INCREASING SECURITY AND POLITICAL COOPERATION BETWEEN CAMBODIA-CHINA IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to analyze the China-Cambodia system for the period 2010-2020 in the context of security and politics, thereby examining the quality of the relationship, as well as the achieved results and prospects of the bilateral relationship of both sides.

Theoretical framework: The research is approached based on theoretical frameworks on international relations, including realism, and liberalism with basic arguments about the nation, the issue of power, the national interest, and the problem of harmonizing attractions.

Design/methodology/approach: The research uses interdisciplinary methods in social sciences, such as historical and logical methods; international relations research methods; and politics. Findings: The China-Cambodia security and political system is a relationship that has gone through many ups and downs with its long history, basically throughout the process of the system is that the interests of the two sides are still the priority, although there are separate characteristics in general, the relationship between the two countries is quite close, with little fluctuations about the mutual benefit.

Research practical and social implications: The article contributes to clarifying the Cambodia-China relationship and the impact of this relationship. The report can support further studies on this topic in the future in Vietnam.

Originality/value: The study of Cambodia-China relations is critical in Vietnam, contributing to policy forecasting in international relations in East Asia.

Keywords: China, Cambodia, political security and political, southeast asia.

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AUMENTO DA SEGURANÇA E DA COOPERAÇÃO POLÍTICA ENTRE O CAMBOJA E A CHINA NA SEGUNDA DÉCADA DO SÉCULO XXI

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo do artigo é analisar o sistema China-Camboja para o período 2010-2020 no contexto da segurança e da política, examinando assim a qualidade das relações, bem como os resultados alcançados e as perspectivas das relações bilaterais de ambas as partes.

Estrutura teórica: A pesquisa é abordada com base em quadros teóricos sobre as relações internacionais, incluindo o realismo e o liberalismo com argumentos básicos sobre a nação, a questão do poder, o interesse nacional e o problema da harmonização de atracções.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: A pesquisa usa métodos interdisciplinares em ciências sociais, tais como métodos históricos e lógicos; métodos de pesquisa de relações internacionais; e política.

Conclusões: O sistema político e de segurança China-Camboja é uma relação que passou por muitos altos e baixos com sua longa história, basicamente durante todo o processo do sistema é que os interesses dos dois lados ainda são a prioridade, embora existam características separadas em geral, a relação entre os dois países é bastante próxima, com poucas flutuações sobre o benefício mútuo.

Pesquisa implicações práticas e sociais: O artigo contribui para esclarecer a relação Camboja-China e o impacto dessa relação. O relatório pode apoiar novos estudos sobre este tema no futuro no Vietname.

Originalidade/valor: O estudo das relações Camboja-China é fundamental no Vietnã, contribuindo para a previsão de políticas nas relações internacionais no sudeste da Ásia.

Palavras-chave: China, Camboja, segurança política e política, sudeste asiático.

AUMENTO DE LA SEGURIDAD Y LA COOPERACIÓN POLÍTICA ENTRE CAMBOYA Y CHINA EN LA SEGUNDA DÉCADA DEL SIGLO XXI

RESUMEN

Finalidad: El propósito del artículo es analizar el sistema China-Camboya para el período 2010-2020 en el contexto de la seguridad y la política, examinando así la calidad de la relación, así como los resultados alcanzados y las perspectivas de la relación bilateral de ambas partes.

Marco teórico: La investigación se aborda a partir de marcos teóricos sobre las relaciones internacionales, incluyendo el realismo, y el liberalismo con argumentos básicos sobre la nación, el tema del poder, el interés nacional, y el problema de la armonización de los atractivos.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: La investigación utiliza métodos interdisciplinarios en ciencias sociales, como métodos históricos y lógicos; métodos de investigación de relaciones internacionales; y política.

Hallazgos: El sistema político y de seguridad China-Camboya es una relación que ha pasado por muchos altibajos con su larga historia, básicamente a lo largo del proceso del sistema es que los intereses de las dos partes siguen siendo la prioridad, aunque hay características separadas en general, la relación entre los dos países es bastante estrecha, con pocas fluctuaciones sobre el beneficio mutuo.
Investigar implicaciones prácticas y sociales: El artículo contribuye a clarificar la relación Camboya - China y el impacto de esta relación. El informe puede servir de base para futuros estudios sobre este tema en Vietnam.


Palabras clave: China, Camboya, seguridad política y política, sudeste asiático.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cambodia and China established a diplomatic system in 1958. Until the 1990s, the relationship between the two sides had ups and downs. During the period 1979-1991, Cambodia and China did not have diplomatic relations for two reasons: China supported the army of the Khmer Rouge forces and denied the recognition of the government of the People's Republic of Cambodia (Nguyen, V.T., 2019). Cambodia-China relations only really started to resume after the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in 1991. After the power dispute between First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh and Second Prime Minister Hunsen, with the outcome, Norodom Ranariddh had to flee abroad and Hunsen ordered the closure of the Taiwan Representative Office in July 1997; China officially recognized the new Cambodian government, and Prime Minister Hunsen personally (Nguyen, H.V, 2010).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, and especially after Cambodia and China established the "Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership" during Prime Minister Hunsen's visit to China from December 13-17, 2010, the relationship between Phnom Penh and Beijing is constantly expanding. During Prime Minister Xi Jinping's visit to Cambodia in 2016, Cambodia and China affirmed their efforts to step up the two countries relations into "good neighbors, good friends, good brothers, and good partners". China has become the most important external country of Cambodia, reflected in the aspects of diplomacy, investment, aid, trade, culture, and society, on the other hand, Cambodia also becomes a significant role in China's outward expansion strategy. Cambodia is considered the closest ally of China and responded most enthusiastically to the rise of China – a great power in the international system. This is demonstrated by the fact that for the first time in the history of ASEAN, the Mutual Statement could not be issued due to disagreements among members on addressing concerns arising in the East Sea area at the ASEAN Summit held in Cambodia in 2012. Moreover, Cambodia is very active in participating in China-led initiatives and frameworks, such as the Belt and Road
Initiative (BRI), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Mekong - Lancang Cooperation (MLC). (Bazeed, K. F., 2023). At the beginning of February 2020, the event that Cambodian Prime Minister became the first world leader to visit China amid the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affirming the close relationship between the two sides.

As a neighboring country, sharing land and sea borders, Cambodia is the focus of China which has had an increasing influence on Beijing with Phnom Penh in the fields of politics, security, and defense over the past decade. It will continue to affect many aspects of the relations between Cambodia and its neighboring countries, especially Vietnam and Cambodia. In particular, in 2023, Cambodia is expected to hold the 7th National Assembly election, which is expected to bring about changes in the country's political system. This may affect changes and adjustments in the strategic direction of socio-economic development as well as foreign relations of Cambodia with neighboring countries, the region, and the world. (Obaid, H. J., et al 2023) Therefore, the study of Cambodia-China relations since 2010 is very necessary, and meaningful in theory as well as in practice. From these studies, we can see the extent of China's increasing influence in Southeast Asian countries, as well as the evolution of China-Cambodia relations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Tran Xuan Hiep (2014), in the study "Vietnam-Cambodia relations since the end of the Cold War", analyzed the competition for influence between major countries, especially between the US and China in Cambodia. The author considers this an essential factor affecting Vietnam-Cambodia relations in the post-Cold War period.

Nguyen Thanh Van (director, 2019), in the research work "Cambodia's Foreign Policy from 1993 to the Present", analyzed Cambodia's foreign policy, international integration, including economic integration. Accordingly, Cambodia advocates expanding cooperation with ASEAN and significant countries globally, with multilateral cooperation institutions such as the WTO. The study also devoted a section to analyze and evaluate the development of relations between Cambodia and China over time; now, the two countries have become very close partners.

Po and Primiano (2020), in the study "An "Ironclad Friend": Explaining Cambodia's Bandwagoning Policy towards China", analyzed. Analyze why Cambodia welcomes the rise of China. Meanwhile, other countries are pursuing a mixed strategy of increasing economic connectivity with Beijing and security cooperation with the United States. The study suggests that Cambodia needs to avoid risks from the policy of "prosperity", in response to China's rise, through diversification of economic and security resources, such as strengthening ties with ASEAN and improving relations with the European Union (EU) and the United States. Differences in policy approaches to the rise of China between Cambodia and other ASEAN countries are also analyzed and mentioned in further research, such as Pang (2017a) on "Managing Reliance": The Socio-Economic Context of the Chinese Footprint in Laos and Cambodia. Pang (2017b) on "Same-Same but Different": Laos and Cambodia's Political Embrace of China"; Kuik (2016) on "How do weaker states hedge? Unpacking ASEAN states' alignment behavior towards China. Chen and Yang (2013) on "A harmonized Southeast Asia? Explanatory typologies of ASEAN countries' strategies to the rise of China".

Many studies analyze the impact of investment from China to Cambodia, including O'Neill (2014) on "Playing risk: Chinese foreign direct investment in Cambodia. in Cambodia)", Chheang (2017) on "The political economy of Chinese investment in Cambodia", Po and Heng (2019) on "Assessing the impacts of Chinese investments in Cambodia: the case of Preah Sihanoukville province (Evaluating the impacts of Chinese investment in Cambodia: the case of Preah Sihanoukville province)", Heng (2015) on "China's role in the Cambodian energy sector: catalyst or antagonist for development (Via). China's Role in the Cambodian Energy Sector: Drivers or Oppositions for Development)", Hu et al. (2019) on "Chinese Enterprises' Investment in Infrastructure Construction in Cambodia". Through the analysis of Chinese investment in the whole or some specific economic sectors of Cambodia, the authors believe that investment capital
from China plays a vital role in Cambodia's development, however, it also creates adverse effects on the country.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is approached based on theoretical frameworks on international relations, including realism, and liberalism with basic arguments about the nation, the issue of power, the national interest, and the problem of harmonizing attractions. The article uses the analytical framework of K. Waltz (Hue, Q.T., et al., 2023, p.4) when analyzing the factors affecting the foreign policy of China and Cambodia.

4 METHODOLOGY

The research uses interdisciplinary methods in social sciences, such as historical and logical methods; international relations research methods; and politics. Basically, these research methods remain closely associated and harmonizingly used in order to fulfill the purpose of this article (Hung, N.V., Thinh, T.C., Ly, N.T.K., 2023, p.3).

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Cambodia and China shared each other's positive comments and attitudes towards the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. This is clearly demonstrated in the continuous mutual visits between the two sides. During high-level visits, China expressed and considered Cambodia a true and reliable friend (Chheang, V., 2019). Chinese media regularly report on Cambodia as a great ally of the Chinese leaders and government. Notably, the Cambodian Prime Minister was one of the first heads of state to pay an official visit to China right after Chinese President Xi Jinping took power in 2013. In 2016, during his first visit to his office. Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a speech emphasizing the relationship between Cambodia and China as "good neighbors, good allies who sincerely to each other".

In 2019, Cambodia and China signed the "Action Plan to Build a Cambodia-China Community with a Common Future". A community of common destiny is a concept introduced by China in 2012 with the goal of building a more inclusive and equitable international order; at the same time shortening the North-South development gap in order to make China the leading country of the South. However, until 2017, after the speech of
Chinese President Xi Jinping in Laos, this concept became widely mentioned. The community of common destiny shares core principles including (i) Non-interference; (ii) Openness and inclusion; (iii) Consult and learning from each other; (iv) Mutual understanding; (v) Mutual respect; (vi) Shared interests; (vii) Equal sovereignty; (viii) Peaceful settlement of disputes and differences (Chheang, V., 2019).

In 2020, the Cambodian Prime Minister was one of the foreign heads of state to make an official visit to China during the COVID-19 pandemic in China. Prime Minister Hun Sen's visit at the time of the global pandemic has special significance for the development of China-Cambodia relations. Prime Minister Hun Sen strongly affirmed his pro-China policy in the coming period, at the same time, Mr. Hun Sen advocated that Cambodian citizens not leave China, but stay and support China in the fight against the epidemic. Prime Minister Hun Sen's visit to China, when China was the starting point of the pandemic, was warmly welcomed by the Chinese Prime Minister Xi Jinping (Vietnam News Agency, 2020).

In international and regional issues, Cambodia and China both have similar statements, aiming to show mutual support in bilateral and multilateral matters. In the South China Sea issue, Cambodia and China both accentuated the importance of maintaining peace and stability in the region, promoted the implementation of the "The Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea" (DOC), and participated in the process of negotiating and drafting the "Code of Conduct in the South China Sea" (COC). Cambodia frequently coins the need to soon achieve the COC. In 2017, Cambodia's Foreign Minister underlined that ASEAN - China should accelerate the negotiation process to reach a framework for the COC (Li, R., 2018). In 2018, in a mutual statement, Cambodia and China pointed out the importance of the early achievement of the COC and its role in maintaining peace and stability in the region (Li, R., 2018). That same year, China set a goal of completing the COC in the next three years with the support of Cambodia. In addition, in the China case filed by the Philippines; the countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and China have reached a consensus on four points emphasizing the position that the South China Sea matter is not a dispute between ASEAN and China before the arbitration decision was issued. When the decision was made in July 2016, Cambodia made statements stating its viewpoint not to support the decision. The Cambodian Prime Minister said the decision was the political interference
Cambodia’s position has contributed to reducing the negative effects of this decision on China (Zhang, P., 2016). Cambodia has actively supported China’s economic development and global governance initiatives such as BRI, AIIB, and MLC. Specifically, this Southeast Asian country was one of the first to show support and active participation in these strategies; and is one of the founding members of the AIIB. Nowadays, the two sides have signed many cooperation documents within the framework of the BRI. In particular, in 2020, Cambodia and China only took six months to negotiate and sign an FTA agreement, a component of the BRI framework. At the same time, this year, Cambodia and its member countries officially ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – a regional economic agreement with China that plays a leading role.

In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia steadfastly supports China and continues to develop strong economic and strategic ties with the world’s most populous country. Cambodia advocates China’s support in dealing with the negative impacts of the pandemic on the public’s health and maintaining economic development (Pusparani, I. G., 2020). Cambodia and China have cooperated at various levels in efforts to fight against the pandemic. China has supported medical experts from the Guangxi region in Cambodia and donated masks and medical equipment to Cambodia for COVID-19 prevention and control (Xinhua, 2020). Furthermore, Chinese corporate organizations and investment funds such as Alibaba Group, China - Asia Economic Development Association, and China Biomedical Laboratory have also provided medical equipment aid to Cambodia (Pusparani, I. G., 2020).

Thus, the political and diplomatic relations between Cambodia and China have become tighter since 2010, continuing to develop mutual relations in the context of the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2 SECURITY AND DEFENSE RELATIONS

Security and defense cooperation between Cambodia and China mainly focuses on aspects such as promoting high-level leaders’ visits between the two sides, intensifying army exercises and mutual army exercises, buying and selling weapons and equipment, and providing military aid.

The visits of the military forces of the two sides, especially the senior defense leaders, contribute to promoting and strengthening defense diplomacy between Cambodia
and China. From 2014 to 2019, the two sides conducted 32 mutual military visits, including visits by the two highest defense leaders of Cambodia and China (Yi, L. J., 2020). High-level visits have become a strategic fulcrum for Cambodia-China relations, enhancing mutual understanding of the situation and development of the two country's militaries, thereby building appropriate and instant defense diplomacy decisions. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has repeatedly mentioned the importance of visits between the two country's militaries. In 2015, on the occasion of the visit of the Chinese Navy to Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen indicated that exercising and cooperation between the two militaries contribute to protecting people's lives and properties, enhancing Cambodia's defense capacity against external threats (Yi, L. J., 2020).

Mutual army exercises are considered one of the key activities of the Cambodia-China security and defense relationship, an extension of the two sides' defense diplomacy. From 2013 to 2020, there are 11 bilateral and multilateral exercises with various training contents and forms, including rescue on land and at sea, military medical exercises, and naval exercises with a focus on improving submarine rescue, counter-terrorism, and peace-keeping. Markedly, since 2016, Cambodia and China have agreed to hold a bilateral exercise called "Golden Dragon". The first exercise of 2016 took place in Kampong Speu province, with 85 Chinese and 256 Cambodian soldiers taking part, focusing on the areas of road repair, demining or explosives materials, bridge construction, and resettlement of victims of natural disasters. In 2018, the second Golden Dragon exercise took place in the west of Phnom Penh with the participation of 280 Cambodian soldiers and 216 Chinese soldiers, focusing on counter-terrorism operations and humanitarian assistance. In 2019, the "Golden Dragon" exercise took place in Kampot province, focusing on the contents of counter-terrorism, hostage rescue, disaster response, biological weapons response, and peacekeeping. The Chinese government has sent special forces, air force, army, and artillery, with a total number of 252 people and modern military equipment including tanks. Meanwhile, the Cambodian government directly participating in the exercise is 382 people, army reserve force is 448 people (Cambodia and China conduct the "Golden Dragon" 2019 exercise). In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the "Golden Dragon" exercise is held as the plan, focusing on improving the capacity of counter-terrorism, and the ability to synergize combat between units (Cambodia - China exercise "Golden Dragon"). This annual bilateral exercise mechanism was asserted by the two governments as one of the measures to promote the
friendly tradition of the army, government, and citizens between the two countries, in the context of Cambodia's cancellation of military exercises with the US further affirms the close military ties of China and Cambodia.

Weapons purchasing and exchanging are the focuses of the defense and security relationship between Cambodia and China, with the aim of the development of defense technology, the need to protect Cambodia's sovereignty, and increasing China's presence in Cambodia and the region. Cambodia has spent millions of dollars buying weapons from China, in particular, Cambodia's financial source of arms purchases mainly comes from China's aid packages to improve its defense capacity. In 2011, Cambodia ordered Panther helicopters from China, and so far, Cambodia has received 12 aircraft in this order. The budget for this order was extracted mainly from a concessional loan of 195 million USD from China. In 2012, Cambodia continued to order a batch of Chinese-made military transport aircraft. In 2019, Prime Minister Hun Sen announced spending 40 million USD as part of China's 290 million USD support package to buy a large number of military weapons manufactured by China (Agence France-Presse, 2019).

Military aid between Cambodia and China is mainly one-way, in which Cambodia is the receiving country. China's military aid packages to Cambodia focus on providing medical equipment and serving rescue. In 2012, China provided a $19 million aid package to Cambodia to build an officer training academy and a Royal Military Medical Hospital. In 2013, Cambodia and China signed a memorandum of bilateral military assistance cooperation, in which China supported Cambodia with equipment upgrading, weapons, and facilities for training. In 2014, China provided 26 military trucks and 30,000 military uniforms, to solve Cambodia's shortage of military supplies. In 2016, China gave Cambodia a batch of mine clearance equipment; in 2017, China provided Cambodia with 65 million USD to promote the construction of a military hospital in Phnom Penh. China's aid packages aim to improve mine clearance capacity, and China's aid continued to be provided to Cambodia from 2017 to 2019. In 2020, China sent a military transport plane carrying medical supplies and equipment to support Cambodia in the prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic, including masks, test kits, and hand sanitizer with a total value of about 1 million USD (Chheng, N., 2020).

Hence, along with political and diplomatic relations, Cambodia-China defense and security cooperation have been continuously expanded over the past decade. This development is reflected in high-level visits by leaders of the two country’s defense
ministries, mutual military exercises, aid packages, and the purchase of military equipment.

6 CONCLUSION

The relationship between Cambodia and China is constantly developing in many aspects and it can be said that both sides are satisfied with the role of partners in the framework of a comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership. Within this framework, Cambodia and China have played the role of a reliable strategic cooperative partnership, in which, Cambodia is satisfied with its expectations about China's policies, at the same time, China has also met its expectations of Cambodia's viewpoints as a trusted strategic partner.

Cambodia has achieved its foreign policy goals in its relationship with China, such as: continuing to maintain independence, protecting territorial sovereignty, national security, and economic and social development; coping with the risks and challenges from the outside, and balancing relations with the largest countries including the US, EU, and Southeast Asian neighbors in a direction which is more beneficial to Cambodia; reducing pressure on democracy and human rights, attracting aid packages, trade, and technology investment, promoting regional and world integration, thereby for the comprehensive development of Cambodia. This explains Cambodia's tendency to tighten its relationship with China the fact that China has an extensive and comprehensive influence on Cambodia.

China expects Cambodia to become a contributing factor to its development in the context of the influence and domination of the US, as well as Cambodia will not participate in building any military and political alliances to counter China's rise.

China is very interested in the relations of ASEAN countries with the US and allied countries of the US. China has reacted very firmly to the US presence in regional affairs. However, the current development of Cambodia's relations with the US and some Western allies is in line with China's expectations. In addition, China is actively attracting and gathering forces, building for itself a system of reliable partners, and supporting China's global governance initiatives, in the process of actively competing with the US. This is clearly seen in Cambodia's relations with Western countries. Cambodia actively supports China's stance on international and regional issues and China's BRI strategy. The viewpoints of Cambodia and China on the South China Sea issue are relatively similar.
In order to expand its influence in Cambodia, China has stepped up the implementation of many measures in some key areas. China consistently supports Cambodia's neutral policy and opposes acts of infringing Cambodia's independence and sovereignty with the purpose of maintaining and developing further relations. China's presence is evident in recent elections in Cambodia. After the National Assembly elections ended, in 2013, the political situation in Cambodia was tense because the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) announced that they did not accept the election results and conducted a series of protests with the support of several international organizations, demanding re-inspection of the election results. During this tough time in Cambodia, there were two visits of Chinese senior leaders to Cambodia in less than a month\(^6\). The visit to Cambodia when the election has just ended, the new government has not been formed, has shown the desire to confirm its role in the unstable Cambodian political issue. The Supreme Court of Cambodia announced the dissolving of the CNRP on November 16, 2017, due the pressure from the US and Western countries, in 2018, China strongly supported Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cambodia People’s Party (CPP) during the 6\(^{th}\) Cambodian National Assembly election (Bao Vinh, 2018). In fact, after meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the end of March 2018, Prime Minister Hun Sen wrote on his Facebook page: "Chinese leaders will support and look forward to Samdech Techo Hun Sen winning. This will lead Cambodia to become more developed in the future” (Nachemson, A., 2018). After the CPP and Prime Minister Hun Sen announced the election victory, the US and Western countries shared their doubts about Cambodia's democracy. In contrast, China continued its support for this important ally – Cambodia.

The Cambodia-China relationship is characterized by an asymmetric relationship. Cambodia and China have different expectations of interests. On one hand, Cambodia expects to be able to maximize its capacity for autonomy, and with China's support, Cambodia seems to feel more "confident” in handling diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, the US or the EU. On the other hand, China expects its maximum influence in Cambodia. For China, the economic benefits derived from Cambodia are important, but not the priority. In fact, China is the largest non-refundable aid provider

\(^6\) Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited and held talks with Prime Minister Hun Sen and Foreign Minister Hor Nam Hong; Politburo Standing Committee member and Secretary of the Central Committee Luu Van Son visited Cambodia at the invitation of the CPP and FUNCINPEC royalist Party, and met with Prince Sihamoni, Prime Minister Hun Sen, National Assembly Chairman Heng Samrin, FUNCINPEC President Norodom Arun Rasmey.
for Cambodia. China's interest is the recognition of Cambodia to China's great power status and demonstrating its leading position.
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