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The Rise of China: Global Threat or International Peace?

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Abstract

This critical review is aimed at examining different justifications for the rise of China and its implications for ASEAN, with particular reference to Cambodia. A careful examination of the literature on the rise of the world's most populous country reveals two distinct prevailing views with regard to the Chinese phenomenon. On the one hand, China's rise is equated to a global threat because, given its more advanced economy and powerful military development, China is more likely to aspire to be a global hegemon and regain its Middle Kingdom status. On the other hand, the rise of China is not considered to be yet a threat, but rather an opportunity for interstate cooperation and global engagement. These two opposing views clearly divide scholars into two camps: realists and liberalists. However, the author supports the latter camp and believes that the rise of China could enhance the sustained growth of bilateral ties between China and Cambodia in particular and China-ASEAN relations in general. Toward the end of this review, major findings are summarized, implications for Sino-ASEAN and Sino-Cambodian relations discussed and areas for further research suggested.

Keywords: The rise of China; China-ASEAN relations; China-Cambodian relations

I. Introduction

1. Background of the study

The impact of China's rise on global affairs has been a hot topic for researchers since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In other words, China's rise has attracted global interest particularly since the end of the Cold War (Guo, 2006; Ikenberry, 2008; Kem, 2011; Lynn-Jones, 2000). There are two major schools of thought – realism and liberalism – which try to put forward their own hypotheses regarding the rise of China. For realists, the rise of China is seen as a threat against the rest of the world since, in realist views, states are bound to pursue power, self-interest, and other benefits. Therefore, China is more likely to go to war to extend its influence and dominate other states to fulfill its own interests. In addition, the more

powerful a state is, the more aggressive and dominant it becomes and therefore the more likely conflicts may arise. For liberalists who believe in order, justice, and cooperation within the anarchic international system (Dunne, 2014), however, the rise of China can be translated into global economic development, including a cooperative and harmonious world, and international peace.

These two opposing views have led many researchers to conduct their study in order to dispel the doubt and uncertainty regarding the impact of China's rise (Glaser, 2011). On the one hand, China's rise will bring about intense competition in the global context. China's growing strength will lead it to pursue its interests more assertively, which will in turn lead the United States and other countries to balance against it. As a result, the second Cold War or even a hegemonic war may take place (Glaser, 2011). On the other hand, as the liberalists argue, China's rise in the current international system will enhance interstate cooperation based on the principle of free markets, civil rights, democratic society, and international cooperation between states.

Despite many negative views toward the rise of China, Yee (2010) argues that many of China's neighboring countries, except South Korea, India, and some ASEAN states, are beginning to accept and accommodate China's rise. Brazil, Australia, African states and other natural resource rich countries, for example, welcome China's rise and see it as an opportunity rather than a threat. For industrialized countries like Japan and European Union states, they are desperately in need of the huge Chinese market in order to boost their exports. Politically speaking, according to Yee (2010), some countries are also pleased with the rise of China because there is a balance of power between China and the United States. In other words, with rapid economic expansion, China becomes the only country in Asia and probably the world that could compete with the United States economically in the current unipolar world led by the latter. Kissinger, as cited in Yee (2010), also argues that cooperation between China and the United States can bring about world peace.

Although Yee (2010) sees a more positive than negative impact of China's rise on international affairs, several other researchers take an opposite view. Friedman (2010), for example, states that China's rise cannot guarantee a peaceful future. Instead, based on power transition theory, he argues that powerful states on the rise often fight wars with other major powers. Wars can also be caused by the fact that a rising power feels constrained by the existing superpower and seeks to overturn or balance against it, or the existing superpower

might engage in a preventive war to contain the rising power and preserve its leading position as a hegemon in the international system.

2. Purpose statement

Having examined several studies on the impact of China's rise on global politics and international affairs, it is interesting to investigate the literature on the rise of China in order to clear the doubt about its consequences, either positive or negative or both. Thus, this review is aimed at examining the literature on the rise of China to see whether China's rise is considered a threatening global phenomenon, as postulated by realists, or a welcoming peaceful addition to the international politics, as liberalists believe.

3. Research questions

This critical review seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Is the rise of China a security threat to the world or an opportunity for global cooperation?
2. What implications can be drawn for Sino-ASEAN and Sino-Cambodian relations with regard to the rise of China?

4. Significance of the study

This is an extensive literature review which is carried out to examine some heated arguments over the rise of China. This critical review is firstly useful in filling the gap in literature on the mentioned topic with regard to how ASEAN, particularly Cambodia should respond to the phenomenon of China's rise. Secondly, this review hopes to dispel doubts and controversies over the impact of China's rise, in particular, its effects on global security and international peace. This review, thirdly, may encourage other Cambodian researchers and students to conduct empirical research into this popular yet controversial topic to better understand how Cambodia and ASEAN can take advantage of this 21st century Asian phenomenon.

5. Scope and limitations of the research

This review no doubt cannot be flawless. Its scope is limited to the context of China-ASEAN and China-Cambodia relations. It does not attempt to discuss the impact of China's rise on other regional and international contexts. As for the limitations, this paper is not research-

based, meaning that the findings are based on secondary data. Therefore, all findings are extracted from previous research studies, which limits the originality of ideas in this review. The quality and comprehensiveness of the paper is also another issue which should be tolerated and understood because the researcher had limited access to the body of available literature while conducting this review.

II. Literature Review

1. The development of China

Since initiating market reforms in 1978, China has shifted from a centrally planned to a market based economy and has experienced rapid economic and social development. With a population of 1.3 billion, China recently became the second largest economy and is increasingly playing an important and influential role in the global economy. Although China remains a developing country with 98.99 million people still living below the national poverty line of RMB 2,300 per year at the end of 2012 (World Bank, 2015), this country has enjoyed the benefits of dynamic growth for more than two decades. For example, Chinese GDP has experienced high growth rates, with an average annual growth rate of 9.4 percent from 1979 and 2004 (Liu, 2006).

With its high economic annual growth rate which has taken place since the late 1970s, China has transformed itself from a low-income to a middle-income country. And if this trend persists, China is more likely to be on a path to becoming a high-income country (Ye, Zhang, & Zhao, 2015). And the development of China, according to Malesky and London (2014, p. 397), has been more rapid than that of its neighboring countries, namely Japan and Korea, and China's growth is "among the most rapid in modern history". In addition to its status as the world's second largest economy, China is also the world's greatest export economy; therefore, the fact that China has been predicted to be the next great superpower is highly likely (Watson, 2016).

Several key factors, however, are required for China's development (Liu, 2006). First, it is social and political stability, which in turn requires ongoing reforms in economic and political systems. Therefore, China has to create and maintain a peaceful environment set forth in its five principles of peaceful coexistence. Second, China needs to sustain its open door policy which has played crucial roles in attracting FDIs, opening up markets, and promoting

international trade. Third, it is China's integration into the international system. Without such integration, it would be unlikely for China to be able to enjoy its rise at the moment. Moreover, by integrating into the global system, China has improved its economics, human rights, and security.

2. Challenges to China's rise

Since the 1990s, the rise of China has become a popular topic for discussion and debate among researchers in the field of international relations. Given its enormous population, China is struggling with almost everything. China's reliance on coal, for instance, causes serious environmental and health problems. Energy consumption is also a big issue, and China has become the second largest consumer of energy resources in the world, only behind the United States. Thus, the possibility of a global oil crisis is very likely, especially when the Chinese oil consumption per capita increases.

China has also been experiencing a problem with skilled labor. While there is a great demand for skilled labor, there are also surplus laborers, caused by labor migration into the city. This in turn leads to unemployment, lack of social safety, and a source of social instability. In a similar vein, the issue of income disparity is not uncommon. The consumption gap, for example, between rural households and urban households jumped from 227 yaun in 1978 to 5365 yaun in 2000 and 6110 yuan in 2003 (Liu, 2006). Although there has been a lot of discussion on the issue, more actions are needed to tackle such a huge gap in income disparity in China.

Although Beijing has followed a good neighbor policy and built friendly relations with almost all of its neighbors, except Japan whose political system and ideology differ greatly from those of China, the world's most populous country is also troubled by a number of issues within the region (Liu, 2006). One is its relation with Russia. Although the Sino-Russian relations have seen much improvement over the last few decades, both countries are seen to have mistrust and suspicion with one another. In other words, their bilateral relation is purely grounded on their national interest gains and other benefits.

Despite its rapid growth, however, China last year experienced the lowest growth rate (6.9%) for the first time in 25 years. This continued economic slowdown was a result of a continued decline of domestic investment demand and a fall in international market demand. Moreover,

the development of China's economy has also been impeded by the imbalanced income distribution structure, a slow and imperfect reform to the production factor market and capital market, and an mismatch between the economic growth pattern and economic development stages (Slowly, 2016). Furthermore, China's potential growth has continued its downward trend since 2013. This economic slowdown has been impacted by a number of constraining factors, including the slowdown in infrastructure investment, a decline in production output, and resource, energy, and environmental constraints. Nevertheless, despite the decline, China's economic growth rate is still regarded as a high speed, if not rapid one (Ye, Zhang, & Zhao, 2015).

3. The threat of China's rise

Many scholars have examined the potential impact of the rise of China on global security or world order. According to Glaser (2011), who bases his argument on realist views, China's growing strength will lead it to pursue its interests more assertively, which will in turn lead the United States and other countries to balance against it. This phenomenon will eventually generate a parallel to the Cold War stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union, and perhaps even a hegemonic war. Similarly, many Western neo-realist IR scholars have already drawn a dark picture of Eastern Asia regional security with a pessimistic view about the China threat (Ye, 2002). That is why whether China as an emerging or a rising power in the East Asia region and in the world will be a threat to its neighbors and even to the United States within the next few decades, is a big issue that has been widely discussed in the Western IR academic circle and among Western and Japanese political experts.

According to the notion of power structure transformation, when any state becomes wealthier and more powerful, it will inevitably seek greater regional and then world-wide political influence, which will cause a change of the power-structure in the region and in the world. The change of the power structure caused by the rise of a newly established regional and world power usually poses a long-term danger for the security of the region and even for the stability of the world. According to the power structure analysis, China is a threat to the security of the East Asia region and the United States and its main ally in East Asia, Japan. Thus, Asia is likely to see more international conflicts in the near future (Ross, 2015).

For Lemke and Warner (1996), war is most likely when the power of a rising, dissatisfied country becomes equal to that of a dominant state, the US, in this case. Then power parity

provides the opportunity to act for those who are committed to changing the status quo. The phenomenon has been applied to China as a rising power seeking to change the status quo in the East Asia region. Moreover, China's desire to make change to the international status quo can be explained by China's historical memory of past greatness and the desire to regain its Middle Kingdom status; its determination to erase the painful legacy of a century of national humiliation; its desire to recreate the traditional Sino-centric world order as a means of regulating political and economic structures of the world; and its belief that China's external security in the past was primarily assured by a strong state (Swaine; Daly, & Greenwood, 2000).

On another note, given the dramatic increase in its economic development, China, since the 1970s, has begun to modernize its armed forces by, in a large part, importing advanced weapons from overseas. This has led many observers to argue that China will not only seek hegemon in East Asia, particularly its territorial claims over the South China Sea, but it will also assert its influence in the global sphere, which will most likely lead the US to counterbalance against China's assertiveness, and if this situation persists, an hegemonic war would be on the horizon (Lynn-Jones, 2000).

4. China's rise and international peace

Although many scholars have expressed their pessimistic views of the threat of China's rise on global security, others who belong to the liberalist group positively see China's rise as opportunities for global economic cooperation and international peace. Friedman (1999), for instance, states that a new international system which is globalization, has now clearly replaced the Cold War. Globalization, the integration of markets, finance, and technologies in a way that is shrinking the world from a size medium to a size small, enables each of us to reach around the world farther, faster, and cheaper than ever before. It is not just an economic trend, and it is not just some fad. Like all previous international systems, it is directly or indirectly shaping the domestic politics, economic policies, and foreign relations of virtually every country. Even though this view seems to be at least slightly alarmist, most people would agree that globalization has directly or indirectly re-shaped the foreign relations of almost every country big or small, including the United States, an established power, and China, a rising power.

Unlike Germany in the late 19th and early 20th century or Japan in the period between the two world wars, according to Ye (2002), China as a rising power prefers to merge into the international cooperative regimes like WTO or IMF and tries its best to cooperate with the established powers and follow the international norms and rules. In the traditional international system dominated by power politics, the level of integration and interdependence was very low because there were no efficient international organizations such as WTO, IMF, World Bank, etc., nor was there any orientation towards cooperation for both the established or the rising powers.

Furthermore, the globalization process has also improved the deepening of mutual influence of the economies in various countries, and China is no exception. In other words, China has adjusted its attitude toward the world economic system from self-reliance to cooperation. China has already become a member of the IMF, the World Bank, and other international economic institutions and has been very active in those institutions that it once condemned as tools of capitalist imperialism. The cooperative and integrative nature of the Chinese government clearly shows that China has the willingness to integrate itself into the world market system and catch up with the quick pace of globalization (Ye, 2002). Put another way, China has not only shifted its attitude towards the world market from self-reliance to cooperation but also has been taking a more active role in those international economic regimes.

III. Methodology

1. Research instrument

This is a critical literature review which is aimed at investigating different views regarding the impact of the rise of China. Since this research is based on an extensive literature review, content or document analysis is used as the basis for the research design for this study. Thus, no questionnaire or interview has been used to collect primary data to answer the research questions, that is, the findings of this study are solely based on previous research findings and the analytical skills of the author.

2. Data collection and analysis

Since this is not a research-based paper, secondary data are collected through the extensive critical literature review. All relevant secondary data (i.e. books, journals, government

publications, magazines, periodicals, records, etc.) have been located and examined to seek answers to the research questions. After identifying all relevant data, the writer has examined and read each document to develop central themes relevant to the topic. The writer then presents the findings and discussions based on the available sources in the literature. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, followed by recommendations and suggestions for further research.

IV. Findings and Discussion

Having conducted the critical literature review on arguments for and against the rise of China, three major themes are in order. First, the rise of China is a threat. Second, the rise of China can promote international cooperation, and third, China's rise is not a global threat. What follows are the presentation and discussion of major findings derived from the review of literature, with support and references to a number of relevant research studies.

1. China's rise is a threat

A number of scholars have asserted that the rise of China is equivalent to the threat of the global world order. In other words, China's rise will threaten global security as China seeks to dominate the world or become a hegemon. The literature review reveals that most Western scholars and some Japanese ones tend to have pessimistic views regarding the rise of China. They base their arguments on the realist view by claiming that a hegemonic war is more likely as China rises to balance power with the US. In other words, the change of the power structure caused by the burgeoning of a newly rising regional and world power usually poses a long-term danger for the security of the region and even for the stability of the world (Ye, 2002).

Another researcher who supports this idealist concept is Robert Art. Art (2010) observes that there will be political and economic conflicts and friction between the United States and China as China's economic and military power in East Asia and its global economic and political reach continue to expand. Clearly, there will also be some arms racing between China and the United States as each country attempts to gain advantage over the other and as the United States responds to contain China's growing power. Art further explains that dominant powers have not readily given up their position of number one to rising challengers, and rising challengers have always demanded the fruits to which they believe their growing power entitles them. There is no reason to expect that things will be different in this regard

with China and the United States. Thus, they will not be able to avoid a certain level of problematic relations and political friction over the next several decades.

According to Economy (2005), China's diplomatic offensive in Southeast Asia has raised questions in the US and throughout Asia concerning the nature of China's rise and its implications. Advocates of a China threat scenario have long argued that China desires regional hegemony and that US–China relations in this regard are a zero sum game. Comparisons are made between the rise of China and that of Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan: China's rise will necessarily be highly disruptive to US preeminence in the global system, stability in Asia, and the international system. There are also views of the return of the glory days of the Middle Kingdom, China, using its economic power to re-establish an empire reaching out throughout most of Asia and transforming its neighbors into little more than subordinate states.

2. China's rise promotes cooperation

Despite pessimistic views from many Western scholars who see China's rise as a global threat, there is a possibility of economic cooperation associated with the rise of China. This view is held by many researchers who assert that China, unlike Germany or Japan in the 20th century, is adopting principles of peaceful coexistence. As a result, the rise of China means global cooperation in terms of economy, security, technology and other sectors. For example, although China has emerged to be both an economic superpower and a leader of Western markets, this Chinese economic dominance has not been found to have a detrimental effect on ASEAN's GDP growth rate; conversely, it has benefited ASEAN exports and GDP advancement (Napoli, 2014).

China's rise does not have to be as aggressive and dangerous as the standard realist argument suggests because the structural forces driving major powers into conflict will be relatively weak. The outcome of China's rise will depend less on the pressures generated by the international system than on how well U.S. and Chinese leaders manage the situation. Conflict is not predetermined, and if the United States can adjust to the new international conditions, making some uncomfortable concessions and not exaggerating the dangers, a major clash might well be avoided (Glaser, 2011). In addition, current international conditions should enable both the United States and China to protect their vital interests without posing large threats to each other. The presence of nuclear weapons will also make it relatively easy

for major powers to maintain highly effective deterrent forces. Even if Chinese power were to greatly exceed U.S. power sometime in the future, the United States would still be able to maintain nuclear forces that could survive any Chinese attack and threaten massive damage in retaliation. Moreover, large-scale conventional attacks by China against the U.S. homeland are virtually impossible because the United States and China are separated by the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, which makes it difficult for China to attack the US if it intends to (Glaser, 2011).

Ye (2002) also sees a positive aspect in the rise of China. Ye states that the official acceptance of the inevitable trend of globalization and the willingness of moving along in harmony with globalization indicates that Chinese elites are keenly aware of the relative weakness of China's power and the absolute necessity of cooperating with other countries in the international systems formed by the force of globalization. Similarly, according to Ding (2008), China's foreign policy is based on four main pillars: a commitment to multilateralism underpinned by the central role of the UN as the guarantor of global security; a commitment to consultation and dialogue rather than force as a means of settling disputes; a commitment to global economic development with the developed world taking a greater share of the responsibility for promoting growth elsewhere; and a spirit of inclusiveness for all societies and cultures to coexist as equal stakeholders in the global order. Therefore, China values a democratic international order rather than the unipolar hegemony, and China has utmost respect for state sovereignty rather than imposing values and policies on other countries. This eliminates the possibility of the hegemonic war but promotes economic and bilateral cooperation.

Moreover, the Chinese leadership is using trade and investment as a means of obtaining security objectives by establishing a Sino-centric regional economic order. But this attempt to place China at the center of the region is more a consequence of conforming than of confronting, and results from the changing ideational basis of Chinese foreign policy and the increasing acceptance of 'neoliberalism's core belief that economic interdependence creates common interest and lessens the probability of conflict' (Yunling, 2004).

3. China's rise is not a threat

Having examined the vast literature on the rise of China, a conclusion can be drawn. That is, the rise of China will promote global economic cooperation rather than an international or regional threat. Many scholars have supported this optimistic view. Breslin (2009), for example, believes that China will be a more responsible regional actor, that is, China is working not just to stabilize its own economy for its own sake, but also to stabilize the regional economy as a whole. Moreover, China is becoming increasingly important for the region as a source of finance and, if the Chinese economy recovers as planned, should become an even more significant market in its own right for regional producers. Breslin (2009) also concludes that China's regional influence might indeed be predicated on the strategic use of trade and investment strategies and promoting diplomatic/economic initiatives at bilateral and multilateral levels.

In a parallel manner, Kem (2011) also sees China's rise positively. Kem believes that the rise of China, with its five principles of peaceful coexistence and win-win policy, will promote cooperation in the region, particularly with ASEAN. China has enhanced mutual trust with ASEAN members by actively participating in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and has reached agreements of concrete substance through multilateral dialogue and cooperation. China is the first non-ASEAN country to formally join in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and has even played a positional role in maintaining stability. All of these have served to create favorable conditions for maintaining stability in Southeast Asia (Kem, 2011). Despite China's increasing economic and military power, likewise, Goldstein (2000), having considered China's actual economic and military capabilities, argues that China's rising power would not threaten the international system for the time being.

Moreover, although it is unlikely that China will be able to assume a leadership role in promoting good governance in the very near future, and even though the region undoubtedly recognizes the limitations of China as a leader on such issues, China's role as a contributor to transnational problems dictates its presence at the table. To the extent that China is reforming its own practices and increasingly behaving in a responsible manner both domestically and internationally, the opportunity for China to assume a leadership role will increase exponentially. China's efforts to assuage the fears of its neighbors by adopting a foreign policy approach that is active, non-threatening, and generally aligned with the economic and security interests of the region is also clearly making headway (Economy, 2005).

The rise of China, therefore, does not have to trigger a complete hegemonic transition. The U.S.-Chinese power transition can be very different from those of the past because China faces an international order that is fundamentally different from those that past rising states confronted. China does not just face the United States; it faces a Western-centered system that is open, integrated, and rule-based, with wide and deep political foundations. The nuclear revolution, meanwhile, has made war among great powers unlikely – eliminating the major tool that rising powers have used to overturn international systems defended by declining hegemonic states. Today's Western order, in short, is hard to overturn and easy to join (Ikenberry, 2008).

V. Conclusion

1. Summary of the main findings

The literature review has revealed the two main arguments regarding the rise of China. On the one hand, researchers and scholars who belong to the realist camp argue that the rise of China will lead to a hegemonic war or China will pose a threat to the whole world. This belief is based on the realist view which puts much emphasis on the concept of balance of power and power transition theory. In other words, China's rise will trigger a new world order in which the US and China are the major actors. Thus, the two superpowers would be involved in hegemonic competition, which will possibly lead to a major war or conflict for hegemony in the international system, particularly in the Asia Pacific region.

On the other hand, those who belong to the liberalist camp argue that the rise of China will enhance global economic cooperation, bilateral relations and international peace. They also raise the term 'globalization' to support their point of view, meaning that, in the age of globalization, states seek for cooperation rather than disagreement or war. Moreover, with the presence of the international organizations such as the United Nations, a full-scale war is less likely because states would try their best to maintain peace in order to benefit from it. Simply put, such liberalist scholars see opportunities that states are more likely to cooperate to survive and prosper rather than conflict or war which eventually would cause destruction to states' wellbeing.

The findings also show that many scholars are in support of the liberalist camp despite heated arguments regarding the threat caused by China rising. This trend is understandable,

considering several crucial factors such as the state interdependence, international trade, mutual interests, global security and other important issues. The advent of the Internet and high technology, together with the presence of nuclear weapons, has also contributed to the deterrence of war, particularly the hegemonic war because such an extensive war would be synonymous to the destruction of human beings or simply the end of the world.

2. Implications for Sino-ASEAN relations

The rise of China shall have several implications for Sino-ASEAN relations. First, as China is one of the largest ASEAN export markets, ASEAN apparently needs to play a careful and proactive role in dealing with the world's second economic superpower. To this end, instead of competing with China, ASEAN should take advantage of this Chinese phenomenon and continue to enhance its economic development through free trade agreements and other economic and strategic cooperation such as China's One Belt, One Road initiative, China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreements, and a China-led East Asian Community.

Second, given its geopolitical proximity to China, ASEAN should foster and improve its foreign policy relations with China to ensure its regional security and avoid unforeseen conflicts which may arise from growing regional tensions on the issue of South China Sea as well as other territorial claims to the same stretch of water or land between China and several ASEAN member states. Good China-ASEAN relations would also place ASEAN in a good position to exercise its strategic balancing between China and the United States. However, such a balancing act should be conducted with great care and caution to guarantee that ASEAN would not fall under too much influence from China, which will definitely enrage America, another good friend of ASEAN.

Third, in addition to strengthening itself, maintaining its unity, and safeguarding its centrality, ASEAN needs to focus on building its own community and seek acceptable and practical alternatives to bilateral and regional dispute settlements (Heng, 2013). Unless issues surrounding border disputes among ASEAN member nations and disputes in the South China Sea are resolved, peace, stability, and development within the region are still at stake. Thus, not only does ASEAN need to be inward-looking in terms of maintaining and enhancing its unity, stability and cooperation in the regional group, but it also need be outward-looking in order to further strengthen its good relations with its dialogue partners, regional powers and

other countries within and beyond Asia. In so doing, ASEAN could send a message to China that Beijing is one of ASEAN's most important partners in their various bilateral and multilateral agreements and partnership. Meanwhile, another message is also conveyed to China that ASEAN cannot afford to be too reliant on its Chinese counterpart although it now needs this great Asian power to accelerate its economic, social and cultural development.

3. Implications for Sino-Cambodian relations

As Cambodia and China have been engaged in a long history of bilateral relations, Cambodia would definitely benefit from the phenomenon of China's rise. Therefore, Cambodia should try to maintain and enhance its relations with China, and it should play its role in ASEAN carefully and tactically, particularly with regard to the South China Sea conflict. Cambodia should also demonstrate to the Chinese government that it will continue to support China's one policy, and that Phnom Penh is a long-time supporter of China on the international stage, as seen twice in the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh and Vientiane when Cambodia blocked a joint communiqué with reference to China's growing assertiveness and militarization in the South China Sea (Millar, 2016). Moreover, Cambodia should continue to open its door for Chinese investment as well as strengthen its trade with China at all levels to reap as maximum benefits as possible from Chinese initiatives such as the Maritime Silk Road. Both governments should be constantly involved in dialogues and discussions to better understand one another and work collaboratively for the interests of both states.

Nevertheless, Cambodia has to establish a strategic alignment with China, instead of adopting a full bandwagoning strategy with this rising power. To this end, several alternatives are feasible, as suggested by Cheunboran (2015). Firstly, Cambodia needs to strengthen its bilateral relations with other major powers who are China's competitors such as India, Japan, Russia, and the United States, although this approach would put Phnom Penh in an uneasy position packed with challenges and obstacles. Secondly, Cambodia should improve its bilateral and multilateral relations with its ASEAN counterparts by playing a more proactive role in this regional grouping and abiding by the ASEAN Way to promote ASEAN centrality. Thirdly, Cambodia ought to pursue an omnidirectional foreign policy by forming a good partnership with other states within the region and beyond for the sake of its social, economic, and cultural advancement. More importantly, Cambodia should carefully and strategically maintain a balance between China and ASEAN, particularly its closest neighbors, Thailand

and Vietnam, to ensure its national security (Leng, 2014), bilateral trade deals, and other important interstate agreements between Cambodia and its old friends and enemies.

4. Implications for further research

Due to the fact that this paper is a review, not an empirical study, it is vitally important that further research-based studies be conducted to better understand the controversy surrounding the issue of China rising. Future research should employ both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data from various sources so that a good conclusion can be drawn and implications can be made in reference to the rise of China. Future empirical studies should also consider a variety of views from different scholars and researchers regardless of their nationalities and stances. Most importantly, they should take the current world situation, particularly new global trends arising from the rise of China, into account so that a more accurate interpretation of this controversial topic could be made and reported.

The Author

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