

Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning? D. Roy

In this article, Roy (2005) examines four significant approaches that are apparent within the region of Southeast Asia in response to a potential domination by China. The author places emphasis on the following countries: Singapore, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia within Southeast Asia and how they interact with both China and the United States. It is through his analysis of the political concepts of hedging, balancing, bandwagoning and engaging that similarities emerge across the region.

In order to understand effectively what processes are present in the region, it is first necessary to define the different concepts at play. The process of hedging revolves around the notion of keeping more than one strategic option available given the possibility of future threat. Within this area, balancing may or may not be considered a component, as Roy (2005) illustrates it is often determined by whether or not there is a presence of an actual threat, rather than simply implementing as a preventative measure. Balancing can be conducted both internally, for example the shifting of resources towards defense, or externally, for example co-operating with another stronger state in order to ensure military support. Conversely, engagement is the process of a weaker state utilizing inclusion and reward techniques to ensure the formation of an efficient working relationship. This can result in the formation of compassion by the dominating state for a weaker state's rules, and possibly even conflict evasion. Lastly, Roy (2005) illustrates the final concept as more complex, largely due to the disputed definition, which depending on what meaning is applied, will greatly effect whether it is apparent in Southeast Asia or not. This term is that of 'bandwagoning,' which can be found to have two distinct definitions in international relations literature. Firstly, it can be that of a state simply aligning itself with a threatening state to avoid be attacked, the typical "make your friends close, but your enemies even closer" strategy. The second definition however, is that of ensuring you are "on the winning side" (Walt 1987, cited in Roy 2005) in the hope

of obtaining economic benefit. In this particular article, Roy (2005) assesses the prominence and frequency of these concepts across a number of countries in the Southeast Asia region.

The purpose of Roy's (2005) article emerges from the onset, and involves an investigation into the establishment of political strategy in ensuring the evasion of Chinese dominance in the region of Southeast Asia. Roy (2005) approaches this through firstly creating a general overview of the states within the Southeast Asia region and how they have historically interacted with China, both positively and negatively. Through the author's description, it becomes evident that China, in the recent past has endeavored significantly to illustrate a relatively low dominating and threatening presence in the area, and has demonstrated its passive approach to the rest of the region, particularly through its positive interaction with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In particular Roy (2005) depicts such events as China's signing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in South China Sea (DOC), for which he suggests, won substantial Chinese support from a lot of the region. In my opinion as the reader of this article, it felt rather ironic for the author to illustrate a relatively harmless appearance of a state, followed subsequently by an explanation of the approaches undertaken by surrounding states to protect themselves from the possible domination, of what has just been illustrated as a relatively 'well meaning' state. However, I believe his initial purpose was to create an impression in order assist in general understanding of the dynamics of the region, and ensure that there is still a widely held underlying suspicion of China's future intent.

Although Roy (2005) does not state explicitly his research method, it becomes apparent that the basis of his hypothesis is formed through the gathering of historical and contemporary data, relating to the actions of countries in the region, and applying them to fit within the array of presented concepts. It is through this that particular method that overall trends emerge, which are pursued by particular case studies. Initially, Roy (2005)

illustrates the overall trends of the ASEAN nations, in a section entitled “region wide tendencies.” I believe that this format is beneficial as it enables an examination to occur at both overall and specific levels, which I think when analyzing a region is important. The key issue that arose from this particular section was an overall pattern of ensuring that the individual states in the region sustain two things, their sovereignty and autonomy. Secondly, an overall trend when discussing the way in which Taiwan is treated by China, many Southeast Asian countries regard this as a ‘litmus test’ for China’s future relations with its neighbors. As well as demonstrating the overall caution exhibited by the region, this section also outlines the common traits of hedging that exist across the countries, particularly with that of the United States and in some cases through relations, the United Kingdom, Japan, Russia and India. These act as an external balancing factor to protect against possible domination. As well as the general action of balancing, Roy (2005) also illustrates the common action of engagement. Although many of the ASEAN countries balance, surprisingly many engage with China, largely through the incorporation of China in multilateral organizations and international dialogue. Many of the countries agree that incorporating China into local economies and agreements will eventually assist in reducing tensions that may be apparent in some situations. There is a widely held belief that in incorporating China in the day to day running of the state, China will develop the mechanisms that will facilitate in the sharing of the benefits. As well as the many regional trends that are expressed, Roy (2005) then goes on to illustrate the specific case studies that have slight variations.

The first of which was Thailand, where Roy (2005) illustrated the state’s classic utilization of the hedging technique, as the Thai Government attempts to keep good relations with both China and the United States simultaneously. Many relations exist between Thailand and America through the supply of arms, however many historical influences, particularly that of the shared views over Vietnam for example, force a stronger relationship to occur between Thailand and China, rather than that of the United States. However, Roy (2005) illustrates very well the way in which Thailand’s balancing

occurs by providing many active examples for both sides. Roy (2005) illustrates the common features that are apparent between Thailand and China, including Thailand's criticisms of Taiwan, while also demonstrating that Thailand is a major non-NATO ally of the United States. It is through his presentation of evidence to support the appearance of two main concepts, however, one difficulty I found with this particular section, and therefore proved an area in which I would approach differently, was his clear demonstration of how the concepts are actually applied. In my opinion, I was led to believe that in this particular case, Thailand was a demonstration of a state that engages in both balancing and engagement, however, Roy (2005) depicts an environment of hedging and low-level balancing, due to the lack of threat. If I were to conduct this investigation, I would ensure that the concepts I am using don't bare the possibility of encompassing one within the other.

The following case studies involve Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. Here Roy (2005) uses two categories to group these particular states, Singapore and the Philippines in one, and Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia in the other. In the initial category, according to Roy (2005), the states utilize "low-level balancing," however; the second category performs that of "highly restrained balancing." In my opinion, one 'grey area' that appears rather consistent in Roy's (2005) research, is the lack of accurate differentiation between some terminologies, as it is hard to fully comprehend the extent to which low level and highly restrained balancing differ. The only way in which to gain suffice insight into the differences between the terms is through the author's use of specific state examples which follow, for example Singapore's hosting of the US Navy's Western Pacific Logistics Command, built specifically for US aircraft carriers. With another example being Vietnam's avoidance of antagonizing China, and therefore has undertaken such initiatives as delimiting land and Tonkin sea borders, as well as fishing rights co-operation with China. From these to examples it can assumed that 'low level balancing' is more consistent with the notion of building up

external support for a possible need of protection, whereas ‘highly restrained’ balancing insinuates a more general idea of ensuring the threatening state is not antagonized.