POLI3052 Response paper II

Tao Yujia, 3035945883

Reading:

Ann Marie Murphy (2017) Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages, Asian Security, 13:3, 165-182, DOI: 10.1080/14799855.2017.1354566

In the tide of the great power rivalry, especially the rivalry between China and the United States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) faces significant challenges. These challenges involve managing relationships with great powers and the concern for domestic politics, economy, and security.

Murphy (2017) pointed out the increasing effects of public opinions on domestic politics and then the corresponding foreign policies of ASEAN countries. Also, Murphy emphasizes that ASEAN countries will employ hedging as the preferred strategy to design foreign policies to maintain their relationships with great powers and protect their autonomy. However, Murphy mainly focuses on the purposes of the strategy, which are national security, political autonomy, and economic cooperation.

This essay critically evaluates Murphy’s analysis of the linkages between public opinions and foreign politics of countries and the hedging strategy by ASEAN countries. I argue that Murphy’s analysis ignores a crucial process in forming politics and applying hedging strategies in foreign policies, called norm entrepreneurship. Norm entrepreneurship is a process that initiates, structures, or intervenes in new norms and knowledge, and new systems of meaning conducive to multilateral hedging policies are produced(Ruland,2011). Therefore, this essay will discuss the effects of norm entrepreneurship on impacts from public opinions to foreign policies. Then, the seeking of political, economic, and security purposes of ASEAN countries in great power rivalry depending on norm entrepreneurship will be demonstrated.

Murphy(2017) illustrated the rising effects of public opinions and media power in scrutiny of foreign policies and decision-making of leadership in governments in the ASEAN countries. In my opinion, the effects of public opinion depend on the regional norm of entrepreneurship. Norm entrepreneurship of multilateral utilities and hedging utilities in ASEAN countries have different emphases on civil society participation. In the hedging utilities applied by ASEAN countries (Ruland,2011). Although both of them involve the encouragement of civil society participation, multilateral utilities emphasize the engagement of public opinions in multilateral consultations of international organizations; meanwhile, hedging utilities preferred by ASEAN now tend to consider too much intervention from public opinions as impediments and to emphasize the state-centered propositions in international organizations(Ruland,20211). Under the background of hedging utilities, the media and civil society mainly act as information carriers to disseminate the policies of governments and international organizations. Therefore, public opinions, evaluations, and criticisms toward the foreign policies of Southeast Asian countries are mostly restricted to the implementation process instead of the decision-making process by governments (Ruland,2011). Generally, after involving the norm entrepreneurship in analyzing linkages between public opinions and ASEAN foreign policies, those effects from public opinions and media can be specified to the impacts on implementing and disseminating policies depending on the hedging utilities.

Apart from the norm entrepreneurship applied by ASEAN in international organizations, ASEAN is an example of norm entrepreneurship. The norm of entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in forming regional ideological frameworks([Qiao](" \l "auth-Guangyu-Qiao_Franco" \t "_blank) & [Nandyatama](" \l "auth-Randy_W_-Nandyatama" \t "_blank)). The principles among ASEAN countries: non-interference, informality, minimal institutionalization, consultation, consensus building, non-use of force, and non-confrontation form the ASEAN way with regional norms to ensure the autonomy of each country and respect for each other.

Additionally, ASEAN countries convert these norms from regional contexts to global level to face the challenges of the great power rivalry(Katsumata, 2003).

Their hedging strategy under great power rivalry does not only include Murphy’s statements about those countries’ political, economic, and security purposes by applying specific foreign policies. Norm entrepreneurship of ASEAN pushes the achievement of their factual purposes by creating new norms for their international images and implying these norms globally (Katsumata,2003). For example, ASEAN’s efforts to promote the Treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) by negotiating with countries with nuclear weapons to improve their prospect of achieving consensus with great power([Qiao](" \l "auth-Guangyu-Qiao_Franco" \t "_blank) & [Nandyatama](" \l "auth-Randy_W_-Nandyatama" \t "_blank),2023). Such norm entrepreneurship firstly sets an image that they are a group of cohesive countries without nuclear weapons but seeking the push for world peace. Then, such a norm with legitimacy can help reach regional security in the great power rivalry based on agreements with countries like China and the United States. Also, such a norm entrepreneurship process reveals ASEAN’s hedging strategy toward great powers to avoid the risks of being identified as standing at one of the sides ([Qiao](" \l "auth-Guangyu-Qiao_Franco" \t "_blank) & [Nandyatama](" \l "auth-Randy_W_-Nandyatama" \t "_blank),2023).

Admittedly, the norm entrepreneurship of ASEAN faces challenges from the possible conflict between the global and domestic norms. As Murphy(2017) mentioned, Vietnam and Malaysia have territorial disputes over the South China Sea, and their governments make decisions to show their attitudes of protest toward China. However, their cooperation with China is deepening. Such norm entrepreneurship outside the ASEAN leads to opposition from the domestic society. Nevertheless, such contradiction is inevitable when using a hedging strategy; thus, governments of ASEAN countries need to find a way to implement the “ASEAN way” and find an appropriate method to push the acceptance of the norms at the global level in the domestic contexts(Katsumata,2003).

In conclusion, I agree with Murphy’s analysis of the hedging strategy of ASEAN under great power rivalry, but the analysis neglects the norm entrepreneurship process of the hedging strategy. Norm entrepreneurship is devoted to constructing regional consensus and forming international ASEAN images. At the same time, the norm entrepreneurship as a part of the “ASEAN way” will help Southeast Asia countries to achieve their economic, political, and security purposes under the great power rivalry. Moreover, the addition of norm entrepreneurship to Murphy’s analysis of the effects of public opinions on ASEAN foreign policies detailed the effects, which are mainly restricted to the implementation processes of policies.

References

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