concern. Internal political developments in the Central Asian countries and the growing geostrategic importance of the region have changed the EU's position. To be more precise, the EU perceived a monopolization of Central Asia by either Russia or China as to be avoided, because this would not only jeopardize the EU's chances of getting direct access to the region's energy

resources and hamper its overall economic prospects in the region, but also contained the risk that the Central Asian countries' progress towards democracy and political pluralism would be halted. Also the emergence of transnational security challenges emanating from the region, including rising Islamic radicalization, instability in neighboring Afghanistan, and drug trafficking (from Afghanistan through Central Asia), has fast-tracked Europe's interest in the region. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have further enhanced the EU's relations with Central Asia. Military cooperation with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan became important for EU member states as they needed access to military bases in the region (Jian, 2018, p. 246).

It is this awareness of the EU of the geopolitical, geostrategic, political, and economic importance of Central Asia, that has also led to a growing interconnection between the EU and Central Asia in the form of trade. As stated, China and the EU are the major trading partners of the Central Asian region, be it that the EU's trade volume with the Central Asian states is hugely unbalanced with Kazakhstan accounting for 90 per cent of the total trade volume (Bossuyt, 2015, pp. 210–211). It can hereby also be taken into account that the EU's enhanced energy connection with Central Asia (especially with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) is also an important feature to diminish its reliance on Russia for its energy supply (Bossuyt, 2015, p. 227) – a tendency that has gained importance given the current war in Ukraine. In a context in which the region's current dependence on its hydrocarbon resources has deepened, the region would greatly benefit from European as well as from Chinese investments that would help make the transition to 'green' energies. This would not only be beneficial for Central Asia itself, but given the current climatic challenges also for the world at large (Siddi & Kaczmarek, 2022).

Deepened EU engagement in the central Asian region has the possibility to break the EU's image of being a regional donor without influence. Jasper Roctus (2020, p. 4) interestingly noted that the open-door policy that started at the end of the 1970s was essentially an empty box, inviting Western countries to economically engage with China, and that also the BRI likewise is a deliberately 'empty' concept, an "ambiguous heading for a hotchpotch of many divergent local experiments." This means that the BRI holds in it the possibility for the EU to "remold the project from within by making conforming to EU standards a requirement for joint initiatives" (Roctus, 2020). To this has to be added that it is the EU that has the leverage to give the BRI the necessary credibility

because the whole project has met with growing doubt and criticism, also among the populations of those countries that have engaged in BRI related initiatives, and because of the very fact that the EU is the final destination of the global network envisaged in the initiative. Seen from this perspective, the importance of Central Asia and the EU for the BRI might therefore be the perfect opportunity for the EU to implement a policy of 'principled pragmatism' *vis-à-vis* China in co-operational projects in Central Asia. Such cooperation initiatives should be built on solid relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. In cooperating with China on its BRI initiatives, EU policy-makers should carefully balance the EU's relationship with the United States, possible Russian involvements and reactions, and great power geopolitics more broadly.

6. By way of conclusion: borders and limits of culture

The trajectory of China's 'discovery of the world' during the country's long imperial period is illustrative of the porosity of cultural boundaries and the incentives for constant cultural renewal this porosity brings about. This not only applies to China's western borders that were cut by the Silk Roads and the accessibility of Chinese territory over the seas, but also to the famous Great Wall (*changcheng*) at the country's northern border. China's Great Wall that conspicuously marks the northern frontier of the agricultural domains that were referred to as 'Zhongguo' (commonly translated as 'China') in Chinese classical literature, may have been intended to 'delimitate' the Chinese cultural and agricultural lands and protect it against invasions by northern steppe peoples, but it is important to note that, in the eyes of later historians, this Great Wall became a negative symbol as it stood for the tyranny of China's first emperor Qin shi huangdi towards the people who were coerced into forced labor to build the wall (Waldron, 1990, p. 195). Also the repeated reconstructions of the Wall throughout Chinese history depended on forced labor. Moreover, despite the human and financial cost to build and maintain the Wall, the structure was only effective as part of a much more complex military organization. Any neglect in maintenance works on the Wall – symptomatic for a decline of power of the central authorities – undermined the functioning of the Wall and resulted in the intrusion of northern steppe people into the heartland of 'Zhongguo'. Such was the

case with, among others, the aforementioned Mongols who incorporated China in their Yuan empire, and the Manchus who established the last imperial dynasty of the Qing (1644–1911). That the connotation of China's Great Wall was, until modern times, a negative one, is important for the following: a 'limit' is what one cannot go beyond. In contradistinction to 'limits,' borders, including cultural borders, are what one can go beyond; they connect what they have separated (Chakrabarti & Weber, 2016, p. 1). In actual practice, the Great Wall did not prevent cultural influences from the north entering China; it therefore was a 'border,' not a 'limit,' in the same way that also the Silk Roads that cut into China's western borders were channels of intercultural exchange. Also in the contemporary period, the Central Asian region could and should become a region of intercultural exchange in a constantly changing global order.

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Burmese Buddhist Idealism from U Thant to Aung San Suu Kyi. Two Case Studies of Myanmar's Political Thought

Abstract

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi remains a puzzle. Not a long time ago a global democracy icon, she now faces harsh criticism for her actions in governance. Much has been written about her policies yet there is little attempt to trace the intellectual sources of her policymaking. This article will try to fill this gap by showing that important sources of Suu Kyi's governing philosophy can be found in 1950s intellectual climate of Burma. Suu Kyi in her political thought follows the (completely forgotten now) tradition of Burmese Buddhist modernists of 1950s whose most famous representative was U Thant. Suu Kyi is quite like them in many regards including the inability to successfully govern a country.

Keywords: *Burma, Myanmar, U Thant, Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's Political Thought, Burmese Buddhist Modernists*

1. The background: U Thant and Buddhist Modernists

The roots of Suu Kyi's political thought should be located in postcolonial Burma. Among various intellectual traits represented by the Burmese postcolonial elites the one that comes closest to Suu Kyi is the heritage of so-called modernized Burmese Buddhists, best personified by U Thant, UN secretary general from 1961 to 1971.

U Thant, born in Irrawaddy Delta in the family of landowners and businessmen, was in his youth a journalist, a Rangoon University student. During studies he met and befriended U Nu, the future prime minister of Burma (in the years 1948–1956, 1957–1958 and 1960–1962), a teacher and a headmaster in the countryside, before becoming a civil servant in newly independent Burmese government (Nassif, 1988; Bingham, 1966; Charney, 2009). He became well-known internationally for being the secretary of Bandung Conference in 1955. During that time, he became a close adviser to U Nu, if not his closest confidant (Dorn, 2007). Once he was offered to become Burma's permanent representative to the UN in 1957, he was happy to leave the "ugly political atmosphere" in Rangoon in late 1950s and moved to New York (Thant Myint-U, 2007). Four years later he was elected the UN Secretary General, escaping the fate of his former colleagues from U Nu government imprisoned by the military junta under general Ne Win.

On ideational ground U Thant was the best personification of the group called Burmese Buddhist modernists. They "championed Buddhism as the only suitable religion for the modern world" and dreamed of offering Buddhism as "an alternative not only to the world-systems prevailing at the time (...) but to those that it was designed to replace – traditional Buddhism and the British empire" (Winfield, 2017). As Jordan Winfield elaborated, Buddhist modernism "represented a non-reactionary critique of Western modernity": it "emphasized and affirmed the cultural and spiritual superiority of Asia over the West, yet it did not urge a retreat from Western institutions or technology," rather "it insisted that the high sciences of the West, from particle physics to dialectical materialism, were in fact Buddhist ideas seen through a glass, darkly," hence "Buddhists (particularly Burmese Buddhists) were the true inheritors of science and their way of life was the one best suited to a scientifically advanced civilization" (Winfield, 2017). According to him, inside Burma, the Burmese modernism was an intellectual solution of the problem of lack of a "blueprint" of development: Burmese Buddhist modernism "subverted the universalist/particularist dichotomy by making what was local – Buddhism – universal"; in their view "only Buddhist modernism represented a coherent philosophy that was modern and scientific, and yet was also moral and – importantly – local"; it "reaffirmed Burmese moral and cultural superiority at the local as well as the global level, challenging the existing world-systems and overturning the universalist/particularist dichotomy that supposedly confronted them" (Winfield, 2017).

Burmese Buddhist modernists biggest problem was their administrative incompetence: they “found themselves in a situation where they could build neither pagodas nor factories. They lacked the desire to build the former, and the expertise to build the latter. The only thing they could build (...) were ivory towers; intellectual edifices that failed to provide concrete outcomes” (Winfield, 2017).

Well-known and universally respected, U Thant in the 1960s “was a figure of enormous fame and stature, his curious name and smooth, sensitive, rather worried-looking features” were universally familiar (Popham, 2011). With his “doubts veiled beneath more than even the normal measure of Burmese charm” (Lewis, 1952) and “mild, gentle and in several ways typical ‘Burmese’ manner appealed to most parties in the otherwise very fragmented United Nations” (Bengtsson, 2012) U Thant was well-equipped for the role of “moderator” designed for the UN secretary general and he personally agreed to play it (U Thant, 1978). He was a skilful negotiator who gained respect for handling the Cuban crisis, ending the war in Congo, mediations in Yemen and Bahrain and establishing the UN development, humanitarian and ecological programmes. He supported the Third World, and decolonization, and was hostile to neo-colonialism which deteriorated his relations with the USA over war in Vietnam; he was unable to countermine the Six Days War. He ended his career as a tired and ill man, albeit still respected, and he died of cancer three years after leaving the post in 1971 (Nassif, 1988; Thant Myint-U, 2007).

In his memoirs, U Thant concentrated on describing above mentioned events. Yet here and there, there are more personal moments. At the beginning, he started with personal words (that are now his frequently – if not most frequently – cited words) that in order to make others understand him and his role, he needed to present his religion and its ethical aspects: “As a Buddhist, I was trained to be tolerant of everything except intolerance. I was brought up not only to develop the spirit of tolerance, but also to cherish moral and spiritual qualities, especially modesty, humility, compassion, and, most important, to attain a certain degree of emotional equilibrium. I was taught to control my emotions through a process of concentration and meditation. Of course, being human, and not yet having reached the stage of *arahant* or *arhat* (one who attains enlightenment) I cannot completely ‘control’ my emotions, but I must say that I am not easily excited or excitable (...) I believe I have attained a greater degree of emotional equilibrium than most people”

(U Thant, 1978). U Thant followed with describing and emphasizing the importance of *brahmavihāras* (*Mettā*, “impersonal love or good will,” *Karunā*, “compassion,” *Muditā*, “sympathetic joy,” *Upekkhā*, “equanimity,” “a balance of mind”) as well as meditation: he rejected popular association of meditation with “a particular posture, or musing on some kind of mystic or mysterious thought, or going into trance” and instead wrote that “through meditation I seek inner peace” (and quoted Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dominique Georges Pire’s words to be “a man of peace, one must first be at peace with oneself,” “one must first achieve inner peace”), which helped him to accept both tragic news (the sudden death of his only son) and good ones (intention to award him Nobel Peace Prize) with “minimal emotional reaction”; U Thant’s ideal remained the Buddha’s words “to contemplate life, but not be enmeshed in it” (U Thant, 1978). In this words one may find characteristic aspects of Burmese modernist Buddhists: “the usual Buddhist virtues of tolerance and humility are lauded, but so too is the ‘process of concentration and meditation’ leading to the very rational outcome of emotional equilibrium,” moreover, U Thant “did not speak constantly about his religion, yet (...) he made it plain that Buddhism was his main inspiration” and “underpinned his conception of his own role as an international figure and – significantly – of the role of the responsible ‘planetary citizen’” (Winfield, 2017). This can be seen in his memoirs, where he rejected concept of different civilization as a “meaningless fallacy” (for him “civilization connotes a mental and spiritual excellence”), stressed the “oneness of the human community” and opted for “a great human synthesis” and “universal or planetary man” (U Thant, 1978).

U Thant’s modernized Buddhism was also visible indirectly. U Thant stressed that modern science should be used by mankind to eradicate the poverty, not to build another mortal weapon: “I wish that the immense progress achieved in science and technology be equaled in the spheres of morality, justice and politics” (U Thant, 1978). He wrote about “magnitude and poignancy of the problem of poverty in two thirds of the world” and “inadequacy” of sums spent of armaments with the budget of the UNDP (“senseless spending on potential forces of destruction and death, instead of construction and life”) – he complained that his urges about “substantial savings from disarmament” that could “rapidly accelerate the raising of economic and social standards of the less developed countries” fell on deaf ears”; and he warned that “humanity has reached the point of no return. Acceptance of the community of interest has become

a requirement of human survival on this planet" (U Thant, 1978). In this vision, "the perpetration of poverty in a world of plenty" is "morally wrong and politically intolerable" (quoted in: Nassif, 1988). The problem is not the lack of resources but the wrong use of it: this was an indirect criticism of the developed countries (their "moral failure"), a criticism "consistent with what the Burmese postcolonial elites were saying about Buddhism and science in Burma; that there was a connection between developing the country and making it more Buddhist, that there was a Buddhist moral imperative to use science to improve people's lives"; in this regard, U Thant articulated the "internationalist applications of this new moral philosophy" – "since poverty exists in a 'world of plenty,' the prevailing moral orthodoxy of the developed economies – Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union – is perhaps inherently flawed and Buddhism is an obvious alternative." (Winfield, 2017). This is how U Thant followed Burmese Buddhist modernists hope "to make an existing philosophy – Buddhism – into the intellectual and moral context for that imagined global fraternity, with Burma as its source and example"; the challenge they faced was "to balance the emphasis on Buddhism's universalist and universalising tendencies with the championing of the superior Burmese variety" (Winfield, 2017). U Nu failed that, for he was too local, but U Thant was able to promote this vision to the international audience. In the late 1950s he advocated Burma as a place which harmoniously combined both democracy and socialism; he claimed that it happened since roots of both these ideologies lay within Burma. U Thant's vision of both democracy and socialism is modern, yet "defined by the values of the past" such as "pacifism," "tolerance," and "equality" – he managed "to equate the modern concepts of socialism and democracy, the Buddhist virtues of tolerance and pacifism with a sense of Burmese nativism"; this all echo Buddhist modernist argument about Buddhism – "with its emphasis on individualism and laicization" – being "a more egalitarian and inclusive framework for global modernity" than rival ideologies (Winfield, 2017). It does not matter that these comparisons were historically far-fetched at best (what pacifism in precolonial Burma?) and constructed on wrong assumptions (U Thant hailed Burma's democracy as a strong one just before it was killed by the army). What mattered here was that by doing so U Thant "could promote a different view of Burma's cultural landscape to an essentially non-Buddhist audience internationally": a Buddhist and modern landscape and the same time (Winfield, 2017). Although U Thant must have been well aware that his imagined Burma

in both democracy and social aspects was long dead when he wrote his memoirs, he did not stop his attempts to combine his patriotism with a sense of being a “world citizen” (Ma Than, 2010; Thant Myint-U, 2007). This attitude is clearly seen in the final pages of his memoirs, where he wrote explicitly: “a new quality of planetary imagination is demanding from all of us the price of human survival. I am not decrying that form of nationalism that prompts the individual citizen to appreciate and praise the achievements and values that his native land has contributed to the well-being and happiness of the whole human race. Nor am I calling for international homogenization, for I rejoice in cultural and national uniqueness. But I’m making a plea (...) for dual allegiance. This implies an open acceptance of belonging (...) to the human race as well as to our local community or nation. I even believe that the mark of the truly educated and imaginative person facing the twenty-first century is that he feels himself to be a planetary citizen” (U Thant, 1978). Finally, he dots the “i” by writing “perhaps my own Buddhist upbringing has helped me more than anything else to realize and express in my speeches and writings this concept of world citizenship” (U Thant, 1978). As Jordan Winfield observed, Burma in U Thant memoirs appeared only in the context of Buddhism (“Buddhism is Burma’s most significant feature, for him and for the world”), as it was Buddhism that the Burmese modernists presented as the remedy for both domestic and global challenges: “In the rhetoric that U Thant deployed we see efforts on the part of the modernist Burmese to campaign for a Burmese-centred Buddhist internationalism, to wrest their history and their future away from external hegemony, as well as refuting the old British claims of backwardness by presenting international modernity as an essentially Burmese (as opposed to Soviet or American) concept” (Winfield, 2017).

Unfortunately for modernist Buddhists like U Thant, this vision was not accepted internationally during their lifetime. And – perhaps even worse for them – a certain global popularity of Buddhism did indeed emerge in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, but it was Tibetan Buddhism with its pivotal person of the 14th Dalai Lama – not Burma with its Theravada Buddhism – that won the hearts and minds of so many in the West and beyond. In the meantime, in Burma the army has completely killed the ideas of modernized Burmese Buddhists, by totally rejecting their dual heritage (Burmese and, by their Anglicized education, international) and by concentrating fully on nation-building, based on narrow-minded, local, xenophobic nationalism. Only with the 1988 political entry of Aung San

Suu Kyi – who knew U Thant, worked in the UN during his time and lived among the Burmese emigre diaspora where Buddhist modernists were strongly present – did this combined Burmese and universalistic ideas re-emerged in the mainstream Burmese political thought.

2. Aung San Suu Kyi: the Epigone of Buddhist Modernists

Aung San Suu Kyi, with her unique blend of internationalized Burmeseness and with her universalistic emphasis on Buddhism as compatible with democracy and human rights may be considered Buddhist modernists' intellectual epigone. One may trace Buddhist modernists' inspiration in Suu Kyi political thought particularly in some of her texts written for international audience, especially those that do not deal with her political struggle directly.

In first four of her "Letters from Burma," Suu Kyi described an idealised vision of Thamanya monastery which served her to present her political philosophy – "some have questioned the appropriateness of talking about such matters as *metta* (loving kindness) and *thissa* (truth) in the political context. But politics is about people and what we had seen in Thamanya proved that love and truth can move people more strongly than any form of coercion" (Suu Kyi, 1997). Suu Kyi's Thamanya was "Gandhian in its Shangri-La serenity" (Sengupta, 2015). In one of her descriptions of Thamanya, Suu Kyi wrote about the abbot of the monastery that he "combines traditional Buddhist values with a forward-looking attitude, and is prepared to make use of modern technology in the best interests of those who have come under his care" (Suu Kyi, 1997) which followed Buddhist modernists sentiments about the need to subjugate modern science to moral guidance of Buddhism.

Not only science should be subjugated: democracy, too. In her lengthy interviews from the mid-1990s Suu Kyi almost openly followed Buddhist modernists' line of thinking about the West lacking spiritual values by declaring: "I don't agree with everything that's happening in the West, which is why I say that I would like our democracy to be a better, more compassionate, and more caring one. That is not to say we have fewer freedoms. But we will use these freedoms more responsibly and with the wellbeing of others in mind" (Suu Kyi & Clements, 2008). She repeated this sentiment when asked about her vision of Burma's future democracy

– “it would be a democracy with a more compassionate face” (Suu Kyi & Clements, 2008). Thus, Suu Kyi’s vision of “compassionate democracy” can be classified as the 1990s equivalent of Buddhist modernists’ hope of Burma being the model for the West, with the Burmese version of democracy being appealing thanks to the spiritual, universal values of Buddhism.

Further Buddhist modernists’ inspiration is clearly noticeable in her several lectures/essays. In one of them, Suu Kyi started from elaborating on the issue of culture of peace. She emphasized the universal appeal of peace and combined it with democracy and human rights. Having declared this, she proceeded to criticise critical voices: “there is ample evidence that culture and development can actually be made to serve as pretexts for resisting calls for democracy and human rights” as “some governments argue that democracy is a Western concept alien to indigenous values; it has also been asserted that economic development often conflicts with political (i.e. democratic) rights, and that the second should necessarily give way to the first”; in this regard culture and development should be presented in such way to prevent misusing these concepts “to block the aspirations of peoples for democratic institutions and human rights” (Suu Kyi, 2010a). Suu Kyi clearly referred to her political struggle with Myanmar generals who used culture as an argument against democracy and human rights in Burma, saying that these values ran against traditional Burmese values. The indirect criticism of the military government served Suu Kyi as a pretext for more philosophical deliberations. She used it to criticise the concept of economic development in favour of human development, for “development projects (...) should be done with people in mind,” therefore “those who organize development projects should take into consideration that people need the balm of loving-kindness to withstand the rigours of human existence” (Suu Kyi, 1997). For Suu Kyi development projects and planning should arise “out of love,” whereas “true development” should also “comprise spiritual cultivation,” for “no amount of money or technical expertise or scientific knowledge or industry or vision can make up for lack of love” (Suu Kyi, 1997). And “no amount of material goods and technological know-how will compensate for human irresponsibility and viciousness” (Suu Kyi, 1993). Suu Kyi then rejected the notion of Western or Eastern type of development in favour of a division between “people centred” and “government centred” development, and called the latter “democratic” (Suu Kyi, 1997). In short, “for Aung San Suu Kyi, true development involves much more than mere economic growth”

(Silverstein, 1996). This idea of people-centred development is a clear indicator of Suu Kyi being the intellectual epigone of the 1950s Burmese Buddhist modernists. She did not reject the West and international (Western) ideas (here: development) as such; she just wanted to improve it, upgrade it “spiritually” by adding human dimension in accordance with Buddhist ethics. This was what Burma, an underdeveloped country with few international assets, could offer to the world in both the 1950s and the 1990s: a more humane, Buddhist-inspired vision of development that is both local and international at the same time.

This sentiment can be seen, too, in Suu Kyi’s criticism of capitalism, especially her objections to capitalist belief that development would solve all the problems. Suu Kyi complained about “an increasingly materialistic world” and about the “ardent advocates in favour of giving priority to political and economic expediency,” who based their reasoning on “cold argument: achieve economic success and all else will follow”; and about “policies heavily, if not wholly, influenced by economic considerations” that would unlikely “make of the much bruted ‘New World Order’ an era of progress and harmony such as is longed for by peoples and nations weary of conflict and suffering” (Suu Kyi, 2010b). She repeated these thoughts more elaborately elsewhere: “the Market Economy, not merely adorned with capital letters but seen in an almost mystic haze (...) economics is described as the *‘deus ex machina*, the most important key to every lock of every door to the new Asia we wish to see” (Suu Kyi, 2010a). She rejected this economic vision as reductionist, outdated and outmoded. Reading this criticism of the materialism one may conclude that this is another 1990s equivalent of Buddhist modernists’ criticism of the West, with its material progress but lack of spiritual values.

Suu Kyi combined her criticism of capitalism/materialism with appraisal of Buddhism. She stated that what the world has just recognized (the need for more spiritual values), the Burmese have known for long, thanks to their Buddhism: “such a ‘modern’ concept of poverty is nothing new to the Burmese who have always used the word *hsinye* to indicate not only an insufficiency of material goods but also physical discomfort and distress of mind” (Suu Kyi, 2010b). Hence, according to her, “individual happiness needs a base broader than the mere satisfaction of selfish passions,” but “the desirability of redressing imbalances which spoil the harmony of human relationships (...) is not always appreciated,” however “Buddhism (...) have long recognised and sought to correct this prejudice in favour of the self”; therefore, if taken Buddhism message

into consideration, “many seemingly insoluble problems would prove less intractable,” for “the drive for economic progress needs to be tempered by an awareness of the dangers of greed and selfishness which so easily lead to narrowness and inhumanity,” thus “only policies which place equal importance on both will make a truly richer world” (Suu Kyi, 2010b). Again this Suu Kyi’s declaration echoes Burmese Buddhist Modernists’ claim that all the problems have already been recognized and adequately dealt with by Buddhism and it would be beneficial for the world to look at the global problems from a Buddhist perspective. This would be Burma’s piece in resolving international challenges and making this world a better place.

She followed up along these moral lines with a wider generalization: “if material betterment, which is but a means to human happiness, is sought in ways that wound the human spirit, it can in the long run only lead to greater human suffering”; it must be “serving the people, instead of people serving the market” (Suu Kyi, 2010a). She repeated these thoughts, too, during her rallies, saying that the government should encourage foreign investors “to do the kind of business that would benefit our people” (Suu Kyi, 1996). Suu Kyi’s vision of economy, in which she “obviously finds more appealing an economic growth based on ‘simplicity, comfort and respect for the community’, thereby reflecting a Gandhian vision of small is beautiful” – has been criticised for being confusing, as well as “simplistic, with no clear predilection evident for capitalist or socialist structures” (Sengupta, 2015). This is naturally correct, for Suu Kyi’s economic vision is not a concrete economic, developmental programme, but a moral vision, based on *metta* and Engaged Buddhism’s inter-dependent co-arising “wherein no individual or society is free of the shared matrix of values and systems to which it belongs” – “what Suu Kyi has envisioned is an economic landscape which is inclusive, organically integrated to the society so as to be responsible during crisis and more importantly people-centric (...) according to her, the economic framework was merely meant to shore up socio-political and even spiritual development and left one with no option of choosing between god and mammon” (Sengupta, 2015). This moral vision of economy, too, was subjugated to politics: to achieving democracy – Suu Kyi constantly “downplayed the role of the economy in favour of implementing democracy first” (Zöllner, 2011). She declared it openly: “Only if there is a good political system will it be possible to reach economic goals. Even if business is doing well, if the political system is unjust, the nation will not prosper” (Suu Kyi, 2010c).

And she repeated this message at the very end of her speech: “don’t give too much thought on economics. Now is not time to be concentrating on economics, but rather on politics (...) After establishing democracy, we may have new responsibilities in the economic sphere but at this time work towards democracy!” (Suu Kyi, 2010c). This accent on politics at the expense of economics can be seen elsewhere: “the challenge we now face is for the different nations and peoples of the world to agree on a basis set of human values, which will serve as a unifying force in the development of a genuine global community” (Suu Kyi, 2010b). In other words, capitalism is insufficient to solve the problems of the world as it has a reductionist vision of human beings. Free market economy, thus, needs to be deepened by empowering the people, in other words, by more cultural and spiritual needs. And the world needs to find an ideological consensus. This argument, combined with Suu Kyi’s accent of Buddhism as guarantor of social justice, is another feature in making Suu Kyi a distant intellectual cousin of the Buddhist modernists of the 1950s.

3. Conclusions

To conclude: in Suu Kyi’s political thought economy played an adjunct position to both politics and morality. This was due to objective reasons – the logic of her political struggle – but probably subjective as well. Suu Kyi is a moralist, not economist, and her knowledge on economy is limited at best. Thus, she theorised on economy from moral perspective because morality is the field where she feels secure. The lack of the NLD’s concrete economic vision for the country both before 2015 and after, suggests that Suu Kyi is similar to the 1950s Burmese Buddhist modernists in many aspects. The most fundamental one is that just like them, Suu Kyi is unwilling to build pagodas and unable to build (contemporary equivalent of) factories: she lacks the expertise to make Myanmar economy competitive.


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Proliferation of RTAs in the World Economy as a Consequence of the Crisis within the WTO – the Case of Agreements between the EU and ASEAN Countries

Abstract

The ever-expanding and progressive crisis in fulfilling its key roles by the World Trade Organization (WTO) is the main reason behind the proliferation of Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) all over the world. The growing trend in this regard could also be observed in actions taken by the European Union. The EU's current policy of diversification and intensification of trade relations involves mainly the conclusion of numerous Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). A clear tendency, in this context, is a special interest in markets of the Asia-Pacific region, owing to their enormous economic potential. Of particular note, in this context, are the bilateral agreements concluded with countries of the ASEAN group, which, as a whole, constitute EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe. These agreements, leading towards restarting negotiations of the ambitious region-to-region FTA with ASEAN, are particularly significant to reinforcing EU's position in this economically important area, also, in light of other crucial agreements concluded in the region, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) or the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Ensuring better access to the dynamic ASEAN market is a priority for the EU. This region is critical to European economic interests, which was emphasized in the trade and investment strategy for the EU – “Trade for All,” presented in 2015.

In the face of the multilateral crisis within the WTO, the EU, as the most active participant of RTAs in the world economy, will, therefore, concentrate on

implementing its current policy and activities in this regard – negotiating RTAs. This solution, owing to its discriminatory nature, further complicates world trade, however, on the other hand, it grants the EU greater bargaining power. Changing this situation requires reforming the WTO and rebuilding the organization's position in the world trade system.

Keywords: ASEAN, EU, FTA, RTA, WTO

1. Introduction

Changes in the structure of the world economy regarding the proliferation of bilateral or multilateral Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs),¹ are reflected in the actions of the EU, which, in the context of a widening and progressive crisis at the World Trade Organization (WTO), is seeking alternative options for more favourable access to other markets. These steps are also a response to ongoing developments in global trade, including, for instance, increased protectionist tendencies in U.S. trade policy and, more recently, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU is, therefore, negotiating and concluding a new generation of trade agreements with its partners, within the framework of which a broader and more comprehensive trade liberalization is taking place, as compared to that under the auspices of the WTO. Particularly noteworthy in this context are actions taken in relation to the region of Southeast Asia, especially the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The negotiated and successively concluded agreements with the members of the group, which are to become the basis for an interregional agreement in the future, significantly expand the catalogue of EU RTAs, confirming its engagement in this economically important area.²

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- 1 Citing the definition used by the WTO, RTAs are reciprocal trade agreements between two or more partners. Sometimes in the literature the terms regional trade agreements (RTAs) and preferential trade agreements (PTAs) are used interchangeably. According to the WTO, PTAs refer to unilateral preferences. In the present paper, the author relies on the WTO definition and thus applies the indicated distinction (World Trade Organisation, 2021b).
 - 2 The region's significance to the global economy is also confirmed by the 2020 foreign trade volume data. The impact of the pandemic on volumes of trade in goods varied by region, with most regions seeing large declines in both exports and imports, the only exception being Asia, where export volumes increased by 0.3% and import volumes fell by a modest 1.3% (World Trade Organisation, 2021e).

The aim of the paper is to analyse the current situation of the EU's RTAs with ASEAN countries in the context of the potential future region-to-region agreement especially against the backdrop of the WTO crisis. While analysing the issue, special attention will also be paid to the proliferation of RTAs in world economy, in particular, crucial agreements concluded in the Asia Pacific region that are of great importance for both the EU and ASEAN.

The basic thesis of the paper is that, at least until the WTO rebuilds its position in the global economy, the EU will continue to conclude RTAs with key partners, including ASEAN members, thus, filling the space created in the multilateral system. The ensuing trade liberalisation can contribute to a significant revitalisation of trade relations, strengthening and broadening cooperation, particularly in difficult post-pandemic times, and strengthening the EU's position. For this reason, the analysis of trade with EU partners in ASEAN was an important background for the study. The research were conducted using data from the resources of the Asian Development Bank, the European Commission and the World Trade Organization. Due to the extent and complexity of the subject matter, the author focused on selected aspects of the issue at hand.

2. The crisis in the world trade forum as a multi-dimensional problem – the causes of proliferation of RTAs in the world economy

Since its inception in 1995, the WTO has played a very important role in shaping the multilateral trading system.³ Replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), it covered a much broader thematic area, which corresponded with the changes occurring in the global market. Thus, its establishment did not only mean taking over the previous achievements of GATT and expanding its activities – but it was also the beginning of a new stage in the history of the multilateral trading system. Relatively quickly, however, it turned out that building and strengthening the multilateral trading system are not easy tasks, and multilateral negotiations at the WTO clearly lag behind transformations

3 The creation of the World Trade Organization was a major event in the international arena in recent decades, and along with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, it was considered the third pillar of the global economy.

in the global economy. The impasse in the forum of the organization, which is difficult to resolve, and the lack of concrete results of the initiated actions⁴ contributed to the deepening of the negotiation crisis, which, in turn, revealed certain weaknesses and inefficiencies of the system. This has resulted in calls for reform of the organization becoming more pronounced. However, the mounting crisis within the WTO should not be identified only with the deadlock in negotiations and complications in concluding the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations. Effective functioning of the organization also requires reform of other, beyond the negotiating functions, key areas of WTO activity, such as the dispute settlement system, the system of notification of trade policy measures, or the way multilateral agreements are negotiated. Therefore, the beginning of an internal discussion on the need to reform this organization has become a fact (Majchrowska, 2018, p. 243).

After two decades of negotiations, WTO members have not lived up to the need to reach consensus and conclude negotiations under the DDA, and the year-to-year protracted negotiations have made it the longest negotiating round under the entire GATT/WTO system. It is important to note that the problem of the negotiation impasse is complex and involves many aspects. The main area of divergence is the difficult issue of agriculture – with the question of subsidies as the subject of divided interests and numerous controversies. Not insignificant are also the expectations of the rich countries concerning the access to the service markets of the poorest countries. Finding consensus in the Development Round is also a challenge incomparably more difficult than in previous rounds, both because of the increase in the number of members of this organization representing different interests and the expansion of the scope of negotiations itself. The emergence of important new members, such as China,⁵ India and Brazil, has weakened the importance of existing trading powers – the United States and the European Union – which has meant that the changing balance of power in the world economy has also been reflected in WTO negotiations. The significant increase in the involvement of other developing countries, relative to the situation

4 An exception, however, is certainly the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which is a key element of what is known as the Bali Package.

5 It is also pointed out that one of the main reasons for the crisis is the fact that China's accession to the WTO has not contributed to its transformation into a market economy and the level of opening of the Chinese market still does not correspond to its importance in the global economy (European Commission, 2021a).

in earlier rounds, should not be overlooked, either. As a result of these developments, there has been a great difficulty in reconciling the defensive and offensive interests of different groups of countries, which, in turn, led to a polarization of positions between developed and developing countries. These divisions, a consequence of the changed balance of power in world trade and the growing prominence of developing countries, gradually damaged the image of the WTO as the overarching forum for regulating world trade.⁶

The slow progress in negotiations has also been attributed to the negotiating formula of the single undertaking principle, which means that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed,”⁷ which, as it turned out, did not have a positive effect on making arrangements. Moreover, some of the objectives set out in the DDA have already been achieved by other means. First of all, there has been a reduction in the average level of customs protection – many countries (e.g. the above-mentioned China, Brazil or India) have reduced tariffs unilaterally (but mainly on industrial goods) as part of economic reforms and regional integration processes (Majchrowska, 2018, p. 244).

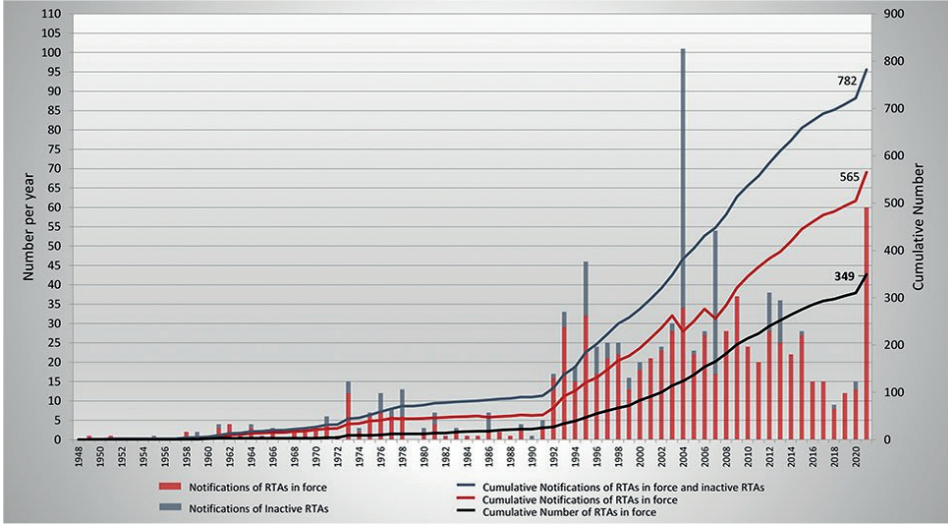
The waning importance of the WTO is, thus, a consequence of the lengthy multilateral negotiations in the Doha Development Round, but also of the significant involvement of many key members of the organization in the RTAs negotiations. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the proliferation of RTAs is also the result of the lack of progress in the DDA, which creates a “vicious circle” from which it is difficult to find a way out. The real cause of the negotiating impasse certainly also lies in the simple lack of determination and motivation among members to seek agreement during the protracted negotiations and the loss of a sense of common purpose. As a consequence, RTAs have come to the foreground, and their participants expect further liberalization of trade. It needs to be pointed out that all WTO members belong to at least one trade agreement. This trend is, unquestionably, characterized by a growing tendency, particularly owing to numerous RTAs that are

6 Crucial in this context is also disappointment of developing countries connected to the effects of negotiations in particular regarding “special and differential treatment” provisions.

7 The approach was that, unlike GATT, multilateral agreements, with certain exceptions, were to apply to all WTO members. These exceptions include the SDT, and the schedules of commitments and concessions submitted at the time of accession to the organization.

currently being negotiated. After noticeably diminishing dynamics since 2015, a significant rebound is seen in 2021 mainly due to UK post Brexit deals (see Figure 1) (World Trade Organisation, 2021a).

Figure 1. Evolution of RTAs in the world, 1948–2021



Source: World Trade Organisation 2021b.

Until 1990, the total number of concluded agreements stood at 30, while it reached almost 160 up to the year 2000. According to the WTO figures for June 2021, the organization had received 782 notifications of regional trade agreements counting goods, services as well as member accessions separately. If notifications are taken as a whole, the number of agreements physically in force was 565, with 349 of those being active (World Trade Organisation, 2021b).

It should also be stressed that in the first decade of 21st century, in trade regionalism, the dominant force were bilateral agreements. The second ten-year period saw a substantial rise of interest in Mega-Regional Trade Agreements (MRTAs).⁸ In the context of this analysis, it needs to be noted that signing and entry into force⁹ of the Regional

8 MRTAs are defined as “regional agreements that have systemic, global impact. In other words, they are large enough and ambitious to influence trade rules and trade flows beyond their areas of application” (Lakatos et al., 2016, p. 221).

9 The CPTPP was signed by 11 countries on March 8, 2018 and finally entered fully into force in July 2023. Codifying pre-existing bilateral agreements between 10 ASEAN

Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) was important for the EU, given its engagement in the Southeast Asian region. The agreements pose challenges for the EU, including the possibility of reducing its trade with CPTPP or RCEP countries in favour of trade between members of these groups (trade diversion effect). Four ASEAN countries (Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam) have signed the CPTPP, while all ASEAN economies participate in the RCEP. It is also worth noting that RCEP is the first regional multilateral trade pact signed by China, which will certainly also be significant for strengthening the position of this economy in the region.

The ongoing crisis at the WTO, thus, affects three main functions of the organization: the negotiations have not led to modernization of the rules; as it was the case under GATT, there is the possibility of blocking the dispute settlement system, as was evident in late 2019 when the U.S. blocked the nomination of Appellate Body members; there is a lack of effectiveness in monitoring trade policy.¹⁰ Modernisation of the system is, therefore, inevitable and urgent reform is now necessary. Indeed, a stable trade environment, with the WTO at its core, is essential, especially in view of the upcoming challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The reform that the EU is leading will, therefore, be vital to facilitate economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to develop trade rules that better reflect developments in the global economy (European Commission, 2021j).

To conclude this section, it is worth emphasizing that the new Director-General of the organization will have an important role to play in terms of the smooth implementation of the organization's reform and the restoration of the WTO's position. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the first woman in the history of the WTO and the first African to be elected to the post of WTO DG, and her term, after a drawn-out selection process, began on March 1, 2021. Just as in 2013, when Roberto Azevedo took over the helm of the organization in a moment of crisis, hopes for reform and restoring the organization's credibility in the global economy are high.

members and five of its major trading partners, the RCEP (ASEAN+6 without India) was signed on November 15, 2020. The RCEP entered into force on January 01, 2022.

10 Topics such as environmental degradation, climate change and decent work pose serious challenges to the WTO's monitoring and debate functions (European Commission, 2021a).

3. EU-ASEAN trade relations – origins and institutional foundations of cooperation

EU policy towards the countries of Southeast Asia is carried out through the implementation of external trade policy. However, the scope of ties with the countries of the region varies significantly, which is due to the fact that the area is not a homogeneous whole. It should be emphasized, however, that an important collective partner of the EU in the region is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹¹

ASEAN was founded on 8 December 1967 during the conference in Bangkok. The Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand signed the so-called Bangkok Declaration, i.e., an agreement on the foundation of the ASEAN. The Bangkok Declaration determines seven major objectives of the association, including: to accelerate the economic growth in the region, to collaborate more effectively for the expansion of their trade, to maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes, etc. (ASEAN, 2021a).

Political issues¹² were of a more dominant nature in the initial period of the ASEAN existence, and it was not until later those economic issues gained in importance. At first, the member countries were not willing to work towards binding agreements or to integrate more closely. In effect, the main role of the Association was that of a forum for exchanging opinions on regional cooperation. Yet, due to various integration tendencies, in January 1992 a decision to set up Free Trade Area ASEAN (ASEAN FTA – AFTA) was made during the Fourth Summit of ASEAN in Singapore, now in the area of six member countries (the sixth country was Brunei

11 The size of the region is directly related to the great diversity of the countries belonging to it. The area brings together countries with different histories, traditions, cultures, political systems and levels of economic development. There are different degrees of the economic development also of the ASEAN countries. Among them there are very wealthy countries (e.g. Singapore – a modern city-state, and Brunei), dynamically developing countries (Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam), as well as less developed countries with GDP per capita slightly exceeding USD 1000 (Cambodia, Myanmar). Based on the level of development, ASEAN countries are also traditionally divided into two groups: ASEAN 6 (Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines) and ASEAN 4 (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar) (Majchrowska, 2019, p. 121).

12 Mainly the question of political stability with regard to the Vietnam War. Thus, the reason for the creation of ASEAN was, as with the European Communities, the desire to avoid conflict and the fear of war.

Darussalam, admitted in 1984).¹³ It was presumed that the area would be created with fifteen years beginning from 1 January 1993.

In 2007, ASEAN members signed a Declaration on the Establishment of an Economic Community to promote an EU-like common market for the free exchange of goods, services, labour and capital (Nawrot, 2008, p. 83 ff.) Since 2016, ASEAN members have been laying the groundwork for this higher stage of economic integration. This process will take many more years, but it is worth remembering that the result will be one of the world's largest economically integrated markets.

Mutual relations between the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have spanned more than 40 years, evolving both economically and politically. The European Economic Community (EEC) was the first institution to set up informal relations with the formation in 1972. Official contacts were initiated in 1977 through the 10th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting. The signing of the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement in March 1980¹⁴ institutionalised these relations. Mutual relations between the groups are based on the Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership, accepted in March 2007. The document defines an extended vision and commitment to joint cooperation. After the adoption of the ASEAN Charter in 2008, the EU initiated official diplomatic relations with ASEAN (March 2009). During the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Brunei in 2012 partners adopted the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013–2017). It was a comprehensive document intended for guiding and bringing to a greater level the cooperation between the two groupings. The official paper called: *The EU and ASEAN: a Partnership with a Strategic Purpose* (European Commission, 2015a), was endorsed by the EU Foreign Affairs Council which issued conclusions on EU-ASEAN relations in June 2015. The ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting which took place in Bangkok in October 2016 confirmed the positive momentum in mutual relations and the common goal of taking them to the next level with the possibility of creating a Strategic Partnership between the two regions (European Union, 2017). At their recent 23rd meeting, held by video conference on 1 December 2020, the ministers of the 27 EU member

13 Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999.

14 ARTICLE 2, Commercial Cooperation: "The Parties undertake to promote the development and diversification of their reciprocal commercial exchanges to the highest possible level taking into account their respective economic situations" (ASEAN, 2021b).

states and 10 ASEAN countries decided to elevate their bilateral relations to the level of a strategic partnership. Closer cooperation, e.g., in the area of trade, will be important particularly due to the necessity of overcoming the effects of a pandemic. During the meeting, a declaration was adopted on closer cooperation in promoting multifaceted links between Asia and Europe and related strategic investments (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Another important element of mutual relations is the fact that in July 2007, the EU and ASEAN began negotiations on the creation of an interregional free trade area. However, the talks were suspended, by mutual agreement, after just two years, at the end of 2009, due to unsatisfactory progress in the negotiations. Instead, it was proposed that bilateral talks between the EU and individual ASEAN members were to commence, while retaining the strategic objective of an interregional agreement.¹⁵ Thus, talks were first initiated with Singapore and Malaysia (in 2010), followed by Vietnam (June 2012), Thailand (March 2013), the Philippines (December 2015) and Indonesia (July 2016). By mid-2021, only Singapore and Vietnam had managed to sign agreements (completed negotiations with Singapore in October 2014 and Vietnam in December 2015), which entered into force on November 21, 2019 and August 1, 2020, respectively. Four other countries are still at a more or less advanced stage of negotiating bilateral agreements. Talks with Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines have been temporarily suspended. Negotiations with Indonesia are still ongoing and are intended to further deepen EU-Indonesia trade and investment relations. It is worth noting that the EU and Myanmar launched negotiations for an investment protection agreement in 2013, which are also currently on hold.

These bilateral RTAs between the EU and ASEAN countries are supposed to form the foundation for an interregional agreement, which remains the ultimate goal for the EU. However, despite declarations of willingness to replace bilateral agreements in the future with an EU-ASEAN interregional agreement, it will not be easy to achieve it mainly because of the different level of advancement of bilateral negotiations, but also due to the already mentioned differences in economic development of ASEAN members. Thus, a return to the concept of a framework

15 In order to discuss the terms of the future interregional agreement, an EU-ASEAN Joint Working Group was formed in March 2017. The Group has met three times so far (European Commission, 2021k).

FTA will only be possible if the requirement that all countries abide by its provisions can be met. In this context, agreements with Singapore and Vietnam may provide a basis for further agreements and, as a result, a broad agreement between the regions. However, the question remains whether the provisions contained in these agreements will be acceptable to other ASEAN members, for example, Indonesia, which is an advocate of stronger market protection. Therefore, discrepancies related to the level of market protection between ASEAN members may also constitute a significant obstacle on the way to broad cooperation (Wnukowski, 2016).

4. Volume and structure of EU trade with ASEAN countries

Trade relations constitute a fundamental part of the EU's overall relationship with ASEAN, and the main area of mutual cooperation is trade in goods (European Commission, 2021b).

The ASEAN grouping is now a rapidly growing market with nearly 650 million consumers. ASEAN as a whole is the EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe (after China and the US) with a goods turnover of up to €190 billion in 2020. The EU is now also ASEAN's third largest trading partner (after China and the US) accounting for over 10.6% of ASEAN trade. Therefore, ensuring better access to the rapidly developing market of this group is, undoubtedly, a priority for the EU (European Commission, 2021b).

The EU's trade relations with ASEAN are characterized by a rising balance sheet surplus in favour of the EU partner, which is, with some exceptions, quite characteristic of the EU's trade relations with this region of the world in general. In 2020, EU exports of goods to ASEAN exceeded €69 Billion (accounting for 3.6% of total EU exports) and were €15.5 billion higher than the 2010 value. The value of imports, in turn, increased by almost €49 billion during the period under review. The EU's trade deficit with ASEAN in 2020 amounted to over €51 billion, which is over €33 billion more than a decade earlier (see Table 1). In 2020, a decrease in reciprocal trade was also noticeable, mainly due to the pandemic situation. However, it was much stronger on the EU export side.

Table 1. EU trade in goods with ASEAN (2010–2020)

Year	Imports			Exports			Balance bn €	Total trade bn €
	Value bn €	% Growth between current and previous year	% Extra-EU	Value bn €	% Growth between current and previous year	% Extra-EU		
2010	71.6	–	4.9	53.7	–	3.7	–17.8	125.2
2011	78.8	10.2	4.7	59.7	11.2	3.7	–19.1	138.5
2012	83.5	5.9	4.9	69.7	16.8	3.9	–13.8	153.2
2013	82.0	–1.8	5.0	69.6	0.0	3.9	–12.4	151.7
2014	86.2	5.1	5.3	68.9	–1.0	3.8	–17.2	155.2
2015	99.5	15.5	6.0	72.2	4.6	3.8	–27.4	171.7
2016	102.2	2.7	6.4	75.8	5.0	4.1	–26.4	177.9
2017	115.1	12.7	6.5	80.9	6.9	4.1	–34.2	196.1
2018	121.2	5.3	6.4	85.8	6.0	4.2	–35.6	207.2
2019	125.2	3.3	6.5	85.3	–0.6	4.0	–40.1	210.7
2020	120.3	–4.1	7.0	69.2	–18.9	3.6	–51.1	189.5

Source: European Commission, 2020d.

EU and ASEAN trade is dominated by industrial products. In 2020, they accounted for almost 90% of all goods exported to ASEAN and 89% of goods imported from ASEAN to the EU. The commodity structure is definitely dominated by products of sections XVI and VI, i.e. machinery and appliances and products of the chemical or allied industries (see Table 2). Together, these two product groups accounted for almost 54% of all EU exports to ASEAN and 53% of imports from the group in 2020.

As for ASEAN members, for years, the most important trade partner for the EU has been Singapore. The situation changed in 2020, when for the first time Singapore gave way to Vietnam in this respect. Still, in 2020 the share of Singapore in total EU exports to the ASEAN was the largest and amounted to almost 35% (see Table 3). It is worth noting that this is also one of only two countries in the region with which the EU has a trade surplus (over €7 billion in 2020).

In terms of mutual trade in services between the groupings, the EU notes a significant surplus in this regard – over €31 billion in 2019. Bilateral trade in services then amounted to €111.5 billion, with Singapore accounting for more than half of this value. This was followed by Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia.

The EU is a key investor in ASEAN countries. In 2019, foreign direct investment in ASEAN totalled over €293 billion. Although a more recent development, ASEAN investment in the EU has also been growing steadily and impressively, mainly driven by Singapore, reaching a total value of almost €45 billion in 2019, of which as much as 87% was accounted for by this single ASEAN member (European Commission, 2021b).

Table 2. Commodity structure of the EU trade turnover with ASEAN by the five most important product groups (HS section) in 2020

Imports from ASEAN		Exports to ASEAN	
HS Section	Share (%)	HS Section	Share (%)
XVI Machinery and appliances	44.0	XVI Machinery and appliances	35.9
VI Products of the chemical or allied industries	9.0	VI Products of the chemical or allied industries	17.8
XI Textiles and textile articles	8.5	XVII Transport equipment	7.7
VII Plastics, rubber and articles thereof	5.2	XVIII Optical and photographic instruments, etc.	6.2
XII Footwear, hats and other headgear	4.9	IV Foodstuffs, beverages, tobacco	4.7

Source: European Commission, 2020d.

Table 3. The EU trade in goods with ASEAN countries (mio EUR, 2010 and 2020)

ASEAN country	Place in Extra-EU total trade in 2020	2010				2020			
		Imports Value	Exports Value	Total trade	Balance	Imports Value	Exports Value	Total trade	Balance
Vietnam	15	8.318	4.363	12.681	-3.956	34.413	8.790	43.202	-25.623
Singapore	16	15.224	20.823	36.047	5.599	16.984	24.008	40.992	7.025
Malaysia	20	15.044	9916	24.960	-5128	24.702	10.542	35.244	-14.160
Thailand	26	14.655	8734	23.389	-5920	17.683	11.388	29.072	-6.295
Indonesia	31	12.516	5917	18.433	-6600	13.398	9.410	20.643	-6.153
Philippines	37	4.820	3437	8257	-1382	6.510	5.767	12.277	-742
Cambodia	57	735	148	883	-586	3.662	651	4.313	-3.010
Myanmar	66	124	77	201	-47	2.628	516	3.144	-2.112
Laos	129	112	97	209	-15	307	128	435	-179
Brunei	156	9	561	570	552	6	146	152	140

Source: European Commission, 2020c.

5. Regional Trade Agreements as an element of EU and ASEAN trade policies

The EU's trade policy is based on three pillars: an active role in multilateral negotiations at the World Trade Organization,¹⁶ the deepening of bilateral or multilateral trade relations, and the so-called unilateral preferences.¹⁷ Given the difficulties in reaching a multilateral agreement at the WTO, bilateral agreements, which represent a new generation of comprehensive trade agreements, are now playing a particularly important role for EU trade policy.¹⁸

Considering the situation on the global market, the WTO crisis and the position of the EU in the world economy, it is necessary to refer to the trade and investment strategy adopted in 2015 – “Trade for All,” which concerns, among others, the issue of effective implementation of trade agreements. Importantly, the strategy emphasizes the complementary nature of bilateral agreements in relation to actions taken at the WTO. On the one hand, further trade agreements are planned, but on the other hand, the strategy emphasizes the need to reinvigorate multilateral negotiations under the aegis of the WTO, which, as is already known, requires reforming the multilateral system in the first place. What is particularly important in the context of this study, this strategy strongly emphasizes the significance of the Asia-Pacific¹⁹ region to European economic interests. The importance of the ASEAN bloc itself and the implementation of a strategy towards its members based on individual agreements as the building blocks of interregional relations was underlined.²⁰ It seems, however, that the turning point in the EU activities regarding this region was the strategy “Global Europe. Competing in the

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16 Now also in the EU's efforts to modernize this organization.

17 These are unilateral preferences under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), which includes the GSP+ preference scheme and the EBA initiative.

18 The broader scope of these agreements involves going beyond the rigid framework of trade in goods and tariff reductions that were characteristic of classic FTAs. They regulate trade cooperation according to the WTO+ or even WTO-x formula by referring to issues that are not negotiable in the multilateral forum.

19 The EU's engagement strategy in the Asia-Pacific region began over a decade ago with the signing of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with South Korea. In July 2018, in turn, the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EJEP) was signed, which is the largest bilateral free trade agreement ever. The agreement is effective as of February 2019.

20 5.2.2 Strategic engagement in Asia and the Pacific (European Commission, 2015b, p. 30).

global market” presented almost a decade earlier, because it was actually from that moment a significant role has been attributed to RTAs. What is more, already then ASEAN was identified as one of the priority partners for the conclusion of a trade agreement, which also emphasized the growing importance of this trade bloc in the global economy (COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, 2006). It is important to note that this strategy sets out the main economic criteria for new FTAs. The economic size and growth and the level of protection against EU export interests (tariff and non-tariff barriers) have been indicated. The issue of negotiating trade agreements with EU competitors in each region is also important. Based on these criteria, it is ASEAN, which combines a relatively high degree of protection with a huge market and activity in concluding FTAs with EU competitors emerge as priority (COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, 2006).

As far as ASEAN countries are concerned, the contents of the Commission’s communication – “A new partnership with South East Asia” is also relevant to the EU’s efforts in the region. According to the document, the strategy *should be both ‘offensive’, seeking to improve the EU’s position in this important market, and ‘defensive’, protecting its existing economic interests in the region* (COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, 2003, p. 10). This is particularly significant against the background of the proliferation of RTAs in this part of the world.

The EU is the most active participant in RTAs in the global economy, and the list of trade agreements concluded by the EU is expanding year by year. This is an upward trend, especially because of the RTAs that are currently under negotiations. In 2019, the EU had 44 trade agreements with 76 partners. The value of trade with these partners exceeded €1.300 billion, representing 33% of the EU’s external trade (World Trade Organization, 2021c).

Over the last two years, the EU has made significant progress in trade policy, especially in the area of bilateral trade, as reflected, for instance, in the ratification of trade agreements with Singapore and Vietnam. At the same time, however, the COVID-19 pandemic can be expected to have a serious adverse impact on trade between the EU and its partners, including preferential partners. According to EC estimates, EU exports to third countries could fall by 9–15% and imports by 11–14% (taking goods and services together). However, the EU’s extensive network of trade agreements can effectively contribute to counteracting and mitigating these negative effects by, for example, diversifying supply chains. Therefore, it is important to redouble

efforts to further improve the implementation and enforcement of these agreements, especially in key regions for the EU, which is undoubtedly the region of South-East Asia (European Commission, 2020b, p. 6).

RTAs constitute a vital element of the trade policy of ASEAN members, which is also developing its treaty base. The array of agreements concluded by this group of countries extends on an annual basis. This trend has a growing tendency, primarily due to the great number of RTAs that are presently under negotiation or consideration (see Table 4).

Table 4. ASEAN's RTAs (as of January 2021)

RTA	Status/year
ASEAN Free Trade Area	signed and in effect: 1993
ASEAN-Australia and New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA)	signed and in effect: 2010
ASEAN-Canada	proposed/under study: 2017
ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement	proposed/under study: 2015
ASEAN-Eurasian Economic Union Free Trade Agreement	proposed/under study: 2016
ASEAN-Hong Kong, China Free Trade Agreement	signed and in effect: 2019
ASEAN-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	signed and in effect: 2010
ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP)	signed and in effect: 2008
ASEAN-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement	proposed/under study: 2009
ASEAN-People's Republic of China Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	signed and in effect: 2005
ASEAN-Republic of Korea Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	signed and in effect: 2007
Comprehensive Economic Partnership for East Asia (CEPEA/ASEAN+6)*	proposed/under study: 2005
East Asia Free Trade Area (ASEAN+3)	proposed/under study: 2004
Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific	proposed/under study: 2014
SUMMARY	
STATUS	NUMBER
Proposed/Under study	7
Signed and in effect	7
TOTAL	14

* Proposal for trade co-operation taken over by the RCEP (without India)

Source: Asia Regional Integration Center, 2021.

Trade agreements apply to the group as a whole, but agreements are also made by members individually, as evidenced by ASEAN member countries' negotiations with the EU. The situation concerning individual members of the bloc is presented below. The most active participant among the ASEAN member countries is Singapore, also considered to be one of the most open economies in the world.

Table 5. FTA Status by ASEAN Country in 2020

COUNTRY	Under Negotiation		Signed but not yet In Effect	Signed and In Effect	TOTAL
	Framework Agreement signed	Negotiations launched			
Brunei Darussalam	0	1	0	10	12
Cambodia	0	2	1	7	10
Indonesia	0	7	3	12	22
Lao PDR	0	1	0	9	10
Malaysia	1	6	1	16	25
Myanmar	1	2	0	7	10
Philippines	0	3	0	9	12
Singapore	0	7	1	25	36
Thailand	1	9	0	14	24
Vietnam	0	3	0	13	17

Explanation: Framework Agreement signed: the pre-negotiated content of the framework agreements will serve as a basis for future negotiations; Negotiations launched: the official launch of negotiations has been declared or its date has been indicated

Source: Asia Regional Integration Center, 2021.

The CPTPP²¹ and RCEP (seven countries are members of both agreements) are examples of the increasing economic integration in the area in recent years, which is significant both, for the ASEAN countries, and for the EU's position in the region. These agreements will certainly influence not only the growth in trade, but also the reinforcing of regional supply chains, and this may strengthen the economic recovery of the members of these agreements after the pandemic. Notably, the signing of the RCEP also demonstrates ASEAN's growing role as an organization that integrates and stabilizes the Asia-Pacific region (Wnukowski, 2020).

21 It is worth noting that in February 2021, the United Kingdom (UK) made a formal request to join the CPTPP, on 16 July 2023 it signed the agreement.

As for the EU, however, the entry into force of the RCEP may reduce the competitiveness of EU companies in the markets of RCEP countries, especially those with which the EU does not have a signed FTA. Thus, there will be a diversion of part of the EU's trade with signatory countries in favour of trade between RCEP members. This situation, in turn, may prompt the EU to intensify trade negotiations with Australia, New Zealand and ASEAN members with whom the EU has not yet concluded such agreements (e.g. Indonesia or the Philippines), and, in the future, also with the entire trade bloc, which, as mentioned earlier, remains among the EU's priorities (Wnukowski, 2020). This is all the more important because RCEP, as an agreement that broadens and deepens ASEAN's engagement with the five dialogue partners, is intended to complement the multilateral trading system under the WTO, building on the WTO agreement in areas where the parties have agreed to update or go beyond its provisions (ASEAN, 2020).

6. EU's RTAs with ASEAN countries – current stage and future challenges

As mentioned before, ensuring better access to the rapidly growing ASEAN market is among the EU's priorities. This objective is currently being pursued through the negotiation of bilateral agreements with members of the group, which is intended to lay the groundwork for a future agreement between the blocs.

The following is a synthetic analysis of the agreements already concluded or the status of negotiations of agreements with individual partners, ordered according to the position a given country held in EU external trade in 2020.

Vietnam

Among the wide range of trade agreements concluded by the EU in recent years, the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) deserves special attention, significantly expanding the catalogue of EU RTAs, confirming its commitment to the crucial Asia-Pacific region.

Bilateral trade and investment negotiations with Vietnam were launched in 2012²² and completed in 2018. The European Union and Vietnam signed EVFTA and an Investment Protection Agreement on 30 June 2019 in Hanoi. EVFTA went into effect August 1, 2020²³ (European Commission, 2020a). As the scope of the agreement falls under exclusive EU competence, its entry into force did not require signature and ratification by EU Member States. The situation is different in the case of Investment Protection Agreement, which requires ratification by the national parliaments of EU Member States²⁴ (European Commission, 2018).

In negotiating a free trade agreement with Vietnam, the EU sought to achieve two main objectives: first, to provide EU economic operators with the best possible conditions of access to the Vietnamese market, and second, to provide a valuable second point of reference (after the agreement with Singapore) for other EU negotiations in the region (European Commission, 2018).

It must be borne in mind that the agreement is not only a trade deal. Indeed, it is related to limiting and then eliminating the existing barriers. However, the most significant matters concern the so-called WTO+ or even WTO-x. The agreement, thus, goes well beyond the parties' existing WTO commitments in areas such as, for example, services, procurement, non-tariff barriers and protection of intellectual property rights, including geographical indications. In all these areas, Vietnam has also agreed to accept new commitments going beyond what it has committed to in other agreements, including the CPTPP (European Commission, 2018).

As a result of the EVFTA, access to the Vietnamese market for exporters and investors from EU member states will be simplified, mainly through the elimination or alleviation of non-tariff barriers and the reduction or elimination of customs duties on many goods. The change in customs tariffs also applies to imports into the EU of goods originating in Vietnam.

22 In 2012. The EU and Vietnam signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which was ratified in 2015 and entered into force a year later, replacing the 1995 agreement (Polish Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology, 2020).

23 The European Parliament approved the free trade agreement between the EU and Vietnam on 12.02.2020 (European Commission, 2020).

24 From the date of entry into force, the EU-Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement will replace bilateral agreements between Vietnam and EU member states. The agreement will be the third EU agreement (after the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the EU-Singapore Agreement) to provide for an investment court system to settle disputes between investors and countries.

The agreement provides for the final liberalisation of customs duties for 99% of trade between the EU and Vietnam.²⁵ The remaining 1% will be partially liberalized through the introduction of tariff quotas. Upon entry into force of the FTA, 65% of tariffs on EU goods imported into Vietnam were eliminated (the remaining tariffs will be removed gradually over a maximum of 10 years) and 71% of tariffs on Vietnamese goods imported into the EU were eliminated. The remaining duties will be phased out over a maximum of 7 years (DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO VIETNAM, 2019, pp. 26–27).

Accounting for 1.2% of total EU trade, Vietnam is the EU's 15th trade in goods partner and, as of 2020, the EU's largest trading partner in the ASEAN. In turn, the EU is Vietnam's fourth largest trading partner, accounting for almost 10% of the country's total trade in 2020 (after China, the US and South Korea). Trade in goods between the two partners amounted to €43.2 billion in 2020. For trade in services, turnover was almost €6 billion in 2019, with a positive balance on the EU side exceeding €1.5 billion. The EU is one of the largest foreign investors in Vietnam (€6.1 billion of total foreign direct investment outward stock in 2019), with the most important sectors being industrial processing and manufacturing (European Commission, 2021i).

It is worth noting that an important element of the growth of ties between the Vietnamese economy and the world economy was the country's accession to the WTO structures in January 2007, which also enabled it to actively operate in the sphere of RTAs.

Two years after the entry into force of the EVFTA the country will lose the GSP beneficiary status.

Singapore

Bilateral trade and investment negotiations between EU and Singapore started in 2010 and were finalized in 2017. These agreements, the first to have been concluded between the EU and a Southeast Asian country, were signed on 19 October 2018. On November 21, 2019, the free trade

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25 ARTICLE 2.7 EVFTA – Reduction or Elimination of Customs Duties: Except as otherwise provided for in this Agreement, each Party shall reduce or eliminate its customs duties on goods originating in the other Party in accordance with its respective schedule included in Appendices 2-A-1 (Tariff Schedule of the Union) and 2-A-2 (Tariff Schedule of Viet Nam) to Annex 2-A (Reduction or Elimination of Customs Duties) (Polish Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology, 2020).

agreement²⁶ between the European Union and the Republic of Singapore (EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, EUSFTA) entered into force. The agreement will foster economic relations with a country that is the 6th largest in Asia (after China, Japan, South Korea, India and Vietnam) and the 16th most important trading partner for the EU overall (European Commission, 2021m).

During the negotiations, the parties focused on far-reaching liberalisation of trade in services and the elimination of non-tariff barriers, which was crucial for the partners of the agreement. This included the fact that more than 99% of all products imported from the EU to Singapore were free of tariffs, and Singapore's abandonment of tariffs was the result of a unilateral decision by the country. Thanks to the EUSFTA, this commitment will be permanent and will give companies long-term predictability in terms of preferential access to the Singapore market. In addition, Singapore will remove tariffs on other products that are still subject to duties (e.g., alcoholic beverages). In addition to reducing customs duties and non-tariff barriers the agreement contains commitments on protecting intellectual property, liberalising investment, public procurement, competition, and sustainable development. As for the EU, since the day the agreement came into force, more than 80% of all imports from Singapore to the EU have been duty-free. Sectors that have benefited from the immediate elimination of duties include electronics, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals and processed agricultural products. For other imports, EU tariffs will be eliminated over three to five years, depending on the product category²⁷ (European Union, 2019). Ultimately, under the agreement the EU will eliminate duties on more than 99% of tariff lines for imports from Singapore by 2025. In addition, both sides agreed to improve market access for trade in services and investment compared to their commitments under the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).²⁸

Singapore is the EU's 16th (2020) largest trade in goods partner with a share of 1.1% and from 2020 the EU's second largest trading partner, after Vietnam, in the ASEAN. This situation has changed, because until 2019, Singapore was the EU's largest trading partner among ASEAN countries.

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26 The investment protection agreement needs to be ratified by all EU Member States.

27 For instance, tariffs on certain textiles and carpets will be eliminated within three years; tariffs on bicycles, fruit, cereals and athletic shoes will be eliminated within five years (Polish Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology, 2019).

28 It is emphasized that the agreement has helped to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on reciprocal trade (World Trade Organisation, 2021d).

The EU has a substantial positive balance in both goods and services trade with Singapore (respectively over €7 billion and almost €5 billion in 2020). That country is the main destination for EU's investments in Asia, and the third largest Asian investor in the EU (after Japan and Hong Kong). The bilateral foreign direct investment stock between the EU and Singapore exceeded €348 billion in 2020 (European Commission, 2021f).

Singapore is a very active member of the WTO. It is a founding member of the organization and an advocate of the multilateral trading system.

Malaysia

Negotiations on the EU-Malaysia FTA were launched in 2010 and suspended in 2012, at Malaysia's request, after seven rounds of negotiations. A detailed analysis was conducted in 2016–2017 to assess the prospects for resumption of negotiations. Following Malaysia's general election in May 2018, the new government has not yet taken a position on the possible resumption of negotiations (European Commission, 2021k).

The EU is Malaysia's 5th largest trading partner, accounting for nearly 7.5% of Malaysia's total trade in 2020. Malaysia, in turn, is the EU's 20th largest trading partner in the world, accounting for 1.0% of the EU's total trade. Trade in goods between the two partners amounted to over €35 billion in 2020. Although Malaysia has not been a significant partner of the EU in terms of services, this situation is changing with its liberalisation policies. For trade in services, turnover amounted to almost €7 billion in 2019, with a positive balance on the EU side of €0.7 billion. Malaysia is also an important FDI partner – the bilateral foreign direct investment stock between the EU and Malaysia exceeded €37 billion in 2019 (European Commission, 2021d).

Malaysia is a member of the WTO since its creation in 1995.

Thailand

Negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement with Thailand, the second largest economy, after Indonesia, in the region in terms of GDP, were launched in March 2013 and halted just one year later due to a military coup in that country. To this point, four rounds of negotiations have taken place, however, no new talks have been announced. The October 2019 conclusions adopted by the council highlighted the importance of taking

steps to resume negotiations on an ambitious and comprehensive trade agreement with Thailand. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to ensure that the partners agree on the essentials of a future agreement (European Commission, 2021k). Negotiations are aimed at concluding a comprehensive FTA, including issues such as tariff and non-tariff barriers, services, investment, and procurement intellectual property regulatory issues competition sustainable development.²⁹

In 2020, total bilateral trade between the EU and Thailand amounted to over €29 billion. The EU is Thailand's 4th largest trade partner (after China, Japan, and the USA), accounting for 7.5% of the country's total trade. Thailand is the EU's 26th largest trading partner worldwide. In terms of trade in services, on the other hand, turnover exceeded €10 billion in 2019. Thailand is one of the key destinations of European investments within ASEAN with almost €20 billion of outward stocks. The EU is the second-largest investor in Thailand after Japan (European Commission, 2021g).

Thailand is a member of the WTO since its creation in 1995. Thailand is also the original ASEAN member state to enter negotiations on domestic services legislation (November 2020) (World Trade Organisation, 2020).

Indonesia

The EU is negotiating a free trade agreement with Indonesia, ASEAN's largest economy, to facilitate market access, increase trade and expand direct investment. The aim of the negotiations is to conclude an agreement similar in scope to the trade agreements with Singapore and Vietnam. Therefore, prior to the talks, an analysis was conducted to determine the details of the future trade agreement (European Commission, 2021l).

Negotiations officially commenced on July 18, 2016. To date, there have been ten rounds of negotiations, the last took place in June 2020 (European Commission, 2021k).

The current relations between the partners are based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force in May 2014. The negotiated FTA will certainly contribute to develop of the overall bilateral relationships. The EU has presented preliminary drafts of provisions to

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²⁹ In November 2013 Thailand and the EU have negotiated and finalised a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which provides a broad framework for developing mutual cooperation.

Indonesia as a basis for discussion. The actual text of the final agreement will be the result of ongoing negotiations between the EU and Indonesia. The full text of the final agreement will be published after the conclusion of the negotiations – well in advance of signature and ratification (European Commission, 2021c).

The EU is Indonesia's 5th largest trading partner, accounting for over 7% of Indonesia's total trade in 2020. Indonesia, in turn, is the EU's 31st largest trading partner worldwide, accounting for 0.6% of the EU's total trade. Trade in goods between the two partners amounted to €20.6 billion in 2020. It is worth pointing out that in the case of trade in services, turnover exceeded €26 billion in 2019, and the positive balance on the EU side of €25.4 billion was the highest among all ASEAN members. Indonesia ranks 5th among ASEAN countries in terms of FDI – the bilateral foreign direct investment stock amounted to €7.5 billion in 2019 (European Commission, 2021k).

Indonesia has been a member of the WTO since 1995 and continues to benefit from the EU's GSP, under which about 30% of Indonesia's imports are subject to lower tariffs (European Commission, 2021k).

The Philippines

Negotiations for a trade and investment agreement between the EU and the Philippines began on December 22, 2015. Two negotiating rounds have been held so far: in May 2016 and February 2017. The agreement is expected to cover a wide range of issues, including customs duties, non-tariff barriers, trade in services, investment, and trade aspects of public procurement, intellectual property, competition and sustainable development (European Commission, 2017).

As in the case of trade negotiations with other ASEAN countries that started talks earlier, the EU conducted a joint analysis with the Philippines to determine the scope and level of ambition of a future trade agreement. The negotiated agreement is intended to contribute to the overall EU-Philippines relationship, which is currently based on the EU-Philippines Framework Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation³⁰ of March 2018 (European Commission, 2021h).

30 In the Agreement, the parties reaffirm the importance of international trade rules contained in the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization (Official Journal of the European Union, 2017).

The EU is the Philippines' 4th largest trading partner, accounting for nearly 8.5% of the country's total trade in 2020 (after China, the US and Japan). The Philippines, in turn, is the EU's 37th largest trading partner in the world, accounting for 0.3% of the EU's total trade. Trade in goods between the two partners amounted to €12.3 billion in 2020. Total trade in services amounted to €4.3 billion in 2019 and the bilateral foreign direct investment stock amounted to €15.4 billion in 2019, ranking the Philippines 4th in this regard among ASEAN members (European Commission, 2021h).

The Philippines has been a member of the WTO since 1995 and also benefits from the EU's increased trade preferences under GSP +.

Myanmar/Burma

The re-establishment of trade and investment relations with Myanmar took place in 2011. It involved lifting the sanctions,³¹ granting preferential access to the EU market and commencing negotiations on an investment protection agreement. In mid-2016, the adopted communication (European Commission, 2016) outlined a plan for coherent EU engagement and intensified cooperation with the country. The Council adopted conclusions on an EU strategy with Myanmar highlighting that the European Union has a strategic interest in strengthening its relationship with that country.

Negotiations on an investment protection agreement between the EU and Myanmar started in 2013. The EU sent a proposed text of the agreement at the end of 2014. There have been four rounds of negotiations: three in 2015 and one at the end of 2016. Technical discussions were held in April 2017, where progress was made, but the talks need to continue. Negotiations have been halted since 2017, and a return to them is hampered by the current difficult political situation in the country (European Commission, 2021h).

The EU is Myanmar's 3rd trading partner after China and Thailand, accounting for more than 11.5% of the country's total trade in 2020. Myanmar, on the other hand, is the EU's 66th trading partner in the world, accounting for only 0.1% of the EU's total trade. Trade in goods between the two partners exceeded €3 billion in 2020 (European Commission, 2021e).

Myanmar has been a member of the WTO since 1995. As a least developed country, it benefits from the EU's EBA scheme (European Commission, 2021e).

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31 Except for the arms embargo.

7. Conclusions

Trade agreements are one of the key elements of the EU's trade policy and a key driver of economic growth. Therefore, the EU is active in this area, especially in the context of the crisis at the WTO, filling the resulting space in the multilateral system. The current EU policy of diversification and intensification of trade contacts emphasises the dynamically developing markets of ASEAN countries and the enormous economic potential they offer.

The analysis carried out in the study showed, however, that the process of building an EU-ASEAN regional agreement based on agreements concluded individually with this group's member countries may take decades. By mid-2021, agreements with only two of the bloc's countries had entered into force – with Singapore and Vietnam. Nevertheless, these RTAs represent a significant shift towards the region as a whole and certainly strengthen the EU's position there. However, they are also an expression of the desire of the region's heavily export-oriented economies to reduce protectionism in world trade, significantly exacerbated today by the pandemic. Despite the start of negotiations with the other 5 ASEAN members, only negotiations with Indonesia are still ongoing, but certainly not facilitated by the pandemic. This situation also shows the need for the existence of the WTO.

An efficient global organization should be paramount to every participant in world trade. It is important to remember, however, that the multilateral trading system remains the main defence against protectionism and contributes to fuelling economic growth. It is these two aspects that will be crucial in the near future, as the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic may also be a pandemic of increased trade restrictions. Therefore, broad international cooperation will be key, including forums such as the WTO. Nevertheless, modernization of the principles of its functioning through organizational reforms is necessary.

In the face of the stalemate within the WTO, the EU, as the most active participant in RTAs in the world economy, will, therefore, focus on its existing activities – the RTAs negotiations. This solution, due to its discriminatory nature, does not facilitate world trade, but provides the Union with greater negotiating clout. However, with the current weakened role of the WTO and until it is reformed, RTAs will probably remain Brussels' focus.

To conclude, it is worth quoting the words of Josep Borrell, Commission Vice-President in charge of coordinating the external action of the European

Union: “Multilateralism matters because it works. But we cannot be ‘multilateralists’ alone. At a time of growing scepticism, we must demonstrate the benefit and relevance of the multilateral system” (EEAS, 2021).

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Overlapping Regionalism in East Asia: A Critical Review on Mega-Free Trade Agreements

Abstract

Despite the existence of region-wide economic networks and the proliferation of regional cooperation processes in the 1990s and 2000s, East Asia is still one of the under-institutionalized regions in the world. In the absence of a single regional organization covering all regional states, the region is fragmented among regional organizations/groups, most of which geographically overlap due to multi-membership. In the literature on regionalism, this phenomenon has been recently conceptualized as “overlapping regionalism,” which has been observed worldwide. Indeed, East Asia constitutes a special example of overlapping regionalism with its current regional setting because of the high number of overlaps under regional organizations, initiatives, and agreements. Yet, the region has not been extensively examined in the emerging literature on overlapping regionalism. This paper aims to discuss overlapping regionalism in East Asia and its effects. It asks two central questions: why do regional states implement regional initiatives that geographically overlap, and how do overlapping regional initiatives affect regional states’ positions in the current setting of regional architecture in East Asia and vice versa? In order to answer these questions, it first proposes an analytical framework to examine overlapping regionalism. Later, it focuses on selected geographically overlapping free trade agreements like Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). It evaluates political and economic factors and determinants of the emergence of these overlapping regional initiatives within the East Asian context. East Asia constitutes a distinctive example in terms

of overlapping regional initiatives. It argues that rivalry among the big powers of the region, hedging strategies of middle and small powers, and the loosely-institutionalized structure of the regional governance are the primary reasons behind their emergence.

Keywords: *Overlapping Regionalism, East Asia, Mega-FTAs, RCEP, CPTPP, IPEF*

1. Introduction

Regional cooperation is one of the most complicated issues determining East Asian politics. Since the 1990s, the region has been experiencing a boom in regional cooperation processes of all kinds. Nevertheless, there is no single cooperation framework or regional organization covering the whole region. Instead, the region is fragmented by various regional cooperation attempts overlapping in terms of membership and mandate. Multiple initiatives to form region-wide free trade areas are good examples for this kind of regional landscape fragmentation. This paper aims to discuss the reasons and effects of recently initiated overlapping mega-FTAs through the concept of overlapping regionalism.

Due to the intertwined structure created by FTAs in the region, the region has been a well-known case in the international political economy literature since the 1990s. Most economists describe this situation as the “spaghetti/noodle bowl effect” (Bhagwati, 1995; Dent, 2005; Kawai, 2005; Baldwin, 2008). Despite the promising potential of the region to be economically integrated, they suggest that the existence of multiple regional cooperation attempts in forming regional free trade areas hinders regional integration.

In the literature on International Relations, on the other hand, this situation has been conceptualized recently with the concept of “overlapping regionalism.” Previously, there were various theoretical frameworks examining the relationships between overlapping institutions and their effects on regional settings (see e.g., Young, 1996; Aggrawal, 1998; Alter & Meunier, 2009). However, particularly within the literature on regionalism, which mainly focuses on the dynamics of cooperation among regional states, this specific aspect of regional cooperation processes has recently been conceptualized as “overlapping regionalism” (See e.g., Panke & Stapel, 2018; Nolte, 2014; Haftel & Hofmann, 2019; Malamud, 2018). In a broader sense, overlapping regionalism can be described as the existence of multiple regional initiatives which overlap in terms of

geography and mandate in one single regional landscape due to the multi-membership of regional states to them simultaneously.

Overlapping regionalism is a phenomenon seen all over the world (Panke & Stapel, 2018). However, East Asia is a unique example of it, because of the high number of regional cooperation initiatives with lower intensification towards regional cooperation. Yet, studies evaluating East Asian regionalism with the notion of overlapping regionalism are considerably rare (See e.g., Yeo 2018; Rüländ & Michael, 2019). For this reason, this paper aims to discuss overlapping regionalism in East Asia and its effects on regional politics by combining economic and political dynamics behind it into the picture.

In conjunction with this aim, it is built upon to answer two main research questions. Firstly, it asks why regional states implement regional initiatives that overlap geographically. Secondly, it discusses how overlapping regional initiatives affect regional states' positions in the current setting of regional architecture in East Asia and *vice versa*.

In order to answer these questions, it mainly relies on a case study on the region's mega-free trade agreements (mega-FTAs) established after 2010. Since FTAs are inseparable parts of the East Asian political economy, the literature on FTAs in East Asia is abundant. However, mega-FTAs initiated after 2010, like RCEP, TPP, and CPTPP, are considerably unusual examples because of their size and geo-economical contests triggering them to emerge. It is quite rare to find studies examining all of them as one single case. Also, they have not been examined through the conceptual and analytical framework of overlapping regionalism.

For this reason, this paper focuses on these mega-FTAs as a case study to discuss the causes and effects of overlapping regionalism in East Asia. In that regard, the primary regional initiatives that are examined within the borders of this study are Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). Except for the recently initiated Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the others ended with free trade agreements. IPEF has been added to the analysis with its huge potential to influence regional economic architecture.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Firstly, the notion of overlapping regionalism will be explained with its conceptual and theoretical foundations. Secondly, East Asian regionalism will be elaborated on its characteristics and historical development. Thirdly,

examined FTAs and the conditions that they emerged will be summarized. Later, the reasons for the overlaps among these mega-FTAs and the type of regional regime they resulted in will be elaborated. Finally, the paper will end with a conclusion section.

Regarding the geographical delimitation, a quick reminder should be added here. In its most basic definition, with the term East Asia, the paper will refer to the geographical area covering Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei, Laos, Japan, South Korea, and China. However, reminding that “region” is a fluid concept changing in accordance with dynamics shaping it, the borders may not be stable. Therefore, the geographical delimitation of this study is also flexible in conjunction with the involvement of individual states influencing it. In that regard, despite the abovementioned regional space that would be the focus of this study as “East Asia,” its borders are open to change according to the geographical area examined in regional free trade agreements. Consequently, this list should also count other actors like the United States, India, Australia, and New Zealand.

2. Overlapping Regionalism: From a Conceptual Framework to an Analytical Framework

2.1. History of Regionalism in Brief

In its most basic form, regionalism is a cooperation process in which regional states arrange region-wide arrangements for finding a solution to their mutual problem in one or more policy areas. There could be multiple forms of regionalism, such as security, economic, social, or hybrid, that include multiple forms under one framework.

The target of regionalism is to create a regional setting that promotes further development of regional cooperation among regional states. At the end of the day, as it may bring a deep regional integration under a supranational regional entity, it may also be unable to create a regional setting desired by member states. Yet, whether it brings regional integration or not, each region-wide cooperation attempt creates a regional regime that has the potential to affect and be affected by regional politics.

When the historical development of regionalism is examined, it is mostly accepted as a post-Second World War phenomenon. During the Cold War, regionalism went through its first phase in which regional

integration in Europe started (Mansfield & Milner, 1999). In other parts of the world, the first steps were taken to create regional organizations such as ASEAN and LAFTA. This phase of regionalism in the world had an exclusive understanding of membership because of restricting member states' relationship with non-member states (Lawrence, 1996).

The second phase of regionalism started in the mid-1980s. With the end of the Cold War and the penetration of economic globalization to regions, in this period, the world experienced a proliferation of regional cooperation attempts and the deepening of already existing ones. Unlike the first phase, regionalism lost its exclusive understanding of membership. Regional cooperation processes were designed to coordinate regional states' relationships and connect the region to global economic architecture (Either, 1998; Hettne & Söderbaum, 1999).

The third phase of regionalism is also built upon the dynamics that the second phase of regionalism created. In this period, which roughly started in the mid-2000s, regional cooperation processes gained a porous structure that makes influences of global and regional interferences more visible in shaping regional settings and *vice versa* (Katzenstein, 2005). Also, regionalism turned into a complex phenomenon shaped by interregional and intraregional dynamics (Söderbaum, 2016). At the same time, due to the increasing number of regional frameworks targeting the same policy in one geographical area, most of them started to overlap. At the end of the day, the world's landscape becomes a giant spaghetti bowl of regional cooperation initiatives ranging from security to trade and finance to social.

2.2. *Overlapping Regionalism*

The notion of "overlapping regionalism" emerged in the literature on regionalism in the mid-2010s (Panke & Stapel, 2018; Nolte, 2014; Haftel & Hofmann, 2019; Malamud, 2018; Yeo, 2018). In its most basic form, overlapping regionalism can be described as a form of regionalism in which multiple regional cooperation initiatives intertwine with each other in terms of geography and mandate.

After conceptualizing this worldwide phenomenon, the initial focus of scholars working on overlapping regionalism is to investigate the reasons for the overlaps. As regional states' actions towards cooperation mainly shape regionalism, it is essential to understand states' motives to form multiple overlapping regional initiatives instead of pushing for the

development of only one. As an analytical framework, the scholars mostly rely on the literature on institution formation in International Relations and regime complexes that comes with the existence of multiple regimes in one policy area (Young, 1996; Aggrawal, 1998; Alter & Meunier, 2009; Hoffman, 2011).

Following the ground that they open, primary causes for overlapping regionalism can be summarized as conflicts and rivalries among regional states, bargaining issues, balancing strategies and informal characteristics of the regional landscape, and the need for an institutional framework (Weiffen, Wehner & Nolte 2013; Yeo, 2018; Nolte, 2014; Malamud, 2018). In other words, overlapping regionalism is a byproduct of not only state-to-state relations but also the institutional architecture of the regional landscape. Therefore, while discussing the reasons for the overlapping mega-FTAs in East Asia, all these dimensions should be taken into consideration. This perspective will help us in the forthcoming pages of the paper while questioning why regional states form them and how their attitude affects regional settings and *vice versa*.

3. East Asian Regionalism

3.1. *A Brief History of East Asian Regionalism*

In its most fundamental way, *region* can be defined as a geographical area hosting two or more states bound together with mutual interdependence. Yet, *region* is not something given. Rather, it is a construct that is shaped by multiple political, economic, and social processes. Therefore, in order to discuss a region's current condition, it is necessary to consider the historical route it has taken so far. In that vein, East Asia is not an exception. The historical development of regionalism in East Asia can be discussed by dividing three main periods.

The first period was the Cold War period. In this period, the first signs of comprehensive regional cooperation frameworks emerged. The initial steps towards forming regional organizations such as the Association of the South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) were taken in this period. However, in this period, these initiatives remained limited due to security-related concerns of regional states associated with the tension of the Cold War and the interstate rivalry among newly independent states of the region (Pomfret, 2011, p. 4).

The second period was between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s. Compared to the previous period, this period brought radical changes to East Asia. In this period, while new regional cooperation frameworks such as APEC, ASEAN+3, and East Asian Summit were formed, already existing ones like ASEAN were renewed with respect to many aspects for deeper regional integration. In this period, the motives behind the boom of regional cooperation frameworks were associated with the end of the Cold War uncertainty, increasing economic interdependence among regional economies due to economic globalization, and regional states' desire to push Asia-only regional initiatives (Buckley, 2011, p. 289; Yeo, 2018, p. 164).

The last and current phase of regionalism in East Asia covers the period after the 2010s and today. This period is not as radical as the previous period in changing the dynamics of regionalism in the region. Instead, in this period, the pace of regional cooperation boost has decreased due to increasing tension among big powers like the USA, China, and Japan and the penetration of the multipolar world order to the region. Especially with the escalation of the trade war between the USA and China and China's one-sided region-targeted initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative, a regionalist narrative of the 1990s was replaced by the balance of power strategies (Yeo, 2020).

Yet, this did not totally end regional cooperation initiatives like free trade agreements. On the contrary, it paved the way for the emergence of mega-free trade agreements, which is the main focus of this paper. Most of these critical initiatives of the region were negotiated and concluded in this period. These are very important for the future economic regionalism of East Asia. The real puzzle that these mega-FTAs brought to the picture is how they could be possible under the pressure of increasing regional geo-economical and geopolitical tension. The forthcoming pages will provide a more concrete answer to this question. However, here, it should be stated that the mega-FTAs of East Asia need to be thought of in conjunction with this new phase of East Asian regionalism.

3.2. Characteristics of East Asian Regionalism

Since *region* is accepted as a construct shaped by various dynamics, each region has its own characteristics shaping the experience of regionalism. For East Asia, particularly in conjunction with the notion of overlapping regionalism, three key characteristics, all of which intersect with each other, can be listed.

The first key characteristic of East Asian regionalism is its loosely-institutionalized structure. Despite hosting different sorts of regional cooperation processes, East Asia does not have a formal institutional structure leading all regional cooperation processes. Consequently, since boundaries between member and non-member states are not clearly defined, the region becomes a playground for open interactions of multiple actors (Yeo, 2010; Katzenstein, 2019, p. 225). One of the immediate effects of this loosely-institutionalized structure is the fact that regional states are more active in shaping cooperation processes. As a result, while examining a regional cooperation process, it is crucial to consider how and why regional states, including big, middle, and small powers, position themselves within broader regional settings in accordance with their foreign policy priorities.

Secondly, East Asian regionalism is mainly market-driven regionalism. Since the 1980s, with the influence of economic liberalization in regional and world trade, the region has become a huge production center bound together with increasing transition of production factors. Inevitably, together with the influence of economic globalization, increasing economic interdependence among regional economies creates pressure on regional states to cooperate. In that regard, East Asian regionalism is shaped mainly by bottom-up pressure of region-wide economic interdependence rather than being a process promoted by states as a top-down pressure.

Lastly, as it constitutes the focal point of this study, East Asian regionalism is characterized by multiple overlaps among regional organizations/initiatives/agreements with respect to geography and mandate. In the region, the institutional overlap rate is considerably higher than in other regions (Yeo, 2018, p. 162). The primary reason for geographical overlaps is regional states' attitudes to simultaneously becoming members of different regional initiatives. Yet, the real puzzle emerges when we discuss the motives pushing states to be a party to different regional initiatives and forming regional initiatives that are almost similar in terms of the mandate. In the forthcoming pages, this paper will elaborate on this puzzle by focusing on recently initiated mega-FTAs in the region.

4. Mega-Free Trade Agreements in East Asia

Today, while the multipolar world order of international relations is defined around regional poles, East Asia has become one of them. Indeed, East Asia is now a hot spot with its increasing economic significance at

the global level and political tension at the regional level simultaneously. Nevertheless, while the geo-economical and geopolitical tension has been escalating, the region is also hosting region-wide free trade agreements and some regional initiatives with the potential to turn into free trade agreements. TPP, RCEP, CPTPP, and IPEF are four of these crucial cooperation initiatives. However, they are noticeably different from their previous samples with the vast landmass and the economic size they attributed. At the same time, mega-FTAs involve one or more big powers in their structure (Kolsky-Lewis, 2015, p. 11). Because of their economic and geographical size and big powers' involvement, mega-FTAs are seen as a new game changer in international political and economic architecture.

When this kind of free trade agreement first emerged, the literature started to discuss the potential of mega-FTAs to overcome the proliferation of FTAs by refreshing old agreements and formulating new regional trade governance (Baldwin, 2012; Schwab & Bhatia, 2014; Rensmann, 2017). In East Asia, on the other hand, instead of reorganizing the so-called "noodle bowl structure," they also started to overlap in terms of mandate and geographical scope. Under this title, the conditions in which these crucial cooperation initiatives emerge and their current status will be discussed.

4.1. From Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)

Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was an initiative to form an FTA among Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and the United States. It was officially signed in 2016.

Originally, the idea of creating TPP was pushed by Pacific Four (P4) countries (Chile, New Zealand, Singapore, and Brunei) to liberalize trade across Pacific Rim. Yet, there had already been ideas to create a "pan-Asia-Pacific trade agreement" since the 1960s, but it could only find a place in 2008 thanks to the USA's intention to become more active in Asia-Pacific (Aggarwal, 2016, p. 1008). In its broader structure, TPP was designed as a wide-ranging comprehensive trade agreement that targets multiple economic sectors, including manufacturing, service, and agricultural facilities.

Despite its promising content, the TPP could not enter into force because the USAs' withdrew from the agreement after Donald Trump's election. Later on, other signatories of the agreement revived the agreement

under the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2018 and entered into force in a very short time. Most of the chapters agreed on in the previous version remained unchanged in CPTP. In that regard, the difference between CPTPP and TPP may not be considerable in terms of the mandate. However, it should be underlined that whereas the USA's mainly led the TPP, Japan played an active role in the revival process of CPTP.

4.2. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

RCEP is an initiative that ended with a free trade agreement bringing Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam together. As Aggarwal (2016, p. 1009) pointed out, the original plan of creating a free trade area among these countries can be traced back to the early 2000s when it was proposed to create a trade area among ASEAN and its six dialogue partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand). While discussions to draft an agreement started in 2011, it was eventually signed in 2020 and entered into force in 2022.

RCEP emerged as a compressive FTA covering a vast geographical area with a promising scope. Also, since it appeared at the same time while negotiations of TPP and CPTPP were continuing, it has been compared and contrasted with them in many different aspects (See e.g. Oba, 2016; Hamanaka, 2014). However, rather than its content, RCEP has two main aspects differentiating it from TP. First of all, it is closely associated with ASEAN's centrality in driving the process (Mueller, 2019). Although China's positive attitude towards it is quite effective in making RCEP enter into the force, ASEAN and, consequently, middle and small powers of Southeast Asia have a voice in RCEP. Secondly, RCEP is a regional initiative to which the USA and India are not parties. Actually, in its original plan, India was part of the negotiation process. However, as of 2019, India opted out of RCEP due to concerns about the harmful effect on the domestic economy and India's foreign trade (Gupta & Ganguly, 2020).

4.3. Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)

The last regional initiative we can assess in conjunction with East Asian economic regionalism is Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). It is one of the recent initiatives, and it is not an FTA like the previous ones. Instead, it is

a framework targeting deeper economic cooperation and collaboration among the United States, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. It was officially declared in May 2022 with an emphasis on launching negotiations in pillars of trade, supply chain, infrastructure development, and anti-corruption (White House, 2022).

At present, IPEF is not a trade area agreement as opposed to the previous three. Nonetheless, since it is declared that the framework aims “to build high-standard, inclusive, free, and fair trade commitments,” it may turn into an FTA or pave the way for forming an alternative FTA to other regional mega-FTAs. Considering its potential, it is better to evaluate it in the broader regional setting created by RCEP, TPP, and CPTP.

Other than that, within the general structure of the mega-FTAs, IPEF has significance with its member states, particularly the USA and India. Considering the fact that the USA withdrew from TPP and consequently CPTPP and was excluded from RCEP, IPEF formed under the USA's leadership can function as a tool for Joe Biden to continue his policies towards East Asia. Also, considering India's opting out of RCEP, IPEF can function to open new ground for India to engage in the middle powers of East Asia.

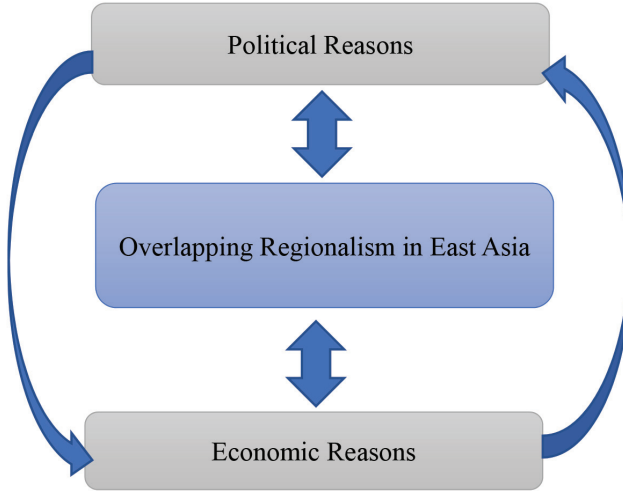
In this current setting, neither of the abovementioned trade agreements (and/or economic cooperation frameworks) can function as an umbrella framework to cover all regional economies. Indeed, they create a situation where each of them overlaps in terms of both membership and aim. In addition to overlapping with each other, they also overlap with other bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements like AFTA and ASEAN+. However, they are unique because of their size and scope. Therefore, instead of assessing their effects on regional settings individually, this paper suggests evaluating them together within the broader regional regime complex they created. As part of this evaluation, it firstly questions the reasons for the overlaps, and secondly, it discusses outcomes that the overlap brings to the region. The following subtitles are dedicated to answering these questions.

5. Reasons for the Overlap of Mega-FTAs in East Asia

In general, as reasons for the overlap, it is possible to point out numerous factors. However, under this title, all these factors will be elaborated by clustering them as economic and political reasons. However, here, it should

be underlined that both economic and political reasons are in simultaneous interactions that push for overlapping regionalism in East Asia and trigger each other. The interaction among these factors is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Drivers of Overlapping Regionalism in East Asia



Source: own elaboration.

As stated before, East Asian regionalism is mainly a market-driven regionalism. Hence, economic interdependence among regional economies and the penetration of economic globalization into the region are economy-related factors pushing regional states to cooperate. However, economy-related factors could not be the only reason for the overlaps. Indeed, economy-related factors pressure the regional states to open new grounds to promote *de facto* economic integration in the region.

Rather, factors that might be clustered under the title of “political reasons” create the basis for the overlaps. In the literature, the tendency is to explain the political root causes of this kind of overlap with states’ behavior (See e.g. Weiffen, Wehner & Nolte 2013; Yeo, 2018). Nevertheless, this paper approaches “political reasons” for the overlaps from a broader perspective by bringing multiple dimensions into one single ground. In that regard, it claims that rivalry among the big powers of the region, hedging strategies of small and middle powers, and loosely-institutionalized structure of regional governance are three important political factors for overlapping regionalism.

First, rivalry among the region’s big powers is the root cause of overlapping regionalism. In that regard, the rivalry among China, the United States,

Japan, and India needs to be emphasized. As defined by Kai He (2019), the East Asian regional order is an example of “contested multilateralism 2.0,” in which states use multilateral initiatives as a means of a contest. In that regard, big regional powers apply institutional balancing strategies to balance each other. In that regard, they may create a regional initiative to ensure their dominance by preventing other big power/big powers from becoming a member. We can mention the USA’s initiative to form TPP, which excludes China, as an example of it. Also, Japan’s take-over to the leadership of CPTPP after the withdrawal of the USA can be considered a Japanese maneuver in that respect. Similarly, India’s and the USA’s involvement in IPEF, excluding China, can be regarded as their mutual attitude to balance China’s influence.

As part of institutional balancing strategies, big powers may also choose to become a member of a regional initiative in order to prevent their counterpart would dominate it in the long run. In that regard, Japan and China’s mutual involvement in RCEP can be considered an example of this kind of attitude. By doing so, they not only exclude the USA from RCEP but also balance each other’s influence in it. In both ways, the region’s great powers aim to use mega-FTAs as multilateral institutional tools to balance each other’s impact.

As Penghong Cai (2016, p. 1025) indicated, while TPP emerged as part of Obama’s “pivot the Asia” strategy, China’s strategy towards mega-FTAs has become an inseparable part of China’s foreign policy since then. Therefore, it is unsurprising that mega-FTAs became a new ground for tension between the USA and China. In that regard, the USA’s maneuver to return the region with IPEF in collaboration with India, China’s positive support to RCEP, and Japan’s desire to lead CPTPP can be considered as a maneuver of these big powers of the region to use mega-FTAs as tools for institutional balancing.

Nevertheless, rivalry among regional big powers can only be one side of the coin. On the other side, the behavior of small and middle powers is also equally important. While the rivalry among big powers intensifies, small and middle powers apply institutional hedging strategies. By applying an institutional hedging strategy, small and middle states avoid taking a clear side in a condition of rivalry (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019, p. 368). In that regard, they would have two main options. Firstly, they may form an alternative regional initiative in which they ensure their place in the driver’s seat. Secondly, they may simultaneously become members of multiple regional initiatives dominated or formed by two or more big powers. While evaluating the behavior of ASEAN and other middle

powers of the region like South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, the so-called “institutional hedging strategy” is very expletory. For instance, among these mega-FTAs, RCEP, with its clear support from ASEAN members, can be given as an example for it. As Kazushi Shimizu (2021) claims, with its similar aims to ASEAN Economic Community, RCEP does not only support East Asian economic integration but also ensures ASEAN’s centrality in broader economic regional integration. Similarly, the rationale behind states like Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore choosing to be part of CPTPP and IPEF along with the RCEP is also related to institutional hedging strategies.

As Seungjoo Lee (2016, p. 1061) claims, in East Asia, regional states tend to apply soft balancing strategies, including ad hoc cooperation initiatives in regional institutions. Consequently, big and middle powers of the region inevitably use mega-FTAs as a tool for soft balancing. Yet, one critical aspect of East Asian regionalism makes this kind of maneuver of regional states possible. This is the loosely-institutionalized structure of regional governance. It can be counted as the third reason for overlapping regionalism in East Asia. As Andrew Yeo (2018, p. 170) claims, the weak institutional structure of regional governance of East Asia results in a kind of “informality.” Consequently, “informality” that loosely institutional structure and the absence of one single regional organization that would shape region-wide cooperation processes, regional states find a ground to play their institutional balancing and hedging strategies freely. India’s withdrawal from RCEP and the USA’s withdrawal from TPP can be an example of this situation. Thanks to this weakly-institutionalized type of regionalism, they can find room for themselves to engage easily or opt-out of any regional arrangement that may not fit their interest.

In brief, overlapping regionalism is a byproduct of multiple factors, including the demand coming from the market, regional states’ attitudes to balance each other through forming new institutions, and the weak institutional landscape of regional governance. Each of these factors pushes the other to emerge in a vicious cycle. Therefore, in order to understand the reasons for the overlaps among the abovementioned mega-FTAs, East Asia’s geo-economical and geopolitical structure needs to be evaluated together.

In other words, overlapping regionalism can be both cause and effect of the tension among regional states. While they may emerge out of the geo-economical and geopolitical tension, they also create new grounds for future conflict among regional states. As a result, instead of calming

down the tension by stimulating a cooperative environment, they have the potential to bring new tension points to the region. To put it in other words, the more there is geo-economical and geopolitical tension, the more overlapping initiatives would potentially emerge. It is a paradox for the future of these initiatives and East Asian regionalism in general.

Other than that, it should be underlined that every agreement mentioned above mainly targets liberalizing region-wide trade in goods and services and facilitating the easy flow of investment. Indeed, as they are examined in terms of content, it is seen that there is no clear-cut norm conflict in terms of policy mandates since they are almost identical to each other in many respects (Crivelli & Inema, 2022). It should be reminded that every agreement comes with its own regime. Therefore, the existence of multiple regimes in one policy area might eventually result in regime complexes that refer simultaneous existence and interaction of multiple regimes in the same policy area. So, the problem would potentially emerge when deciding which agreement will be applied in case of a clash. In brief, considering the fact that overlapping regionalism in East Asia was born out of rivalries among regional states, the regime complex that these mega-FTAs have the potential to turn into a conflictive structure.

6. Conclusion

With its increasing significance in world politics and economics, today, East Asia is one of the significant regions of global politics. As a consequence of increasing geo-economical and geopolitical tension in the region, it brings new puzzles to international politics. Recently initiated mega-FTAs are new dimensions of this complicated structure of the region. In addition to being unique in many respects, they are also complicated because of overlaps among them in terms of both membership and mandate. This paper aimed to examine them through the conceptual framework of overlapping regionalism briefly.

By examining the process in which mega-regionals like TPP, CPTPP, RCEP, and IPEF emerged, it was found that rivalry among big powers of the region, hedging strategies of middle and small powers of the region, and loosely-institutionalized structure of the regional governance are the primary reasons behind the emergence of them. In other words, they are mainly byproducts of increasing tension between regional states that apply institutional balancing and hedging strategies. Hence, the picture is

more complicated about the fate of these region-wide initiatives because the more there is geo-economical and geopolitical tension, the more overlapping initiatives would potentially emerge in the long run.

Studies pointing out the effects of rivalry in East Asian politics are abundant. However, in this study, the new mega-regionals of the region were examined through the lenses of overlapping regionalism by bringing them into one single pot. It is evident that overlapping regionalism is a fruitful concept for understanding East Asian FTAs. Also, East Asia can potentially contribute to the development of the analytical framework of overlapping regionalism, which is a new conceptual invention.

Yet, there are still some unexamined aspects within the scope of this paper. For instance, this study does not examine the contents of these agreements and the economic impacts they will have on the regional economy. Since it focuses on regional states' position, it does not provide any explanation regarding overlaps in the mandate of these mega-FTAs. Therefore, the ground is still open for further studies, which will examine this aspect of overlapping regionalism in East Asia. In that manner, this study can be considered a modest contribution to the development of the literature on mega-FTAs in East Asia, along with the literature on overlapping regionalism.

Endnote:

The conceptual and analytical framework of this chapter is based on the author's doctoral thesis at Kadir Has University, Turkey.

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Contrived Citizenship in Olympic Competition: Politicisation of the Olympic Games – to Divide Instead of to Unite when Para-diplomacy is Abused

Abstract

An Olympian Spirit is an ideal goal envisioned to bring outstanding athletes in many sports together in objective competition. Historical rules have been strict, some nations have skirted accepted regulations. Then more recently, multiple standards have been relaxed to the point where they seem to be non-existent or mandatory more on some than on others: both nations and athletes. This is para-diplomacy gone wild in the wrong direction. Examples are bountiful: changing of citizenship vicariously, representing countries without citizenship, testing positive for contraband substances then being allowed into competition, denial of a place in competition because the brand on a snowboard is not that of an Olympic “sponsor,” and the list goes on. Olympic training is gruelling. To allow an unqualified athlete to compete deprives a qualified athlete of an opportunity that can be life-changing. Same for fictional disqualification, medal stripping or reduction on pretext technicalities, raiding by some countries of athletes born and trained in other countries. Standards must be uniform, applicable to all competitors, enforced punctiliously by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Alternatively, right-thinking countries will consider withdrawing from the Olympics. Is the Olympic goal only to make money, to generate media contracts, to pander to sponsors? What sanctions are appropriate? If an athlete wins a medal under a “false flag,” should that award be transferred to her/his real country? When an athlete violates a material rule, should the team of athletes representing that athlete’s country be sanctioned? If fairness is to dominate, what is fair?

Keywords: Olympic Games, sport, citizenship, sponsorship, competition

1. Introduction

Much of the controversy over multi-national sports competitors began or at least escalated with Chinese-American (United States born) “Big Air” and “Halfpipe” gold medalist in the 2022 winter Olympic skier Gǔ Àilíng [谷爱凌], known in the West as Eileen Gǔ, who also won a silver Olympic medal in “Slopestyle” competition. Gǔ Àilíng was born in San Francisco, California to a mother who was born in People’s Republic of China [hereinafter China] and an American father, making her American by conventional citizenship standards. Chinese coaches recruited Gǔ to compete for China to which she acquiesced, all-the-while contending she would not renounce her United States citizenship, necessary for her, *inter alia*, to matriculate at Stanford University as an American and as a legacy because her mother is a Stanford *alumna*. Part of the issue is that China does not permit dual citizenship: someone born in China who migrates and receives foreign citizenship must relinquish their Chinese citizenship; someone such as Aileen Gǔ who was born in America must relinquish her American citizenship in order to gain Chinese citizenship. Although the United States allows multiple citizenships, for Gǔ to become a Chinese citizen she would have to formally renounce her United States citizenship. Gǔ told reporters rather arrogantly: “When I’m in the U.S., I’m American, but when I’m in China, I’m Chinese” (Binner, 2021). Citizenship does not work that conveniently, at least not as a rule, nor should it. In fairness to the people of China, however, it is important to note that the overriding issue seems to be more of status than of national origin. By way of example, Arnold Schwarzenegger, famed movie actor, at age 23 the youngest “Mr. Olympia” ever, former husband of Maria Owings Shriver [granddaughter of wealthy Ambassador Joseph Patrick Kennedy, Sr., niece of the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy] and himself two-term Republican Governor of California, was able to retain his Austrian citizenship when he became naturalised in the United States (Leamer, 2005, pp. 199–200), although, same as for China, this is unusual for Austria, transparently a “double standard” favouring the rich and the famous. So, this hypocrisy extends well beyond sports competition, although undoubtedly the visibility it receives in the sphere of sports competition causes this form of a double standard to be understood by the public more than in other contexts. Denigration of the Olympics by anyone’s misconduct relegates the Olympics into disrepute, whether the misconduct involves citizenship misrepresentation, drug abuse, pretext disqualifications, or other questionable behaviour.

An Olympian Spirit is an ideal goal envisioned to bring outstanding athletes in many sports together in objective global competition. Historical rules have been strict, some nations have skirted accepted regulations. Then more recently, multiple standards have been relaxed to the point where they seem to be non-existent or mandatory more on some than on others: both nations and athletes. This is para-diplomacy gone wild in the wrong direction. Examples are bountiful: changing of citizenship vicariously, representing countries without citizenship, testing positive for contraband substances then allowed back into competition, denial of a place in competition on the American team as Julia Marino was because the brand "Prada" on a snowboard is not that of an Olympic "sponsor" (Anderson, 2022). That list goes on. By eliminating legitimate competitors or by allowing entry of seemingly illegitimate competitors, the Olympic games become a pedestal for the lucky at best, or for the corrupt, denigrating traditional Olympic values. Leaving aside the acceptability of any country "raiding" Olympic athletes from a competitor nation or tolerating that paradigm, what must certainly be prohibited is a resulting practice whereby an athlete gains one questionable profit from a foreign country, such as Olympic medals, then returns to the home country to attend college on the basis of birth citizenship at a time when countries such as the United States are inclined to limit both Asian immigration (Hanna & Batalova, 2021) and acceptance of Asian students at elite American universities (Xu, 2021).

Citizenship issues are at the forefront of some countries currently, notably Poland and the United States. In the United States, with the administration of President Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr, its Southern border (with Mexico) is functionally "open," meaning a plethora of migrants cross into the United States each day, frequently risking sexual harm from drug cartel members or perishing in the Rio Grande River as they try to wade or swim across. It has been only since 1882 that the Federal government and not the states came to regulate migration into the United States, some states having abused their authority during the period of American Slavery (Law, 2021). More than 6.7 million refugees from (in some cases through) Ukraine have been admitted as of 01 October 2022 following the invasion by the Russian Federation of Ukraine on 20 February 2022 (The First News, 2022), with that number swelling to 6.884 million by 10 October 2022, with many receiving PESEL (work registration) accounts entitling them to work in Poland, although 5.08 million have left Poland (PolskieRadio.pl, 2022). In an effort to help foreigners to enter and remain

in a country, sometimes politicians betray citizens of their own country in various ways, such as by handing jobs to newcomers that have been long coveted by their own citizens, especially native-born minorities (Sobel, 2016). This situation can foster ethnic and racial hatreds, evidenced in Sweden, the United States, and becoming visible in Poland with so many highly-educated Ukrainian refugees taking coveted jobs away from under-educated Polish citizens. Persons whose lives are endangered should be granted refuge in a safe haven country. Economic migrants are an entirely different story and, indeed, Olympic level athletes who travel from one country to another in search of fame and commercial royalties fame brings are economic migrants. To explore this phenomenon, various types of citizenship will be explored.

Several research questions are addressed in this chapter: 1) Do athletes contrive to adjust their citizenship to compete on Olympic teams with higher status?; 2) If so, is their purpose financial, such as to gain income from product endorsements?; 3) Do countries connive with athletes to attract promising competitors by offering them "citizenship"?; 4) What concrete action should be taken to minimise this behaviour? In the following parts of this text, the author will try to answer all of them.

2. Varieties of Citizenship

Most people in the world are citizens of at least one country somewhere, generally that is where they were born and where they live currently. Some change their country of residence, domicile, and citizenship, occasioned when they are adopted, marry a foreign national, work abroad for a long time, change countries for income tax considerations, or for other reasons. Infrequently, people become "stateless," such as if they have been divested of citizenship where they were born and no other country is willing to confer citizenship on them, fearing the wrath of the country where they were born. This has been the case with residents of Estonia who fled China in 1989 because of their participation in the student uprising on 4 June 1989 at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, following the suppression of which China hunted them down as wanted criminals (Zhang B., 2002; He, 2014; Zhang L., 2020). Some were given refuge by states such as Estonia, but they have not become Estonian citizens (Roads & Kingdoms, 2017). Carrying a "gray" passport issued to "aliens" including ethnic Russians who have not successfully completed a rigorous Estonian language

examination, they cannot depart from Estonia and expect to be allowed entry into any other country besides the country where they were born. Functionally, they have become prisoners to their host country, having been sent into exile by the government of their homeland, return to which would mean death or torture with lengthy imprisonment (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Conventional Citizenship

Citizenship is obtained by birth for most people, who take the citizenship of their parents and of the country where they were born. Usually, they are one and the same. Sometimes, parents-to-be arranged to give birth to a child in a country they deem to be more favourable than their own, often the United States, sometimes a European country, in which case they hope the child will have the citizenship they wanted for themselves. Occasionally, individuals or couples migrate lawfully and become citizens of their adopted country by naturalisation. Less frequently, until recently, people migrated unlawfully then hoped to receive amnesty entitling them to secure naturalised citizenship. This became with the inauguration of U.S. President Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr. on 20 January 2021 with the “open” Southern border of the United States he encouraged. Undoubtedly, citizenship in the United States by persons who have been or will be born in the United States to a mother who is present in the country unlawfully, will have to be decided by the United States Supreme Court, unless the Congress acts to determine this outcome one way or another by statute and the statute is upheld by the Supreme Court. Citizenship in the United States (and Canada) is different from citizenship almost anywhere else in the world, in that American citizenship is conferred based on where a child is born (with very limited exceptions), whereas in most of the world citizenship is conferred upon a child based on to whom s/he was born: citizenship of the parents regardless of where born.

Birthright Citizenship

Full citizenship is conferred automatically by birth of a child to parents who are citizens of a country, according to the laws of about one quarter of the world’s nations. United States and Canada are the only developed countries to confer citizenship by birth within the country

regardless of the citizenship of the child's parents. Unless renounced, this type of citizenship is viewed as being both absolute and permanent. It cannot be withdrawn or forfeited even by conviction of a serious crime. It cannot be annulled or "cancelled" under any circumstance. However, a person who has renounced citizenship of the country within which s/he was born but who recants that renunciation may become a citizen once more by naturalisation if citizenship is restored, subject to the same limitations as pertain to anyone who was not born in the country but became a naturalised citizen.

Citizenship *jus soli* or "right of the soil" by birth within a country's "soil" meaning borders, in contrast to citizenship *jus sanguinis*, meaning "right of blood" by reason of a parent's bloodline (frequently the father's) no matter the birth location, is followed by the common law of England. With enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution on 09 July 1868, clause one providing that "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside," *jus soli* became the basis for citizenship of anyone born on American soil, with limited exceptions, as clarified by the United States Supreme Court in its decision of *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, 169 U.S. 649 (1898). Wong had been born in San Francisco in 1873, remained permanently domiciled in the United States thereafter before traveling to China to visit relatives' multiple times. Returning in 1890, Wong was denied admission under the Chinese Exclusion Act applicable to non-American citizens who had been born in China and were deemed to be immigrants. Crucial to an understanding of *Wong Kim Ark* is the rationale of the majority (6:2, one Justice abstaining) opinion that appears to limit its application to the case of a child such as Wong who was born in the United States to parents who were aliens at the time of his birth but maintained a permanent domicile in the United States. This is evident from Justice Gray's legal issue framed in his Opinion of the Court, stating: "whether a child born in the United States, of parents of Chinese descent, who, at the time of his birth, are subjects of the emperor of China, but have a permanent domicile and residence in the United States, and are there carrying on business, and are not employed in any diplomatic or official capacity under the emperor of China, becomes at the time of his birth a citizen of the United States. For the reasons above stated, this court is of opinion that the question must be answered in the affirmative" (169 U.S. 649, 705). In addition, the majority opinion in *Wong* that "Wong

Kim Ark has not, either by himself or his parents acting for him, ever renounced his allegiance to the United States, and that he has never done or committed any act or thing to exclude him therefrom" (169 U.S. 649, 704-05). This leaves unanswered in 1898 whether an alien including an alien child born in America without maintaining a permanent domicile in the United States, could be deprived of citizenship, or whether, as Justice Gray mentioned in *obiter dictum*, such a person might commit "any act or thing to exclude him therefrom" (169 U.S. 649, 705). What would be such an "act" or "thing," exactly? Possibly that a child is born to a parent present in the United States unlawfully? Or an athlete, born, raised, and trained in the United States, who competes for a foreign country that does not recognise dual citizenship, pursuant to circumstances that may be akin to constructive renunciation of birth citizenship? Each of these and other scenarios may be or may become relevant. Is there or will there be such a thing as constructive renunciation of citizenship, meaning implied from a person's conduct?

An example of what some might term "accidental citizenship" is that of former British prime minister Boris Johnson, born in New York City when his British parents were there because his father was a Columbia University student. Only in 2016 did Johnson renounce his American citizenship, occasioned by what he considered to be a hefty United States tax on property he sold in London (Peddicord, 2022). Someone born in the United States to parents who were citizens of a foreign country at time of the child's birth would become an American citizen by birth as well as a citizen of the foreign country of her/his parents by reason of their citizenship if the latter country follows the principle of *jus sanguinis*. What of parents, particularly a pregnant mother, who contrive to travel to the United States to deliver their child on American soil, intending not to remain in America but to return to their homeland? They do not seem to want or expect domicile in the United States. Should they be covered by *Wong Kim Ark*, or is this outcome simply too "accidental"? Examples abound of both Chinese females (SCMP, 2019) and males (Harney, 2013) who seek artificial insemination with sperm or eggs provided by anonymous Western donors, sometimes seeking American citizenship for the child(ren) to be produced, then with the child(ren)'s citizenship the same for themselves. Viewed in this context, sports figures seeking to exploit citizenship may not be so audacious, certainly not so unusual. Does a rule of reason work in this context, or do countries require a *per se* rule applicable to everyone, rich or poor?

Conferred Citizenship

Pursuant to Article 137 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the Polish President may confer Polish citizenship upon anyone, details specified in the Act of 15 February 1962 on the Polish Citizenship and the Decree of the President of the Republic of Poland of 14 March 2000, although this Presidential discretion is exercised sparingly. When citizenship is conferred upon both parents, automatically it extends to their children under age sixteen, and to children over age sixteen with their consent (President.pl). This practice, in variation, known as citizenship by declaration, is available in Czech Republic and Germany, among other nations. Section 31 of the Czech Citizenship Act 186/2013, as amended, allows citizenship by declaration for descendants of any Czechoslovak or Czech citizen (GetCzechCitizenship.com). In Germany, the Fourth Act Amending the Nationality Act that became effective on 20 August 2021 “created a ten-year right of declaration (Section 5 of the Nationality Act), granting children born to a German parent after 23 May 1949 (entry into force of the Basic Law) who, under the version of the Reich and Nationality Act valid at the time of their birth, were excluded in a gender-discriminating manner from acquiring German citizenship by descent at birth have the option of obtaining German citizenship by making a simple declaration to the competent citizenship authority” (Federal Foreign Office). Australian law currently allows someone who is Australian, such as by descent, to merely “affirm” Australian citizenship, then receive it by declaration (Australian Citizen Test). Declaration pertains to persons whose ancestors have been of a declared nationality, or *jus sanguinis*, so it does not pertain ordinarily to citizenship *jus soli*. Several combinations and permutations of conferred or declared citizenship exist, they vary country by country.

Important to this analysis is Chinese nationality that can be conferred pursuant to the Nationality Law of the People’s Republic of China (CNL). Section 5 of the CNL expressly declares “Any person born abroad whose parents are both Chinese nationals or one of whose parents is a Chinese national shall have Chinese nationality.” It goes on to impose limitations: “But a person whose parents are both Chinese nationals and have both settled abroad, or one of whose parents is a Chinese national and has settled abroad, and who has acquired foreign nationality at birth shall not have Chinese nationality.” Accordingly, Aileen G who was born in the United States and received American citizenship from birth should not qualify to be a Chinese citizen by declaration.

Article 7 of the CNL provides: “Foreign nationals or stateless persons who are willing to abide by China’s Constitution and laws and who meet one of the following conditions may be naturalised upon approval of their applications:

- they are near relatives of Chinese nationals;
- they have settled in China; or
- they have other legitimate reasons.

However, CNL Article 8 provides that: “Any person who applies for naturalisation as a Chinese national shall acquire Chinese nationality upon approval of his application; a person whose application for naturalisation as a Chinese national has been approved shall not retain foreign nationality”. So in the case of Aileen G , her mother and her maternal grandmother both are Chinese, so the disqualifying variable would be G ’s American citizenship, unless renounced. If she did receive Chinese citizenship for the Olympics but did not renounce the same thereafter, she could retain her American citizenship because the United States allows dual citizenship. Probably, her only consequence would be to have her Chinese citizenship revoked pursuant to the interface of CNL Article 8 and Article 9.

Article 8 provides that: “Any person who applies for naturalisation as a Chinese national shall acquire Chinese nationality upon approval of his application; a person whose application for naturalisation as a Chinese national has been approved shall not retain foreign nationality”.

Article 9 provides further: “Any Chinese national who has settled abroad and who has been naturalised as a foreign national or has acquired foreign nationality of his own free will shall automatically lose Chinese nationality”. An interesting question arises: did Aileen G obtain United States citizenship at birth “of her own free will”? No is the only logical answer.

Constructive Citizenship

Families of military personnel who are serving or deceased may be eligible for what is called Constructive Citizenship in one of several categories. To become a candidate for the office of United States president or vice president, one must be a “natural born” United States citizen pursuant to Article II, section 1, clause 5 of the United States Constitution. This has posed issues for some candidates, such as Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) who received the Republican Presidential nomination in 1964 but

lost to President Lyndon Baines Johnson, and Senator John Sidney McCain, III (R-AZ) who won the Republican Presidential nomination in 2008 but lost to Senator Barack Hussein Obama (D-IL). Goldwater had been born in Arizona when it was a territory before statehood, and McCain had been born in the Panama Canal Zone where his father was stationed as a United States Navy officer. Ultimately, United States District Court Judge William Alsup ruled that Senator McCain was a natural-born American citizen, relying in part on an act of Congress that specifically conferred American citizenship by birth under these circumstances, and in part upon Senator Goldwater's case (NBC, 2008). It is important to note, however, that both parents of Senator Goldwater and Senator McCain were American citizens. On this issue, legal scholars have voiced disagreement, sometimes politically, with the prevailing view taken by Laurence Henry Tribe, Carl Morris Loeb University Professor of Constitutional Law, *Emeritus*, at Harvard Law School,¹ supporting Judge Alsup's decision (Mikkelson, 2008). In 2020, Congress passed a bill expressly conferring American citizenship upon children born abroad to American service members or civil servants such as diplomats serving abroad "Citizenship for Children of Military Members and Civil Servants Act".

Naturalised Citizenship

Citizenship in most countries may be obtained by naturalisation, a procedure whereby a foreign national proposes to become a citizen of an adopted country by swearing allegiance to that country, thereby assuming the obligations of the country into which s/he has been naturalised, including its taxation obligations. This new citizen may retain obligations to the country of their original citizenship unless renounced. In the case of the People's Republic of China [China]), however, that country does not recognise "dual" citizenship, and upon being naturalised in another country a Chinese person must renounce Chinese citizenship. To fail to

1 Note that Professor Tribe was born in the French Concession at Shanghai to Jewish parents: his mother with many Jewish people had been given refuge in Harbin by the *Kuomintang* [Chinese Nationalist Party] at the heroic behest of Soong Meiling [Mme. Chaing Kai-shek], China's First Lady; his father was Polish, in exile from the Nazi Holocaust in occupied Poland. Nationalist China recognised licenses of displaced Central and Eastern Europeans, revoked by the Nazi regimes, entitling them to practice their professions. When he was six years old, Professor Tribe's family migrated to the United States.

renounce Chinese citizenship, a Chinese citizen who is naturalised in another country will face prosecution upon returning to China, the penalty is likely to include revocation of her/his Chinese international passport and Houkou, the latter being the Chinese household registration card that doubles as a domestic passport (Boquen, 2022). Without an active Houkou, a Chinese person will be unable to travel on airplanes, trains, busses, subways, or public transportation generally, probably be unable to work. Furthermore, a Houkou is location-specific, entitling its holder only to live in the area so designated on the Houkou, and if China were to strip someone of their Houkou, with that action the person would forfeit any land to which s/he would have remained entitled under the Houkou when in effect. If China refuses to recognise the passport of the country into which the Chinese person has been naturalised, or if the person did not bring their foreign passport with them to China, this person would be unable to depart from China without the intervention of the country that naturalised the Chinese person, creating a diplomatic drama that might go on for many months.

Dual Citizenship

Many countries in the world allow their citizens to hold “dual” citizenship, for many this means a second citizenship, for some it can include a third or even a fourth citizenship. Some countries, such as the People’s Republic of China, do not permit dual citizenship at all, others permit it with restrictions (VisaGuide.world, N.d.). Dual citizenship is valuable to persons holding it: they will receive dual voting rights and dual entitlement to Healthcare, although it does come with drawbacks, including potentially double taxation, burden of offering both (all) passports in travel, lack of consular protection from one’s main country when in the dual citizenship nation.

Artificial Insemination with Surrogate Motherhood

Neither artificial insemination nor surrogate motherhood creates an obstacle to citizenship in the United States, provided the child born therefrom is born in the United States. This is an advantage of citizenship *jus soli*. However, until recently, a child born outside of the United States from artificial insemination would be denied American citizenship even

if both parents were citizens of the United States. This policy changed in 2021, allowing a child born under these circumstances abroad to be granted American citizenship, provided the parents were married to each other at time of the child's birth and at least one parent is American (Diaz, 2021). Typically, the father will be American, consigning artificial fertilisation abroad where medical expenses are less expensive than at home, the donor of the egg may not be, the surrogate may not be, the identity of the egg donor may not be known in fact or this may be required to remain confidential to protect her anonymity. Sometimes, sperm may come not from the male parent but from an anonymous donor, in which case either the mother (if her egg has been used) or both parents will be the adoptive parent(s) functionally rather than either of them being a biological parent.

Contrived Citizenship

Family members of military personnel who are either serving or who have lost their lives in military service may be eligible for Constructive Citizenship in one or more of several categories that include Expedited Naturalisation, adjusting status of spouses and/or children of service members, expedited processing, overseas naturalisation of spouses and/or children of service members (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Service, N.d.). Benefits of this kind are intended to maintain family ties among children born to United States military and naval personnel serving overseas. An example of this, mentioned previously, is the case of the late U.S. Senator, prisoner of war and Presidential candidate John Sidney McCain, III (R-AZ), who had been born in Coco Solo, Panama to a serving naval officer who would go on to become a four star admiral and chief of naval operations. Reflected in this kind of citizenship is the strength of family ties to the country of patriation. United Kingdom follows a similar regime, requiring "registration" of children born outside of the United Kingdom to a British parent (www.gov.uk). Eligibility includes but is not limited to children born to serving or deceased British service personnel, provided the British parent possesses "settled status" or "indefinite permission to remain" in the United Kingdom (Global Citizenship Solutions, N.d.).

Parental Adoption

Generally speaking, lawful adoption of a child entitles the adopted child to take the citizenship of the parents. This situation can become complicated when, somewhat unusually, the parents decide to dissolve the adoption, or a “disruption” occurs when a different parent or set of parents adopts the child before s/he obtains citizenship, leaving the status of the child’s citizenship in a quandary. In the United States, for example, once the child obtains citizenship, neither dissolution nor disruption of the adoption impacts the child’s citizenship. Trouble occurs when dissolution or disruption of the adoption occurs before citizenship, possibly following a foreign adoption that the country of the adoptive parents, such as the United States, declines to recognize (U.S. Customs & Immigration Services, N.d.). This means that prospective adoptive parents, no matter the country of which they are citizens, should immediately secure the adoption takes place in the country where they intend to reside and to raise their adopted child(ren), and the child(ren) must have their citizenship secured at once so that citizenship becomes independent of the adoption. Once naturalised, children remain citizens of the country in which they have been naturalised, regardless of whether the adoption is dissolved by the adoptive parents or disrupted such as by the child being re-adopted by different adoptive parents (U.S. Customs & Immigration Services, N.d.). Rather evidently, international adoptions pose a hazard to adopted children. Some countries are reluctant to recognise foreign adoptions for the purpose of granting citizenship to the adopted children. This seems unfortunate at a time when a wave of migration is occurring worldwide, and in most instances adoption by parents affluent enough to negotiate an international adoption would appear to be in the best interests of the child(ren), the standard courts tend to use when evaluating any change in a child’s supervision.

Renounced Birthright Citizenship

Citizens born in a country sometimes decide to renounce that birthright citizenship. In a country where citizenship is grounded on ethnicity, the outcome may be different than in a country such as the United States or Canada where citizenship normally is grounded on birth location. Ethnicity does not change. Renunciation of citizenship is different from citizenship dissolution, the former is a voluntary act by a citizen

to relinquish their citizenship, the latter is a governmental decision to dissolve naturalised citizenship, generally for fraud in obtaining it or on account of a subsequent criminal conviction. Government cannot dissolve anyone's birthright citizenship. When someone does renounce their citizenship, they relinquish all rights and privileges of that citizenship, and unless they have secured citizenship in another country beforehand, they may be rendered stateless, unprotected by any government and unable to travel (U.S. Citizenship Laws & Policy, N.d.). This is one reason why a country such as the United States requires citizenship renunciation to occur abroad, by the renouncing citizen taking an oath of citizenship renunciation at a United States embassy or consulate. In effect, the country whose citizenship is being renounced does not want to have to deport its former citizen who no longer enjoys a right to remain on its soil.

Flexible Citizenship

Flexible or "Flex" citizenship seems to have its roots from the United States Future Leaders Exchange Program ("FLEX") created by the United States Congress in 1992, first for Estonian children, then for Eastern European youth generally. As its popularity burgeoned, many Chinese students applied for its benefits (Ong, 1998). This became an ambition of Chinese "cosmopolitan" parents who aimed to send their children to elite United States colleges, improving their chances of competing for prestigious jobs in the Chinese workplace (Ong, 1999). In this situation, parents are exploiting a host country for whatever values it might have in improving their child(ren)'s education, wealth, networking, or social standing. Rather evidently, "cosmopolitan" citizenship carries with it questionable loyalties by parents and children alike: are they disloyal to their country of birth, such as China, by wanting to obtain benefits from a foreign land, such as the United States, or disloyal to those foreign lands by exploiting their benefits without necessarily transferring their allegiance thereto? (Milikh, 2016).

Pretended Citizenship

Citizenship as a pretense is core to this analysis, it is a form of fraud whether prosecuted or not by either country involved. It occurs when a citizen of one country endeavours (contrives) to obtain recognition by another country as a citizen or national, traversing laws or customs of

both countries. It is different from either dual citizenship or permanent residency obtained lawfully by a citizen of one country desiring to live or work in another location. In the context here, someone secures an arrangement in a foreign country to compete as an athlete, for example, without relinquishing their legitimate citizenship or applying lawfully for citizenship in another country. In effect, in this example, the person quietly interrupts their legitimate citizenship in an effort to pass as the subject of a foreign country temporarily, meaning for the duration of a competition such as the length of summer or winter Olympic games that last only several weeks every four years generally, intending all the while to return to the country of their legitimate citizenship.

American skier Eileen Gū, born, raised, and trained in the United States, told reporters “When I’m in the U.S., I’m American, but when I’m in China, I’m Chinese,” thereby admitting that her Chinese “citizenship” during the 2022 Winter Olympics was a pretense. Gū is American by birth to a Chinese mother, Yan Gū, and an American father although her parents have not married. By many accounts, Gū and her mother considered her chances of winning multiple gold medals skiing for China were greater than had she skied for the United States of which she was and is a citizen by birthright. At stake were high-profile “sponsorships” from manufacturers of sporting equipment, fast food and soft drink products, even automobiles and health resorts. American corporations and the elites who run them make fortunes selling out the United States for profits to China and themselves (Schweizer, 2022). This has to stop.

Gū Ailing or Eileen Gū was not the only foreign athlete competing for China in the 2022 Winter Olympics, professing to do so in the name of generating “unity”: Samuel Ikpefan of Nigeria, Richardson Viano of Haiti, and Yohan Goutt-Gonçalves of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste also competed under the Chinese flag (Creech, 2022). Does inter-flag athletic competition promote “unity” or chaos, this is a derivative question. Eventually, countries with vast athletic training capabilities will stop training athletes of foreign ethnicity.

Strategies for Planned Change

Nations of the world simply have to collaborate more effectively to construct than to enforce proper regulations on global athletic competitions. In the process, nations should consider forming more closely aligned policies involving the granting of citizenship, recognition of citizenship

from other countries, sanctions on people generally who violate laws pertaining to citizenship, access to foreign countries, participation in global athletic competitions.

1. Countries must unite to formulate a common regime for “citizenship” as that term pertains to global competitions, especially.

2. At its core, as a concept, “citizenship” must reflect where a prospective competitor resides currently or has resided for a reasonable period immediately prior to the competition into which s/he enters.

3. Citizenship in sports competition such as the Olympics should relate to the training of an athlete as well as to their domicile, meaning where they live at time of competition, where they have lived over several years before each game. It seems inherently unfair to taxpayers of a country that have paid part or all of the cost of arduous sports training to then witness the trained athlete return home or go on to compete as a member of another nation’s team; even more unfair if the trained athlete moves on to compete for a country with which s/he enjoys few to no ties whatsoever.

4. International Olympic Committee (IOC) directors and managers should adopt then enforce regulations requiring accurate declarations by coaches and competitors as to each competitor’s actual citizenship, supported by documentary proof including passports, with competitors and teams that provide false data to lose medals or sub-medal recognitions, and be banned from competition for a lengthy period.

5. Part of the problem is that some countries, such as the People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.) do not allow for dual citizenship. Chinese passport holders cannot lawfully hold citizenship in another country. Eileen Gü boldly and incredibly told reporters: “When I’m in the U.S., I’m American, but when I’m in China, I’m Chinese,” but that is unfair to other competitors from the United States, China, other nations who will likely face exclusion from competition because of someone such as G. Certainly, she took the place that otherwise would have gone to a young female Chinese athlete.

6. Countries must establish regulations for inviting foreigners to live and work within their territories: Poland’s invitation of nearly seven million Ukrainians comes at a price to Polish workers.

7. No country can maintain “open” borders for long, such as the United States has been doing since the change of administrations early in 2021. Some migrants are people who have been displaced by conflict or other oppression, many are economic migrants, some are criminals or foreign operatives. Left unchecked, these migrants pose a very serious threat to

a country's general population, evidenced by a recent Las Vegas stabbing spree attributed to a Guatemalan criminal who entered the United States illegally, then committed heinous crimes in multiple states (Reilly, 2022).

3. Conclusions

Citizenship regulations have become fragmented and chaotic in recent years, leading to contrived qualifications of some athletes seeking to become Olympic game participants or competitors in other global athletic events. Fragmented citizenship divides more than it unites. Part of this is due to vast differences in the meaning of citizenship or of its enforcement. Another part is due to seeming indifference by the International Olympic Commission (IOC) or counterpart oversight organisations that bear responsibility for governance of competitive sporting events. An Olympian Spirit is an ideal goal envisioned to bring outstanding athletes in many sports together in objective competition. Historical rules have been strict, some nations have skirted accepted regulations. Then more recently, multiple standards have been relaxed to the point where they seem to be non-existent, or mandatory more on some than on others: both nations and athletes. This is para-diplomacy gone wild in the wrong direction. Examples are bountiful: changing of citizenship vicariously, representing countries without citizenship or ties, testing positive for contraband substances then being allowed into competition, denial of a place in competition because the brand on a snowboard is not that of an authorised Olympic "sponsor," and the list goes on. Olympic training is grueling. To allow an unqualified athlete to compete deprives a qualified athlete of an opportunity that can be life-changing. Same for fictional disqualification, medal stripping or reduction on pretext technicalities, raiding by some countries of athletes born and trained in other countries. Standards must be uniform, applicable to all competitors, enforced punctiliously by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Alternatively, right-thinking countries will consider withdrawing from the Olympics. Is the Olympic goal only to make money, to generate media contracts, to pander to sponsors? What sanctions are appropriate? If an athlete wins a medal under a "false flag," should that award be transferred to her/his real country? When an athlete violates a material rule, should the team of athletes representing that athlete's country be sanctioned? If fairness is to dominate, what is fair? To answer the Research Questions,

1) Do athletes contrive to adjust their citizenship in order to compete on Olympic teams with higher status? They do; 2) If so, is their purpose financial, such as to gain income from product endorsements? It is; 3) Do countries connive with athletes to attract promising competitors by offering them “citizenship”? Some do; 4) What concrete action should be taken to minimise this behaviour. Countries should unite to develop and adhere to a normative standard of citizenship for international sports competition, possibly through the United Nations.

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Rethinking Agriculture Development in the Greater Mekong Subregion Countries

Abstract

The agriculture remains a strategic sector of the economy, despite the widespread decline in its share in GDP production and employment. Its development is observed as a key factor in maintaining food security, as well as reducing poverty. The GMS's agriculture is characterized by lagging growth rates in comparison with other sectors of the national economy. However, the GMS's agriculture has shown positive changes. First of all, countries in the region are following a path of intensification, so the yield has increased steadily, although its strong dependence on variable weather conditions is major risk. Much of the agricultural land in the GMS is prone to floods, droughts or both. At the same time, despite the growth in labor productivity, its increase was not significant. The structure of agricultural production has begun to change. Traditionally monoculture production, specializing in rice cultivation, is gradually diversifying into secondary cash crop production, which is helping to increase cash production and agricultural exports. Agriculture in the GMS has been shifting from traditional subsistence to modern commercial farming. Peasant farms are increasingly oriented to the regional and world markets. They begin to produce products with comparative advantages, participating in the regional division of labor. The construction of vertically integrated enterprises and value chains within the framework of the GMS is also taking place. The positive effect of integration processes is the convergence of prices on the regional agricultural market and direct impact on global consumers. This article examines the features and achievements of agriculture, as well as highlights the challenges and problems.

Keywords: *agriculture, Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), agriculture development, agriculture productivity*

1. Introduction

The agricultural sector has traditionally occupied important positions in the economies of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries. While its contribution has declined across the region and varies markedly, being more significant in Myanmar and Cambodia and less in Thailand, agriculture continues to have a large impact on economic development in all countries of the subregion without exception. Its role can hardly be overestimated.

Although in recent years GMS economies have acquired industrial-agrarian features and some of them have focused on creating a more forward-thinking, modern economy, the country's agricultural sector remains a crucial cog in the engine driving the country forward. With rapid development in manufacturing, service, retail and other sectors over the past few decades, the direct economic impact of the agricultural industry has been declining, although it remains a vital social backstop for rural population. Agriculture, the rice subsector, is still the dominant economic activity in many of the rural regions of the country, in places where other modernization and economic development efforts have not yet made a significant impact.

The subregion, while rapidly industrializing and urbanizing, remains predominantly rural; roughly 61% of the population, or 145 million people, live in rural areas and the vast majority are engaged in agriculture and depend on it (Ingalls et al., 2018, p. 2).

Agriculture remains a strategic sector of the economy for several reasons. First, food security is a key challenge for many Asian countries. This goal could be achieved only with self-sufficiency in agricultural products and the creation of reserves that guarantee food supply. Agriculture acts as the main production system that provides the population with food and guarantees food security. The GMS countries have achieved self-sufficiency in food production at the macro level but they face food shortages at the household level. 15% of GMS population suffer from malnutrition.

According to FAO food availability, access, utilization and stability over time have been identified as the four pillars of food security (FAO, FAOSTAT, 2021). In terms of physical accessibility, GMS countries have made tremendous progress, supported by increased production of staple food. For example, in Vietnam per capita food production has reached 525 kg/year. As a result, Vietnam was ranked among the top six countries in terms of food security and has become more resilient than most developing countries in Asia (Dao The Anh & Pham Cong Nghiep, 2020).

The results were more modest in other countries, but their success in increasing production were also very impressive. Over the past 10 years, the productive capacity of the GMS agricultural sector has made it possible not only to provide the necessary food but also to become a top exporter of several products, such as rice. This applies to Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

At the same time, due to persistent poverty, economic availability of food remains low. The GMS countries are challenged massively by maintenance of rural poverty. Currently, 19% of the population lives below the poverty line. Most of the poor are concentrated in rural areas. So, the development of the agricultural sector is also seen as a key factor in reducing the poverty.

Secondly, agriculture is a special sector of the economy, as it is highly dependent on environmental conditions that producers cannot always influence. Sometimes weather conditions cause serious deviations from average yields and thus seriously affect farmers' incomes.

Despite the serious outflow of labor from the agricultural sector, it retains an important role in ensuring employment of the population, reaching 44% in the subregion in 2019. So, the dependence of the rural workforce on agriculture for employment has not declined relative to the sector's contribution to GDP. This has resulted in widening income disparity between agriculture and non-agriculture sectors.

The agricultural sector has played an important role in accelerating and maintaining the dynamism of economic development. During the crisis years, when the export sectors of the economy were in the most vulnerable position, the role of the potential leader of economic growth in the country passed to the agricultural sector.

Despite all this, the level of agricultural production in the GMS countries remains rather low. It is characterized by an exceptionally high degree of dependence on weather conditions, rather weak diversification, and a low standard of living for the bulk of the rural population. That is why agriculture requires rethinking.

Methods and materials

The author focuses on the analysis of trends and problems in the development of the agricultural sector. The relevance of scientific research in this area stems from the strategic priority given to the agricultural sector in the modern economic development of the GMS countries, as

well as due to the need for a systematic understanding of the totality of processes and phenomena associated with the development of agricultural production.

This article is based on statistical data published by FAO, World Bank, which made it possible to track the dynamics of the production quantity, yields, agricultural lands, value added in agriculture, allowed to assess the change in productivity and trends of agriculture development.

Of great interest to the author were the publications of field studies conducted by various international and national non-governmental organizations. They contain very rare and valuable materials on the influence of the market on the budget of households and on the involvement of farms in agricultural diversification. Field studies provide an opportunity to see the problems of the village from the inside, and they provide insights into sometimes minor but crucial details of the peasantry's life that cannot be found in any of the Government's programs and Ministry's reports.

The preparation of the work also benefited from press materials containing numerous publications on economic and agrarian issues, including some of a critical nature. Among such publications we shall name the English-language newspaper "Phnom Penh Post."

Trends in agriculture development

In 2000–2020 agriculture value added has increased in all countries across the subregion. In Cambodia it has raised from 1.3 billion USD to 5.7 billion USD, in Laos – from 582 million USD to 2.7 billion USD, in Myanmar – from 2.6 billion USD to 17.7 billion USD, Thailand – from 10.7 billion USD to 44.2 billion USD, Vietnam – from 7.6 billion USD to 36.5 billion USD (Data World Bank, 2021).

At the same time, its contribution to GDP production decreased – in Cambodia from 35.9% to 22.8%, in Laos from 33.6% to 16.1%, in Myanmar from 57.2% to 22.8%, in Vietnam from 24.5% to 14.8%. The only exception was Thailand, where the agricultural sector's contribution to GDP increased rather than decreased – from 8.5% to 8.6% (Table 1). This was due to the more dynamic growth rates of other industries, in particular in manufacturing, tourism, retail and other service, which led to structural transformation.

At the same time, there was an outflow of labor force from agriculture. In 2001–2019 employment in agriculture decreased from 4.1 million to

3.2 million in Cambodia, from 13.9 million to 11.8 million in Myanmar, from 17.1 million to 12.1 million in Thailand, from 27.3 million to 21,3 million in Vietnam. Only in Laos there is a tendency to increase employment in agriculture in absolute indicators – from 1.9 million to 2.3 million (Data World Bank, 2021).

Despite the outflow of labor, a high proportion of workforce is still working in agriculture, even it has been decreasing in all countries without exceptions. The share of agriculture workers in total labor force declined from 73.4% to 34,5% in Cambodia, from 61.1% to 48,8% in Myanmar, from 81.8% to 61.4% in Laos, from 48.7% to 31.4% in Thailand, from 65.2% to 37.2% in Vietnam (Data World Bank, 2021).

Table 1. Contribution of the agricultural sector to the economies of GMS countries

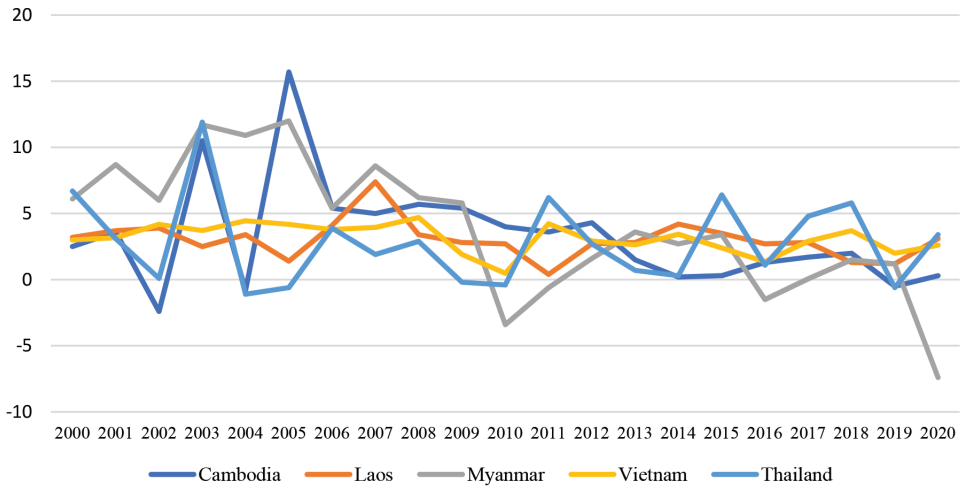
	Share of agriculture in GDP (%)		Share of agriculture in employment (%)	
	2000	2020	2000	2019
Cambodia	35.9	22.8	73.4	34.5
Laos	33.6	16.1	81.8	61.4
Myanmar	57.2	22.8	61.1	48.8
Thailand	8.6	8.5	48.7	31.4
Vietnam	24.5	14.8	65.2	37.2

Source: Data World Bank (September 2021).

The growth rate of the agricultural sector was marked by extreme unevenness, as well as strong fluctuations (graph 1). Since 2008–2010 growth has tended to slow. GMS agriculture found itself in the «track» of dependence on previous development and this is because the process of reorganization of the agricultural sector, which began in the late 2000s, has been slow and has not resulted in adequate and proper increase of efficiency in this sector.

The reasons for the slowdown are several, among them: unfavorable structure of the agriculture, extreme depreciation, wear and tear, obsolescence of production facilities and technologies. The growth of the agricultural sector was primarily based on labor-intensive and resource-intensive technologies, with little regard for labor efficiency.

Graph 1. Annual growth of agriculture (%)



Source: Data World Bank (September 2021).

Restructuring rice

Traditionally, in all GMS countries rice has been and remains the important agricultural crop in Cambodia, occupying 54% of GMS crop land and being the staple food of the population. Its share in the structure of cereal production varies from 77% in Laos to 92% in Cambodia (FAOSTAT, 2021).

Rice possesses vital importance to household food security and livelihoods. It's seen as the traditional basis of wealth and well-being. Rice farming is an integral part of life for most rural population. In the past decades, rice has also become a commercial crop of great importance GMS farmers, augmenting but not replacing its role in securing their subsistence.

There has been an increasing trend in the cultivation area of rice in three countries. Most significant expansion of rice land occurred in Cambodia – from 1.9 million ha to 3.0 million ha. In Myanmar and Laos land use under the rice was quite stable and there has been a minor expansion from 6.3 and 0.719 million ha to 6.9 and 0.783 million ha consequently (FAOSTAT, 2021). While in Thailand and Vietnam rice land has declined from 9.8 and 7.6 million ha to 9.7 and 7.4 million ha (Table 2).

At the same time, there was an increase in yield as a result of intensive, land-saving approaches. Average yield across the subregion has improved

from 3.0 to 4.1 ton per ha. However this pattern varies significantly across countries, being more significant in Vietnam and Laos and more moderate in other countries. For example, rice yield in Vietnam has reached 5.8, in Laos – 4.3, in Myanmar – 3.7, in Cambodia – 3.6, in Thailand – 2.9 ton per ha (Table 2) (FAOSTAT, 2021).

Following the increase in land productivity or higher yields, there has been a dynamic increase in production quantity of rice. Across the GMS it has reached 112.36 million tons. It should be noted that GMS occupies a prominent place in the world rice production. It accounts for 44% of world production. However, due to the variability of weather conditions and various natural disasters, fluctuations in production were observed. The most moderate growth of production quantity was in Thailand – from 25.84 to 28.35 million tons in 2000–2019, and most significant growth was in Cambodia, where production has more than doubled – from 4.02 to 10.88 million tons (Table 2) (FAOSTAT, 2021).

Table 2. Dynamics of rice production

	Cultivated area (million ha)		Yield (ton per ha)		Production quantity (million tons)	
	2000	2019	2000	2019	2000	2019
GMS	26.478	27.889	3.0	4.1	85.56	112.36
Cambodia	1.903	3.001	2.1	3.6	4.02	10.88
Laos	0.719	0.783	3.0	4.3	2.20	3.43
Myanmar	6.302	6.921	3.3	3.7	20.90	26.26
Thailand	9.891	9.715	2.6	2.9	25.84	28.35
Vietnam	7.663	7.469	4.2	5.8	32.52	43.44

Source: FAOSTAT (September 2021).

The growth of production quantity made it possible not only to meet the domestic needs of the country, but also to supply products to the world market. All GMS countries are net rice exporters, and their positions in the world market are quite significant. The share of the five GMS countries in global rice exports is 39%, the main contribution of which is made by Vietnam and Thailand.

It is curious to note that the best rice in the world is grown in the GMS. For almost 10 years, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam are got to be right up the top and have been sharing Best Rice awards, consistently entering the top three producers of the best rice. Their rice has become a brand, has

evolved into an intangible asset that offers rich opportunities for additional income as well as positive spillover effects in related source-product areas. For example, in Cambodia the reputation of the best, most delicious and fragrant rice in the world has also had a positive impact on the development of gastronomic tourism and restaurant business. A chain of restaurants “Malis” and “Topaz” was opened in the country, aimed not only at the domestic consumer, but also at tourists. These establishments were included in the list of the best restaurants in the country (Jackson, 2014).

With the achievement of self-sufficiency in rice, despite its strong position, the restructuring of agriculture and diversification have begun. Agricultural sectors of some countries, such as Vietnam and Thailand, are more diversified than the rest of the subregion. They are among the leading exporters of several agricultural products, not only rice. While other countries have just started the diversification path. Some households combine cultivated crops, actively experiment with new technologies, and use high-yielding varieties with a short vegetation period. Many farmers have switched from growing rice to producing cash crops, such as fruits, vegetables, rubber, and pulpwood.

Interestingly, all major cash crops had a relatively high yield growth. This indicates that crops other than rice shared the technological benefits. As well cash crops are more profitable. According to the World Bank research, the income from rice production from 1 ha of irrigated land is much lower than the income from vegetables, amounting 654 and 4862 USD / ha respectively (World Bank, 2016).

Rice cannot be the future of a country's food security. Cash crops, such as coffee, cashew and fruit, can provide greater stability and higher incomes, enabling smallholders to lift themselves out of poverty and gain access to more nutritious food (Turner, 2019).

Farmers have begun to focus more and more on the demand in neighbouring and world markets. They have launched to produce products with comparative advantages, participating in the regional division of labour. In Cambodia, for example, in mid-2000s farmers have started to cultivate cassava. Its production has increased 41-fold, from 0.33 million tons to 13.7 million tons. It is mostly exported to GMS partner countries. Thailand is the main consumer of Cambodian cassava, accounting for 60% of its exports. China ranks second and accounts 38% of Cambodian cassava export (FAOSTAT, 2021).

The construction of vertically integrated enterprises and value chains within the framework of the GMS is also taking place. As studies show,

the efficiency of agricultural production increases significantly due to new organizational and economic forms of production, including vertically integrated enterprises and associations, capable, with the assistance of the state, to implement a coordinated innovation policy, long-term investments, technical re-equipment and infrastructure development on their territory.

So, diversification contributes to increasing profits, efficiency of agricultural production, improving food security and stability, and therefore improving the living standards of the rural population.

2. The main features of the technological method of agricultural production

Many areas of the subregion are characterized by high demographic pressure on land and, as a result, small size farms become the main production unit. The need to save land determined the parameters of economic growth in the agricultural sector. Land-saving technology, as the basis for technological transformation of agriculture, has contributed to the substitution of the land resource by the labor force resource, as well as material resources of industrial origin by repeatedly introducing into the production cycle the factor of land fertility and wasps of new methods of cultivation, using high-yielding varieties, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, allowing to increase yields. Thus, the need to save land resources caused the intensification of agricultural production, which is necessary to increase the yield of the product.

The productivity of the land, first of all, is provided by a significant level of consumption of chemical fertilizers, which tends to increase. Use of fertilizers has more than doubled in some countries and achieved high rates in others. In Vietnam, for example, the rate of use of fertilizers reached 252 kg / ha, which is significantly higher compared to other major agricultural producers. Vietnam significantly exceeds the level of fertilizer consumption compared to its neighbors in the region. In Thailand, which is the second largest exporter of rice, it was 117 kg / ha, while in Cambodia, the eighth largest exporter of rice, it was only 33 kg / ha (FAOSTAT, 2021). But the dynamics in the region shows growth. Likewise, herbicides are widely used, and their use is also growing.

The GMS countries did not ignore the achievements of the Green Revolution. High-yielding varieties and hybrids of the main agricultural

crop, rice, were also widely introduced. The most common varieties are (IR50404, VND95-20, OM576, VD20) with a short growing season, which are actively used in the rice bowls and allow up to 2–3 harvests per year (Dao The Ann & Thai Van Tinh, 2020).

Irrigation made a significant contribution to development, which also strengthened the land productivity. The share of irrigated land has significantly increased, but the main contributor to this process in the region was Vietnam. The share of irrigated land in Vietnam reached 69%, the highest rate. Cambodia has also made tremendous progress (Cammarota, 2019). Cambodia's irrigation systems have been accessible by about 62% of total farmland throughout the country (Khmer Times, 2020). In Laos it was estimated that the irrigation area covered around 31% of arable land (Sengsourivong, Ichihashi, 2019, p. 4).

So, the GMS countries have entered the biological and chemical stage of agricultural intensification, in which the main effect is manifested in an increase in land productivity (for example, there is an intensive increase in productivity due to the use of new technologies of irrigated agriculture, the use of mineral fertilizers and the use of high-yielding seeds).

Agricultural production has steadily increased in all countries of the GMS. And the main reason was the yields growth. Although the yield picture is very diverse by crop, direct comparisons are difficult to make given the differences in growing conditions, resource use patterns, seed varieties, but we can see the clear upward trend (Table 2).

3. Challenges in GMS agricultural sector

Despite significant successes in increasing production volumes, the most urgent economic task and the main indicator of success – a radical increase in labor efficiency in the agricultural sector – has not been solved. In 2019 in Vietnam, it was 1251 USD, in Cambodia – 1494 USD, Myanmar – 1697 USD, and in Thailand – 3288 USD per worker (Data World Bank, 2021). Labor productivity in agriculture, viewed from a macroeconomic perspective, is in fact increasingly lagging the changing average national productivity.

So, the problems in agriculture can be pointed out. The first is a dominance of rice, monoculture structure. Due to the lack of statistical data, it seems impossible to provide accurate estimates of labor efficiency in various sectors of the agricultural sector, but it can be assumed that there is a noticeable gap

between them. Rice cultivation is characterized by low labor productivity, its rate is noticeably lower than the average for the agricultural sector. At the same time, given the predominance of rice in the structure of agricultural land and the number of employees, the conclusion suggests itself that rice growing makes a negative contribution to increasing labor efficiency.

Moreover, the increase in rice production reduces the marginal use of resources to produce other crops. Most of the irrigated land is used for rice cultivation, which complicates the production of other more productive and highly profitable crops.

Second is high dependence on weather conditions. Due to water scarcity during the dry season, agricultural productivity is low in Cambodia and northeastern Thailand and moderate in Laos and the central highlands of Vietnam. In the most fertile area, the Mekong Delta, farmers can get up to three harvests a year. The introduction of modern water-saving technologies allows more efficient use of water, which is a limiting factor in plant growth in the dry season.

Third, the size and fragmentation of agricultural plots have had a negative impact. Small agricultural land often consists of three, four or many other tiny plots, sometimes separated by considerable distances, which affects the efficiency of labor. The degree of fragmentation differs by GMS countries and is higher in Vietnam, in particular in the Red River Delta and northern mountainous regions than elsewhere. Fragmentation is more pronounced for land with permanent crops than land used for permanent crops, forestry or aquaculture.

The small form of organization of production prevents the use of new technologies and methods of production, including more environmentally friendly ones. Land productivity comes to the fore and is achieved through the use of input resources. As a result, agriculture is placing significant and growing pressure on natural resources.

The fourth problem is overuse of natural resources. Rising use of land, water and chemical fertilizers has accelerated deforestation, biodiversity loss, land degradation, water pollution and increased greenhouse gas emissions. The consequences of active deforestation are becoming more and more evident, including the loss of soil cover, erosion, landslides.

Extremely negative consequences also arise from the excessive use of chemicals, such as fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides in crop production, and antibiotic therapy in livestock and aquaculture production. Farmers are risk averse and focus on maximizing yield rather than increasing efficiency and lowering costs for higher financial returns.

In the agricultural sector, the trend of the «costly» economy is growing, which leads to high production costs. At the same time, GMS specialization in inexpensive raw agricultural production of low or medium quality determines the low cost. Almost all GMS countries with only exception of Thailand exports unprocessed agricultural production. This results in excessively large losses of gross product and negative economies of scale.

The agricultural sector of GMS countries also has weak ties with industry, is insufficiently vertically integrated into the country's economic system, which complements each other for development. It remains a production base of poor quality agricultural raw materials with low competitiveness. Most of GMS's agricultural products are exported raw, unprocessed, accounting for example in Vietnam for over 80% of export turnover. The competitiveness of agricultural products remains low due to low variety, low quality, lack of brands on the market, identification labels, and traceability of goods.

Along with the economic indicators that revealed kind of developmental bottleneck and the “dead end” of economic progress in the agricultural sector of GMS countries, serious threats were manifested by the aggravated environmental problems and climatic changes caused to a certain extent by the intensive development model.

It can be said that at present the model of GMS countries is functioning at the limit of its capabilities, since the degradation of natural resources begins to have a noticeable effect on the net profit of farms.

The image of the GMS village has changed significantly over the past decades. At the same time, the main objectives of improving the well-being and standard of living of the rural population have been implemented unevenly and at a slower pace than in urban areas. For example, in Vietnam recent surveys show that the incomes and living standards of the majority of farmers, although increasing, are still low. At the same time, living costs are rising, so that the actual saving capacity of rural households remains very low. 40% of rural households have no savings. The rate of rural poverty is 6.4 times higher than urban poverty. Despite its significant decline, a sizeable proportion of the rural population remains very vulnerable to poverty, as a large proportion of the population is concentrated at the bottom of the income distribution scale.

The situation is similar in other countries. In Cambodia, for example, three quarters of the population is still classified as nearly poor, just above the poverty line. Thus, the poverty rate is very sensitive to where the poverty line is drawn. A drop in the daily income of farmers by only

0.30 USD will cause an increase in poverty, because of which at least about 3 million people will be below the poverty line (World Bank, 2017).

With this financial capacity, it is very difficult for households to not only invest in expanding production, improve their skills or cope with weather disasters and epidemics, but also maintain food stability. Thus, the slow improvement of the living conditions of the rural population and rural poverty severely hamper the development of the agricultural sector.

4. Conclusions

The agricultural sector in GMS countries has demonstrated a number of achievements. Agricultural practices, technologies and mechanization of production have been introduced in the agricultural sector, significantly increasing land productivity and, as a result, yields and production quantity. Its transformation and growth have helped to lift millions of people out of poverty, improve the living standards of the population, ensure food security and ensure stable and large supplies to the world market.

However, they have revealed a number of difficulties along with their enormous results. Having achieved the growth of yields, production and exports, the GMS countries has not achieved a corresponding increase in efficiency and product quality. Substantial transformation of the productivity potential of the land used has failed to liberate economies of scale from the gin bottle. The quantitative increase in agricultural production and land productivity has been accompanied by negative consequences for the natural resource base of the agricultural sector, compounding the problems of preserving land potential and maintaining ecological balance, threatening the possibility of sustainable growth in the agricultural sector. Thus, “in order to grow, agriculture must learn to conserve.” So, despite significant progress a number of problems persist and are increasing in agriculture, making rethink of agriculture.

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Historical and Contemporary Challenges for Japanese Politics, Society, and Security

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Overcoming Animositities: History Issues and Japan's Cooperation with Southeast Asia

Abstract

Although anti-Japanese sentiments in Southeast Asia initially remained strong after the Second World War, since the 1970s, Tokyo has managed to establish mutually beneficial cooperation with many Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Cordial relations between Japan and Southeast Asian states contrasted with periodic reemergence of history issues between Japan and China or South Korea. This article examines the causes of this difference. It analyzes the international and domestic factors behind rapprochement between Japan and such states as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, or Vietnam. It is argued that reconciliation with ASEAN countries was a part of Japan's foreign policy strategy. Initially, it was aimed at promoting mutually beneficial trade through the Fukuda Doctrine, but over time, it started serving as one of the ways of containing and counterbalancing China's rise in the region.

Keywords: *Japan, Southeast Asia, international relations, Fukuda Doctrine*

1. Introduction

Since the late 1970s, relations between Japan and Southeast Asian countries have generally remained friendly and cordial. On the other hand, in the immediate postwar period, they were characterized by distrust and enmity stemming from the memory about the Japanese invasion during the Second World War. This article examines how both sides managed to overcome history issues and establish mutually beneficial cooperation.

History problems between Japan and Southeast Asia have been less frequently researched than similar problems between Tokyo and Seoul or Beijing. Peng Er Lam (2015, p. 44) argues that reconciliation between Japan and Southeast Asia ended in a success due to four factors: 1) Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia lasted shorter than the invasion of China and South Korea; 2) Southeast Asian states displayed pragmatic approach in putting economic and security problems before sentiments; 3) authoritarian regimes in the region ignored anti-Japanese feelings of ordinary citizens; and 4) Japan succeeded in addressing the issue of difficult past relatively early through the Fukuda Doctrine. Other authors pointed to religious (Chamberlain, 2019, p. 6) or geopolitical factors (Mikalsen Grønning, 2018) that facilitated improvement of relations between Southeast Asian countries and Japan.

The impact of history problems on foreign policy may be interpreted through the lenses of three major theories of international relations: neorealism, neoliberalism, and constructivism. Neorealists draw attention to objectively definable national interests that determine decisions of statespersons (Waltz, 2010). In this light, rather than being influenced by the difficult past between both countries, relations between Japan and Southeast Asia depend on such strategic factors as consideration paid by ASEAN states to Tokyo as a counterweight against Beijing's growing regional ambitions. History problems can, at most, constitute an instrument of applying political pressure on Japan whenever such policy is beneficial to the concerned governments. Neoliberal scholars, in turn, put emphasis on the significance of growing economic interdependence as a factor that assuages international disputes (Nye, 1976, pp. 130–161). According to them, mutually beneficial trade exchange and foreign direct investments between Japan and Southeast Asia should mitigate the impact of history issues on bilateral contacts. By contrast, constructivists tend to consider intersubjective identity of nations, based on such factors as history of mutual interaction, as a crucial determinant of foreign policy (Wendt, 1999). According to this theory, lack of reconciliation between Tokyo and ASEAN states would constitute a severe obstacle in bilateral relations, though mutual perception may change over time due to friendly cooperation.

This article draws on the discoveries of all the three abovementioned theories to analyze the process of reconciliation between Japan and Southeast Asian countries after the Second World War. In line with constructivism, it stresses importance of emotional factors that hindered

cooperation between Tokyo and the region in the immediate postwar period. Based on neorealism and neoliberalism, however, it examines the pragmatic rapprochement between Japan and Southeast Asian states since the 1970s. Significance of Japan both as a counterweight against growing influence of Beijing and as a leading investor contributing to economic growth in the region facilitated overcoming mutual animosities.

The article is composed of three sections. The first one briefly describes the history problems between Japan and Southeast Asia. The following sections, in turn, analyze how Tokyo managed to reconcile with the countries in the region – at first through symbolic gestures and development assistance, and later by becoming a strategic geopolitical partner against external threats.

2. History Issues Between Japan and Southeast Asia

Immediately after the Second World War, anti-Japanese sentiments in Southeast Asia were as strong as in China or on the Korean Peninsula. The atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army were remembered not only by the societies, but also by the governments, which severely complicated Tokyo's diplomacy towards the region.

Due to rich deposits of energy resources, European and American colonies in Southeast Asia, particularly Dutch East Indies, became an important target of Japanese territorial expansionism during the War on Pacific that began in late 1941. Until Tokyo's surrender in 1945, the Japanese occupation of the region was accompanied by numerous atrocities and crimes against local population. Within the so-called Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, Japan implanted puppet regimes in most of Southeast Asian countries. While Japanese propaganda maintained that the aim of the empire was to liberate Asian nations from Western colonialism, Japanese occupation abounded in greater brutality than the European or American rule. In Indonesia, Japanese troops enslaved millions and murdered at least half a million of forced laborers, called *romusha*. Moreover, they killed hundreds of *romusha* in a medical experiment to develop tetanus vaccination (Baird & Marzuni, 2015). In Singapore, Japanese soldiers executed Chinese population in *Sook Ching* massacre and bayoneted medical staff and patients of hospitals. In the Philippines, they organized the Bataan death march, killing thousands of Filipino and hundreds of American prisoners. In current

Myanmar, numerous Asian laborers and POWs who built Thailand–Burma Railway died of ill treatment and overwork. In the occupied countries, the Japanese military police Kenpeitai tortured members of local population suspected of espionage or sabotage. Other examples of war atrocities in Southeast Asia included massacres, murders, torture and beatings, forced marches, forced prostitution, decapitation of prisoners, neglect of the detainees' welfare and health, rapes, pillages, and even cannibalism (Wilson et al., 2017, pp. 3–17).

Under the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, Tokyo was to negotiate payment of war reparations bilaterally with the concerned governments. After Southeast Asian states gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s, they established diplomatic relations with Japan. As a result of bilateral talks, Tokyo provided as war compensations and development grants 200 million USD to Burma in 1954 (with additional 140 million USD in 1963), 550 million USD to the Philippines in 1956, 223 million USD to Indonesia in 1958, as well as 39 million USD to South Vietnam in 1959 (Kuriyama, 2016, p. 36). These funds contributed to the rebuilding of the concerned countries from war destruction.

Despite receiving war reparations, Southeast Asian nations felt strong resentment against Japan. In 1962, as many as 120.000 Singaporeans participated in a demonstration, demanding erection of a memorial after discovery of mass graves of the victims of *Sook Ching* massacre (Lam, 2015, p. 53). The memory of war atrocities was often accompanied by the fear of Japanese economic domination. As exemplified by Japanese products boycott movement in Thailand in 1972, history issues hindered Japan's trade with the region (Sudo, 1988, p. 511). Anti-Japanese feelings made bilateral diplomatic exchange an extremely delicate matter. For instance, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei's visit to the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia in January 1974 was accompanied by violent riots and demonstrations in major cities. In particular, in Jakarta violent mobs attacked Japanese companies, burned vehicles made in Japan, and demanded dismissal of pro-Japanese advisors to President Suharto who were accused of giving excessive economic privileges to Japan (Anwar, 1990, p. 238). At that time, the fear of potential revival of Japanese militarism made Southeast Asian governments reject the possibility of Japan's participation in political affairs of the ASEAN, established in 1967 (Singh, 2002, p. 282).

The scale of war atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army during the Second World War made it difficult for Southeast Asian

nations to reconcile with postwar Japan. While war reparations provided by Tokyo contributed to the economic development of the region, the fear of revival of Japanese militarism and economic domination of Japan was omnipresent. As a result, in order to develop cooperation with ASEAN states, Japan first had to heal the wounds it had caused.

3. Overcoming History Problems Through “Heart-to-Heart” Relationship

While it is not easy to change the perception of one nation by another, constructivist theory claims that such development is possible. The expression of regret for the difficult past, coupled with gestures of goodwill by Japan, initiated the process of a shift in its perceived role from the one of an enemy to the one of a partner, and potentially even a friend. What is important, the reconciliation policy was pursued not only by Japan, but also by the governments of Southeast Asian states.

The geopolitical situation in the 1970s favored Tokyo's growing interest in Southeast Asia. The withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam created a political vacuum in the region, which Japan, as a new economic power, intended to fill. When Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo attended the first ASEAN–Japan meeting in Kuala Lumpur in August 1977, he delivered a historic speech that became the foundation for the so-called “Fukuda Doctrine.” It was announced that Japan would never again become a military power, that it wanted to establish “heart-to-heart” relationship with Southeast Asian nations, and that both sides should treat each other as equal partners in contributing to prosperity and stability in the region (Haddad, 1980, p. 10). The Fukuda Doctrine was continued by successive Japanese prime ministers, which contributed to overcoming mutual animosities.

The Filipino government started making efforts for reconciliation with Japan as one of the first governments in Southeast Asia. In the 1970s, Tokyo was allowed to fund construction of numerous memorials commemorating Japanese soldiers who had died in that country, such as the Caliraya Memorial in Batangas Province. In 1977, President Ferdinand Marcos invited Japanese veterans, including convicted war criminals, to visit the Philippines. As stressed by Sharon Chamberlain (2019, pp. 3–6), the Filipino political elites used the narrative of Christian forgiveness to assuage anti-Japanese sentiments.

In the 1990s, Japan made symbolic gestures that served reconciliation with Southeast Asian countries. Murayama Tomiichi, the first socialist prime minister of Japan since the 1940s, was particularly eager to properly apologize to all countries that had suffered from Japanese territorial expansionism. When he visited Southeast Asian countries in August 1994, he stressed that in its diplomacy towards Asia Japan should always keep in mind that its acts of aggression and colonial rule in the past had inflicted “unbearable suffering and sorrow” to many people. What is important, he laid a wreath in the Memorial to the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore. He made this gesture despite strong protests from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs that emphasized there were doubts about the number of victims of the massacre instituted by the Imperial Army. Murayama, however, stressed that such details did not matter as there were no doubts that the massacre had taken place (Murayama & Sataka, 2009, pp. 45–47). In August 1995, Prime Minister Murayama issued a revolutionary statement, in which he expressed his “feelings of deep remorse” and “heartfelt apology” to those Asian countries which had experienced “colonial rule and aggression” from Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1995).

Reconciliation between Japan and Southeast Asian nations was symbolized by the fact that governments and NGOs from the region cooperated with the Asian Women’s Fund – an institution established in 1995 to compensate the so-called “comfort women,” that is, sexual slaves abused by the Imperial Army during the Second World War. For instance, the Philippines, despite initial skepticism, decided to fully respect the will of victims and agreed to participate in the project. The most controversial was cooperation with the Suharto regime in Indonesia. Jakarta insisted on receiving lump-sum grants from the fund to construct 50 welfare facilities for the elderly instead of paying atonement money to individuals. Unfortunately, the constructed facilities only to a small extent served former “comfort women.” Still, Southeast Asian countries were much more cooperative than South Korea and China, which rejected the whole idea of accepting apology letters and indemnities from Tokyo (Ōnuma, 2007, pp. 33–75).

Reconciliation with Japan was reflected in official documents issued by the governments of ASEAN states. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in August 2015, Manila stated:

Since the middle of the 20th century, the Philippines' relationship with Japan, in particular, has been characterized by trust and unfailing support in so many fields, as Japan has acted with compassion and in accordance with international law, and has more actively and more positively engaged the region and the world. This 70-year history demonstrates to the world that through their relentless efforts, peoples of two countries can attain a remarkable achievement in overcoming issues of the past and establishing strong friendship (Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, 2015).

Less cordial, but equally future-oriented, was statement by Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson:

In the 1960s, there was a period when we discovered the mass graves where the civilians had been massacred in Singapore. (...) There was a big outcry, I think the Japanese government made an apology, donated some money and we built a memorial. So between Singapore and Japan, the chapter is closed. Officially, we have moved on. And we have very good relations between Singapore and Japan since then – investments, trade, cooperation in many areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, 2013).

The other Southeast Asian governments did not even feel the necessity to issue official statements on the anniversary.

What is significant, while anti-Japanese sentiments were usually transmitted to the younger generations in China or South Korea, the youth in Southeast Asian countries perceived Japan as the source of rich popular culture rather than a former invader. This difference resulted mainly from the way the Second World War was narrated at schools. According to an analysis of the contents of history textbooks in ASEAN countries conducted by Peng Er Lam (2015, pp. 48–58), Japanese war atrocities tended to be either downplayed or depicted as less destructive than the colonial occupation by Western powers (Lam, 2015, pp. 48–58).

Opinion polls indicate that Japan's "heart-to-heart" diplomacy towards Southeast Asia contributed to amelioration of Japan's perception in the region. According to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2015, 84% of respondents had a favorable view of Japan in Malaysia, 82% in Vietnam, 81% in the Philippines, and 71% in Indonesia, compared to only 12% in China and 25% in South Korea. Interestingly, despite the shared experience of Japanese occupation, Malaysians, Filipinos, and Indonesians perceived South Korea less positively than Japan (Vietnamese perceived both countries equally positively) (Stokes, 2015). Another poll, conducted by TNS Singapore in 2008, showed that majority of Southeast Asians thought about history problems that "Japan did some bad things, but they are not an issue now" – 78% in Vietnam, 70% in Indonesia, 69% in Singapore, 68% in Thailand, 65% in Malaysia, and 59% in the Philippines

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008). This pro-Japanese attitude indicates that while Southeast Asian nations never forgot war atrocities, they did not intend to excessively dwell upon the difficult past.

Both Tokyo and Southeast Asian governments put a lot of effort into overcoming the mutual animosities. Japanese politicians issued historic declarations, such as the Fukuda Doctrine and the Murayama Statement, as well as made symbolic gestures, e.g. laying wreath at the Memorial to the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore by Prime Minister Murayama, which contributed to reconciliation. Most importantly, words and gestures were accompanied by compensations and atonement money to the victims of Japanese invasion. However, acceptance of these apologetic acts probably would have been more problematic without a future-oriented, pragmatic stance of Southeast Asian leaders.

4. Overcoming History Problems Through Joint National Interests

The reconciliation between Japan and Southeast Asian nations was fuelled by joint national interests. Initially, they were related mainly to mutual benefits from bilateral trade exchange and foreign direct investments. Over time, however, Southeast Asian governments started perceiving Japan as a potential counterweight against China's growing ambitions in the region.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, cooperation between Tokyo and Southeast Asia focused mainly on the economic dimension. ASEAN took advantage of Japan's economic assistance to strengthen regional cooperation, while Japan perceived relations with Southeast Asia as an instrument for developing multilateral economic cooperation. In November 1977, the Fukuda cabinet promised to provide 1 billion USD to ASEAN industrial projects, agreed to reduce barriers on trade, and offered to establish bilateral cultural exchange programs (Sudo, 1988, pp. 514–522). In 1990, one-third of Japan's whole Official Development Assistance (ODA) was devoted to finance various projects in ASEAN states, which amounted to 2.299 billion USD. Japan's position in the region was symbolized by the fact that in 1996 Japan was the largest ODA donor to all of the ASEAN countries except for Malaysia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1998).

Some of Southeast Asian governments started openly admitting that Japan's economic development became a model for them to emulate.

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew made a pragmatic choice of overcoming the painful memory of war in order to establish mutually beneficial economic cooperation with Japan as early as 1966, when he accepted 25 million USD in war reparations from Tokyo. Japanese investments in the city-state propelled reconciliation between both countries. Yaohan, a Japanese supermarket chain opened in Plaza Singapura in 1976, became an icon among the Singaporeans. In the 1980s, Singapore introduced a system of community-oriented neighborhood police posts modeled after the Japanese *kōban*. At the same time, Japanese corporate practices were emulated by local companies, and Prime Minister Lee made Harvard Professor Ezra Vogel's bestseller *Japan as Number One* – a book that lauded Japanese business model – a recommended reading for the Singapore Cabinet (Lam, 2017, pp. 71–72).

Similar development was observed in Malaysia. In 1982, Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad launched "Look East" policy, which was fuelled by his anti-Western nationalism. Japan, along with South Korea, became a model of economic development for Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur actively encouraged Malaysians to emulate Japanese work ethics, management style and values, and even established a special scholarship program for those who wanted to study in Japan. Most importantly, Malaysia offered tax incentives to Japanese corporations to persuade them to establish joint-ventures with Malaysian counterparts. This policy resulted in a considerable increase in Japanese investments in the country. At the beginning of the 1990s, Mahathir Muhammad together with Lee Kuan Yew proposed a concept of East Asian Economic Caucus composed exclusively of the states representing East Asian civilization. His aim was to make Japan leader of this initiative, but Tokyo distanced itself from the plan so as not to damage its good relations with the US (Furuoka, 2007, pp. 505–519).

Gradually, security concerns became as important incentive for strengthening ties between Japan and Southeast Asia as economic cooperation. After the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, China started emerging as the strongest political, economic, and military power in the region. Concerns related to China's sudden rise were shared by Japan with many Southeast Asian governments. Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei were involved in a territorial dispute with Beijing over the Spratly Island in the South China Sea, reminiscent of Japan's dispute with the People's Republic of China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. In the 1990s, Beijing started demonstrating an

assertive posture in both seas through frequent incursions into territorial waters of the neighbouring countries. Tensions peaked at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. A collision between a Chinese fishing boat and a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in the East China Sea in September 2010, followed by nationalization of three islands of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Archipelago by the Noda cabinet in September 2012, caused a series of diplomatic crises between Beijing and Tokyo (Żakowski, 2015, pp. 134–140, 185–192). In parallel, dangerous incidents took place in the South China Sea. An aggressive approach of two Chinese patrol ships to a Philippine survey vessel at the Reed Bank in March 2011 as well as incursion of Chinese fishing boats to the waters near the Scarborough Shoal in April 2012 prompted Manila to hasten modernization of its army (Cruz de Castro, 2017, pp. 37–38). For that reason, it is not surprising that many ASEAN states perceived Tokyo as a counterweight against Beijing's growing ambitions.

In particular, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō strengthened security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries under his long term in office from 2012 to 2020. During his visit to ASEAN in January 2013, he announced “Five Principles to Build the Future,” which included protection of freedom of speech, ensuring rule of the law in the seas, “pursuing free, open, interconnected economies,” as well as promotion of cultural and youth exchange with the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2013). Protection of open seas was a camouflaged criticism of China's rising maritime ambitions. In December 2013, Japan published the National Security Strategy and announced the concept of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” (*sekkyokuteki heiwashugi*), aimed at strengthening Japan's deterrence capabilities, enhancing alliance with the US, as well as protecting regional and global stability based on universal values. In April 2014, the Abe administration relaxed the ban on arms export so as to allow transfer of military technology, provided it “contributes to active promotion of peace contribution and international cooperation” or “the transfer contributes to Japan's security” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2014). In February 2015, in turn, Tokyo revised the rules of providing the ODA to allow financing projects involving armed forces upon the condition that they are related to “development cooperation for non-military purposes such as public welfare or disaster-relief purposes” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015, pp. 10–11). Most importantly, in July 2014, the Japanese government revised interpretation of the Constitution to legalize collective self-defense, which was confirmed by

the security bills passed in the Diet in the summer of 2015. The new law enabled Japan to provide military assistance to “a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan” in case it was attacked by a hostile army (Zakowski, 2021a, pp. 206–229). These revolutionary changes paved the way towards Japan's greater involvement in maintaining regional balance of power.

Japan's new security strategy enabled strengthening cooperation with those Southeast Asian countries that could serve Tokyo to contain the rising China. In particular, Japan developed strategic partnerships with the Philippines and Vietnam based on regular security dialogue meetings, high-level political interaction, diplomatic support against Chinese maritime claims, financial assistance, and military cooperation (Mikalsen Grønning, 2018, pp. 535–540). During his visit to the Philippines in July 2013, Prime Minister Abe promised to equip the Philippine Coast Guard with ten patrol vessels. Two years later, the contract on the construction of ships was signed by the Japan Marine United Corporation. Symbolically, in June 2015, Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force P-3C surveillance aircraft took part in joint drills with the Philippine Navy off the coast of Palawan Island near the Spratly Archipelago. In September 2016, Tokyo decided to provide the Philippines with two additional large patrol ships through a yen loan, transfer Maritime Self-Defense Force's TC-90 training aircraft, and assist in training the Philippine Navy pilots. Similar cooperation was launched with Vietnam. In August 2014, Japan finalized negotiations over free provision of six used patrol vessels to this country, and in January 2017, it promised to provide six new patrol ships to the Vietnamese maritime law enforcement entities (Zakowski, 2021b, pp. 193–194).

The China factor also compelled Japan to further promote economic cooperation with Southeast Asia. Rivalry between both powers in the region was particularly visible in the infrastructure sector. Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank by Beijing in 2015 prompted Tokyo to launch the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure initiative in the same year. In August 2016, Prime Minister Abe announced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy aimed at improving connectivity both through developing transportation infrastructure and enhancing maritime law enforcement. While Japan focused on promoting construction of East-West economic corridors, China's goal was to build North-South Pan-Asian Railway Network and integrate it with the Belt and Road Initiative – a new silk route linking Asia and Europe (Zhao, 2019, pp. 558–574).

Both economic and security cooperation fuelled reconciliation between Japan and Southeast Asia. Focused on economic development, ASEAN countries not only downplayed commemoration of war atrocities committed by the Imperial Army to attract Japanese investments, but also perceived Japan as a model to emulate. After the end of the Cold War, Tokyo additionally became a potential counterweight against China's growing position in the region. Joint national interests explain why Southeast Asian elites avoided antagonizing Japan through reference to history problems.

5. Conclusions

The relative success of postwar reconciliation between Japan and Southeast Asian nations stemmed both from the gestures made by Tokyo and from the convergence of the national interests of both sides. Japanese leaders relatively early after the Second World War started perceiving ASEAN states as important partners, which explains their willingness to pay war reparations and express regret for the past invasion. Most of Southeast Asian governments, in turn, treated Japanese occupation as a relatively short interlude in their struggle for independence against colonial powers. In line with constructivist theory, it was thus possible to gradually change the perception of Japan in Southeast Asia from an enemy to a partner and friend. Historic declarations and gestures by Japanese prime ministers, such as announcement of the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977 or laying wreath at the Memorial to the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore by Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi facilitated this process.

Nevertheless, as stressed by neoliberal and neorealist interpretations, reconciliation was largely fuelled by a pragmatic choice. Such countries as Singapore and Malaysia were eager to attract Japanese investments and emulate the Japanese corporate culture. Japan's ODA largely contributed to the economic development of ASEAN states. After the end of Cold War, in turn, security concerns became crucial in understanding Tokyo's cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. In particular, Vietnam and the Philippines treated Japan as the only power in the region that could counterbalance the growing influence of China. Announcement of the "Five Principles to Build the Future" by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō in 2013 showed the strategic convergence between Tokyo and most of ASEAN

states. For these reasons, Southeast Asian governments and nations did not excessively dwell upon the past and managed to establish mutually beneficial cooperation with Japan.

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Game Theory as A Method of Analysis of Visits to Yasukuni Shrine by Japanese Prime Ministers: Case Study Based on Jun'ichirō Koizumi's Visits

Abstract

This paper aims to use game theory to analyze the decision-making process associated with Japanese prime ministers' visits to the Yasukuni shrine. The central thesis of the research is that it is possible to construct a model that enables the analysis of past visits to the shrine and assess the probability of such visits in the future. The presented research is a case study based on Jun'ichirō Koizumi's visits during his term as Prime Minister of Japan. The model used for the analysis is based on the 'chicken dilemma' and is an example of a non-cooperative and repeated game. Relying on the model also allows us to juxtapose foreign pressures with those exerted by domestic interest groups, as preliminary findings suggest that using game theory to analyze visits to Yasukuni provides a better understanding of the rationality underlying the decisions to visit the shrine. Overall, the research presented here is preliminary and should be continued to deepen the analysis and develop a more accurate model.

Keywords: *Yasukuni, politics of memory, nationalism in Japan, game theory*

1. Introduction

In September 2020, three days after officially stepping down as Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzō Abe decided to visit the Yasukuni shrine in central Tokyo. Abe announced on social media that the purpose of his

visit was to personally inform the souls enshrined there of the completion of his mission as a head of the Japanese government (Asahi Shimbun, 2020a). Abe's previous visit in December 2013, then as a prime minister, sparked strong protests in Beijing and Seoul. The United States also expressed disappointment over Abe's visit (Asahi Shimbun, 2013). During his seven years in office, Abe did not decide to revisit Yasukuni and did so only after he had resigned, which proves the still crucial symbolic significance of this shrine for Japan's international relations. Since 1985, when Prime Minister Nakasone's visit sparked protests in China and South Korea, Yasukuni has been one of the most controversial elements of Japan's memory politics.

This paper aims to analyze the decision-making process influencing visits to the Yasukuni shrine by Japanese prime ministers. The main research question is: to what extent can it be justified to use game theory to examine the processes that determine the decisions to visit this shrine? The thesis assumes that it is possible to construct a model based on game theory that would provide a basis for analyzing the rationality behind the decision-making process concerning visits to Yasukuni and assessing the likelihood of such visits in the future.

The paper is divided into two main parts. The first is an introduction to the applicability of game theory to the analysis of political decision-making processes. It also focuses on the creation of a model which would most adequately describe the decision-making process related to visits to Yasukuni. The second is a case study of the application of the model, based on Jun'ichirō Koizumi's visits to the shrine between 2001 and 2006.

2. Game theory and modeling of the decision-making process concerning Japanese prime ministers' visits to Yasukuni shrine

The fundamental issue that needs to be defined is game theory itself. The origins of game theory can be found in strategic games, such as chess, whose aim was to create models simulating real conflict situations. In the 19th century, the development of war games began exclusively for purposes of military training (Pietraś, 1997, pp. 15–16). However, if we are talking about the contemporary origins of game theory, we should first mention the 1944 work by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern: *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour*. Even though it focuses on the

economic aspect of game theory, it is worth noting the definitions of the essential elements of a game which they cite. According to Neumann and Morgenstern, a game consists first and foremost of specific rules which should be respected while playing. It is these rules that determine the nature of the game. Every game consists of moves which should always represent a particular choice between several options. A move is, in fact, a decision between equivalent and compliant possibilities. Finally, the choice of moves based on the same rules is called a strategy that may differ each time the game is played (Neumann & Morgenstern, 1972, pp. 48–49).

Game theory itself is defined as a theory of conflict situations that seeks to develop rules for rational action by each actor involved in the conflict (Weres, 1982, p. 21). Roger Myerson pointed out that game theory focuses on analyzing mathematical models of conflict and cooperation involving intelligent and rational decision-making actors. For Myerson, the critical point is that game theory focuses on situations in which actors make decisions that affect their mutual status. In Myerson's view, game theory is a conflict theory or an interactive theory of decision-making (Myerson, 1997, p. 1).

Whatever the definition, they assume that players have at least partially conflicting interests, that the decisions they make are rational and that the decision-making process itself can be represented by a mathematical model. When applying game theory to the analysis of political decisions, interests will naturally be understood as political interests that are also at least partly conflicting. Based on the level of contradiction of these interests, a vital division of the games themselves is made. The more conflicting the interests are, the more conflictual the game is. The closer the interests, the more likely it is to choose a cooperative game, assuming, of course, that players are rational enough to recognize this community of interests (Weres, 1982, pp. 29–31).

A model is a basis for analysis using game theory. By their very nature, models represent a certain simplification and, therefore, always leave out specific elements they consider less important. Models are not a complete reflection of real situations, but through a certain degree of conventionality, and hence clarity, they facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon which they refer to (Myerson, 1997, p. 2). Therefore, models used in game theory are a kind of abstraction whose main advantage is that they allow us to deepen our understanding of real situations. The main category by which we should judge models is their usefulness, i.e., how accurately they describe the situation we want to analyze. In the case

of game theory, most models are essentially a graphical representation of what can be represented descriptively. However, the use of models is more practical as it allows the decision steps to be shown in an accessible and more readable way (Osborne, 2003, pp. 1–2).

The second key issue that needs to be addressed is rationality. Myerson notes that a player acts rationally when they make decisions based on their goals. This means making decisions that are designed to result in profit maximization. Rationality is therefore measured by the utility. The more rational a decision is, i.e., the higher the profit/payoff can be obtained from it, the more rational it is. However, the utility should be treated as relative, depending, among other things, on the level of uncertainty associated with the dependent and independent variables. Each player may seek to estimate the probability of a given situation and, on that basis, assess which decision from their perspective will be the most rational (Myerson, 1997, pp. 3–4). A key assumption of rationality in game theory is that when faced with a choice between more than two options, assuming that we have full information about them, the player is able to assess not only which of them they prefer the most but is also able to arrange these options in a certain hierarchy (McCarthy & Meirowitz, 2007, pp. 6–7). The relationship between decisions or, in other words, preferences, is visually represented by a payoff matrix. This matrix is a combination of preferences with assigned values that determine which of the possible decisions is considered the most beneficial (Osborne, 2003, pp. 4–5).

The understanding of rationality mentioned above assumes that all players will make decisions based on reliable and comprehensive information. This will allow them to obtain utility maximization, i.e., the highest payoff. John Harsanyi is the author of a thesis on ‘mutually expected rationality’, which assumes that since all players base their decisions on rational calculations and on reliable and exhaustive information to which all of them have access, none of the players should be surprised by the decision of their opponents (Harsanyi, 1977, pp. 11–12). However, when analyzing political conflicts, a more appropriate concept seems to be ‘bounded rationality’, which considers the cognitive limitations of the actor making the decision. This concept assumes that due to insufficient information, or lack of confidence in its reliability, the actor may not be following only the maximum utility when making a decision, but rather the satisfying utility, which is essentially a compromise between the goal they wish to achieve and the uncertainty associated with the potential consequences of our decisions (Simon, 1997, p. 291).

Another theoretical concept that helps to explain rationality behind the decision-making process is the expected utility theory. It stresses that the decision maker, a player in the case of game theory, bases decision on weighted sums by adding the utility values of outcomes by their respective probability. As such, expected utility can differ significantly from utility under certainty (David, Hands & Maki, 1998, p. 171). Expected utility theory is also related to two kinds of risks. Ordinary risk addresses uncertainty arising from randomness, while strategic risk arises from the interaction between players in a game. Risk can affect preferences, and therefore affect the decision-making process (Roth, 1988, pp. 57–58). When under risk, players will calculate their expected utility considering a probability of occurrence of a situation they would most likely prefer to avoid. This ‘risk aversion’ will therefore influence the decision-making process and affect the rationality behind each move in the game (Quiggin, 1993, pp. 7–8).

When creating a model itself, one of the first steps is to define the players. In the situation under analysis, one of the players is relatively easy to define, and for the purposes of this research, it is assumed to be the prime minister of Japan. Obviously, the prime minister does not make decisions alone, but it is prime ministers’ visits to Yasukuni that generate the most international controversy. The second player for the purposes of this research is the government of the People’s Republic of China, hereafter referred to simply as China. This is a simplification as well, as there are numerous factors influencing decision-making in Beijing. However, since the Chinese position regarding Yasukuni has historically been unified, such an assumption seems to be justified.

Once the players are identified, it is necessary to determine whether the situation in question can be analyzed using a non-cooperative or cooperative game model. As already mentioned, the nature of the game is largely determined by the convergence of interests. Therefore, it can be assumed that while the Japanese side may wish to visit the Yasukuni shrine, both for its symbolic significance and for domestic political gain, the Chinese side is strongly opposed to such visits. It will therefore be justified to rely on a non-cooperative game (Mesquita, 2014, pp. 57–58).

Let us now consider what a simple model of conflict around visits to the Yasukuni shrine might look like. Since we are dealing with a non-cooperative two-player game, we will use the so-called ‘chicken dilemma’ as a basis. In its traditional form, it describes a situation in which we have, for example, two cars speeding towards each other from opposite

directions. Each of them can either dodge, saving his life but losing prestige (peace strategy P), or decide to drive ahead, counting on the opponent to turn (war strategy W). In case both drivers choose the war strategy, the game ends in a collision (Pietras, 1997, pp. 57–58). In international relations, this game is mainly used as a basis for analyzing behavior during a military crisis. The game starts when at least one of the players threatens to choose a war strategy, hoping that the opponent will yield and choose a peaceful strategy. Despite its conflicting nature, this game does not exclude some form of cooperation. This is possible when players become aware of the scale of potential losses if each of them chooses a war strategy. While in cooperation, neither side gains anything, but neither loses anything either. If both decide to choose a war strategy, both sides are pure losers. Cooperation is therefore not the expression of common interests but rather the consequence of mutual threats, which both sides perceive as credible. Only the perspective of impending catastrophe forces them to choose a peaceful strategy (Snyder, 1971, pp. 82–87).

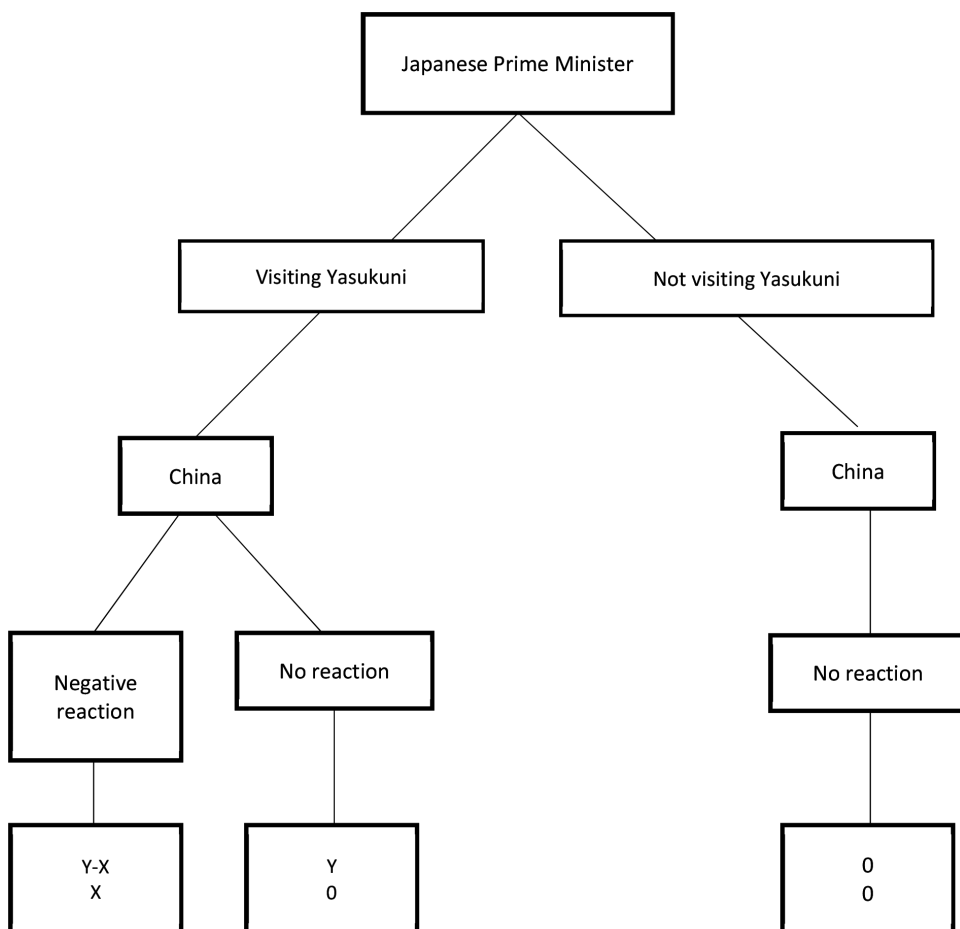
One of the key concepts involved in the 'chicken dilemma' is the issue of probability. Each player must assess how likely it is for their opponent to choose a war strategy. They must also assess their chances of survival, or at least potential losses, in a situation in which the other player decides to confront them in response to their war strategy (Snyder, 1971, p. 87). The concept of 'critical risk' introduced by Daniel Ellsberg allows us to better understand how assessing the probability of which strategy the opponent will choose influences the choice of our strategy. It describes a situation in which a retaliation from the other side is acceptable when choosing a war strategy (Ellsberg, 1961, pp. 475–476).

However, games like the 'chicken dilemma' assumes that both players make a decision simultaneously. Such a model called the 'normal' or 'strategic form' not only says nothing about the sequence of events but also assumes that both strategies are equally likely (Gibbons, 1992, p. 2–4). In the situation under analysis, China's reaction is, in fact, only a response to Japan's actions, or at least to an announcement of those actions. Therefore, it is necessary to rely on an extensive form that assumes the sequence of player movements. The extensive form of a game assumes that players are faced with a finite number of potential choices, and once one choice is made, further choices are revealed until an endpoint is reached, to which a certain utility is assigned on the payoff matrix (Harsanyi, 1977, pp. 89–90). Such a model usually is referred to as a tree, consisting of branches that connect nodes. The last nodes are the payoff values. The

branches represent the potential choices of the players, to which we can assign specific probabilities if we can estimate them (Myerson, 1997, pp. 39–40). What is particularly important in the case of political decision analysis is that a single tree represents a scenario in which one predefined player makes the first move. To analyze a decision from both perspectives, it is necessary to prepare at least two free models.

If we analyze the decision-making process regarding visits to Yasukuni from the Japanese perspective, the extensive model could look as follows:

Figure 1. A model of the decision-making process



Source: own elaboration.

This model assumes that Japan makes the first move and starts the game. Y represents potential political gains on the Japanese side by visiting the shrine. Negative consequences by the Chinese side are represented by X . If the Japanese side decides not to visit the shrine, i.e., chooses a peace strategy, the Chinese side also chooses a peace strategy, so it can be argued that a conflicting situation is not occurring, and therefore the payoff equals 0 for both parties. If the Japanese prime minister decides to visit the shrine, but there are no repercussions from the Chinese side, the payoff represents political gains without any negative consequences ($Y; 0$). If negative consequences occur, the Japanese side's payoff considers both political gains, and international repercussions, so it is represented as $Y - X$. Therefore, if $Y - X > 0$, the most rational choice from the Japanese perspective is to visit the Yasukuni shrine. In a situation where $Y - X < 0$, it is more rational to forgo the visit. If the result is $Y - X = 0$, then the expected utility of internal political factors becomes crucial for determining rationality.

At this stage of the analysis, a problem becomes apparent. How can we estimate the probability of the Chinese side choosing a war strategy? The concept of repeated games comes to our aid. A potentially infinite number of rounds characterizes repetitive games. Consequently, each player's moves can have potential relevance for future moves and provide valuable information about the player's behavior in certain situations. Since the relationship between players does not end after one game, they can adjust their strategies based on the games already completed (Myerson, 1997, pp. 308–313). For this research, it is assumed that the analyzed situation is an example of an infinite repeated game.

Repetitive games also introduce the concept of 'reputation'. Game theory understands 'reputation' in two ways. The first assumes that a player who always chooses the most rational strategy never changes it, and thus maintains his 'reputation'. In this understanding, any deviation from this strategy would mean a loss of 'reputation'. From the perspective of the presented research, the second understanding of this concept is more interesting. It assumes that players do not have comprehensive information about their opponents, do not know their payouts and do not know the factors determining their decisions. What they can do is based on past rounds, they can assign a certain probability for repeating a particular strategy (Mailath & Samuelson, 2006, pp. 459–460). 'Reputation' can also affect the assessment of the credibility of threats. When a player assesses his 'critical risk' as higher than the credibility of the other player's threats,

he will be inclined to choose a war strategy, regardless of what the payoff matrix would seemingly suggest (Snyder, 1971, pp. 88–89).

In summary, the research so far suggests that an extended form of the ‘chicken dilemma’ can be a useful model, although naturally highly simplified, to describe the decision-making process associated with the Japanese prime ministers’ visit to the Yasukuni shrine. The game is repeated and infinite, and the probability of choosing a particular strategy is assessed based on past decisions.

3. Case study: analysis of visits to the Yasukuni shrine by Prime Minister Jun’ichirō Koizumi

The model presented in the previous section assumes that we are dealing with a repeated and infinite game. It does, however, have a clearly marked first round. Prime Minister Nakasone’s visit to the Yasukuni shrine on August 15, 1985, the year the war ended, provoked massive criticism from Japan’s closest neighbors. Violent protests took place in China and South Korea, as the Prime Minister’s gesture was interpreted as praise of pre-war militarism and a signal that perhaps in the future, Japan would want to regain its once lost influence (Hardcare, 1991, p. 151). Another visit by a sitting Japanese Prime Minister did not take place until 1992. However, Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa’s visit took place in secrecy, and it did not become public until 1996 (Tanaka, 2008, p. 124).

Ryūtarō Hashimoto, who, as Prime Minister, visited Yasukuni on his birthday on July 29, 1996, had previously been the long-term president of the Japanese War-Bereaved Family Association, (Nippon Izokukai), an organization which has supported official visits to Yasukuni shrine by Japanese politicians in the past (Pletnia, 2020). It was primarily due to the support of the Association that he was able to take the position (Mochizuki, 2010, pp. 43–44). After the 1996 visit, Chinese Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai and Vice-Premier Qian Qichen expressed outrage and called on the Japanese authorities to stop visiting the shrine. The Chinese press also openly criticized the visit and the Prime Minister himself (Cheung, 2017, pp. 51–52).

As a result of China’s reaction, Hashimoto not only did not revisit Yasukuni during his time in office but – perhaps even more significantly – during the election for chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party in 2001, he did not declare that in the event of his re-election he would visit the

shrine again. Instead, such a declaration was made by his main competitor Jun'ichirō Koizumi, who additionally declared that he would visit Yasukuni on the anniversary of the end of the war, something that had not occurred since Nakasone's visit in 1985. As a result, Koizumi received the support of the Izokukai, and he served as prime minister of Japan from 2001 to 2006 (Cheung, 2010, p. 538). Koizumi visited Yasukuni six times during his term, each time provoking a negative reaction from China. In 2005, a visit to the shrine resulted in a temporary freeze of official talks between China and Japan (Breen, 2008, p. 91). Koizumi visited Yasukuni for the last time in 2006, finally deciding on a promised date of August 15. At that time, it was already well known then that he would resign from office in September of the same year (Smith, 2014, p. 93). Throughout his term, Koizumi sought to pass postal reform. However, for this to be possible, he needed the support of the Izokukai, particularly of then president of the Association, Makoto Koga. The support of Koga and his faction of the Liberal Democratic Party in the Diet for the proposed reform was essential to secure the votes necessary to pass the bill (Cheung, 2010, p. 538).

Koizumi's term represents a relatively unusual situation, with both players constantly choosing a war strategy each time, hoping it would force the other to yield. However, as a result, with each round, the chances of choosing a peaceful strategy became less and less likely. From Koizumi's perspective, it was crucial to push through the postal reform. Hence the war strategy (Y) was considered rational, since it might guarantee a higher payout than the peace strategy, regardless of the Chinese threats. From this perspective, the value of 'critical risk', or in other words, acceptable losses, was high enough that Koizumi was willing to continue visiting Yasukuni as long as it brought him closer to finally passing the bill mentioned above. The costs involved, namely the protests of Chinese politicians and public opinion, were acceptable from his perspective.

In October 2005, the privatization of the postal system was finally passed (Maclachlan, 2006, pp. 1–2). However, Koizumi decided to make one more visit to the shrine on August 15, 2006. This visit may have seemed irrational, as he had already accomplished his goal, so the payoff would have to be lesser than in case of not visiting Yasukuni ($Y - X < 0$). It is true that Koizumi no longer needed the support of Izokukai to push through the proposed reform, and relations with China were already extremely strained at this point. However, by changing his strategy, Koizumi would be acting inconsistently with his 'reputation' (understood as pursuing a strategy perceived as optimal), which would have consequences for

future games, regardless of who served as a prime minister. Koizumi could have assumed with a high degree of probability that China would again choose a war strategy. He could also have assumed that the very value of China's strategy (X) would be no greater than it was in 2005, since after *de facto* suspension of diplomatic relations, China had little room for further escalation. Furthermore, Japanese public opinion was also becoming increasingly supportive of Koizumi's visits. A 2006 opinion poll showed that 5.6% of respondents supported the Prime Minister's visit to Yasukuni on the anniversary of the end of the war. Additionally, 25.3% believed that the visits should not be canceled under foreign pressure (Shoji, 2012, p. 129). In conclusion, despite already achieving his main political goal, at the time of his last visit, the payoff for choosing war strategy was higher than if Koizumi decided to break his promise to Izokukai and cancel his visit to the shrine.

4. Conclusions

The last visit by a sitting Japanese prime minister to the Yasukuni shrine took place on December 26, 2013. Shinzō Abe waited a year after becoming the prime minister for the second time before making his first and only visit. Crucial to understanding Abe's decision is the international context. At that time, there was an extremely heated dispute with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands (Stockwin & Ampiah, 2017, p. 89). In 2012, before Abe returned to power, diplomatic relations between Beijing and Tokyo were almost completely frozen. Abe's unannounced visit to Yasukuni sparked protests from China and South Korea. For the first time, the United States also spoke out, expressing disappointment with Abe's visit. However, it should be emphasized that Abe himself declared during the election campaign that he would visit Yasukuni, so it was not a complete surprise. In addition, throughout 2013, Liberal Democratic Party politicians frequently visited the shrine, and the Prime Minister himself also made an offering on his behalf in the form of a 'masakaki' tree (Smith, 2014, pp. 57–58).

The controversy over visits to the Yasukuni shrine has, undoubtedly, not ended with Shinzō Abe. Although his successor, Yoshihide Suga, has not yet had the opportunity to visit the shrine during his time in office, he did make an offering in the form of a 'masakaki' tree on October 17, 2020 (Asahi Shimbun, 2020b). A few months earlier, on August 15, four cabinet

ministers visited the shrine. This was the first visit by politicians at this level since 2016 (Asahi Shimbun, 2020c). In general, if visits to Yasukuni shrine can help build and consolidate political support for conservatives, they will remain an element of Japanese politics.

Game theory can be a useful tool for analyzing the rationality of decision-making in conflict situations. The research presented above proves that it can also be successfully applied to studying the decision-making process related to the visits of Japanese prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine. By using the developed model, it allows us to indicate to what extent the final decision to visit the shrine is based on reliable information regarding the potential Chinese reaction. The reliance on the tree model allows the sequentially of events to be captured, while the assumption that the game is repeatable enables the analysis of the relationship between past strategies.

This paper, however, only provides some introduction to further considerations of the application of game theory to the analysis of Yasukuni shrine visits. It is, undoubtedly, worth considering how to incorporate more varied strategies of Japanese prime ministers concerning visits to the shrine into the model, such as the offering of a 'masakaki' tree already mentioned. Consideration should also be given to extending the model to include, for example, the United States and perhaps also South Korea. This would naturally involve a redesign of the payment matrix. In addition, it would be worth considering adding another level of decisions that would consider the further reaction of players. Finally, to show the full complexity of the controversy surrounding the Yasukuni shrine visits, it would be necessary to construct a model that shows the decision-making process from the perspective of the other players and not just the Japanese side. It would also be necessary to reconsider to what extent we are dealing with one game repeated indefinitely and to what extent we are dealing with several repeated, finite games for which separate models would have to be constructed. However, this does not change the fact that the above research proves the validity of using game theory to analyze visits to the Yasukuni shrine. Its application allows us to deepen our understanding of the extremely complex decision-making process behind each visit so far, as well as to predict with some probability what might influence the decision to visit Yasukuni by Japanese prime ministers in the future.

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From Pork-Barrel Machine to Relevant Policy Communication Platform? Transition of LDP's Personal Support Group Koenkai in the Japanese Political System

Abstract

Koenkai 後援会 individual support group of Japanese politicians has become phenomenon that has no equivalent in any Western democratic country. It emerged on political scene long before introduction of universal suffrage, have spread in the post-war period of rapid democratization due to electoral campaign constraints, and survived until today despite of major evolutions of political environment. The aim of this paper is to show the historical trajectory of individual support groups development and attempt to answer the question if Koenkai's funds distribution function-claimed in previous research remains valid. To prove the above I have examined previous research, utilized data of public opinion pools executed by Akarui Suishin Kyokai (Clean Election League) and financial reports submitted by support groups to electoral commissions in each of 47 prefectures and Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Keywords: *Japan, political system, political parties, Koenkai*

1. Introduction

Koenkai is an individual support group in Japanese political system, established to endorse any individual who stands or intends to stand for the public office, including person in public office, running as a member of political party, other organization, or its branch. From member point of

view Koenkai is an organization that supports specific person to political body in order to efficiently reflect his interest in policy making process (Kabashima & Yamada, 1994, p. 231).

In most of democracies that role is usually appointed to political parties. However, due to the lack of organizational structures, membership advancement and mass involvement in party affairs at grass-root level, individual support organizations filled the gap of lacking party structures. According to the Japanese Public Offices Election Act:

Koenkai is organization that endorse and recommend candidates for public office – including person already in public office, running as a member of political party, other organization, or its branch (Kōshoku senkyo-hō, 2020).

Gerard Curtis (2009, p. 128) perceives Koenkai as the ‘mass membership organization with the function of organizing large numbers of the general electorate on behalf of the Diet candidate’. In most of democracies that role is usually appointed to political parties, however in Japan top-down development of post-war political parties, resulted in lack of organizational structures, membership advancement and mass involvement in party affairs at grass-roots level. Koenkai developed as the auxiliary organization to tackle with all those issues.

In this research I claim that adoption of new rules constituting Japanese political and electoral system, known as package of four laws of political reforms (Seiji kaikaku shihō 政治改革四法,) consisting of Public Offices Election Law, Political Funds Control Act, Act on Granting of Juridical Personality to Political Party Receiving Political Party Grants and Act for Establishment of the Council on the House of Representatives Electoral District, affected Koenkai membership negatively decreasing the number of members since 1994. Furthermore, I hold that decentralization reforms and revised local allocation tax (Chihō kōfu zei – 地方交付税), the system of general-purpose intergovernmental transfers had indeed weakened dependency between local level politicians and individual support group’s members. Above that, I try to elaborate if Koenkai’s funds distribution function-claimed in previous research still remains valid, after nearly a three decades of the most important institutional change initiated by first non-LDP government since 1955.

2. Historical approach

One of the first record of personal support organization belongs to Yukio Ozaki and is dated back to 1912 (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2011, p. 48). Nevertheless, Koenkai activities expanded on large scale not sooner than since election campaign in 1958. In the first decades of Japanese parliamentary democracy only small group of citizens, the highest taxpayers had the suffrage law. In consequence local and national legislatures were dominated by the elite margin of Japanese society.

The most influential, first political parties Seiyukai and Minseito built their electoral support by maintaining strong connections with landlords. Every village had its powerful landlord, affiliated with one of the two parties, either as a member or as a sympathizer in close personal relations with politicians at the prefectural and parliamentary level. As the universal male suffrage for citizens over 25 years old has been introduced in 1925, enlarged groups of electorate eagerly supported candidates who have the closest connection with their landlords (Fukutake, 1967, p. 190). That time, no politician even bothered to address farmers directly in political agenda as the connection with landlords guaranteed politicians foreseeable support at the ballot box.

This stable electoral apparatus of mutual interdependency between landlords and Diet members terminated with results of II World War that brought about two crucial reforms: land reform and rapid democratization (Ouchi, 1966, p. 130). Great majority of tenant farmers became landowners, and under the new constitution eagerly cherished new set of political and personal freedoms that had to be noticed by politicians aspiring to position of the Diet member.

At the same time elected politicians or candidates could not have secure their re-election by maintaining just win-win relationship with local politicians. They couldn't control vote flow as efficiently as pre-war class of the landlords. Additionally, competition within constituency with members of the same political party induced them to seek the support by enlarging elector network among adherents of lower level (e.g., prefectural) politicians. Only this strategy could have guaranteed them re-election in the long run. To receive the sufficient number of votes, Diet politicians did not only take care about sufficient money transfer to local constituencies, but they were also gradually extending network of support incorporating individual support group members into their own Koenkai structure. This

process is perceived by many scientist as the beginning of Koenkai as the widespread organization (Fukutake, 1967, pp. 192–193).

Matsushita Keichi underlined post-war replacement of landlords by new ruling class of local officials as the direct consequence of post-war reform that brought about crucial changes in social structures (Keichi, 1961, p. 519). In the prenatal phase Koenkai were created by incorporation of vote-mobilization organizations belonging to local politicians under the banner of single Diet member. Following, they have been transformed into autonomous organizations with purpose of single diet member constituency *jiban*¹ cultivation, that linked the parliament member and the voters directly bypassing local politicians.

It is widely held in previous research, that Koenkai with the organizational framework as an indispensable part of electoral campaign appeared not sooner than in second half of 1950th, when the most important feature of contemporary organization – mass-membership – had developed.

Koenkai as electoral strategy was no different from previous old hierarchical mechanisms, in which entitled to vote citizens entrusted their ballots to the local opinion leaders. Novelty that transformed individual support groups from old hierarchical organization into the modern one was the membership that run in the tens of thousands. Gerald Curtis emphasized mass-membership and function of organizing large number of the electorate on behalf of the particular Diet member candidate as the feature that made Koenkai contemporary institution (Curtis, 2009, pp. 128–129). Nevertheless, there is no secret that most of organizations were run, organized and stimulated solely by no mass electorate but by politicians themselves.

Nobosuke Yasuno (2019, pp. 302–303) noticed a sudden increase in the number of Koenkai preceded by revision of Public Office Law in 1954 that enumerated political organizations as the only permitted to receive donations from individual voters. He claims that uncertain and sudden dissolutions of legislature² forced candidates into seeking new efficient forms of introducing themselves to the constituency voters, whereas current members tried to strengthen their support base before legal campaign was even announced. As acting as a candidate with intention to run in election rally could be considered as illegal pre-campaign act, candidates developed commonly practiced custom of distributing

1 Jap. *jiban* (地盤) literally 'land' in political studies used to refer single politician support base.

2 Jap. *Nukiuchi kaisan* (抜き打ち解散)

occasional gifts and gratitude envelopes with clearly marked name among voters. Before Public Office Law revision all kind of promotional activities were organized -at least officially, not by politicians themselves but by individual persons. 1954's revision of Public Office Law limited all donations into the transfers to political organizations.³ It resulted in directing most of the donations to Koenkai and caused rapid growth in their number.

Ida Hiroshi explained emergence of Koenkai by urbanization that occurred in second half of 20th century (Ida, 1995, pp. 4–8). Between 1920 and 1980 Japanese urban population increased from 10 to 89 million people, between 1950 and 1955 urban population grew by slightly more than 60%,⁴ 1955 was the year that number of people fleeing to the cities surpassed those living in rural areas for the first time in Japanese history. Population shift caused dismantlement of local tight-knit communities, politically cohesive and gathered among the local leaders. To prevent the inevitable slump of support measured by the ballots on the election day, local leaders had to fill the lack of sufficient endorsement base creating individual support associations. This process was accurately described by Matsushita Keiichi (1961, p. 521):

Koenkai is Japanese form of a modern political organization that appeared on the large scale in the post-war period with the expansion of the electorate which fell from grace of the local bosses. It is a substitute for a formal party organization. It is not all feudalistic but, on the contrary, is a technique which inevitably arose as a response to the destruction of the feudalistic order.

Indeed Koenkai had emerged even before the period of democratization but developed after the II World War as the institution that represents democratic regime and reflects the old hierarchical social order.

3. Why Koenkai?

The vast part of researchers perceives roots of the personal support groups in electoral system and strict political campaign rules. It is widely held that electoral rules shape the extent to which individual politicians

3 Allowed were only donations that not exceeded socially accepted level (一般の社交の程度を超えない寄附).

4 However some part of this increase is attributed to expanded number of cities that resulted from the Municipal Amalgamation Act (市町村合併法) in 1953. The number of officially classified cities changed from 254 in 1950 to 496 in 1955.

can benefit electorally developing personal reputation. In many systems strong personal reputation within a limited electoral district is critical to electoral success.

According to the study held by John Carey and Matthew Shugart (1995, pp. 417–439) in which they rank electoral system based on how it affects candidates, the formula used in Japan until 1993 the single non-transferable vote in multi-member district system (SNTV MMD) creates the greatest incentives to cultivate personal reputation and personal vote. Personal vote is referred as ‘portion of candidate’s electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record’ (Cain, 1987, p. 9). Candidates competing with same party nominates had to use any possible method to earn adequate number of votes guarantying the re-election.

Ōtake Hideo (1998, pp. 11–14) claims, that introduction of single seat constituency electoral system surprisingly undermined party discipline and strengthen individual support organizations to that extent, that elections in Japan come to bear an even greater resemblance to the American Congressional Elections, in which single candidates are supported mainly by personal networks than by political party structures.

Another factor that has been stimulating development of Koenkai are extremely strict rules of election campaign stipulated by Public Office Election Law. It imposes extensive restrictions on election rally. According to the act (Kōshoku senkyo-hō, 2020), candidates are permitted to run campaign from the day of the notification to the day before election, accordingly – 17 days to House of Councillors, 14 days in mayoral election, and only 12 days for candidates to House of Representative. Furthermore, there is wide list of strictly prohibited acts: door-to-door canvassing with the intention of soliciting a vote for oneself or another person, provision of food or drinks, signature movement, publishing popularity contest results etc.

All registered candidates may ply the streets of electoral districts between 8 am and 8 pm, in the clearly identifiable campaign car or boat, blaring speeches by the microphones – with specified maximal loudness, surrounded by vowing supporters. Multiple private speeches at public facilities without any charge are allowed, however prior notification to Election Administrative Commission is required. Law prohibits candidates in Lower House single seat districts from distributing any sort of writing or illustrations, aside from two types of fliers with a maximum of 70 000 leaflets, and 35 000 postcards. Updating the website or blog is forbidden,

candidates can also hang individual poster with notified content on official campaign bulletin board.

Most political activities before the first day of campaign are prohibited, however politicians using constitutionally guaranteed freedom of political activities can engage in promotion of general political objectives and policy. Koenkai has naturally become dedicated platform for those activities. As there is no restriction imposed on activity within the groups. Japanese politicians don't ask for vote but to join to their individual support groups. They also trying to attract voters by organizing multiple events and trips. Politicians used to mark their presence on all sorts of ceremonies relevant to local communities and individuals, especially important members of local society.

Ray Christensen (1998, pp. 986–1004) is considering those strict restrictions as the main reason that harms development of issue voting in Japan. Having all those law constraints candidates and politicians are seeking to sidestep all restrictions by dividing their activity between official campaign period and non-campaign period. What is more, various organizations with no legally imposed restriction are utilized, among them Koenkai's are the most developed and successful one. In addition, it is widely held that electoral reform from 1994 has made political campaign even more candidate oriented than ever before.

4. Previous research

There is only a few aggregate academic research entirely dedicated to Koenkai. Most of them has been conducted by Japanese and foreign political and electoral studies researchers and can be divided into three following categories: case studies based on field research, theoretical approaches, secondary data analysis based on survey conducted on voters or politicians. In addition, unquestionable position of Liberal Democratic Party attracts many journalists to shed some light on various LDP's organizational structures: factions, PARC, and Koenkai in various publications.

One of the earliest case studies on Koenkai was conducted by Nathaniel Thayer (2015, pp. 88–110), who examined individual support groups of Yasuhiro Nakasone.

Significance of multiple connections between constituency members and politicians under the Koenkai network has been shown in field research

conducted by Gerald Curtis (2009). He delivered valuable insight into everyday work in electoral district as well as electoral campaign in second Oita district in 1967. Study abounds in description of original electoral tactics -unnoticeable by ordinary voter, and methods of building support. Author hasn't made though any attempt to systemize those tactics that may vary according to the constituency specification. His observations reaffirmed informality of individual support groups, which is generally overlooked in analyses based exclusively on membership data. Curtis evoked Yoshimura Tadashi, claiming existence of two different patterns of organization. First are political support groups in a strict sense, officially registered, with office in Tokyo. Second are patchworks of cultural, sports and hobbies groups with politician on the top of the structure, who usually holds honorific function of president. During the electoral rally groups are freely utilized as electoral campaign organizations. Sense of affiliation is accomplished by official membership or unofficial participation in activities organized by those groups over the year. It gives evidence that Koenkai constitutes itself through participation. Ultimately activities within informal groups serve to the main goal of expanding and institutionalizing support among general electorate (Curtis, 2009, pp. 126–211).

Curtis statement that Koenkai is effective electoral platform only 'in fairly small cities' has been denied by Ichiro Miyake, who proved correlation between Konekai's membership rate and level of urbanization. He justified statement that percentage of Koenkai members growth accordingly to the votes needed to obtain a post in particular constituency, that is why membership in more populated areas tends to be higher (Miyake, 1990, pp. 80–97).

Comparative analysis of urban and rural voters, conducted by Toshimasa Moriwaki (1984) in 1987 aimed to asses' political attitudes, altered due to economic growth, depopulation, and economic crisis of rural areas. Basing on relatively small sample, his study showed that migration from rural to urban areas, induced local voters to affect political outcomes by participation in local organizations. Study showed that most of the votes in rural areas are correlated with political effectiveness, addressing local agenda, and lobbying for it on the national level. Allegedly for this reason, affiliation with support associations in rural areas is higher than in urban ones. What is more, connection between voters and politicians in rural area tends to be more frequent and deeper (Moriwaki, 1984, pp. 557–582).

Hitoshi Abe, Muneyuki Shindo, Sadafumi Kawato (1994) acknowledged Koenkai as electoral strategy machine underlining two main reasons of its spread. First was poverty of local administration in the post-war period. It brought about Diet members quite easy access to local politician's supporters. Secondly, merger of conservative parties that intensified electoral competition among candidates, exceptionally severe between LDP members (Abe, Shindo & Kawato, 1994, pp. 170–181). Additionally, findings showed that Koenkai consist of two parts: steadily expanding membership oscillating around doubled or tripled number of votes indispensable for being elected, and external organizational belt composed of structure of local politicians, leaders of occupational groups, and associations or chambers of commerce. They participate in Koekai as representatives of their organization aiming their own organization's goals (Abe, Shindo & Kawato, 1994, p. 171). Research concluded that individual support groups are organization of great importance for both parliament members and citizens and even electoral changes itself would not affect them considerably.

The most advanced multilevel research has been conducted by Masahiro Yamada and Yukio Kabashima (1994). Their analysis was based on data set accumulated on surveys conducted consecutively on seven general elections between 1972 and 1995 by *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* (Clean Election League). Study showed significance of Koenkai in Japanese political system over the years. Percentage of voters declaring affiliation with individual support groups had been rising steadily until 1979, when it reached maximum 30%. Since then, rate decreased by half, reaching stable level of 18% in 1983 year's election. Growing number of Koenkai members among supporters of each political party indicates that individual support group's importance had been rising in the 70's, 80's and early 90's. Particularly supporters of Liberal Democratic Party organized in Koenkai used to be remarkably active on the election day. More than half of them constantly supported party's candidates in election. This constitutes the fact that Koenkai plays a role of voting machine for Liberal Democratic Party candidates, and LDP's election strategy in one fourth is based on Koenkai's. Surprisingly though, there is no statistically valid correlation between membership and voters' turnout at the ballot box. It is proved that membership tends to increase all kinds of political mobilization and gathering (participation in meeting and speeches etc.) but not necessarily affects voting behaviour. Statistically justifiable are variables describing potential Koenkai member, who is representant of conservative ideology,

most likely to be male citizen older than 40 years old, lives in rural areas or medium size city -the larger the city is membership rate tends to fall. Data confirmed also, that Koenkai members are typically self-employed or work in commerce industry services, agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry (Kabashima & Yamada, 1994, pp. 217, 228–230).

One of the first scientific attempt to explain Japanese voting behaviour has been made by Joji Watanuki in collective publication: "The Japanese Voter" co-authored with Bradley Richardson, Ichiro Miyake, Scott Flanagan and Shinsaku Kohei (1991). Their analysis used single data set based on survey conducted in 1976 by *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* (Clean Election League). Regarding individual support groups, study underlined correlation between occupation and Konekai membership, which was the highest among commercial and industrial workers. Moreover, study showed that relation between occupation and Koenkai membership varies depending on the regions (1991, pp. 387–406).

Field study conducted by Jean-Marie Bouissou (1992, pp. 515–517) on the sample of more than 40 former and past Diet representatives revealed organizational structure of individual support groups in the beginning of 1990s. Findings showed that core element of each Koenkai consist of permanently hired secretaries – use to be members of local community, who's number varies depending on organizational strategy worked out by single politician and oscillate between 15, up to 30 people in large districts. Some studies pointed that core staff of Koenkai may be outsourced from local companies or organizations favourable to the candidate, which remarkably reduce operating cost. Koenkai's main task is to control and represent Diet member in assigned part of constituency, taking part in local gatherings, reporting local community about performance in the Diet. Secretaries persistently reminds about commitment to the issues of the greatest importance to local communities, as well as constantly underlines bonds that link politician with constituency.

Secondly well developed Koenkai consist of large number of lower-level representatives, such persons in charge *sewanin*, organizers *kanji*, liason agents *renrakunin*, officials *yakunin* performing voluntarily various functions. Each of them is responsible for assigned smaller area of constituency corresponding to Japanese town, district or even smaller. Similarly, to the secretaries, they are responsible for communication with hard cord electorate organized territorially or ideologically. According to Bouissou's findings Koenkai are 'mosaic groups of very dissimilar in nature, name and function' and 'born from parochial identification with a local

community, material interest, personal histories, common likes and other feelings able to forge bonds between human beings' (1991, pp. 517–519). Number of dependent organizations varies but on average single LDP Diet member controls from 50 up to 80 organizations. Bouissou beyond the support providing function distinguished convivial, redistributive, constituency service, mutual help, socializing and democratizing functions of individual support groups.

5. Koenkai's distributive function

Koenkai performs multiple roles for both politician and voters. Apart from informing constituency members about upcoming legislation and policy updates, the main function has been strengthening and expanding support base in single constituency. As it requires both time and enormous money contributions – mainly when operating cost rises and electoral competition getting stronger, phenomenon of funnelling pork to the constituencies has become not uncommon aspect of strengthening electoral support base. The iconic example is Tanaka Kakuei, whose Koenkai structures expanded to historically largest scale. The aim of following part is to illustrate the evolution of Konekai as pork barrel machine platforms.

After the II World War Japanese local government system had been institutionalized in a form that deliberately intertwines political and administrative linkages. Historically LDP used the land reforms of the early post-war period as a way of building clientelist networks in rural areas, taking credit for public projects in a manner not uncommon to the political parties in other democracies.

Mancur Olson in his study *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) proved that individuals establishing any group or organization of common interest further its aim only on condition that it will pursue their own particular interest. Moreover, unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will never act to achieve common or group aim. In addition to that Leon Festinger claimed that 'the attraction of group membership is not so much in sheer belonging, but rather in attaining something by means of this membership' (Festinger, 1953, p. 93).

Wakata Kyōji (1982, p. 142) argued that nature of an organization depends on what incentives it uses to organize itself. As the leadership succession and

hereditary politician's phenomenon developed in Japanese political system, one of the Konekai's most important function has become providing the easy access to politician and government. When the politician career advances, the value of being a member of sponsorship association moves from 'a system of solidarity to a system of profits' (Kyōji, 1982, p. 142).

The earliest study on Koenkai proving function described by Wakata Kyōji was conducted by Nathaniel Thayer (2015, pp. 88–110), who examined individual support groups of Yasuhiro Nakasone. Through the field research he stated that Koenkai is platform of providing constituency services and introducing the governmental projects with the primary aim of bringing money to constituencies.

Abe, Shindo and Kawato (1994, pp. 170–181) specified three areas of support groups activity. First is receiving feedback from local politicians as well as constituency members and transmitting those needs on national level to the members of the party -mainly to the most influential figures such as factions' leaders or PARC members. Second is dealing with individual and collective, political, unpolitical requests and demands, answering legal questions or doubts, delivering small favours and advices to the constituency members. 'The more personal the problem, the greater effect, the more solid the vote' (Abe, Shindo & Kawato, 1994, p. 179). Third function is providing Koenkai members with all sorts of recreation strictly not linked with politics. It includes organizing cooking classes for housewife's, sport tournaments, trips to nearby hot springs or National Diet and Tokyo, as well as gatherings with lavishly laid tables in luxury hotels.

Fukui, Shigeko (1996, pp. 268–286) described multilevel, vertically organized mechanism of solicitation for local investments. It contains Koenkai network and local politicians support base on the bottom, Diet members serving as the pipelines in the centre, and Nagatacho bureaucratic decision makers on the top. Individual support groups linked with grass roots level associations affiliated to industry and merchants' groups, has been collecting list of projects that require governmental subsidies. Lists are considered by prefectural governments and legislatures. If they get a green light, Diet members take on their shoulders hardship of referring the projects to the central ministries and agencies.⁵ If the referred project receives donations, it automatically reinforces politician support base in his constituency. If it fails lack of sufficient explanation to the constituency members may even terminate political life.

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5 Pork barrel politics, p. 275.

Shigeno Hirano (2006, pp. 77–80) proved in geographical analysis, that both vote shares and distribution of central government transfers tend to be geographically concentrated across regions within constituencies in close distance to home area of LDP Diet members.⁶

Junichiro Wada (1985, pp. 98–115) sought correlation between elected Diet representatives from Liberal Democratic Party and amounts of subsidies directed to each of 47 Japanese prefectures. Result of his findings showed, that in 1980 single elected representative of ruling party was worth 41 trillion yen expressed in subsidies. In comparison, Diet member of opposition party costed only 7 trillion yen.

Kobayashi Yoshiaki (1997, pp. 129–148) delivered the most advanced multi-level analysis showing that special subsidy grants in contrary to ordinary grants allocations are dependent not mainly on economic situation of municipalities but also on influence of single politician. It is measured not by number of electoral successes or even the fact of being Ministry of Infrastructure, but by the period of holding the political or bureaucratic positions. It is striking that same correlation is not valid for any opposition party members, whereas for LDP members it seems to gain on strength year by year. Additionally, Kobayashi proved that LDP members tend to direct pork exactly to their constituencies, which indicates that whole process of transferring local demands to politicians occur exclusively with use of Koenkai network.

In most of cases money from subsidies are funnelled to the three big industries: construction, forestry and fishing and finance.⁷ LDP voters tends to be strictly correlated with forestry and fishing industry. Politicians funnel pork earning the benefits from constituency members directly receiving donation and expanding their support base, or indirectly by advancing careers. This leads to newer ending circle of democratic process disruption and monopolized by Liberal Democratic Party and concreting the predominant party system.

Masaru Kohno and Yoshitaka Nishizawa (1990, pp. 151–166) called into question if general election date is correlated with economic phases. Statistical model based on governmental expenditures for public works and construction (by public corporations and agencies) between 1950s and 1980s showed no correlation of election timing with economic

6 Shigeno Hirano Electoral institutions Hometowns and Favored Minorities Evidence from Japan Electoral Electoral institutions Hometowns Favored Minorities... 74 = 70reforms.

7 農水族、建設族、大蔵族 142.

expansion phases. It proved however, existence of valid correlation with governmental spending on public construction for electoral purposes. Major part of investment covered by public subsidies has been done in election year or period narrowly preceding elections.

Carlson and Reed (2018) presented grass-root organizations involvement in majority of political scandals appearing on the line between business, Japanese politicians, and bureaucrats. As the nature of those scandals, from raw purchase of public policy to abuse of political power altered, Koenkai involvement in illegal practices has changed.

6. Reforms

Rising cost of nurturing electoral support base driven by severe intraparty competition, local budget dependency on governmental subsidies and tightening rules of political funds raising led to series of corruption and bribery scandals. In the most shocking eleven cases occurred between 1947 and 1993 six involved both politicians and bureaucrats, one was primarily a bureaucratic scandal with politicians involved, four were strictly political scandals with minor bureaucratic involvement (Carlson & Reed, 2018, p. 93). Most of the politician's connivance didn't harm LDP's long grip in power because voters could easily switch their preferences to the clear politicians even within the same constituencies. However, the scale of Sagawa Kyubin scandal, with Liberal Democratic Party deputy leader Shin Kanemaru involved forced not only end of Miyazawa cabinet, it finished almost undisturbed LDP's long grip of power and caused fundamental changes of electoral system – revision of Political Funds Control Act and Public Offices Election Law (Otake, 1996, pp. 271–292).

Introduced in 1994 mixed electoral system put an end to intraparty competition, launching 300 single members districts across the country and 11 proportional representation blocks, with overall number of 200 mandates. Voters has started casting the ballots in both single member districts -on politicians, and on party in proportional representation block. New electoral system was believed to decrease the 'entry cost' for young politicians and downward spiral of harsh competition between same party candidates in constituencies (Hayashi et al., 2018, p. 232). The main ambition was indeed prevention of excessive bribery and personal character of electoral campaign. It won't be an exaggeration if we assume that reform was the move against the strength of Koenkai structures.

Revised Political Funds Control Act prohibited corporate and group donation to individual politicians. All donations from individuals over 50 000 JPY have to be notified in financial reports. Accordingly, donation to 'another groups' such as Koenkai were limited to 10 million JPY per year (Honma, 1994, pp. 23–38).

Liberal Democratic Party since its commencement has been building strong electoral dominance incessantly controlling money flow to the local governments. Municipalities had been collecting only 30% of the total budget spending, whereas national government controlled as much as 70% through several direct taxes and large number of indirect ones. Even though great majority were divided according to the special LAT grant formula, some part of them could be allocated according to the needs of constituencies, that apply to various investments donation. To maximize budget incomes, vast part of non-partisan local politician maintained bold ties with the most powerful LDP structures in the region – Diet members' Koenkai's (Horiuchi et al., 2015, pp. 99–125).

Nevertheless, this situation has been also terminated by administration of Junichiro Koizumi, who cut particularistic spending and increased autonomy of local municipalities. Far reaching package of decentralization aimed to boost Japan's economy were introduced. Decentralization reforms known as *sanmi ittai kaikaku* (Horiuchi et al., 2011) based on three pillars: overall reduction of subsidies from the central government, transfer of tax revenue sources to local governments and revision of institutional architecture that regulated LAT grants. As the transfers to local constituencies had been reduced, autonomy of local governments increased, diminishing cultivated over years links between local constituencies and influential LDP's Diet members to some degree. During Yuinichiro Koizumi 2001–2006 tenure key pieces of the Japanese clientelist bonds has been cut by reduction of construction projects and agricultural subsidies.

Legal and structural changes mentioned above undoubtedly affected whole political institutions, in greatest degree individual support network of Koenkai.

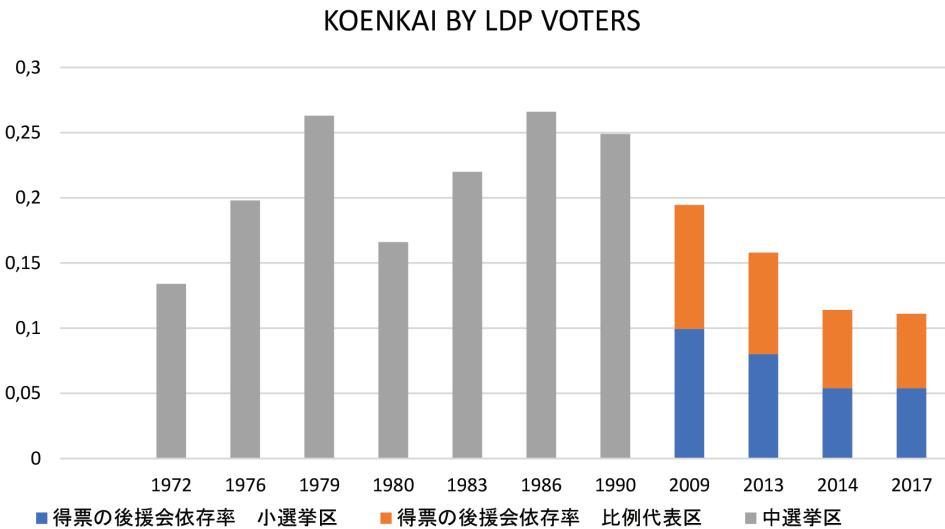
7. Research design and data analysis

Building on previous research I claim that Revision of Public Office Election Law affected Koenkai membership negatively decreasing the number of members since 1994. Moreover, this trend should be visible in recent year even if sharp fall has not appeared soon after the reforms.

Secondly, I hold that decentralization reforms, revised LAT allocation formula weakened dependency between local politicians and Koenkai members, what in addition to tightened restrictions of Political Subsidies Act caused drop in the individual support group’s budgets. Taking into consideration that two points I will try to elaborate if it’s possible that Koenkai’s function of pork barrel platform has been diminished and, if it’s likely that it will lose its importance.

Firstly, in order to answer the question how political system changes affected scope of membership in Liberal Democratic Party’s Diet members Koenkai I examined data set accumulated on surveys conducted by Clean Election League (*Akarui Suishin Kyokai*) on nation-wide sample, from general election between 1972–1990 under the single non-transferable vote in multi member district, and between 2009 and 2017 hold under new mix-member majoritarian system to the House of Representatives.

Figure 1. Share of votes casted on LDP by Koenkai members (0.1 = 10%)



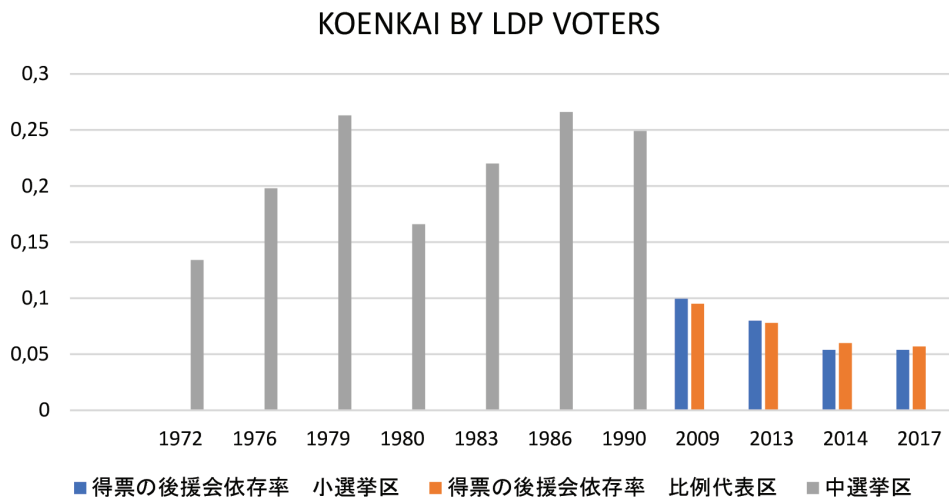
Grey – multi member districts, blue – single member district, orange – pr lists

Source: *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* combined post-election survey for the 1972–2017 House of Representatives Election. Data for this secondary analysis was provided by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

東京大学社会科学研究所附属社会調査・データアーカイブ研究センターSSJデータアーカイブから 衆議院議員総選挙全国意識調査（明るい選挙推進協会）の個票データの提供を受けました。

Figure 1 shows clearly, that Koenkai membership had its peak in 1986, and since then it is gradually decreasing election by election. Continuing downward trend may illustrate that politician facing no intra-party competition are less likely to maintain high membership rate for electoral purposes. This state seems to be reasonable, especially when they were used to covered most of the membership fees by themselves. If the act of being member was usually alleged upon free participation in activities like costly hot spring trips, visible drop could mean that those practices has been to some extent abandoned. Sudden drop in membership to about 15% of Liberal Democratic Party voters may prove new, possible to maintain membership level with limited incentive for membership promotion activities, and after all changes in political system.

Figure 2. Share of votes casted on LDP by Koenkai members (0.1 = 10%)



Grey – multi member districts, blue – single member district, orange – pr lists

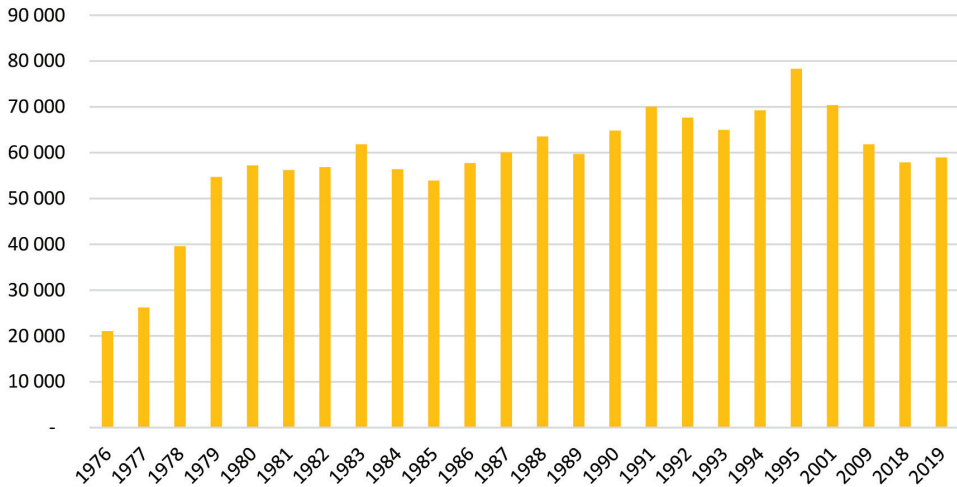
Source: *Akarui Suishin Kyokai* combined post-election survey for the 1972–2017 House of Representatives Election. Data for this secondary analysis was provided by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

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Subsequently, in order to examine the number of individual support groups nation-wide, I utilized data from Political Funds Balance Report that notification is required on yearly basis upon Political Funds Control Act.

Reports are being submitted to the Electoral Commissions on prefectural level and to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. To calculate total number of Koenkai organizations I summed total number of organizations from both ministerial and prefectural annual reports.

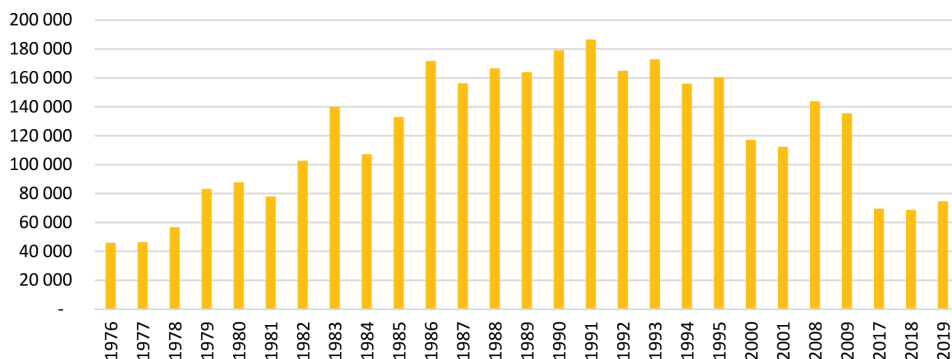
Figure 3. Number of Koenkai ‘other’ political organizations 1976–2019



Source: *Seiji Shikin Zensho, Kōhō, Seiji Shikin Zensho Kanpō 1976–2019*

Accumulated data shows that number of individual support groups had raised to 60 000–70 000 groups nationwide between 1979 and 1994. It peaked once in 1995 which may be the effect of limitations in funding imposed on single organizations in 1994 that resulted in duplication of some structures. Since 2009 number of Koenkai has fallen to level of 57 000–60 000 groups nationwide. More optimistically than the membership rate, total number of organizations seems to stabilize recently on the same level as between 1979 and 1989. It may indicate that Koenkai membership has become more informal, whereas the groups frames exist regardless of membership rate.

To examine the scope of individual support groups activities, I summed total number of incomes submitted by each registered group to prefectural commissions and Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications. Figure 4 presents total accumulated income of all groups across the country. It shows clearly that revenues of political organizations has dropped in last 5 years to the level from 1970s – period preceding Konekai’s beginning of glory.

Figure 4. Total income of political organizations in million JPY

Source: *Seiji Shikin Zensho, Kōhō, Seiji Shikin Zensho Kanpō* 1976–2019

8. Conclusions

Presented in previous part accumulated data of Koenkai membership distinctly indicates that revision of Public Office Election Law altering Japanese electoral system into mix-member majoritarian has led to decrease in the scope of Koenkai membership among LDP voters. It has shrunken significantly over last two elections. The most likely reason standing behind this finding is systemic termination of intra-party competition in the single member districts that lowered degree of electoral mobilization. Moderately higher percentage of membership among voters that casted ballots on LDP candidates on proportional list may indicate continued importance of attracting voters to the individual support groups. Koenkai with large network of followers, could be possibly still perceived as the most efficient electoral strategy of building its own *jiban* and popularity within the party even by the great majority of younger candidates running from proportional representation lists. Share of votes casted on LDP candidates by Koenkai members proves that groups are utilized rather as the platform of maintaining firm but marginal support base among voters, than performing function of electoral mobilization platform on large scale.

Consequently, data revealed visible drop in number of existing Koenkai groups across the country. This trend is clear since 2001 elections, when number of Koenkai organization dropped after reaching its peak in 1995. Data from 2018 and 2019 showed that gentle decreasing trend is constant. Reforms in the smallest degree affected number of Koenkai groups. We

can assume that some of the groups will not be dissolved, even if they lose their primary function.

Interestingly, sharp drop of Koenkai operational incomes proves that intended effects of Political Party Subsidies Act, decentralization reforms, and of LAT grants formula revision have been accomplished. Nor voters, nor any sort of lobbyist or business representatives cannot legally support politicians by enormously generous donations and money transfers. Undoubtedly, reforms mentioned above affected groups in a way that it seems to irretrievably lose its pork-barrel feature. It is also relevant to mention, that nature of political corruption and bribery in Japan also has been changing over last three decades. Yet, reforms and lively public debate enhanced transparency and empowered mass media and public opinion to actively track and discuss any sign of political corruption. As the one of the solidest systems of LDP support base – act of influencing subsidies and directing public works to particular region has been diminished, dependency between local politics and LDP members has irretrievably weakened.

Initiated in 1994 changes of Japanese political system were an attempt to introduce British-party politics to Japan to accord greater emphasis on electoral competition, whereas other reforms were designed to limit corruption and distributive function of money politics. All had its impact on Koenkai – the most important electoral organization of Japanese Diet members. Research proved that individual support group's distributive feature has been marginalized to degree that is very unlikely in future to have any impact on Japanese politics and electoral rules as significant as in the past. Foreseeable social demographic and voting behaviour trends together with evolution of mass communication channels will possibly push Koenkai's under the process of further organizational transformation.

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Circulation and Exportation of the Japanese Childbirth Model in Southern-East Asia Preliminary Insights from Cambodia

Abstract

Globally, maternal health matters and birthing ideologies and practices still generate much controversy. On the one hand, those who are promoting the medicalization of childbirth argue that the mortality and morbidity risks justify the imposition of biotechnological standards and practices. On the other hand, activists for demedicalization of birth are denouncing gynecological and obstetric violence, and pointing the pathologies induced by overuse of technologies. These movements, which are part of the current's feminist calls, advocate a women's reappropriation over their own bodies. The paper, based on long term and more recent ethnographical investigations aims to explore these political, cultural and social controversies by examining the recent initiatives in reproductive health domain carried by Japanese cooperation in South-East Asia. Since the 2000s, JICA (Japanese agency for international cooperation), as part of its infrastructure development, institutional strengthening and training programs, has indeed carried out numerous initiatives. One aims at improving the quality of maternal health care with two main objectives: the reduction of cesarean section rates and the humanization of birth.

Keywords: SEA, Japan, Cambodia, childbirth, maternal health care, social policy

1. Introduction

During the past decades giving birth has been increasingly medicalized widely and pregnancy and birth have been conceptualized as pathologic processes in need of an intensive medical monitoring (Davis-Floyd & Sargent, 1997). This shift in birth management, examined since the year 1960's, is conceptualized as 'technobirth' (Davis-Floyd & Sargent, 1997). Today, the extend use of technologies during childbirth is still a controversial matter. While some women in the world, mostly living in the most deserved areas, are still giving birth with no or a very limited medical assistance, the vast majority is birthing within a growing use of biotechnology: caesarean section, induced labour, amniotomy, episiotomy, recordings of fetal heart activity, ultrasound, epidural anaesthesia. In the early 2000s, this paradigm has spread to all fields of medicine with a shift from a medicine aiming at treating unwell bodies (medicalization) to a biomedicine aiming at the management, the administration and the transformation of bodies, in especially through the development of the pharmaceutical industry and the development of biotechnologies (biomedicalization) (Clarke et al., 2000). Although globally dominant, technobirth is not a uniformed biomedical model, and its various social forms are operationalized by heterogeneous actors, in different contexts. caesarean sections have been adopted on a massive scale in countries such as China, the United States, Brazil, Italy, Turkey and Mexico, while epidural analgesia is widely used in France, Canada and the United Kingdom (Topçu & Brown, 2019).

Today, the biomedicalisation of childbirth is widely legitimated at the international level and movements going in the opposite direction are scarce. However, in some very limited social and geographical spheres, some actors are promoting the 'de-technicalization' of birth. Such initiatives are launched with the objective to humanize childbirth aiming at limiting the unnecessary use of biotechnological practices or their systematic deployment. The genealogy, the implementation, the impacts and the effects of these marginal crusades need to be documented.

This is the case of the programs implemented by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in various southern countries, included Cambodia where we both conduct research in the field of human reproduction (Hancart Petitet, 2012; 2014; 2015; 2017; Hancart Petitet et al., 2014; Hancart Petitet, 2010; Schantz, 2015, 2016). In this paper we aim to provide some preliminary thoughts and insights on our

recent investigations related to the promotion of humanized childbirth initiatives implemented by JICA in one maternity hospital in Phnom Penh. Our driving questions are as follows: What about the genealogy of the JICA maternal health programs promoting humanized birth in South-East Asia? What about their local variations? How do these initiatives take place within the political, cultural, and social controversies related to childbirth 'biomedicalization' and 'de-technicalization'? Does this model, arouse ownership or resistance from health institutions, caregivers, and patients in the hosting countries? What are the interferences between the Japanese model, the state's models, and the United Nations global agenda of reducing maternal mortality? At first, we need to draw the theoretical frame of our purpose and to define the concept of humanized childbirth.

2. History of the Concept of Humanized Childbirth

In recent decades, two historical trends have turned the way of approaching pregnancy and childbirth: the 'pathologization' of the maternal body and its 'techno-bio-medicalization' (Topçu & Brown, 2019). This dominant approach refers to the notion of 'risk' which justifies the use of medical treatment of childbirth to limit and reduce maternal and infant mortality and morbidity rates (Carricaburu, 2005, 2007; Topçu & Brown, 2019). Early, in reaction to the complete domination of the management of births by obstetricians, feminist anthropologists, began to conduct research on birth matters (Kitzinger & Davis, 1978; Cominsky, 1982; Jordan, 1989). These authors denounced the biomedical management of childbirth as a way of depriving women of their bodies and their childbirth (Davis-Floyd & Sargent, 1997). Mostly implemented in Europe by male obstetricians since the end of the 19th century (Schlumbohm, 2002; Carol, 2011), the excessive biomedicalization of birthing practices was seen as a result of the men reappropriation of the women's bodies and has been denounced. As early as the 1950s, isolated militant women movements raised their voice and lead campaigns in opposition to this technobirth model. In France, similar dissidence began in the 1970s and was notably carried by the second feminist wave, which claimed the right of women on their bodies (Akrich & Laborie, 1999). This movement fight for the autonomy of women and leads a battle against a medical power applied without sharing the decision-making process. Pregnancy and childbirth were reclaimed as a physiological event which concerns the private prior

to the medical sphere (Akrich & Laborie, 1999). Internationally, especially in South America, the claim for the demedicalization of childbirth were gradually being heard. In the 1990s, women's associations requested perinatal medicine based on evidence (evidence-based medicine). The notion of humanization of birth was born, especially in Brazil with the constitution in 1993 of a humanization collective of birth (ReHuNa – Network for the Humanization of Childbirth) (Diniz et al., 2018).

The World Health Organization (WHO) supported this movement. In 1996 WHO published international recommendations to limit technical acts during physiological childbirth (World Health Organization 1996). In 2000, the International Conference on the Humanization of Birth was held in Fortaleza, Brazil (Quattrocchi, 2019). The need for a humanized model of birth as opposed to the technocratic model of birth (Davis-Floyd, 2001) was raised. This model advocated for the inclusion of midwives in the support of physiological deliveries; the right to be accompanied during childbirth; freedom of position during labour and delivery; the right to eat and drink; the preservation of the integrity of a woman's body by limiting invasive acts (Diniz et al., 2018).

Since the 2000s, reverse movements towards the demedicalization of childbirth have taken place in many northern countries, where women can now give birth outside the medical institution (i.e. at home or in a birth centre). France, for example, despite a high level of biomedicalisation of childbirth at national level, has launched the experimentation of 8 birth centres since 2016 (Chantry et al., 2019). In these care settings women give birth in absolute safety attended by a midwife, without any use of biotechnology. The opening of 12 additional birth centres is planned in 2021.

3. Japan: A low use of biotechnology during childbirth in a high-tech country

Japan is a 'post-industrial hyper technological consumerist society', and yet the use of biotechnology during childbirth in the country is low, even though all (or almost all) deliveries take place in institutions (public and private hospitals) (Ivry, Takaki-Einy & Murotsuki, 2019).

Japan is very interesting to study regarding these issues of medicalization/demedicalization. Indeed, it is a case apart, as it is one of the industrial countries with the best indicators for maternal and child health, while recourse to biotechnology around childbirth is low (low

episiotomy, epidural analgesia and caesarean section rates) (Behruzi et al., 2010). Studying childbirth in Japan adds complexity to the issue of the adoption of biotechnology in different contexts (Topçu & Brown, 2019). The low rate of epidural analgesia can partly be explained as in Japanese culture, pain is perceived as both an inevitable and required experience of the physiological childbirth process. The delivering woman 'must' suffer in order for the mother-child bond to take place (Ivry, Takaki-Einy & Murotsuki, 2019).

There is need for additional research to be conducted in this field to analyse the emergence, determinants and the declinations of low use to biotechnology in this high-tech country. Exploring the JICA humanized birth expansion project can be a good start.

4. History of JICA

JICA was established in 1974 because of the merger of the OTCA (Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency) and several other organizations. This agency has the responsibility for executing Japan's official development assistance. In 2008, JICA has become one of the largest donors in Asia due to the merger between old JICA and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). Due to ambitious projects implemented in the field construction of infrastructures, JICA major recipients are South Asian countries. In the 1990s, it became the most powerful cooperation agency in the world and decided to expand its projects to Africa (Kato, 2016). Today, while Southeast Asia remains the main arena for its development activities, its presence in Africa is steadily increasing (JICA, 2018). More generally, Japanese cooperation means the construction of infrastructure, the sending of Japanese experts, volunteers and consultants to the field and the training of local staff in solving practical problems through a specific method. The Japanese discipline the '5S Kaizen', a philosophy and a way of organizing and managing the workspace and workflow partly inspires the JICA development approach. Its intents are to improve efficiency by eliminating waste, improving flow, and reducing process unreasonableness which aims to optimize working conditions and time by ensuring the organization, cleanliness and safety of a work plan. This approach was generalized in the 1980s in manufacturing sector in Japan, specifically by the Toyota Production System, were '5 S activities' were set as one of its bases. In 2007, this approach was adapted to the

health sector; it is now distributed to hospitals internationally through JICA (Hasegawa & Karandagoda, 2013).

Since the 2000s, the government of Japan through the JICA and the Bureau of International Medical Centers in Japan (IMCJ), has sought to improve the quality of maternal health care in Japan and around the world. Watching the self-promoting movie of what JICA and the Japanese midwife community wants to export is very useful to understand the cultural representation of birth behind the JICA project implementation (ref film). Such position is very relevant to investigate as the Japanese women/families who choose natural birth facilities introduced at the beginning of the movie belong to a tiny minority.

The humanized childbirth targeted countries have been Brazil (1996–2001), Armenia (2004–2006), Benin (2006–2010, 2011–2016), Madagascar (2007–2010), Senegal (2009–2011, 2012–2018), Bolivia (2010–2014), Cambodia (2010–2015), and Mozambique (2016–2019) (JICA). The main goals of these humanizing childbirth projects are promoting basics of ideal midwifery care, not intervening more than necessary and implementing care through evidence-based medicine) avoiding unnecessary medical interventions (unnecessary caesarean section and episiotomy (Misago et al., 2001; Behruzi et al., 2010; JICA, 2008). How are such initiatives constructed socially and implemented locally? Let us examine the case of Cambodia.

5. Maternal Healthcare in Cambodia

After more than a hundred years of failed regulations intending at medicalizing childbirth under the French Protectorate (1863–1953) (Schantz, 2021), Cambodia is recently and massively adopting biotechnologies surrounding childbirth. Indeed, the 1990s national sexual and reproductive health care policies have been reframed under the global injunction for the biomedicalisation of childbirth, to which the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000–2015) have contributed significantly. Among these MDGs, the MDG 5 aiming at ‘Improving maternal health’ follow several indicators including increasing the rate of births attended by skilled health personnel. These policies have a very strong impact on maternal and newborn health care in Cambodia. Successive Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) in Cambodia attest the very speedy shift from home birth to hospital birth. While in 2000, ‘skilled’ health personnel

assisted 10% of births, this rate rose to 89% in the 2014 DHS (National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health DHS Program 2015). In other words, at the national level, at the beginning of the 2000s, 9 out of 10 women gave birth at home; Fifteen years later, it was only the case for one in 10. This sudden transformation of birthing practices causes major social changes.

The practice of episiotomy is systematic in Phnom Penh since the rate of episiotomy exceeds 90% in a lot of maternity units (Schantz et al., 2015). On the one hand, organizational factors are the reasons behind the systematic use of this practice. Within overcrowded delivery rooms care providers working under pressure use biotechnology to save time. Indeed, cutting the perineum of women with scissors avoids waiting several long minutes for the perineum to soften under the pressure of the foetus (most often under the pressure of the foetal head). In the largest maternity hospital in Phnom Penh (Calmette hospital), the number of deliveries has increased from 3.220 deliveries per year in 2003 to 11.080 deliveries per year in 2015 (Schantz, 2020). Despite ongoing efforts to improve the infrastructure with countless new buildings, the delivery rooms are congested, and the caregivers use perineotomy as an adjustment variable for their time. On the other hand, sociocultural factors also explain this practice in Cambodia. First, the common popular representation of an extremely narrow and rigid 'Khmer vagina' lead caregivers to legitimize the use of episiotomy. Two, a tight vagina is one of the criteria of female beauty and sexual scripts based essentially on penetrative sexuality, also contribute to the success of this practice as it would increase male sexual pleasure (Schantz, 2020).

The practice of caesarean sections is also widespread and on the rise in the capital. In four maternity wards in Phnom Penh, the caesarean section rate rose from 9% to 27% between 2000 and 2015. Various non-medical factors determine this practice and contribute to the construction of a 'social demand' for caesarean sections: the belief that caesarean section is safer for the mother and child than a vaginal delivery; the wish to maintain a narrow vagina; the fear of vaginal delivery; and the pain of uterus contractions during labour. Lastly, given the concern of many Khmer people for astrological determinants, the possibility of choosing the date (and often the time) of childbirth is perceived as a great benefit (Schantz et al., 2016).

6. JICA and Maternal Health in Cambodia

Since 1992, the National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM) of Japan has worked with the Ministry of Health in Cambodia in maternal and child health. In Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital, the National Mother and Child Hospital Center (NMCHC) is also commonly called 'Japanese hospital' (pet japan) for its strong link with Japan. The Japan Official Development Assistance (ODA) built the NMCHC in 1997. The NMCHC is both an administrative centre for maternal, neonatal and paediatric health, a referral hospital (MCH) and a national training centre.

Between 1992 and 2016, JICA carried out 7 technical cooperation projects in Cambodia (JICA, 2014) in focussing on hospital governance, management and improvement of obstetric care, medical training including prevention of maternal-fetal transmission of HIV. Since the 2000s, thanks to the political stability found in Cambodia and its socioeconomic development, many private health facilities have emerged. However, the NMCHC differs from other hospital structures in making known and visible its good quality care to the 'poor population' (NCGM Japan–NMCHC Cambodia. Joint Technical Collaboration Office, 2015, p. 7).

Since 2010, wide-ranging training courses (offered by Japanese experts) have aimed to provide care that insures courteous and pleasant environment for birthing women ('women-friendly care') and promote a high respect for the labour and childbirth physiological process. Training programs highlight the variety of birthing positions to be allowed for labouring women to adopt, the importance of family member presence during labour and birth, and the reduction episiotomy rates. This emphasis given to physiology and to restrictive use of episiotomy has significantly reduced the rate of episiotomy at NMCHC in recent years. This rate fell from 58% in 2010 to 15% in 2015 (Schantz, 2015). In December 2012, Cambodia and Japan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), further strengthening the ongoing collaboration between the two countries and by establishing exchange, training, research and technical cooperation. The NMCHC has a very clear and well-maintained database, developed with assistance from JICA, for tracking the use of biotechnology. In 2015, 7.240 deliveries took place at the NMCHC. The delivery rate has been stable since it opened. In February 2016, a new building was under construction, supported by the JICA.

7. Conclusion and perspectives

Brigitte Jordan developed the concept of authoritative knowledge in obstetrics in her book 'Birth in Four Culture' (1978). This concept makes it possible to analyse the process of legitimizing a practice, surrounding birth, in a given social context. Her major theoretical insight is as follows. When, during the birth event, a biomedical knowledge system is confronted with a 'popular system', only one, the biomedical system, will be recognized as legitimate. This legitimized knowledge is defined as an authoritative knowledge (the knowledge that makes authority) and shapes all decisions and all actions surrounding childbirth care. Jordan shows that in a high-tech birthing system, the distribution of power is unfairly made among people encircling the birthing woman. The legitimacy to decide follows a hierarchy based on the mastery of the technical tools developed by modern obstetrics. On the contrary, in a low-tech birthing system, the birthing mother get more power somehow equally shared among others. Jordan shows that studying the 'birth arena' (means the rules of conduct and practices dedicated to the pregnant body) is a prism to observe different areas of human experience (social organization, gender relations, representations of bodily fluids, etc.).

The concept of authoritative knowledge is very relevant to examine the humanized childbirth model implemented by JICA experts in Cambodian maternity hospitals. The drastic reduction of episiotomy rates in the NMCHC Hospital in Phnom Penh raise various questions that we will need to investigate further. How the concept of 'humanized childbirth', based on low use of technologies became the authoritative knowledge in the daily practice in delivery room? At first, how the Japanese experts manage to promote the non-use of episiotomy as 'the authoritative knowledge' to Cambodian midwives and obstetricians who were trained and used to do it systematically? Similarly, to the study conducted by Behruzi et al. (2010), this experience may be explored in examining the barriers and facilitators encountered by the humanized birth practice and categorized into four main groups: Rules, Regulations and Strategies, Physical Structure, Contingency Factors, and Individual Factors. From our perspective, we would be more inclined to analyse the reduction of episiotomy rates as a social fact and from others stand points.

One aspect drives specially or attention. Who are the Japanese experts who came to work in the Maternity Hospital in Phnom Penh? What about their profiles and biographies? How the decision to come, work and live

in Cambodia took place in their life trajectories and professional careers? What about their perceptions and discourses apropos the encounters and interactions with Cambodian colleagues? Similarly, what about these issues from the Cambodian midwives and obstetricians? How did these encounters impact both their lives and careers? Here we make the hypothesis that the concept of 'turning point' (Abbott, 2001) may provide a useful tool to examine the predictability and unpredictability of life courses and careers.

Secondly, the birth humanization programs carried out by JICA in Cambodia as additionally to be seen as a 'merchant and non-merchant transfer'. As Bouté et al. (2021) proposed it will be necessary to name and signify non-market transfers; classify the forms of non-market transfers; and describe the articulations of non-market transfers with market and state spheres. Then, studying the transferred things, but also their actions, their identities, their statuses, their ideologies, their imaginations, and the social relations in which they evolve may provide meaningful insights. As Bouté et al. (2021) quote, 'It will be a question of observing the different tangles (opposition, competition, combination, complementarity, porosity, coexistence, separation, etc.) between non-market forms of flow and market and state circulation regimes.

In Japan today, caesarean section, episiotomy use rates are among the lowest in the world and the promotion of the humanized birth model is expanding widely (Behruzi et al., 2010). Paradoxically, several Japanese voices are rising to alert the opinion and the authorities about the high rate of suicide of pregnant and post-partum women, mostly in the main Japanese cities (Shigemi et al., 2020; Kubota et al., 2020). Additionnal field investigations are required, both in Japan and in their programs hosting countries to analyse further these issues within a comparative approach. For example, given our arena of observations we wonder why the JICA humanized childbirth project has been a success in Cambodia with concrete achievement (reduction in the rate of episiotomies) while it didn't take root in Benin (Shantz, forthcoming). Obviously, what the exportation of the Japanese birth models drives, makes and generate needs to be documented. Also exploring the 'social construction' and the 'social production' (Fassin & Eideliman, 2012) of a low-tech humanized birth model by a high-tech and in some circumstances too often dehumanized society open new research fields for the anthropology of human reproduction.

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Humanitarian Intervention and the Religious Ethos of Japan

Abstract

The recent military coup d'état in Myanmar has triggered widespread indignation and concern in the international community. The Tatmadaw have deposed a freely elected government led by the National League for Democracy, interrupting a decade-long process of democratization and repressing the ensuing civil protests with violence. Liberal democracies worldwide issued joint statements of condemnation as well as sanctions targeting the economic interests of the Burmese military. Among them, Japan has been a notable exception in taking significant measures against armed violence. Despite being a democracy pledging to pursue a diplomacy based on freedom, the rule of law and basic human rights, Japan tends to assume passive stances towards violence perpetrated abroad. Drawing from ontological security theory, the article tries to explain this attitude by taking into account Japan's religious ethos. It is shown that the normative framework underlying Japan's religious traditions is in stark contrast with the Western, individualistic principles on which humanitarian interventionism is based.

Keywords: *Japan, Myanmar, security, humanitarian intervention, religion*

1. Introduction

Among the recurring patterns in Japanese foreign policy, the ambiguous stance over human security issues is surely a most controversial one. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan is a democratic political system upholding the highest standards of human rights and developing policies for their promotion (MOFA, 2019, p. 1). Moreover, Japan has consistently

acted as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, serving for fifteen non-consecutive years since the Council's creation in 2006 (MOFA, 2019, p. 2). Human rights are also reserved attention in the Constitution of Japan, where several articles stress the importance of fundamental human rights as eternal and inviolate ones, which have to be maintained by the constant endeavor of the people (The Constitution of Japan, 1947). Indeed, Japan's endeavors in enacting a human security policy abroad, revolving around the tenet of 'freedom from want' (Prantl & Nakano, 2011, p. 216), have been the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy since the end of the Cold War (Huda, 2016, p. 21).

However, the recent Myanmar coup d'état laid bare some fundamental ambiguities regarding Japan's approach to human security in targeting international violence. Tokyo has been harshly criticized both domestically and abroad for its lack of commitment in protecting people in conflict situations (see Honna, 2012, p. 100). In the violent aftermath of the coup d'état carried out by the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar military, the Japanese government had expressed deep concern over the ongoing situation, but these formulaic expressions were not met by concrete policy countermeasures. The late condemnation of the military coup (Sasamori, 2021) and the unwillingness to apply sanctions (Kasai, 2021) are seen as unbecoming moves by the international community.

Scholars and pundits have advanced different hypotheses to explain this persistent ambiguity. A prevailing view is that Japan's 'silent engagement' is part of the strategy to counterbalance China's looming aims in South-East Asia (Gaens, 2018; Akimoto, 2021; Kasai, 2021), fearing that sanctions would push the Tatmadaw closer to Beijing. The aim of this paper is to offer a different explanation for this foreign policy stance by exploring the ethical framework that enabled a discourse on humanitarian interventionism in the Western world, which is characterized by strong reductionist individualist values. Japan's religious ethos shows instead a polar opposite view, based on collectivism and the importance of relationships in social nexuses.

The present research will be structured in the following way. First, Japan's ambiguous endorsement of humanitarian interventionism will be presented and contextualized in light of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) paradigm, with subsequent literature introducing the problematic aspects of it. A discussion of ontological security theory in IR will follow in order to shed more light on Japan's ambiguity. From that, there will be an investigation of the individualist ethics of interventionism, which will

be shown to be in contrast with Japan's religious ethos and collectivist predisposition. The paper will end with an analysis of Japan's foreign policy discourse on the Myanmar coup d'état, as articulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its cognate organs. A conclusion will then summarize the findings of the research.

2. The Responsibility to Protect: its reception in Japan and implementation challenges

Humanitarian intervention has always been an object of controversy. Sovereign states and political communities retain their own right to self-determination, preserving order and providing justice according to their own legal frameworks. Yet, members of the international community agree upon a shared set of norms, such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which are aimed at combating injustices at the global level. After the end of the Cold War, ethnic genocides happening in Bosnia and Rwanda prompted a response in moral engagement against massive human rights violations. In response to these tensions, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty introduced the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) in 2001, which was eventually endorsed by the UN in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (UN, 2005). The notion of R2P advances an understanding of sovereignty no more as mere right, but as an actual responsibility towards the whole international community. One of the core principles of R2P states as follows:

Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect (ICISS, 2001, p. XI).

The concept of R2P, at least in its early formulation, entailed an undertaking of military interventions in order to protect people suffering from violence. Still, deploying an army for the sake of peace also implied another series of principles to be followed, either before or after the intervention. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) stressed the importance of prioritising prevention in the R2P debate, and in the necessity of an intervention a major focus on peace-building processes would be necessary. For these reasons, the R2P

would incorporate not only a responsibility to react, but also a responsibility to prevent and a responsibility to rebuild (ICISS, 2001, pp. 69–70).

However, the implementation of R2P norms is replete with risks and difficulties, and in some cases powerful actors can take advantage of their position and engage in forms of neo-imperialism or adventurism (Valentino, 2011). The consequences of one's own intervention can bring about unforeseen or even undesirable circumstances, like the prolonging of internal struggles or the empowerment of local authoritarian actors. Moreover, states can also be willing to engage in intervention in order to reinforce their sense of belonging to a specific group of influence. American scholar Brent Steele contended that NATO powers felt a strong sense of shame for not having been able to avert genocides like Rwanda, as could be observed in the remorse expressed in those states' official discourses (Steele, 2008, p. 70). Hence, the greater the power of a state is the greater its responsibility will be, and in turn the greater the international shame when incapable of addressing international violence.

R2P and interventionism are not limited to the sphere of the military. Rising controversies in the use of force, especially in the limited capacity to avoid either direct or indirect civilian casualties (Wyatt, 2019, p. 38), have urged states and non-governmental actors to consider new modalities for intervention (Zhu, 2019, p. 12). Since R2P is *per se* a broad concept, it should also include actions aimed at the prevention of violence and efforts towards post-conflict reconstruction (Chandler, 2012). Measures can also extend to, among others, diplomatic pressure, arms embargoes, and financial sanctions. Avoiding the use of force can be more successful than direct military intervention, and non-forceful measures are also likely to be implemented more promptly, since the approval of military intervention can only be legitimated by the UN Security Council (Zhu, 2019, p. 12).

The reception of R2P norms in Japan has been unquestionably problematic. Tokyo's human security foreign policy revolves around the tenet of 'freedom from want' rather than 'freedom from fear' (Prantl & Nakano, 2011, p. 216), which translates into the preeminence of economic diplomacy and development assistance over interventionism (Honna, 2012, p. 96). Japan has already deployed token contingencies of Self-Defense Forces (SDF) abroad in the past, but they were involved in non-military roles of humanitarian assistance (MOFA, 2011). Besides that, Japanese domestic consensus for R2P norms is rather fragmented. As both Honna (2012) and Kassim (2014) have pointed out, there are four

different ideological stances over R2P: a conservative one, exemplified by Fukuda's statement (Fukuda, 2008), which tends to passively support the R2P; a revisionist one, advocating for a more robust role of the SDF and the normalization of the constitution; a liberal stance, supporting the pacifist constitution and seeing the R2P as problematic due to potential instrumentalization; lastly, pacifist activism, strongly opposed to R2P as it obscures the international causes of failed states.

Up until now, Japan has maintained a passive posture towards intervention abroad. Several scholars have explained the lack of direct engagement with R2P in terms of Japan's pacifism. The pacifist argument, albeit not directly linked to humanitarian intervention, started to gain traction in the first half of the 1990s, when anti-militarism was seen as the backbone of Japan's postwar pacifist identity (Berger, 1993; Katzenstein & Okawara, 1993; see also Oros, 2015). More recently, Prantl & Nakano (2011, pp. 216–217), borrowing Amitav Acharya's concept of norm localization (Acharya, 2009), argued that the unwillingness to endorse R2P stems out of a preexisting normative framework, where anti-militarism and Japan's pacifist identity are incompatible with norms of intervention. Honna (2012, p. 110) holds a similar view on pacifism, but concludes that Japan has potential to incrementally adjust its position by adhering to the first two out of the three pillars of R2P (i.e., a vague pledge to protect peoples from mass atrocities, and the responsibility to encourage and assist states to meet that pledge), while keeping in check revisionists' efforts towards normalization of the military.

Nonetheless, the reformist government of Abe Shinzo has indeed shaken the image of a 'traditionally' pacifist Japan by establishing a National Security Council, approving record military expenditures (Reuters, 2016), and attempting at revisioning Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (Blum, 2014). It becomes then difficult to categorize Japan as a 'culturally' pacifist country, or at least to consider Japan's pacifism as an obstacle to remilitarization efforts. Indeed, Hagström and Hanssen (2016) have demonstrated how both pacifism and rearmament are not mutually exclusive, and that the concept of peace can be articulated according to the ruling political ideology. Moreover, Gustafsson et al. (2019) have stressed how Japan's new 'proactive pacifism' does not merely entail tougher defence strategies but could also imply pre-emptive moves towards those who are deemed 'unpeaceful'.

Demistification of Japanese pacifism notwithstanding, Tokyo has maintained a stance of strict non-interventionism following events of international violence and human rights violations. Pacifism might not

be the explanation for this tendency, but there is possibly some degree of truth in those scholars that argue for cultural factors to have a major influence. This paper supports the view that those factors relate to Japan's religious ethos and its political implications, which will be shown as being diametrically opposed to R2P's normative framework.

3. Japan's non-interventionism and ontological security theory

In the aftermath of the coup d'état, Japan's stagnant attitude towards military violence has been strongly criticized by commentators worldwide (Heijmans & Tan, 2021; Kasai, 2021; Sasamori, 2021). According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan is a democracy that developed and consolidated policies for the promotion and protection of human rights and universal freedoms (MOFA, 2019). Furthermore, the role of Japan as second largest donor to the UNDP calls for a significant degree of responsibility over international matters (UNDP, 2020). Japan's pledges to the international community are also enshrined in the Free and Open Indo Pacific policy plan, which revolves around the rule of law, stability and prosperity (MOFA, 2021). Despite this, Tokyo struggles to condemn explicitly a military junta that has been killing hundreds of civilians, and some have even argued that the unwillingness to put financial pressure goes against Biden's strategy to defend democracy in East Asia (Heijmans & Tan, 2021).

This seemingly irrational foreign policy stance of Japan has been read by several pundits as a 'passive diplomacy' aimed at withholding China's influence in East Asia (Kasai, 2021; Sasamori, 2021; Sugiyama & Osaki, 2021). They claim that excessive pressure on Myanmar's military would turn the country more towards Beijing, and Tokyo would then lose influence over a nation to which it has been the greatest donor in recent years (UN, 2020). Surely, the passive involvement strategy might be geopolitically efficacious, but costs Japan a heavy toll as a foremost member of the international community in East Asia. While not rejecting either geopolitical strategy or Japan's efforts as a donor country, we can better disentangle this ambiguity by drawing insights from ontological security theory applied to IR.

The ontological security theory paradigm has considerably evolved since its rise to academic renown in the 2000s (Mitzen, 2006; Rumelili, 2014; Lupovici, 2016; Steele, 2008). At its core, the theory endorses an

epistemological stance based on state-level identities and narratives. States are considered like individuals that can pursue actions which steer away from rationality and reasonableness even at the cost of physical harm or loss of approval. This happens because they tend to develop a 'biographical narrative' where cultural identity, shared values, and social hierarchy enable and constrain specific policy choices. The way this is carried out in practice is object of debate among scholars: some think that states achieve ontological security externally, i.e. by establishing a routinization of relations with significant others (Mitzen, 2006; Rumelili, 2014), while others claim that the accomplishment of a stability continuum is reached by being as coherent as possible with one's own pre-established narrative (Steele, 2008).

When thinking about Japan and its foreign policy, we can see how both these theoretical strands somehow converge to provide a powerful explanatory picture. Following Zarakol (2010), it can be observed that Tokyo maintains a state of constant security anxiety by being split between the East and the West. Through the Meiji Restoration, Japan aimed at proving to the West that they did not belong to a still 'uncivilized' Asia, with political élites bolstering a sense of superiority that would ultimately legitimize imperialism. Japan, as a great power frustrated by the incapacity to anchor itself in either the Western or the Eastern world, is split between efforts that keep it away from both the Asian community and the international system (Zarakol, 2010, pp. 16–19).

In the case of the Myanmar coup, Japan is struggling to live up to its role as a prominent liberal democracy. The hypothesis advanced by this paper is that Tokyo is adhering to a line of non-interventionism as part of its policy identity narrative, rooted in values stemming from its religious background rather than from a professed pacifism. The adoption of ontological security as a theoretical paradigm might sound problematic, as it resorts to typically Western concepts such as 'sense of self', 'identity narratives', and 'significant others'. Still, this has already been applied successfully in the analysis of Japan's foreign policy issues (Gustafsson, 2019, 2020; Kumagai, 2015; Zarakol, 2010), even though studies in the field have yet to focus on the influence of religious aspects in Japanese diplomacy and bilateral relations.

4. Human security and the ethical origins of interventionism

Interventionism in human security has been seen by some as a reflection of Western ethos (Prantl & Nakano, 2011, p. 216). This claim can be better illustrated as follows:

Intervention is no longer understood politically or challenged on such grounds but is understood in terms of a moral-ethical framework in which powerful states and international institutions have a moral obligation to intervene on behalf of citizens of other states (McCormack, 2008, pp. 124–125).

To understand this moral-ethical framework, we should first investigate the ethics behind cosmopolitan human protection and intervention. Wyatt (2019, pp. 26–27) pinpoints the three basic premises behind it. First, is the idea of individualism, which tends to reduce collectivities down to the single individual and sees the state as acting on behalf of individuals' fundamental rights; Secondly, an egalitarianism according to which every human being has the same moral status compared to others; lastly, a universalist view of collective agency and global responsibility.

However, both in Wyatt's and other scholars' ideas, we can see how the notion of individualism appears to be the one having logic primacy over the other two. The tenets of egalitarianism and universalism can be understood only when one accepts the ethics of intervention as the protection and advancements of *individual* human rights. Wyatt (2019, p. 37) defines the concept of human security as a search for the strengthening of human development and the protection of *individuals*. Others, for example Robert Fine (2007, p. 79), claim that *individuals* must be safeguarded from murderous governments, and that the principle of non-intervention has to be suspended in front of grave violations of human rights. Patrick Hayden (2005, p. 34) purported instead that *individuals* are at the very heart of the moral claims to basic liberties, needs and interest. Even in David Held, one of the forefathers of cosmopolitan thought, the reduction of collectivities to individual units echoes as the regulating principle for global responsibility:

The first principle is that the ultimate unit of moral concern are individual human beings, not states or other particular forms of human association. (...) To think of people as having equal moral value is to make a general claim about the basic units of the world comprising persons as free and equal beings. This notion can be referred to as the principle of individualist moral egalitarianism or, simply, egalitarian individualism (Held, 2005, p. 12).

Presenting this from a Western religious standpoint, we can draw a parallel between individualism as the first principle for humanitarian intervention and its parallel in Christian symbolism. Durkheim affirmed that the development of the individualistic spirit has underlied Christianity since its inception, as the essential conditions of piety and human dignity were internal, and not external, to the single individual (Durkheim, 1973, p. 52). Thus, the center of moral life finds place in the inner tension between the individual and a transcendent divinity, with the former being ultimate sovereign over its own conduct and accountable only to itself and God.

The notion of egalitarian individualism also entails a reformulation of the very concept of sovereignty. Indeed, so-called sovereign states have well-defined political borders, but in the case of a state failing to protect its people this notion decays and is superseded by individual rights (ICISS, p. 13). Hence, from a conceptualization of sovereignty as territoriality, the ethics of interventionism introduces sovereignty as *responsibility* (Wyatt, 2019, p. 98), one to be borne by the international community at large. This reformulation of sovereignty has not been left unscathed from criticism. Bartelson (2016, pp. 186–189) observed that several academics indulged in historicizing sovereignty as a contingent and malleable concept. As such, this would pave the way to unbridled practices of interference and intervention. The perils of intervention are also discussed by Fukutomi (2021), a scholar advocating for what he calls a ‘minimalist-institutional’ approach. Drawing from Michael Ignatieff, he claims that universal standards for human rights are problematic insofar as having a well-defined one might lead to political crusades (Fukutomi, 2021, p. 18). Humanitarian intervention is thus seen as in need of a minimalist core to be identified through dialogue and cultural pluralism.

In the end, a human security framework based on an individualist ethics of egalitarianism strides with approaches which tend to favor pluralism. The following section will introduce Japanese collective ethics as it emerged from its religious and cultural background.

5. Japan and religious ethos: collectivism and self-negation

Among what defines the ethical structure of a social group, one can single-out shared norms, belief systems, and cultural practices. In the case of Japan, such a framework has been shaped by different religious

traditions (Itō, 1998), which managed to coexist peacefully and influence each other's rituals and practices. It is difficult to identify a religion that has prevailed upon the others, but one can claim that Shintō, Buddhism and Confucianism are those deserving more scholarly attention. All of them are divided into different schools, which in turn enshrine different fundamental values, but what can be said of all is that they share an essential symbolic reality based on *collectivism*. This part will offer a cross section of collective values and tendencies in Japan's religious ethos, which will show a stark contrast to the values and ethics that informed the discourse around interventionism and human security in the West.

It has been shown how the notion of egalitarian individualism underlies the morals of global responsibility. According to advocates of humanitarian intervention, a collectivity has to be understood by reducing it to its basic unit, i.e. a single human individual. Only a global commitment to empowering and emancipating individuals can prevent brutal states to commit human crimes in the name of sovereignty (McCormack, 2008, p. 115). Such a view contemplates human security as something to be achieved without the use of force and transforms the subjects of intervention from mere passive recipients to active agents of change (Chandler, 2012, p. 223). However, the perception of single individuals as the ultimate recipients of rights and recognition is not ubiquitous. Nakamura suggested that in Japan social relationships take precedence over individuals, in a way echoing the development of Japanese society from small, localized farming communities (Nakamura, 1964, p. 424). A limited social nexus, usually reducible to familial ties, is thus considered the smallest social unit, where not individual freedoms, but the intimacy and stability of social bonds are defining the strength of a group of people. According to him, this trait evolved out of traditional Shintō practices during *matsuri*, or festivals. The community is the center of Shintō festivals: individuals put aside their own preoccupations and cooperate as a group, praying for the maintenance of peace and prosperity (Picken, 2004, p. 342). Moreover, the role of social nexuses is not only prevalent in daily life, but also regulates the symbolic universe of Shintō mythology. There lies no concept akin to individual salvation: in the afterlife, individuals lose their identity and merge into a community of ancestral spirits that, besides other human beings, is made of trees, plants, beasts, mountains, seas, and so on (Nakamura, 1964, p. 522).

Is it also worthy to point out how the concept of *kokusaika*, or Japan's internationalization, reflects the collectivism of Shintō values. To

explain this concept, Picken (2004, pp. 340–341) resorts to the insights of Asoya Masahiko, who defined *kokusaika* as the development in the exchange of goods, information, and interaction with people from other nations, carried out in a way to promote a mutually beneficial state of coexistence. *Kokusaika* stands on four precepts: first, that the mutual exchange is understood not only in quantitative terms, but also in terms of mutual prosperity; second, the strict condemnation of the use of force when complications arise during interaction; third, emphasis on financial stability and development for the exchange to be beneficial; lastly, a genuine enthusiasm and diligence for innovation. In these four principles is evident how relations, even at the international level, tend towards collectivism instead of self-gain. Still, this mindset implies a promotion of stagnation patterns rather than exceptionalism or freedom of action.

Confucianism, unlike Shintō, does not contemplate the existence of a transcendental realm. It heavily emphasizes social morality and the use of virtues in this world. More specifically, the symbolic order of Confucianism exactly overlaps the one in which we currently live. As put in the *Analecta*:

Ji Lu asked about serving the spirits. The Master said, "While you are yet not able to serve men, how could you be able to serve the spirits?" "May I ask about death?" "When you do not yet understand life, how could you understand death?" (Eno, 2015, p. 53).

Filial piety and harmony are considered essential virtues in Confucianism, since the family is regarded as the basic unit of the earthly microcosm. Therefore, inasmuch as the microcosm reflects itself into the symbolic order, to respect one's own ancestors and taking care of family members is to attain the ultimate goals of reality (Itō, 1998, p. 626). We can here again refer to what is found in the *Analecta*:

Master Zeng said: Devote care to life's end and pursue respect for the distant dead; in this way, the virtue of the people will return to fullness. (...) The Master said: When the father is alive, observe the son's intent. When the father dies, observe the son's conduct. One who does not alter his late father's dao for three years may be called filial (Eno, 2015, pp. 2–3).

Hence, it is clear how the notion of individualism finds no appreciation in Confucian cosmology, as it contradicts its fundamental symbolic values.

Western individualism is also opposed by Buddhist ideas. Maruyama (2008, p. 178) states that a Buddhist view on the role of humanity in nature is in sharp contrast with the anthropocentric epistemology of the West. According to the *hongaku* principle of Japanese Buddhism,

everything in nature has the same existential value and lives through symbiotic relationships (Maruyama, 2008). The dichotomy subject/object is thus denied, as are denied relationships of material belonging. The monastic life is a perfect metaphor to explain this position. In what might be seen as the individualistic practice *par excellence*, we should highlight that the individualism underlying it is merely a means to an end. The monk, following the path of Gautama Buddha, renounces everything and detaches from the rest of the world to attain enlightenment, which is a state where the individual realizes about the illusions engendered by the self: there are no essential differences in the phenomenal world, i.e. all things are one and become part of the whole that is the universe (Itō, 1998, pp. 624–625).

However, the pursuit of enlightenment has been object of criticism, even from within Buddhist movements. The so-called Critical Buddhism scholarship, a trend peaking in the late 1990s, defined *hongaku* enlightenment as an ideology supporting the *status quo* and legitimizing social injustice (Hubbard & Swanson, 1997, p. 290). When looking at the Myanmar coup, this is readily observable in Japan's non-interventionist tendencies even in the case of harmful violence, and in the uncritical acceptance of the junta as a legitimate governing body (Sasamori, 2021).

6. Japan's Myanmar discourse and foreign policy

Due to the recent nature of the events in question, the choice of available data is obviously limited. However, it can be useful to trace back in time some overlapping patterns of foreign policy discourse, and not only regarding Myanmar diplomacy. A useful starting point can be to reinstate the formula adopted by then Prime Minister Fukuda during the 2008 World Economic Forum in Davos:

Japan does not intervene by force, as a matter of national policy, in such conflict situations where the international community may have to seriously consider fulfilling their 'responsibility to protect'; we are a nation that has primarily focused on humanitarian and reconstruction assistance (Fukuda, 2008).

Fukuda's position reflects an understanding of peace and security as long-term challenges, stressing the importance to develop institutional frameworks and ensuring the rule of law in order to achieve them. This attitude is the most widespread among traditionally conservative politicians,

who wanted to distance interventionism from the concept of human security in order not to appear as too assertive internationally (Honma, 2012, p. 98). Among the different views on R2P in Japan, revisionist politicians such as Koizumi Junichirō and Shinzō Abe are those who encourage the most a robust interventionism in order to bolster the reach of the SDF (Honma, 2012, pp. 98–99). However, this has not been the case for international violence and human rights abuse. The Rohingya crisis of 2017 saw Abe's cabinet as ruling government, and throughout the crisis' years-long aftermath Japan's position has been staunchly non-interventionist. Maruyama Ichirō, long-standing Japanese Ambassador in Naypyitaw, had claimed that Japan would not agree to the pressure from the international community in taking actions against Myanmar, as things could become more complicated (Kasai, 2019). Through a joint effort with then Myanmar's president Aung San Suu Kiy, Maruyama instead co-organized the Rakhine State Investment Fair in 2019, with the scope of preventing further conflict by stimulating economic development.

On February 1 2021, a military coup d'état overthrew the freely elected government of the National League for Democracy. The junta led by general Min Aung Hlaing interrupted a decade-long process of democratization and repressed violently the ensuing civilian protests. The former state counsellor Aung San Suu Kiy and president Win Myint had been arrested (Goldman, 2021). According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a non-profit human rights organization based in both Thailand and Myanmar, early numbers told of more than one thousand persons killed, and several thousands more either arrested or charged with a warrant (AAPP, 2021).

The official response of Japan, albeit critical, was far less condemning compared to other Western liberal democracies. In the words of Foreign Affairs Minister Motegi Toshimitsu:

Japan has grave concern over the situation in Myanmar, where a state of emergency was declared on February 1 and the process of democratization is being undermined (...) The Government of Japan has strongly supported the process of democratization in Myanmar and opposes any action which goes against such process. Japan once again strongly urges the Myanmar military to swiftly restore Myanmar's democratic political system (Motegi, 2021a).

Originally, Japan had made three official urgent requests to the Myanmar military: to immediately stop resorting to violence and restore democracy, to release political prisoners, and to ensure the safety of

every Japanese national in Myanmar. Nonetheless, the Ministry avoided to directly condemn the junta as the perpetrator of bloodshed, and kept insisting on mutual dialogue as the foremost means to deescalate violence (Motegi, 2021b).

Given the preeminent role of Japan as donor to Myanmar, discussions about the suspension of ODA to the country rapidly ensued. At first, Motegi limited himself to evade direct positions by stressing again the necessity of communication and negotiation (Motegi, 2021c), claiming that Japan's stance in the aftermath of the coup had been highly appreciated by the international community (Motegi, 2021e). However, the situation started to change in May. Soon after the news of the release and repatriation of a Japanese journalist arrested in Yangon in April (Reuters, 2021), Motegi claimed that Tokyo might be compelled to review ODA and stop companies from investing even if they wanted to (Motegi, 2021f). However, a final decision was never taken, and the provision for an Emergency Grant Aid was created in half July. It would have provided a total of 5.8 million US dollars in humanitarian assistance to the populations of Myanmar affected by the coup, to be disbursed with the assistance of international organizations (Motegi, 2021g). Again, no specific accusations were made against the Tatmadaw, conveying the impression that the occurring violence amounts to a side-effect of unfortunate domestic conditions.

Japan has also been reluctant to impose sanctions on Myanmar's military government (Akimoto, 2021; Heijmans & Tan, 2021; Kasai, 2021; Sugiyama & Osaki, 2021). When prompted on the possibility for applying some to Myanmar, Motegi carefully drew a line between the kind of sanctions directed towards an irreconcilable enemy like North Korea and those aimed at disciplining a violent, yet friendly, state:

If we think about sanctions, there are various kinds. For example, there are severe sanctions restricting all transactions such as the complete sanctions on North Korea based on the United Nations Security Council Resolutions, and sanctions that are not like that. Amidst this, what would be most effective to urge or, to put it another way, pressure the Myanmar military? I believe it is extremely important to consider what would be most effective from the perspective of what we want Myanmar to become, as I stated earlier (Motegi, 2021d).

This is a point on which Tokyo has never even discussed to change its policy line. The Japanese government has always stressed the importance of mutual communication and dialogue to restore democracy and stop violence. In this respect, Japan proactively encouraged the endorsement of the Five-Point Consensus, an agreement reached during the ASEAN

high-level summit of 24 April (Motegi, 2021h). However, the tentative agreement has quickly been valued as a failure by international observers. No call for the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kiy, had been made, as well as no condemnation of military violence against civilians and other ethnicities (Lee, 2021). Nonetheless, Motegi reiterated Japan's support for the Five-Point Consensus in August, leaving intact the non-interventionist line. Myanmar's coup d'état has since lost political attention, due to the huge impact on the international scenario of the soon-to-follow US retreat from Afghanistan.

7. Conclusion

Despite widespread criticism and pressure from the international community, Japan tended to keep an almost unchanged foreign policy line towards Myanmar's repressive junta government. As observed in official discourse, Japan's diplomatic approach retained much of the religious values discussed earlier in the paper. First, an adherence to principles of financial stability and mutual prosperity with the provision of emergency aid grants, alongside a condemnation of the use of force. Secondly, a passive acceptance of the *status quo* and the tacit legitimization of the Tatmadaw as the *de facto* governing authority. Lastly, a general ambiguity serving as a compromise to maintain harmony with both the junta and the international community.

The religious ethos of Japan is highly syncretic and varied, but the three major religious traditions of Shintō, Confucianism and Buddhism share a collectivist symbolic universe that is in sharp contrast with the one in which Western humanitarian interventionism was conceived. In fact, Tokyo not only found it difficult (if not impossible) to embody the military side of R2P, but also shied away from much softer measures such as sanctions or diplomatic pressure. The case of the Myanmar coup showed that, regardless of the amount of criticism from the West and human rights observers, Japan has never changed its foreign policy line.

Ontological security theory shows how state-level narratives and policy attitudes are built upon shared values and cultural identities, and how states can either resist or succumb to external pressure in order to attain a continuum of stable mindsets. Japan is a case for the former, where deeply internalized social norms, conceivably matured from religious backgrounds as cultural underpinnings, can exercise influence in constraining interference in international affairs.

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**Relations between Central
and Eastern Europe with Asia
– Current and Future Challenges**

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The V4 – ASEAN Perspectives Cooperation and Diplomatic Missions in Southeast Asia and Central Europe

Abstract

This paper provides an overview of diplomatic missions between Central Europe and Southeast Asia and draws a picture of the political, economic, and cultural interactions between the countries of the two regions on vertical and horizontal levels. Desktop research is combined with selected theoretical views on diplomatic representation and international cooperation. A particular attention is paid to the interaction of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Descriptive empirical views are interpreted in a growing “Indo-Pacific” context. The potential of the V4-ASEAN cooperation format is recognized but not yet fulfilled, which is expected to change with implementation of the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Keywords: ASEAN, consulate, cooperation, diplomatic mission, embassy, V4

1. Introduction

This paper is dedicated to the Central European – Southeast Asian perspectives. Attention is given to the distribution of diplomatic representation and cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries (V4) with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Southeast Asia is considered to be the central region in the growing ‘Indo-Pacific’ discourse, in which EU’s position might appear peripheral while

Asia is the core region. This discourse turns on a growing response from the West to the ambitious Chinese international politics. The V4 has been involved in the 'China and Central and Eastern European Countries' (China + 17/16 CEEC), which is a major Chinese multilateral initiative related to the 'One Belt One Road' in this part of Europe.

In East Asia, the V4 has formalized cooperation with Japan (V4 + Japan) and to a lesser degree with South Korea (V4 + South Korea) (cf. Dubravčíková et al., 2019). For Southeast Asia, the V4 countries cooperate with the ASEAN countries mostly on an individual basis, though ASEAN is recognized by V4 among "Other Partners" (Visegrad Group, 2021). The ASEAN is a major trading partner for China, while the European Union (EU) is the ASEAN's 3rd major trading partner. The V4 with the population over 64 million is equivalent to 5th largest economy in the EU 27 (Statista, 2020), but unlike top economies in GDP at current market prices, such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain; the V4 countries has had a modest interaction with ASEAN. This has been changing in the past few years until the coronavirus pandemic paralyzed the steady development of the V4 relations in Southeast Asia.

This short qualitative study explores vertical and horizontal levels of interaction between Central Europe and Southeast Asia. The short study focuses on two cases. The first case presents network of diplomatic missions of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia in Southeast Asia and of the ASEAN countries in Central Europe. The second case sums up cooperation in given three areas. The overview is presented in tables. The methodology is based on desktop research with a focus on political, economic, and cultural aspects from the official diplomatic and governmental sources such as the diplomatic corps, consular lists and websites, providing the primary data.

The literature on Central European – Southeast Asian relations *per se* is lacking. Regarding information sources for this analysis, a portion of undirect or related sources were examined as secondary data. The secondary literature mostly covers academic and local media articles related to the topic. This study is rather empirical and descriptive, filling a gap in literature. The theoretical base stems on international cooperation and diplomatic missions. The study seeks insights to the two following problems: 1) what is the coverage of the general V4 – ASEAN diplomatic representation in Central Europe and Southeast Asia; and 2) how the V4 and the ASEAN countries stand with cooperation in the political, economic, and socio-cultural areas.

In assessing the cooperation and diplomatic representation of a group of countries for another region, this analysis was conducted in two steps – abstraction and decomposition. For abstraction it is creation of a model to solve a problem, in this case which V4 countries have what representation in each Southeast Asian country, and which ASEAN countries have what diplomatic representation in a given V4 country. For decomposition it is the identification of key information and going into a problem based on an analysis of smaller elements of diplomatic representation – e.g. which examples of the political, economic, and cultural cooperation are mostly visible.

2. International cooperation and diplomatic representation

International cooperation is a cornerstone of international relations. Theoretically it stems on empirical knowledge and practice in international politics. According to Dai, Snidel & Sampson (2017), today's study of international cooperation is influenced by constructivism and agent modelling leading to new challenges to a rational approach. There have been occasional shifts from a realist to a neorealist view that stress pessimistic assumptions for new cooperation possibilities. The pragmatic side of traditional diplomacy underwent changes in the turn of 1980s and 1990s with globalization, in which dependency effects were blended with a geo-economic interests of nation states. Globalization brought new actors, such as non-governmental organizations, international institutions, trans-national corporations, who opened new channels of international cooperation. It contributed to horizontal development of sectoral cooperation. Major themes in the contemporary study of international cooperation include reciprocity and reputation, different strategic settings, problems of relative gains, large number of actors as a limit, domestic politics, effects and distribution of sources of international institutions (Dai, Snidel & Sampson, 2017).

The diplomacy as a tool for dialogue and mediation leads us to the explanation of actions among governments of different countries (Steizen, 2018). The diplomatic representation is a broad category, which involves various different levels that delegate national interests. Apart from traditional diplomacy of a nation state, Steizen (2018) divides such a representation further on: non-state representation (e.g. multinational

corporations), supranational representation (EU, ASEAN and to some degree the Visegrad Group), subnational representation (such as sister cities) and the transnational representation (such as non-governmental organizations). The diplomatic mission involves a diplomatic representation of the sending state with the host state. This function is maintained by the embassies and consulates. According to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations from 1961, the diplomatic missions are implemented by diplomatic agents in order to perform and develop friendly relations that will contribute to the international peace and security. The diplomatic agents are represented by heads of missions (ambassadors) supported by members of diplomatic staff. The functions cover protecting the national interests within the international law, negotiations with host country, promotion of political, economic and cultural relations, among other (United Nations, 2005). The embassies, consulates and permanent representations serve as sources of local information and knowledge of host countries, providers of assistance to all nationals and national subjects (corporations, organizations, individuals, etc.) of the country represented by the mission, and last but not least, the platform for development of bilateral relations (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Luxembourg, 2021).

Public diplomacy is one of the primary objectives of state diplomacy. It covers a scope of activities such as cultural events, cultivation of country image and country branding, a channel of state propaganda, visa administration and communication with a host country, among others (Mellisen, 2005). This scope has been developing over the past decades. An important variable is the good or best practices, which as a category is based on successful projects and negotiations that lead to significant spill-overs generated by related areas, such as joint business activities or democracy building efforts. It goes together with the soft power, a concept that has become popular in academia and politics, which is based on attractiveness and persuasion of one country towards other countries (Nye, 2004). It includes cultural factors leading to persuasion without coercion, unlike hard power which stems on strong economy and military. As Mellisen states (2005), the power of persuasion has become a key requirement for the EU's success in the world through the means of cultural diplomacy.

New trends in diplomacy include the diplomacy for sustainable development and the knowledge diplomacy (also science diplomacy) that are upcoming relevant academic trends in the pandemic-recovery era, in the post-truth era and in relation to the climate change (Macaspac Hernandez,

2021). Volker Stanzel explains (2018) that the modern diplomatic practice operates in new conditions of the digital era. Here the digitalization of diplomatic agenda, on one hand, makes the diplomatic practice more efficient and flexible, with better tools to gather local intelligence and synthesize it in a diplomatic output; on other hand, it makes the whole structure more susceptible to cyberthreats, espionage from outside to inside of embassies, or the social media that has become also a diplomatic tool as a channel of public diplomacy and a source of criticism and disinformation. Last but not least, the personal element or the personality of a diplomat has become a critical variable in diplomatic missions (Stanzel, 2018).

3. The V4 and the ASEAN

The EU and ASEAN, although geographically distant regional groupings, are considered as the first and the second most successful regionalisms in the world (Mahbubani & Sgn, 2017). The EU forms a market of up to 450 million consumers, while ASEAN's market counts over 600 million consumers. While the EU, though with regional disparities, can be considered among the richest and most developed parts of the world, ASEAN countries are more fragmented in development. Unlike mono-cultural European civilization with democratic and capitalist systems, ASEAN nations are characterized as a multi-cultural civilization, in which one finds different political systems from autocratic and authoritarian to democratic regimes in different degree of economic and political transitions. The ASEAN is the 3rd largest trade partner to the EU, while the EU is ASEAN's 3rd largest trade partner after China and Japan in 2021.

Created in 1991, the V4 is a Central European regional multilateral initiative, community and political-cultural alliance of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia. These countries had been converging since the fall of Iron Curtain towards EU membership in 2003 and 2004. The transition period strengthened European identity and contributed to democratization of the region, which is located just next to the Baltics, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Balkans. In 2021 the V4 countries were a faction in the EU politics and the fastest growing region in the EU that is prominent in engineering industries based on export-oriented model. The V4 as a platform is not institutionalized deeply, rather it is working on a principle of periodical

meetings and ministerial summits on an annual basis (Visegrad Group, 2021). As well, the V4 stands as a faction in the EU politics. In the past decade the Visegrad Group has been ever more opened to East(ern) Asia.

Created in 1967, the ASEAN operates within a supranational multinational institutional entity based on co-existence of different states (ASEAN, 2021). The so-called “ASEAN Way” has been guided by a consensus on problems while respecting principle of non-interference in internal affairs of different countries share in the region and beyond. As an economic union, ASEAN has become ever more important in global economy following an export-oriented Asian model of state development. With population roughly over 670 million, the 12 countries share located in the region of various levels of socio-economic development (ADB, 2021). The ASEAN binds 10 from these countries into a multilateral community addressing regional and supra-regional common interests and challenges. Known for its multilateralism, ASEAN has become an important international actor in Asia and a mediating factor for diplomatic exchange across Asia, Indo-Pacific.¹

Southeast Asian centrality in the Indo-Pacific makes this diverse region a critical intersection from Indian Ocean to Pacific Ocean through the Straits of Malacca to the South China and East China Seas, and a bridge between Asian and Australian continents. Contradictory Indo-Pacific Asian Regionalisms of Chinese “One Belt, One Road” and the “Indo-Pacific” reflect growing Western-Chinese rivalry manifested in supra-regional geo-economics. In both concepts it is Southeast Asian region, which is central to successful operationalization of both regionalisms. ASEAN as the regional institution is known for its multilateral engagement and often serves as a bridge for rival actors. As a core institution one can mention such formats as Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, Korea), ASEAN+6 (China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India), among others.

The ASEAN has reacted on Indo-Pacific prospects with publishing the official Indo-Pacific Outlook in 2019. In the EU the only country that drafted such a response to Indo-Pacific has been France until Spring 2021, when the EU also presented a common Indo-Pacific strategy (Council of the European Union 2021). Member countries of the V4 are all involved in the China's 16+1 (also 17+1) regional cooperation which puts together some EU and non-EU Balkan countries in the One Belt, One Road. Japan as a major

1 It is no wonder that the first historical meeting of the US president Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un took place in Singapore in 2018. The ASEAN has successfully played a particularly responsible role of a mediator.

democratic country of Asia presented in 2007 in its diplomatic Bluebook the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”– a belt of countries from Southeast Asia to the Central Europe. In context of new Indo-Pacific strategies, Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi held bilateral talks with the V4 and presented Japan’s diplomatic position on the Indo-Pacific in spring 2021 (MOFA, 2021).

Cooperation of the EU with ASEAN follows efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals in three general areas: political security, economic cooperation and socio-cultural cooperation (EUINASEAN, 2021). These categories are also chosen for this analysis of sectoral cooperation of the V4 with ASEAN. The V4 recognizes the ASEAN among its ‘Other Partners’ in a quest for better mutual coordination of joint activities with the Southeast Asian nations in order to strengthen cooperation in various fields. As presented in the official websites of V4, the “Visegrad Group will increase efforts to coordinate the approach of the V4 countries toward ASEAN. A harmonized, joint policy could strengthen the two regions’ relations and may be a base to future cooperation in various fields.” (V4, 2021). This process is ongoing. This text may serve as a referential overview for converging areas, which gives new insights to the contemporary V4-ASEAN relations.

4. Vertical Level of V4-ASEAN Interaction

The vertical level of diplomatic interaction involves governmental representation in abroad by means of diplomatic missions, in which the diplomatic representation is spread into a regional network of embassies and honorary consulates or consulates general of individual countries. The Table 1 presents locations of diplomatic missions of the individual V4 countries in individual ASEAN countries + Timor Leste.

Table 1. The network of diplomatic missions of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia in Southeast Asia

ASEAN + Timor Leste	Visegrad Group (V4)			
	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
1	2	3	4	5
Brunei	Jakarta N/A*	Singapore N/A	consulate Bandar Seri Begawan embassy Kuala Lumpur	N/A

Table 1 (cont.)

1	2	3	4	5
Cambodia	embassy Phnom Pehn	embassy Phnom Pehn (2021), Hanoi	Bangkok N/A	Bangkok N/A
Indonesia	embassy Jakarta, consulate Makassar, Denpasar, Surabaya	embassy Jakarta, consulate Yogyakarta, Denpasar, Bandung	embassy Jakarta	embassy Jakarta, consulate Denpasar
Laos	consulate Vientiane	embassy Vientiane	consulate Vientiane	consulate Vientiane embassy Bangkok
Malaysia	embassy Kuala Lumpur, consulate Kota Kinabali	embassy Kuala Lumpur, consulate Penang	embassy Kuala Lumpur	consulate Kinabalu, Kuala Lumpur
Myanmar	embassy Yangon consulate Mandalay	consulate Yangon	consulate Yangon closed in 2020 N/A	Bangkok N/A
Philippines	embassy Manila, consulate Cebu, Davao	embassy Manila, consulate Cebu, Angeles City, Davao	embassy Manila, consulate Cebu, Davao, San Fernando	consulate Manila, Cebu
Singapore	consulate Singapore	embassy Singapore	embassy Singapore	Jakarta N/A, Hungarian Embassy
Thailand	embassy Bangkok, consulate Phuket, Amphoea Mae Sai	embassy Bangkok	embassy Bangkok	embassy Bangkok
Vietnam	embassy Hanoi consulate Ho Chi Minh, Hai Phong	embassy Hanoi, consulate Ho Chi Minh	embassy Hanoi	embassy Hanoi, consulate Ho Chi Minh
Timor Leste	N/A	N/A	consulate Dili	N/A

* N/A – not available. For the purpose of this analysis, it refers to a situation without direct diplomatic mission

Source: own elaboration.

Brunei is the only country from the ASEAN, which host limited direct diplomatic representation from V4 countries except for Poland that manages the Honorary Consulate in the capital city. Territorially large countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia or the Philippines host most of the diplomatic missions represented by embassies and consulates. There are disparities of V4 countries' representation when it comes to scope and concentration of relations. Thailand, a founding ASEAN country, enjoys particular attention and serves as a major diplomatic hub for countries in mainland Southeast Asia (known as Indo-China). Often it hosts diplomatic missions that cover diplomatic services in neighboring countries, mainly Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam enjoys traditional historical ties with the Central European countries as a remnant of socialist history from the bipolar period. Indonesia on the other hand serves as a diplomatic hub in maritime Southeast Asia. It hosts missions operating in Singapore (Slovakia) and Timor Leste. Malaysia hosts missions mediating somewhat distant relations with the Brunei sultanate. Only Poland has a direct representation in East Timor in the region.

Table 2. The network of diplomatic missions of ASEAN countries in the Visegrad Group member states

ASEAN	Visegrad Group (V4)			
	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Brunei	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cambodia	Berlin N/A	consulate Budapest	embassy Warsaw	Berlin N/A
Indonesia	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	embassy Bratislava
Laos	Berlin N/A	embassy Budapest	Berlin N/A	N/A
Malaysia	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	consulate Bratislava
Myanmar	embassy Prague	Vienna N/A	Berlin N/A	Belgrade N/A
Philippines	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	Bratislava
Singapore	consulate Prague	consulate Budapest	consulate Warsaw	Vienna N/A
Thailand	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	consulate Bratislava
Vietnam	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	consulate Bratislava

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 2 displays an overview of diplomatic representation of the individual ASEAN countries in Central Europe. Again, the only country without a direct diplomatic mission in V4 countries is Brunei. The second most limited diplomatic representation in Central Europe is Myanmar, which embassy can only be found in Czechia. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar but also Singapore have limited direct diplomatic representation and use representative offices in Austria, Germany, or Serbia. The strongest direct Southeast Asian representation is in Czechia, Hungary and Poland, the smallest in the smallest country of the V4 – Slovakia.

5. Horizontal level of V4-ASEAN Interaction

The horizontal level of diplomatic representation covers general sectoral areas of cooperation. This chapter focuses on three general areas often articulated in bilateral cooperation within the political, economic and cultural ties. Due to a vast scope of activities on one hand, and limited comparative available information on the other, it was necessary to generalize various elements into comparable general categories. The point here is not to give a list of all different projects and activities due to a vast empirical information, instead, the following Tables 3, 4, 5, 6 show most visible elements of cooperation from the official websites of foreign ministries and diplomatic bodies. Tourism is included in the cultural area due to the impact that contributes to mutual understanding. The economic impact is relatively small for the V4 countries, unlike EU countries such as France or the Netherlands. In general, with the exception of one-time initiatives, such as Visegrad Group cluster initiative² from the past decade (National Cluster Association, 2014), there have been no particular V4 initiatives aimed at ASEAN. From the side of ASEAN countries, in traceable information resources there have only a been few cases such as an exchange of Indonesia-V4 talks on business and trade from 2019, just before the coronavirus pandemic broke out (KIKE, 2020).

2 This initiative was aimed at creation of sector-specific clusters operating in the V4 traditional industries, the mechanical engineering (Czechia), manufacturing (Hungary), telecommunications (Poland), and the automobile industry (Slovakia).

Table 3. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Czechia and ASEAN

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
Brunei	limited	limited	limited
Cambodia	1956, before 1989, Sihanouk	ODA*	tourism
Indonesia	70 th anniversary of relations	developing	tourism, exchange**
Laos	strong before 1989	negligible, loans	exchange by 1989
Malaysia	1957	developing	tourism, exchange
Myanmar	1952, strong before 1989	high focus last 3 years	limited
Philippines	limited	security (2019)	tourism, exchange
Singapore	limited	strong (1 st), investments	arts/film, exchange
Thailand	1974	strong (2 nd), security	tourism, exchange
Vietnam	70 th anniversary of relations, support in East Sea*** dispute	developing	tourism, exchange

* ODA – official development aid covers various projects including environmental, sustainable development, education, disaster relief. It is categorised under economic area for the economic nature of given help

** Exchange refers here primarily to the student mobilities and to lesser extent the mobilities of staffers or businesses

*** East Sea refers to the Vietnamese marine toponym for the South China Sea

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 3 displays cooperation in three areas summed-up by a single box. Brunei has limited relations with Czechia in all areas. In the political area Czechia has limited relations with the Philippines and Singapore, although it is not case in the economic relations delegated by business chambers. Traditional relations with Cambodia are highlighted by the King Sihanouk who used to study in Prague and speaks Czech. Traditional relations are held with Vietnam and Laos to a lesser degree. There is a significant Vietnamese diaspora of over 80 000 Vietnamese nationals living in Czechia. In economic area Singapore and Thailand are the most important partners for Czechia. Philippines and Thailand have become importers of Czech security technologies such as arms with a potential for further trade growth. Almost all ASEAN countries are involved in student exchange in Czechia. The sector of tourism has a particular potential in case of Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia. Czechia has become the first country of the V4 countries with an Indo-Pacific strategy in 2022 (MZV ČR, 2022).

Table 4. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Hungary and ASEAN

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
Brunei	limited	limited	limited
Cambodia	assistance in 1980s, opening consulates (2021)	ODA (farming, food safety)	tourism
Indonesia	partner	developing	tourism, exchange
Laos	60 th anniversary, strategic partnership	ODA (farming, food safety)	exchange
Malaysia	50 th anniversary 2019	developing	fairs, exchange
Myanmar	60 th anniversary	limited, recognized	limited
Philippines	limited	developing (2021)	exchange
Singapore	50 th anniversary 2020	strong (1 st), investments	arts, exchange
Thailand	oldest relations to monarchy	strong (2 nd)	tourism, exchange
Vietnam	justice, defense, security	ODA, IT, business	tourism, exchange

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 4 displays general cooperation of Hungary with the ASEAN countries. Hungary enjoys generally the oldest relations from the V4 in Southeast Asia, which follows the historical heritage of Austro-Hungary Empire, the dominant political unit in Central Europe before the World War I. Relations with Brunei are limited and distant. Politically most of countries therefore have a tradition of official contacts. Hungary is involved in official development aid in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Hungary has elevated relations with Laos to a strategic level in 2019 following growing mutual trade. Economically the most important partners are Singapore and Thailand, such as it is in case of Czechia. In 2021 Hungary and Cambodia opened diplomatic missions in both directions. Tourism is an important source of cultural rapprochement in both directions. Majority of ASEAN countries are involved in student exchange in Czechia, and these countries are becoming popular partner countries for Czech universities.

Table 5. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Poland and ASEAN

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
Brunei	limited	limited	limited, film
Cambodia	limited, Phnom Pehn embassy closed in 2008	low, recognized, rice	tourism
Indonesia	developing after 1989	strong, diary products	exchange, dialogue
Laos	limited	limited	limited
Malaysia	50 th anniversary	developing slowly	exchange
Myanmar	65 th anniversary	developing since reforms	limited
Philippines	50 th anniversary	developing, recognized	exchange
Singapore	pragmatic	strong, investments	exchange
Thailand	50 th anniversary	strong (2 nd)	tourism, exchange
Vietnam	traditional, pragmatic	strong (1 st for VT)	diasporas, exchange

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 5 displays relations of Poland with individual ASEAN countries. The relations with Brunei are limited although sources show at least cultural exchange in the film industry (Muslim Tatars in Poland). With the exception of Indonesia and Brunei, Poland shares traditional political ties with most of ASEAN countries, although the economic cooperation is only developing. Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore are biggest trade partners of Poland. In socio-cultural area tourism and exchange of Poland with Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam are on the rise.

Table 6. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Slovakia and ASEAN

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
Brunei	limited	limited	limited
Cambodia	limited	recognized	limited
Indonesia	hub to ASEAN	strong	vivid, dialogue, exchange
Laos	recognized	recognized	limited
Malaysia	limited	limited but developing	limited
Myanmar	recognized but limited	limited	limited
Philippines	recognized	recognized	exchange
Singapore	limited	recognized, investing	recognized, limited
Thailand	hub to Indo-China, 1 st	developing	exchange, tourism, fashion
Vietnam	limited	developing, SK 2 nd	exchange, tourism

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 6 summarizes general cooperation of the smallest V4 country – Slovakia with the ASEAN countries. Comparing to Czechia, Hungary, and Poland, except for Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam, the cooperation across the political, economic and socio-cultural areas is limited. Relations with Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are reduced. Thailand has become a Slovak diplomatic hub in continental Southeast Asia while Indonesia in maritime Southeast Asia, these two countries are the major Slovak partners in Southeast Asia.

6. Conclusions

This analysis looked at the nature of diplomatic representation of the V4 countries in Southeast Asia and the ASEAN countries in Central Europe. It aimed at the coverage of the diplomatic representation of the V4 countries in Southeast Asia and the ASEAN countries in Central Europe, and to generalize major contours in relations leading to cooperation in political, economic, and cultural areas. The results displayed in the Tables 1–6 follow a vertical and horizontal levels based on inter-governmental interaction and main areas of cooperation that were traceable at the websites of various foreign ministries and relevant articles in the spring and summer 2021.

The vertical level of V4-ASEAN cooperation shows a distribution of diplomatic missions in Southeast Asia and Central Europe. The least contacts are visible with Brunei, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, in this order. Poland to this date operates as the only V4 country consulates in Brunei and Timor Leste. Contact with these countries are held in mediation or at multilateral meetings where individual ASEAN representatives can meet the representatives from the V4 countries. In Southeast Asia, four countries have particular significance for the V4 countries. Thailand is a diplomatic hub for continental Southeast Asia in case for almost all V4 countries. Indonesia is a diplomatic hub for maritime Southeast Asia and has the highest potential for the development of ties in Central Europe. In Central Europe the smaller ASEAN countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar provide consular services located outside of the V4 countries in Berlin or Vienna. Malaysia, relatively known for an Italian fictional movie character Sandokan in Central Europe, has a rising significance for Czechia. Limited contacts with Brunei are often delegated from Malaysia. Vietnam enjoys traditional ties with V4 countries given by socialist histories.

With regards to horizontal level of V4-ASEAN cooperation, the results confirm a limited interaction among V4 and ASEAN formats except for rare initiatives such as Visegrad Group clusters, which was a one-time project. From the ASEAN countries there has been a limited number of initiatives and exchanges, in which the V4 steps up a joint multilateral representation, such as with Indonesia in 2019. However here the V4 operates only formally as an unified format, in the end such talks follow business delegations of individual countries. Best practices in cooperation of the V4 with the ASEAN are aimed at individual projects with the possible support of the Visegrad Fund. Individual projects *per se* are aimed at development-related areas such as cleaning water supply projects (Czechia, Hungary), or disaster relief support (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). Potential has a recent opening of the Central European universities to cooperation in science and exchange with universities across Southeast Asia. In the economic area there have been occasional talks of joint economic commissions and business chambers (Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore). Singapore and Thailand are the most significant economic partners for most of the V4 countries, while Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines show the growing trends.

The V4 does not profit enough from supranational diplomatic representation, rather the V4 serves as an umbrella in establishing exchange of ideas and business interests that are further followed separately in national diplomatic missions in various countries of Southeast Asia. One reason is that the V4 countries are not bound formally to executive supranational entity such as the member states to the EU. The ASEAN operates more globally and as a supranational institution it binds its member states closer in economic terms, but politically it does not intervene in domestic affairs that much. This reminds of the V4, although in a very different setting. Thus, the ASEAN is rather a referential umbrella, the relations are followed at national/country levels individually.

The V4 as a part of the EU does not use much a joint diplomatic representation, although it holds ministerial meetings within the member states or with a third party, so it doesn't use common instruments at disposal of national states, such as the EU. Soft power is becoming relevant for the V4 in strengthening democracy and civil societies in the Balkans and countries of EU's Eastern Partnership, so does the soft power is important for the ASEAN countries that hold a key role of the international mediator. In the case of V4, the individual V4 countries do not have a full coverage of diplomatic missions across all ASEAN states.

In few cases, a successful diplomatic mission in the countries without a direct representation depends on the personality of a diplomat and his/her abilities to gather regional intelligence in the neighboring countries with external representation from a host country, its evaluation and implementation (for instance the Slovak ambassador in Thailand for Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar).

The limits for unfulfilled potential of V4-ASEAN exchange are mostly based on geographic distance, financial and cultural differences and still a relative unawareness of both sides of the potential. Knowledge of local language is another problem that hinders in penetration to domestic markets in ASEAN. This is connected to limited capacities of the diplomatic missions. This is partly balanced with sharing and delegating diplomatic representation of one V4 country to another, such as the Hungarian Embassy in Singapore providing consular services for Slovak subjects. Or by operating in one country for the whole region, which is the case of the Slovak Embassy in Thailand.

Another limits stem on the fact that official information from diplomatic missions is often limited, untraceable without a coherent follow-up. The challenge lies in a relative unavailability of detailed or comparable published information by the ministries of foreign affairs and embassies of the V4 countries in Southeast Asian states, and of the ASEAN countries in Central Europe *vice versa*.

The foreign ministries often publish limited, poorly-structured or no information on cooperation and mutual projects in different countries. Websites of consulates are often insufficient, displaying the address of a stone branch of a given representative office or consulate, without history of local interaction, or a scale of services for the citizens. This makes the tracking of cooperation challenging. Since diplomatic missions are funded by national governments, this ambiguity prevents the new research, people-to-people exchanges, country branding, knowledge and experience. Local markets and mutual understanding. It shows the activities seem to take place behind closed doors with results hidden from the public. The only sphere that can be a good example is the higher education, here the universities with the support of foreign ministries have the leading role and potential for further inter-cultural spill-overs. However, the current COVID-19 pandemic had literally paralyzed this exchange for a time being.

The perspectives of V4-ASEAN cooperation will develop along the broader EU-ASEAN relations. The EU has been active in Southeast Asia. With publishing the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in April 2021,

a further development can be expected, as it aims at engagement with the ASEAN-led regional architecture. Highlighting the geographical centrality of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific, the EU prepares a new EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership. With this initiative it is a question of time the V4 will strengthen its presence in ASEAN. Recommendations ask for a joint V4 strategy to ASEAN, or a joint V4-ASEAN memorandum of understanding; then intensification of intra-V4 cooperation in sharing diplomatic infrastructure and support for opening the joint consular services of all ASEAN countries in a given V4 country, which would be an optimal hub for interaction and exchange. One potential key activity here will be the future possible organization of the first historical V4-ASEAN meeting, which will open a new chapter in the V4-ASEAN relations.

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Poland–China Educational Cooperation before the COVID-19 pandemic: University of Łódź Case Study

Abstract

This article examines the University of Łódź's educational cooperation before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing educational and research interactions within the broader framework of Poland-China bilateral relations, both from historical and contemporary perspectives, the author argues that the intensity of contacts between University of Łódź and Chinese counterparts has often been dependent upon fluctuations in the political relations between the two countries and that despite initial enthusiasm the cooperation is now heading on more realistic tracks.

Keywords: *Poland–China relations, sister cities, regional cooperation, University of Łódź, China studies, Asian studies*

1. Introduction

In recent years, cooperation in higher education has become an important part of bilateral relations between Poland and China, especially after they concluded their strategic partnership in 2011 and extended it to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016. The 2011 strategic partnership strengthened the role of local authorities in bilateral relations. Article 7 of the document stated that “both sides express their satisfaction with the current stage of local government exchange and will promote interprovincial and intercity cooperation, to deepen

the understanding of the society of both countries and to promote local economic development and cultural and educational exchange" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2011). Łódź is an important example of this. Acknowledging the city's role in developing Polish–Chinese subnational relations, the 2015 edition of the Poland–China Regional Forum was held in the town. Among the numerous local agreements signed at the Forum, the one on cooperation in higher education, concluded between the Governor of Henan province and the Polish Minister of Higher Education, was of particular importance (Renmin Ribao, 2016; Mierzejewski, 2018).¹

Although the cooperation between the University of Łódź (UŁ) and China dates back to the 1950s, a new phenomenon has emerged in recent years. With the growing importance of relations between Polish and Chinese cities and regions (Kamiński & Gzik, 2021), UŁ's cooperation with its Chinese counterparts has gained dynamism, often involving (though by no means limited to) the activities of educational partners based in Łódź's Chinese sister cities and provinces. However, it is mainly the favorable geographical location of Łódź that makes it attractive for China, due to trade opportunities associated with the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The most important example is the rail freight line between Chengdu and Łódź, linking China's western and central provinces with Europe by the China-Europe railway. Due to the railway connection, which laid the ground for regional cooperation between Łódź and Sichuan, Łódź was identified in the Chinese media as an important centre for the promotion of Polish–Chinese contacts at the local level (Kowalski, 2021, pp. 206–207).

Based on the rail project initiated by private companies, the Łódzkie-Sichuan cooperation illustrates how the development of rail connections translates into the institutionalization of bilateral ties and attracts the interest of central authorities. Cooperation between Łódź and Chengdu was formalised in June 2015 within the framework of sister cities. Following this agreement, the municipal and regional governments of Łódź city and Łódź Voivodship set up a representative office in Chengdu in April 2014, and the Chengdu municipal government established an office in Łódź in

1 More than 450 representatives from local governments, businesses and science institutes from China, from the provinces of Sichuan, Hebei, Henan, Guilin and Guangdong and the cities of Chengdu, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Ningbo took part in the Forum. During the meetings, representatives of local governments and businesses of both countries signed several agreements on economic investment, and on cultural and scientific collaboration.

June 2015. The major purpose of the offices is to support commercial, cultural, and educational connections between the two regions. However, the results of these efforts are far below expectations, especially on the Polish side. They did not translate into an inflow of Chinese investments or a substantial presence of Polish exporters on the Chinese market. These are limited by the asymmetry of potential, Central Europe's position in Chinese economic expansion, personal factors on the central and local level, and finally, by growing US–China trade and political tensions (Kowalski, 2021).²

By analyzing educational and research interactions in the broader framework of Poland-China bilateral relations, both from historical and contemporary perspectives, the author argues that the intensity of contacts between the University of Łódź and Chinese counterparts has often been dependent upon fluctuations in the political relations between the two countries, which the COVID-19 pandemic has further limited. To this end, the article seeks to answer the following questions: to what extent do central-level relations influence regional cooperation? What are the main achievements and challenges of China studies at the UŁ? What are the main drivers of UŁ's cooperation with China?

The study subsequently outlines the history of the University of Łódź's educational cooperation with China and the main departments that carry out the partnership. In the last section, by highlighting the institutional framework and the practical outcomes of collaboration, the paper assesses the positive and the negative results of UŁ–China interactions.

2. Comrades in Educational Arms: Early Days of Sino-UŁ Cooperation

In May 1945, with the end of the Second World War in Europe, the University of Łódź was founded, as were other higher educational institutions including Politechnika Łódzka (Łódź University of Technology), the National Film School, the Medical Academy and the Academy of Fine Arts. Therefore, within a short span of time Łódź became a major educational centre in Poland. The story of Łódź's academic cooperation

2 However, as far as institutional presence is concerned, the most important result was the establishment of Poland's consulate general in Chengdu in June 2016, the fourth Polish consular mission to China after Shanghai, Canton and Hong Kong SAR.

with China starts at the School of Polish for Foreign Students (SPFS). The development of SPFS (and the post-war teaching of foreigners in Poland) began in the early 1950s, in a political landscape of growing tensions between capitalist and socialist countries.³ SPFS is the oldest institution in Poland specialising in teaching Polish as a foreign language and remained the only one in Poland until the 1970s. Indeed, apart from the Polish courses for foreigners organised at the University of Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University from 1931 to 1939, there was no tradition of teaching Polish as a foreign language in Poland until the 1950s.

Cooperation with China has constituted an important part of SPFS' work since its foundation. In the roughly half a century between the establishment of the SPFS until the beginning of the 21st century, more than 300 students from China enrolled there (Wielkiewicz-Jałmużna, 2008, pp. 72–73).⁴ Why was 1950s Łódź chosen as the site for teaching Polish as a foreign language? Given that the majority of foreigners were coming from socialist or developing countries, it is likely that Łódź, as a purely industrial city, was seen through the Cold War political lenses as “red.” In the academic year 1956/1957, 42 Chinese studied at the SPFS, the largest single group at the school (Wielkiewicz-Jałmużna, 2005, pp. 180–181). It may also be assumed that this is why Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (the highest-ranking PRC official to have visited the city to date) visited Łódź during a tour of Poland in January 1957. This visit took place in the midst of warming Sino-Polish relations, during a period of development in political and cultural interaction⁵ and people-to-people

3 At present, having gone through the process of institutionalisation and formal incorporation into University structures, combined with seven-decades of teaching experience, the Łódź school offers Polish courses at all levels of proficiency and various degrees of intensity. According to the SPFS, the School of Polish Language for Foreign Students has already received more than 15,000 students, with graduates representing 80% of the foreigners studying in Poland.

4 In the period between 1952/1953 and 2001/2002 (excluding 1957/58, 1958/59, 1961/62 and 1966/67), 233 students from China attended the SPFS. However, the first Asian students, and the first foreigners as such, were a group of 132 North Koreans. Their arrival in the 1952/53 academic year was related to the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–1953) and the fact that Poland, as a fellow socialist country, showed solidarity with North Korea. Officially, the Polish government was responding to the United Nations war relief call, yet the foremost reason for the students' stay was the need to train medics and engineers who were desperately needed in a country destroyed by Cold War rivalry.

5 Emblematic in this regard is the 1957 book *Country at Yangtze*, by the noted Polish historian and essayist P. Jasienica (1909–1970), written as result of his six-week travel to China in 1956.

exchanges, occurring as a result of China's conditional support of the political process of de-Stalinisation in Poland ("October 56," or "the Polish Thaw") (Shen & Li, 2007).

The first cooperative agreement between SPFS and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) was signed in 1985, though the beginning of this cooperation dates back to the 1950s. In its early years, cooperation was chiefly driven by the SFPS. The University of Łódź has sent lecturers to China as experts on the Polish language since the 1960s, and still does so today. Among them were Tadeusz Jeromin, Tadeusz Zwierzchowski, Bożena Zaorska and Lucyna Wawrzyńczak. The agreement remains active on a faculty level, and the main field of study is Polish Philology, with special emphasis on the translation of Polish literature into Chinese. In 1990, in collaboration with Beijing Foreign Studies University, UŁ publishing house published its "Small Polish-Chinese Dictionary" (compiled by Tadeusz Jeromin and Ding Wei. Including more than 5.000 words, the text was initially envisioned for Chinese students of the Polish language at the SFPS. However, the University of Łódź Press, acknowledging the lack of any other Polish-Chinese dictionary at that time, decided to make it more widely available, including for other Polish students interested in studying the Chinese language.

The primary role of the SFPS was to enable foreigners to study at Polish universities. However, with the post-1989 political and economic transformation, the school expanded its profile academically and educationally. This was a period when the number of Chinese students shrank due to the rising costs of studying and living in Poland. Now, 20 Chinese students choose this path annually. In this regard, three major motivations for studying the Polish language can be defined, based on the Chinese students studying at SPFS. First is the ambition to learn the Polish language and about Polish culture, in order to take up full-time studies at Polish universities taught in Polish. The second motivation is driven by the necessity of work requirements or trade negotiations (language as a business tool). The third, though the least frequent, relates to scholarships granted by the BFSU (six stipends in 2018). Here it is worth mentioning that Chinese graduates of the SPFS include Professor Zhang Gao, Dean of the School of European Languages and Cultures and head of the Department of Polish Language and Culture at BFSU, Professor Li Yanan, the first Chinese student to receive a PhD in Poland (in the Polish language programme), from the University of Silesia's Department of Philology, and professionals and senior management staff at Huawei and Stalowa Wola steel works.

Despite multi-layered cooperation, Poland (and other Central and Eastern European countries) and their respective educational institutions are often a “plan B” for Chinese students, who prefer to study in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, or at least in Western Europe.

3. Promoting Chinese Language and Culture: Chinese teachers at the Foreign Language Centre of the University of Łódź

Apart from extensive experience and proven methods of teaching Polish as a foreign language, there is also a three-decade long tradition of teaching Chinese language at UŁ. Based on a Sino-Polish intergovernment agreement, there have since 1988 been 14 teachers of Chinese language working at the Foreign Language Centre of the University of Łódź. Lecturers in Chinese language usually take two-year teaching contracts and are senior lecturers. Although the course has always been optional, it has delivered a high-level programme. Many students who graduated over the three decades of Chinese language courses at UŁ are now at various departments of Sinology and Asian Studies throughout Poland. Since the 2000s, a compulsory Chinese language course has been offered at the Faculty of International and Political Studies, mostly attended by Asian Studies students (BA degree in Polish and English) and Oriental Studies (MA degree in Polish).

The Chinese language teachers, besides leading course groups, are involved in the organisation of many different events, such as the all-Polish research conferences dedicated to teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and Chinese language and culture contests. It has also become a tradition that each of the Chinese teachers residing in Łódź oversees a “Chinese Day,” an annual or bi-annual event aimed at promoting Chinese language and culture.

4. Main Drivers of UŁ’s Cooperation with China

The primary UŁ unit that cooperates with China in research and education is the Department of Asian Studies (DAS, which was DEAS, the Department of East Asian Studies, until 2016), established in 2005 as part of the Institute of International Studies at the Faculty of International

and Political Studies (FIPS) of University of Łódź. The department is chaired by Professor Małgorzata Pietrasiak. Apart from teaching (Asian Studies degree, MA in Polish and BA in English), DAS develops in-depth research into Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Vietnamese internal and foreign policies. To that end, DAS researchers have received numerous Polish National Science Centre grants to study sovereign wealth funds in Asia, paradiplomacy in Europe, China, Russia and India, identity in China's foreign policy, China's multilateralism in the Developing World, the role of cities and regions in European Union's policy towards China, institutional changes in Japan's foreign policy, neoclassical realist analysis of Japan's policy on history problems, and the evolution of the core executive under the Shinzō Abe administration. In 2019 Gu Hongfei, the first-ever student from the PRC to receive a PhD from the University of Łódź, defended a thesis in political science at DAS. Having graduated from UŁ, Mr. Gu continued his research on China-Central European relations as a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Since 2017, DAS has also been engaged in the EU-funded Horizon 2020 project of Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia (CRISEA), with DAS's Professor Tomasz Kamiński acting as a member of its Steering Committee. This interdisciplinary research project included institutions from seven EU Member States and six Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam).⁶

DAS also carries out numerous Asia-related projects, among them study tours to Asian countries⁷ and the annual academic Łódź-East Asia Meeting (LEAM) conference. Since it began in 2002, LEAM has brought together scholars, researchers and students in all disciplines, specialising

6 CRISEA consortium included École française d'Extrême-Orient (France), the University of Hamburg (Germany), the University of Naples L'Orientale (Italy), the Institute of Social and Political Sciences (Portugal), University of Łódź (Poland), The University of Oslo (Norway), the University of Cambridge (UK), the University of Chiang Mai (Thailand), Centre for Strategic and International Studies (Indonesia), Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines), the University of Malaya (Malaysia), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (Vietnam) and the University of Mandalay (Myanmar).

7 In regard to students' tours to China, the very first was themed as "China's Two Rivers - research expedition" (held from 20 August to 8 September 2005). Assisted by Professor Li Mingqi from Shandong University and UŁ doctoral candidate Włodzimierz Cieciora, a group of students and lecturers from the University of Łódź visited such places as Jinan, Nanjing and Shanghai. The research objectives of the trip covered China's political position and international cooperation. The research stay included conducting a survey on the positive and negative aspects of China's cultural transformation.

in East Asian studies. As the first academic conference of its kind in Poland and Central Europe, it has gradually become one of the most important venues for academic exchange in the field. In the beginning, it was directed at post-graduate and doctoral students from Polish tertiary institutions. The goal of these meetings was to contribute to creating an important study centre at the University of Łódź, focusing on current East Asian problems. These efforts culminated in 2012, when, for the first time, it was possible to invite international speakers as well as renowned specialists to take part in the conference. Henceforth, LEAM has become an important regional forum for cooperation and the exploration of new ideas regarding East Asia.

Since 2013, the Department of Asian Studies has been publishing volumes in the Contemporary Asian Studies Series (CASS), under the auspices of the University of Łódź Press. CASS had published a dozen of books, in Polish and English, including thematic monographs, and edited volumes on conferences to which LEAM participants (including Chinese scholars) have submitted papers.

5. Centre for Asian Affairs: Addressing the Issue of Developing Asian-Polish Interactions

Established in 2015, the Centre for Asian Affairs is a university-based think-tank chaired by Professor Dominik Mierzejewski. The establishment of the Centre for Asian Affairs is closely tied to the ever-increasing economic, political and cultural importance of East Asian countries, especially China, and the need to observe and monitor evolving processes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). To this end, CAA publishes monthly reports and commentaries on China, Japan and the Republic of Korea activities in CEE, as well as China and the Balkans, and China and the ASEAN. It also publishes analyses of Sino-German relations and domestic developments in China. CAA provides expertise and fulfills advisory and consultant objectives, at both local and central government level. In 2018, a team of CAA scholars conducted two research projects, focusing on China's relations with CEE countries and the CEE subnational diplomacy towards Chinese regional authorities, which resulted in the publishing of two reports. In late 2019, CCA received a research grant from Poland's National Centre for Science to investigate China's policies in the Developing World, including selected case studies of Central and

Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America (Centre for Asian Affairs, 2022).

Apart from its research activities, since 2017 the CAA has been organising a summer school for Chinese students, the first of its kind in Poland (ScienceinPoland, 2018). Themed as “Understanding Poland: Economy, Society and Science,” it acknowledges the importance of local-level relations between Łódź and cities and regions in China. With financial support from public institutions (Łódź Marshal’s Office and the Special Economic Zone) and private ones (Hatrans logistics company), the University of Łódź offers an interdisciplinary summer programme dedicated to students from Chinese universities. The objective of the two-week summer school is to provide students from China with a better understanding and knowledge of the situation in Poland from historical, economic and sociological perspectives. Special attention is paid to introducing the history of Łódź itself, an industrial city where students from China generally stay during their time at the summer school. To this end, the school offers special courses on the post-industrial heritage of the city of Łódź, with its revitalisation projects including the New City Centre and a special workshop in the Museum of Modern Art. Since its inauguration in 2017, the summer school has been held thrice, attracting 525 students from 17 universities from the People’s Republic of China.⁸ However, the COVID-19 pandemic hampered the mobility of Chinese students, and the last edition of the Summer School by far took place in 2019.

6. Cooperation with Chinese Educational Institutions: Main Agreements, Limitations, and Prospects

By 2018, the University of Łódź had more than 20 partnership agreements with counterparts from all over China, including Nankai University, Sichuan University, Henan University and Beijing Foreign Studies University (International Students Office of the UŁ, 2019). Based on the experience of the Polish higher-education institutions (including

8 These include Guilin University, Sichuan University, Zhengzhou University, Jinan University, Nankai University, Tianjin University of Science & Technology, Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Inner Mongolia University, University of Macau, Shanghai Lixin University of Accounting and Finance, Beijing International Studies University, Shenzhen University and Hezhou University.

UŁ) in undertaking cooperation with Chinese counterparts, it should be noted that the Polish side prefers direct institutional contacts rather than via private agencies, especially in the field of student recruitment services. This is because, in many instances, the initial agreements signed with the help of recruiting intermediaries are not further confirmed by the administrations of the relevant Chinese universities.

Although the Chinese account for the biggest group of international students globally, only a relatively small number come to Poland. In the academic year 2016/2017, the highest number of all Chinese students at Polish universities (953) were enrolled at the University of Łódź (99) (Siwińska, 2017). This is mostly due to UŁ's flagship cooperation project with higher education institutions in Henan Province, where it has already signed agreements with Henan University, Zhengzhou University, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautical Industry Management, Zhengzhou Institute of Light Industry and Huanghuai University (Kronika Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2015). Based on these agreements, UŁ cooperates with Henan universities in various forms, including the "1 + 3" and "2 + 2" student transfer programmes, short-term student exchanges, visiting fellows, and so on.

The University of Łódź, in partnership with Zhengzhou University, conducts a joint study programme in economics, in the "2 + 2" format approved by China's Ministry of Education in 2013. It is the first such Sino-Polish educational project to gain such approval. Under the programme, the students of partner universities in China (Zhengzhou University, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautics, and Cangzhou Vocational College) study at their home university for the first two years, completing the subjects equivalent to the first-year programme of economics at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology (FES) at the University of Łódź. Afterward, they can come to Poland and continue their studies for the next two years (mostly in economics, but also in computer science and business management). Moreover, each semester two lecturers from FES teach two-month courses in economics at Zhengzhou University. This programme is workable due to the difference in the required years of study in China and Poland (BA studies last for four years in China, but only three in Poland). The study programme delivered in English combines two years at Zhengzhou University with a subsequent two years at UŁ. Thus, it enables students to earn a double degree in economics from the two partner institutions (International Students Office of the UŁ, 2013). The admission of Chinese students to

the UŁ part of programme is preceded by a two-month summer intensive English language course in Łódź, as Chinese students encounter some language obstacles when meeting the requirements of courses taught in English.

On the other hand, the limited interest of Polish students in “2 + 2” is, to a large extent, also related to the relatively narrow offer of courses taught in English provided by the Chinese partnership universities. The two-year period of studying in Poland offers Chinese students the opportunity to participate in six-month ERASMUS+ programmes in other European countries and in summer schools co-organised by the Faculty of Sociology and Economics in Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico.

Furthermore, UŁ authorities signed three general agreements in 2011, with universities from Tianjin (Łódź’s sister city since 1994). The three partner universities are Tianjin University of Technology (TUT), Tianjin University of Science and Technology (TUST), and Tianjin University of Technology and Education (TUTE). The main goal of the agreements is to create mutual programmes with partner universities, all of which accepted the initial idea of the cooperation, involving an exchange of students and academic staff, collaborative research, lectures and symposia, and an exchange of scholars and researchers. Cooperation with Tianjin-based universities also covers Nankai University (including political science at the Zhou Enlai School of Government, a unit specialising in China’s local governments activities). Nankai University invited UŁ into the International Forum of Public Universities (IFBU), whose 12th annual general meeting was hosted by UŁ in November 2018 (International Students Office of the University of Łódź, 2018). Regarding UŁ’s cooperation with China through IFBU, the most promising field for future joint projects is ecohydrology, which is to be carried out by the European Regional Centre for Ecohydrology (ERCE) under the auspices of UNESCO and the University of Łódź.

In addition, in June 2018 a new funding opportunity for Polish-Chinese research projects was announced. This was the SHENG 1 programme, co-organised by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN) and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). The programme aims to support research projects in all fields of the natural, engineering, life and management sciences, with only psychology and theoretical sociology eligible from the social sciences (NCN, 2019). UŁ has submitted five proposals to SHENG for joint research projects with Chinese partners, however, none of them was qualified for funding in the first edition of the programme.

Finally, UŁ and Sichuan University have collaborated in recent years within the broader framework of Łódź's cooperation with Sichuan province and Chengdu City. In December 2016, a delegation from Sichuan University, led by vice-rector Yan Shijing, visited the University of Łódź to discuss educational cooperation with UŁ's vice-rector Professor Paweł Starosta and representatives of most UŁ departments engaged in cooperation with China (International Relations Office of the UŁ, 2016). During the visit, the Sichuan University delegation was also received by Witold Stępień, the then marshal of Łódź region. During both meetings, plans for future joint activities were discussed, including student and scholarly exchanges, as well as entrepreneurial collaborations that have so far failed to meet the expectations of the Polish side. As Stępień emphasised, the region would like to be perceived not only as a logistics stopover for Chinese trains, but also as a destination for investments and educational cooperation. He said: "Given the size of the Chinese population, for every Polish student in China, there should be 50 Chinese students at our universities" (Marshal's Office of the Łódź Region, 2016).

In May 2017, to enhance the cooperation, a Sichuan University–Łódź round-table event was organised in Chengdu. The Polish side was represented by regional and university authorities, including Łódź City vice-president Krzysztof Piątkowski and UŁ Rector Professor Antoni Różalski (Sichuan University, 2017). A month later, scholars representing the Centre for European Studies and the Institute of Economics of Sichuan University (Professor Lu Zheng, Professor Shi Jian, Professor Yi Dan and Professor Li Zhiyu) took part in the LEAM Conference (European Studies Centre of Sichuan University, 2017). In October 2019 president of Łódź Hanna Zdanowska visited Chengdu and met with Mayor Luo Qiang to discuss cooperation in logistics, investments and education. However, these high-level visits have not yet translated into a substantial increase in educational cooperation. At the higher education level, the most noteworthy is the fact that SFPS teaching staff member Marta Ułańska, PhD, has been lecturing in the Polish Philology Department, which opened at Sichuan University in 2017. The Foreign Relations Office of Sichuan Province also invited a group of young people from Łódź to take part in the First International Summer School, themed "Imagine Sichuan" (Marshal's Office of the Łódź Region, 2017). In addition to university contacts, the cooperation agreement with Sichuan partners on teaching the Chinese language at Primary School No. 1 and High School XXVI in Łódź was also put into effect, and Polish language is taught at one of the primary schools in Chengdu's Qingbaijiang district.

7. Conclusions: Cooperation that Needs Greater Substance

Seven decades of University of Łódź cooperation with the People's Republic of China show that the intensity of contacts has often depended on fluctuations in the political relations between the two countries. In this respect, one may assume that the development of further cooperation will also be affected by the ups and downs of Sino-Polish relations at the central level. Although collaboration among UŁ and Chinese higher education and research institutions has brought considerable effects, it still offers a lot of untapped educational potential and research space to be filled. The central educational project which is working effectively is “2 + 2,” carried out with UŁ's partner institutions in Henan. However, institutionalised research cooperation in certain fields has limitations, primarily concerning subjects considered by the Chinese authorities to be politically sensitive, such as history, political science, international relations, and so on. At the institutional level on the Chinese side, the Ministry of Science and Technology bears the ultimate decision for international projects, giving preference to the field of science over social science (excluding economy) and humanities.

The “bottom-up” experience of Łódź-Sino relations illustrates how local-level commercial activities can translate into institutionalization of regional cooperation and, to some extent, can pave the way for bilateral collaboration between the central authorities, including in the area of educational interaction. However, the subsequent deterioration of contacts between Poland and China taking place since late 2016 has also affected cooperation on the local level, including the plans for transforming Łódź into a major Central European logistic hub with a Chinese investor (Kowalski, 2021, pp. 204–206), demonstrating that the local-central nexus is a two-way street. Moreover, despite the initial enthusiasm, academic cooperation is seemingly heading on more realistic tracks. Therefore, following the slowdown of interactions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the more tangible results of the efforts made to improve the academic cooperation in the past years remain to be seen.

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Conclusions

This book presents an extensive and in-depth analysis of the multifaceted landscape of Asia's role in global affairs. Throughout its chapters, the book examines a wide range of topics, shedding light on the complexities and implications of Asia's growing significance in the international arena.

The book begins by emphasizing the pivotal position of Asia as the largest continent in the world, serving as a global crossroad that connects various regions and plays a crucial role in international trade and shipping. Its vast landmass and expansive coastline make it an essential hub for economic activities, positioning Asia as a strategic link between the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

One of the central themes explored in the book is the growing economic and military power of Asian nations and its impact on global dynamics. The authors highlight how this rise in power has led to heightened competition for influence on political and economic issues, significantly impacting global security and stability. The book presents a compelling argument that Asia's transformation from being primarily a recipient or observer in global affairs to becoming a central player is evident across various international organizations. Asian countries are actively engaging in decision-making processes and contributing to regional cooperation and integration.

Among the regional organizations discussed, the book emphasizes the critical role played by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in promoting unity and addressing common challenges among the diverse Southeast Asian nations. Additionally, the book recognizes the contributions of other regional bodies and initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Belt and Road Initiative, in shaping regional and global agendas.

The book also highlights the strategic focus on Asia due to its territorial disputes and the influence of major global powers, particularly China and Japan. The South China Sea territorial disputes have garnered significant international interest, reflecting the broader geopolitical competition in the region. The book examines the implications of these disputes and the competition for influence, including the dynamics between China and the United States, as well as Japan's efforts to strengthen political and economic ties with Asian nations.

The authors of this publication have utilized a diverse range of research methodologies to delve into the changing political, economic, and social dynamics across the Asian region. The book encompasses literature reviews, data collection from various sources, case studies, comparative analysis, expert consultations, and an interdisciplinary perspective to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis.

The book is organized into thematic blocks that cover a wide array of topics. These include international discussions on security issues in Southeast Asia, historical analysis of China's cultural influence in Central Asia, economic issues, such as the role of regional organizations and the evolution of the agricultural market, and social issues such as prenatal care conditions and birth ideologies in Japan and Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, the book explores Japan's historical and contemporary questions, including its relationship with Southeast Asian countries, decision-making processes related to visits to the Yasukuni shrine, individual support groups for Japanese politicians, and the Japanese religious ethos in relation to humanitarian intervention. Finally, the book concludes by examining the relations between Central and Eastern European countries and Asia. It explores diplomatic missions, educational and scientific partnerships, and the prospects for future interactions between the countries forming the V4 and the ASEAN countries. The analysis highlights the importance of political, economic, and cultural interactions between these regions and identifies opportunities for further development.

In summary, this book provides a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the changing dynamics in Asia and its implications for regional and global interactions. It sheds light on Asia's growing economic and political importance, the competition for influence among major powers, the role of regional organizations, ongoing conflicts and challenges, and the relations between Asia and other regions. The book's findings and research hypotheses contribute valuable insights to the field of international relations and serve as a foundation for future research in understanding the evolving role of Asia in the global arena.

Rethinking Asia in World Politics

This book presents an extensive and in-depth analysis of the multi-faceted landscape of Asia's role in global affairs. Throughout its chapters, the book examines a wide range of topics, shedding light on the complexities and implications of Asia's growing significance in the international arena.

The book emphasizes Asia's pivotal position as the largest continent in the world, serving as a global crossroad connecting various regions and playing a crucial role in international trade, making it an essential hub for economic activities, and positioning it as a strategic link between the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

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