

mgr Mateusz Chatys
Promotor: dr hab. Dominik Mierzejewski, prof. UŁ
Uniwersytet Łódzki
Wydział Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politologicznych
Katedra Studiów Azjatyckich

THE PATRON-CLIENT FRAMEWORK IN THE PERIPHERAL DIPLOMACY OF THE PRC IN THE CASE OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH VIETNAM, MALAYSIA, AND THE PHILIPPINES

The doctoral dissertation focuses on the mechanisms used in the peripheral diplomacy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since Xi Jinping took power in 2012. The research aims to fill the gap in existing knowledge by examining how the Chinese government operates within the framework of the patron-client state relationship and within the concept of peripheral diplomacy toward three selected Southeast Asian states involved in the South China Sea disputes. What is worth underscoring is that the model of patron-client applied in research was predominantly developed by Christopher C. Shoemaker and John Spanier in the 1980s. For analytical purposes, a patron-client relationship may be distinguished from other forms of bilateral interaction by the dominance of several vital elements. First of all, a sizable difference must occur between the military capabilities of the states involved. Moreover, the client's states play a prominent role in patron competition. In the case of the Southeast Asia region, the most evident rivalry over patronage arises from tensions between China and the United States. Another distinctive feature is the critical perceptual dimension with regard to the patron-client state relationship. This is derived from a consistent association between the two states for a recognizable, if only an occasionally brief period of time. This association can take place at a number of levels. However, it must be apparent to other observers in the international arena that the patron and client are closely connected.

The research conducted was based on the following research hypotheses: **H1:** The concept of peripheral diplomacy towards the Southeast Asia region, implemented since 2013, represents a historic continuity of the tributary system and is used as a platform in the PRC's foreign policy to strengthen asymmetric relations with Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines under the patron-client concept. **H2:** The PRC is utilizing economic tools to manage disputes in the South China Sea with Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and thereby prevents internationalizing any disputes which would run counter to China's preferred method of dispute resolution based on bilateral negotiations. **H3:** The PRC uses its patron-client relationship with Southeast Asian countries to generate divisions within ASEAN, thus gaining greater control over negotiations of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. **H4:** In its rivalry with the PRC, the United States is strengthening the perception of a "China threat" among Southeast Asian countries to prevent China from dominating the region through patronage building.

In order to verify the hypotheses mentioned above, the following research questions were asked: **Q1:** Is there a correlation between the tributary system, peripheral diplomacy, and the patron-client concept in China's foreign policy towards selected Southeast Asian countries? **Q2:** Is the Chinese government in building patronage with Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines consolidating its control of maritime disputes in the South China Sea? **Q3:** Do the interpersonal relations of the leaders from Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines with representatives of the Chinese government have a decisive influence on their foreign policy towards the PRC and act as a hallmark in patron-client relations? **Q4:** Whether and how bilateral relations based on the patron-client concept are reflected in crises within such dyads as China-Vietnam (e.g. crisis around the HYSY-981 platform), China-Malaysia (e.g. the flight

MH-370 disaster), and China-Philippines (e.g. Gem-Ver 1 sinking)? **Q5:** Does China's building of patron-client relationships with Southeast Asian countries affect the functioning of ASEAN, and if so, how?; Does China's bilateral relations with Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines affect ASEAN's position in negotiations regarding the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea? **Q6:** How does the Sino-American rivalry in the South China Sea affect the implementation of the patron-client concept towards the selected countries in the Southeast Asia region?

Chapter I focuses on presenting the evolution of the patron-client concept from anthropological research through political science to the application of typology in international relations studies. For this purpose, the author analyses the contemporary state of research by reviewing both Polish and foreign literature on the subject. Furthermore, the chapter offers the evolution of Chinese peripheral diplomacy, starting from its origins in the tributary system, in which the countries of today's Southeast Asia have played an important role. The next section of the chapter is devoted to the international context and the Chinese government's method of defining peripheral diplomacy. It includes a qualitative analysis of the National Congress of the Communist Party of China's reports from 1989 up to and including 2017.

Chapter II covers quantitative research on mutual visits conducted by foreign representatives in three case studies. This quantitative research is complemented by a qualitative analysis of all official statements from state visits issued by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in terms of the position of Southeast Asian countries in peripheral diplomacy, interpersonal relations of state leaders and the situation in the South China Sea

Chapter III consists of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. The main emphasis is on determining the intensity of the disputes in the South China Sea between China and other claimant states by comparing the number of marine incidents. In order to specify how China is using its economic incentives to manage and negate maritime disputes, a comparative analysis is applied in the case of individual dyads. An additional element is taking into account the involvement of the United States as the only power capable of competing with China in terms of patronage in the Southeast Asia region. The author pays special attention to the reaction of the governments of Southeast Asian countries to China's coercive policy in the South China Sea. At the same time, it considers the influence of China's economic incentives and American initiatives related to security transfer, aimed at building a narrative with reference to the fallout of Beijing's policy on the region's destabilization.

To sum up, an innovative element of the research is a case study of China's bilateral relations with Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines based on the patron-client typology. The case studies were carried out based on a set of variables, including the number of official high-level state visits and maritime incidents in the South China Sea, trade and investment cooperation, analysis of selected infrastructure projects, as well as security cooperation, especially in the maritime domain. Thus far, the vast majority of research devoted to the dynamics of international relations in Southeast Asia, including the engagement of such powers as China and the United States in this region, is based on concepts related to balancing, bandwagoning and hedging. Applying the patron-client state relationship framework brings a new perspective on asymmetric regional relations and great power competition to scientific debate. Summarizing the findings of the conducted research, it should be emphasized that the dispute in the South China Sea is one of the main axes of China's relations with the countries of the Southeast Asia region. Beijing utilizes it to strengthen bilateral relations while creating platforms for multilateral cooperation, such as negotiations on the Code of Conduct. The People's Republic of China uses several mechanisms related to the patron-client framework, such as basing bilateral relations on interpersonal relations or economic tools. In addition, the rivalry between Beijing and Washington makes relations between states very dynamic, with change depending on the regional "state of play". However, the internal situation in individual countries is still of great importance in the studied subject matter.