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## **Regional Linkages and Global Policy Alignment: The Case of China–Southeast Asia Relations**

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# Regional Linkages and Global Policy Alignment: The Case of China–Southeast Asia Relations

## Abstract

This paper uses the case of Sino–Southeast Asian relations to gain insights on China’s ability to muster support for its global agenda. The analysis focuses on the regional–global nexus of interstate relations and explores the extent to which the quality of two states’ regional relations influences the likelihood of behavioral alignment in global politics. To this end, we consider a range of potentially influential aspects of Sino–Southeast Asian relations (the quality of bilateral relations based on recent event data, alliance policy, regime similarity, development level, and economic ties) and employ a statistical model to search for correlations with observed trends of voting coincidence in the United Nations General Assembly during the period 1979–2010. We find a strong correlation between the quality of regional bilateral relations and global policy alignment, which indicates that patterns of regional cooperation and conflict also impact the trajectory of China’s rise in world affairs.

Keywords: regional cooperation and conflict, Southeast Asia, China, event data, UN voting analysis, panel data

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# Regional Linkages and Global Policy Alignment: The Case of China–Southeast Asia Relations

Pascal Abb and Georg Strüver

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## 1 Introduction

Whether or not China has been able to translate its growing material power into actual international influence and the extent to which Beijing has been able to attract other countries to its development model and its visions of global order are key questions in the academic and political debate on China's rise. In the search for answers to these questions, Southeast Asia is often considered a "bellwether for how China's rise might affect the world" (Bolt 2011: 277). While China is "going global" and branching out into other regions as well, Southeast Asia is far ahead of the other regions in its economic interconnectedness and the degree of

institutionalization of its interactions with China. Therefore, China's ability to have its regional and global policies accepted among Southeast Asian countries can be considered a meaningful test of its growing international appeal and recognition as a responsible power (Beeson and Li 2012: 42). Generally, China's prospects for making headway in the region have looked promising for much of the last decade and a half. As a result of the Chinese government's embracing of a "new diplomacy" in the early 1990s – centered around stepped-up diplomatic engagement and economic expansion into the region – the PRC not only paved the way for the normalization of relations with Southeast Asian countries but also gained acceptance and influence among them (e.g. Bolt 2011: 278; Breslin 2009: 821 ff; Womack 2003: 541 ff). The 2010 landmark accord to establish a China–ASEAN FTA (CAFTA) is a good example of this trend. High-level government statements made by China further anticipate not only that neighboring countries will play a crucial role in China's current foreign policy outlook but also that, at least rhetorically, diplomacy and cooperation should prevail in future interstate relations in the region to secure a stable environment for China's development.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, however, relations between China and Southeast Asia have faced significant strains. In recent years, tensions over disputed territories in the South China Sea have flared up again and have not only brought about diplomatic quarrels such as the staking of competing sovereignty claims with the UN but also resulted in maritime clashes between China and several of its regional neighbors (Swaine and Fravel 2011). Against this background, strategic uncertainty about China's regional role has been further nourished by the more than threefold growth of its military expenditures over the last decade and, in particular, its recent focus on modernizing its naval force (Bolt 2011: 282 ff). Taken together, these developments have increased the wariness of Southeast Asian governments vis-à-vis China and provided a catalyst for the expansion of the US presence in "pivotal" Asia (Beeson 2013; Yahuda 2013). Recent studies further suggest that these developments have jeopardized China's prospects of exercising a regional leadership role, let alone establishing any form of hegemony in Southeast Asia (Beeson 2013: 243; Bolt 2011: 283 ff). Statements like that of the former Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi at a meeting with Southeast Asian nations in 2010 that "China is a big country and other countries are small countries" surely have not alleviated Southeast Asian governments' concerns about China's intentions (McCarthy 2012).<sup>2</sup>

This study analyzes the degree to which regional cooperation and conflict impact China's ability to muster support for its policies at the global level. While Southeast Asian governments' reactions to China's material rise and its changing regional behavior have received a

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1 See Diplomacy to focus on neighborhood, in: *China Daily*, online: <[www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-01/02/content\\_17209275.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-01/02/content_17209275.htm)> (28 April 2014), and *Xi Jinping Makes Important Remarks at a Conference on the Diplomatic Work with Neighbouring Countries*, online: <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/t1093870.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml)> (28 April 2014).

2 See also The dragon's new teeth, in: *The Economist*, online: <[www.economist.com/node/21552193/print](http://www.economist.com/node/21552193/print)>, (28 April 2014).

great deal of academic attention, the existing studies are mostly confined to the regional level of analysis. Surprisingly little work exists on the ways in which regional and global politics might interact. In order to contribute to the understanding of this nexus, we suggest exploring the impact that several dimensions of China–Southeast Asia relations have had on both sides' behavioral alignments in global politics. In doing so, we subject two opposing arguments from the literature on China–Southeast Asia relations to further investigation: The first focuses on the potential drivers of regional accommodation of and cooperation with a rising China. The other concentrates on regional balancing and hedging behavior. We reappraise both lines of argument with regard to the potential impact of regional politics on global relations.

The empirical analysis draws on two data sets that, thus far, have not been employed to describe and test arguments on China–Southeast Asia relations. In order to quantify the quality of Sino–Southeast Asian relations, we revert to the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) (Leetaru and Schrodtt 2013). Policy alignment between China and Southeast Asian countries in world affairs is measured by the countries' levels of similarity in terms of voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly (Strezhnev and Voeten 2013a). Drawing on these data, we use descriptive statistics and multivariate least square dummy variable regressions to explore how far patterns of conflict and cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries impact the latter's propensity to align with China in international politics. Apart from the overall quality of Sino–Southeast Asian material relations, we consider factors such as economic exchange, domestic regime characteristics, and diplomatic alignments that could plausibly influence policy alignment.

The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on Southeast Asian nations' reactions to China's rise in the region, paying particular attention to potential drivers of acceptance (or alignment and accommodation) and resistance (or contestation) towards China. In Section 3, we take up the main arguments of the literature and discuss how regional and global politics might interact. We also formulate testable hypotheses regarding the determinants of Southeast Asian states' behavior towards China. Section 4 introduces the indicators and data sources used for the analysis and provides a comprehensive description of the data. In Section 5 we present and discuss the results of our statistical model. The final section concludes the paper by discussing our findings against the background of the ongoing global power shifts and by outlining further areas for research.

## **2 Southeast Asian Reactions to a Rising China: A Literature Review**

Questions concerning Southeast Asian countries' response to China's regional policies and the PRC's growing national capabilities have received significant scholarly attention over the last decade. Many works have examined China's ability to translate its material weight into political power and influence in Southeast Asia and the extent to which this might have helped it exercise a regional leadership role. Other studies have looked at how China has

been a testing ground for mainly (neo)realist expectations of interstate behavior by investigating whether Southeast Asian countries have chosen to balance against or accommodate a rising China, and why they have done so.

There are important reasons why Southeast Asian nations might seek to align economically and politically with China. Of these, shared cultural values, similar views on economic development (and, in some cases, political orders), and the opportunity to profit from the China boom are among the most frequently cited regarding optimism about stable cooperation with a rising China (Acharya 2003b; Glosny 2006; Goh 2007; Roy 2005; Tongzon 2005). The literature discusses three sets of relational factors in particular that contribute to explaining Southeast Asian countries' accommodation of a materially rising China and greater degrees of acceptance of Beijing's policies throughout the region. These are China's strategy of diplomatic engagement, the growing economic interconnectedness in the region, and China's employment of soft power.

Concerning China's strategy of diplomatic engagement, it is argued that the country's policy of "good neighborliness" since the early 1990s has been crucial to the normalization of Chinese–Southeast Asian relations (Womack 2003: 541). A central aim of China's "new diplomacy" in Southeast Asia (and beyond) has been to engage with the region at the bi- and multilateral levels and to enhance "international cooperation that aims to foster economic growth and portray China as a responsible power" (Bolt 2011: 278).<sup>3</sup> The intensification of diplomatic ties is seen as having contributed to the reduction of threat perceptions in the region (Goh 2007). Expanded economic interconnectedness with Southeast Asian countries has helped China expand its influence in the region further. This does not mean that China has gained direct influence over the behavior of Southeast Asian states. Rather, it is argued that "the most notable elements of China's growing power – its economic strength and integration into the world economy – are manifested in structural, and often unintentional, ways" (Goh 2011: 24; see also Breslin 2009: 818, 835). Southeast Asian states might thus accommodate and align with China due to domestic expectations regarding the positive economic impact of their dealings with China and due to the perceived attractiveness of China's economic development model in general (Chen and Yang 2013: 280 ff; Breslin 2009: 826 ff; Beeson 2009: 106 ff).

Against the background of increasingly dense economic and diplomatic ties, China has further relied on its "soft power" to expand its attractiveness and influence among Southeast Asian countries. According to Kurlantzick (2006: 271, 273–274), the Chinese soft-power strategy goes far beyond Joseph Nye's original notion of soft power. It consists of "culture, diplomacy, participation in multinational organizations, businesses' actions abroad, and the gravitational pull of China's economic strength," with the latter also encompassing foreign

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3 Zhu (2010, 6) has argued that the main rationales behind the foreign policy adjustments under the label of a "new diplomacy" lie in China's raw material needs and its access to foreign markets, as well as its wish to isolate Taiwan, to reassure the world about the peacefulness of its rise, and to portray the country as a responsible stakeholder in the international system.

aid and investment. While the employment of different soft-power tools is believed to have helped China improve its image among the (Southeast) Asian elites and publics in general, it is also argued that China's soft-power capabilities are still at a low level – not only relative to its hard-power resources but also relative to the United States', Japan's, and South Korea's softer forms of influence in Southeast Asia and the wider region (e.g. Kurlantzick 2006; Lee 2009; Linley, Reilly, and Goldsmith 2012; Nelson and Carlson 2012).

These relational drivers interact with a number of domestic factors that are expected to facilitate Southeast Asian alignment and cooperation with China. The latter include geographical, cultural, and political proximity, as well as the relatively low power status of Southeast Asian states in comparison to China. For the case of East Asia, it has been shown that in addition to the existence of alliances with the United States and territorial conflicts, regime characteristics play an important role in shaping regional responses to China's rise (Chung 2009).<sup>4</sup> It can be expected that the low-to-medium power capabilities of Southeast Asian countries function as a further impetus for “bandwagoning” rather than balancing behavior. Further, similarities in the developmental experiences of China and (South)East Asian countries as well as a shared Asian culture – including the “ASEAN values,” which highlight the importance of national sovereignty and the principle of nonintervention – might ease interstate exchange and understanding. Both factors are thus expected to facilitate the accommodative behavior of the region's governments and ease China's exercise of influence in Southeast Asia (Beeson 2009; Stubbs 2008).

In contrast, security concerns are usually presented as the main drivers of regional contestation and balancing behavior towards China. Southeast Asian nations are among those states most immediately exposed to the negative corollaries of a rising China (Acharya 2003a; Acharya 2003b; Swaine and Fravel 2011): the recent reescalation of island disputes in the South China Sea has heightened tensions between China and the Southeast Asian claimants.<sup>5</sup> In the wake of its sustained economic boom, China has also been able to boost its military expenditures more than threefold since the beginning of the century, from 41 billion USD in 2001 to approximately 130 billion USD in 2011 when adjusted for inflation, and has already exceeded the combined expenditures of all Southeast Asian nations (28 billion USD) by far.<sup>6</sup> This has triggered a perception of security threats, which has been further nourished by strategic uncertainty about China's future intentions, on the part of all Southeast Asian nations.

It is argued that these developments have caused Southeast Asian reactions to China's rise – such as institutional balancing within the framework of ASEAN and a growing reliance on the United States as an external security provider – which, among other things, have

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4 See also Ross (2006) for a somewhat contradictory argument that the distribution of material capabilities suffices to explain East Asian secondary states' reactions to China's regional rise.

5 On the development of territorial conflicts in Southeast Asia, mainly in the South China Sea, see for example Hu (2010), Miyhushi (2012), and Swaine and Fravel (2011).

6 See the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, online: < [www.milexdata.sipri.org/](http://www.milexdata.sipri.org/)>.



restricted China's ability to adopt any widely accepted form of regional leadership (e.g. Beeson 2013; Emmers 2010; Odgaard 2007; Yahuda 2013). In some cases, Southeast Asian countries' reactions to China's rise have been supplemented with strategies such as omnienmeshment and the balancing of both great powers' influence in the region, the latter of which has taken place since the end of the Cold War (Ciorciari 2009; Goh 2008). Thus, taking the contending arguments together, the literature suggests that Southeast Asian countries occupy a strategic middle position, oscillating between the two poles of contestation of and accommodation of China's regional policies. What is less clear, however, not only empirically but also conceptually, is whether or not such regional patterns of interaction impact global policy linkages between China and Southeast Asian countries. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to suspect that the two are linked.<sup>7</sup>

### 3 The Impact of Regional Politics on Global Alignment: Framework and Hypotheses

A country's ability to exercise effective leadership, ideally to the point of hegemony, within its regional backyard has been described as a prerequisite to major power status at the global level (Mearsheimer 2001), since it frees up resources (or even allows for the extraction of tributes) and allows the dominant country to project its power elsewhere. Such a realist notion of IR theory has usually been applied to explain cases of major powers seeking superpower status and regional hegemony through military expansion (most notably twentieth-century Germany, industrial-era Japan, and the Soviet Union), although a rising China has explicitly been singled out as its next major test case (Mearsheimer 2001; Rosecrance 2006).

Most of these historical examples ended in failure for the would-be hegemon, as coalitions of smaller neighbors and external great powers were successful in defeating or containing the former. In addition to outright war, the regional contestation of a rising power's claim to leadership or hegemony can also have reverberations at the global level: smaller nations trying to balance against a would-be hegemon have an incentive not just to band together with each other but also to enlist outside help from great powers, which are anxious to prevent the rise of a peer competitor.<sup>8</sup> In the regional powers literature, for instance, it has been argued that dominant regional powers that rely too heavily on coercion instead of consensus in their dealings with the region prompt secondary powers to counterbalance by strengthening their own relations with third parties (Prys 2013: 272; see also Flemes and Wojczewski 2011). These secondary powers align with external great powers, in alliances that often include an exchange of security guarantees and economic aid for support of the patron's global agenda – as was the case with many superpower client states during the Cold War.

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7 On the lack of conceptualization of the regional–global nexus and the embeddedness of regional powers in the international system, see, for instance, Prys (2013: 270 ff).

8 This is a standard argument from balance-of-power (Waltz 1979: 118–119) or, alternatively, balance-of-threat theory (Walt 1985).

However, a nation's rise to a powerful position in global politics can also be achieved through peaceful means and take the form of accepted leadership rather than domination, a model that is arguably more common for rising powers in the twenty-first century. According to this view, a predominant power may achieve regional backing for its agenda because it is seen as a "benevolent hegemon" whose interests are at least somewhat aligned with those of its smaller neighbors, and which can effectively articulate these interests on its neighbors' behalf due to its greater weight at the global level. Even better from the point of view of smaller states, a regional heavyweight may feel an actual sense of responsibility for its region, rather than just seeing it as a stepping stone to global power status, and exercise its power on behalf of an inclusive regional community based on shared norms rather than interests.<sup>9</sup> This argument is central to much of the literature on new regional powers, which focuses on their capacity as drivers of regional economic development and integration to explain their growing influence in global politics (e.g. Destradi 2010; Nel 2010; Nolte 2010). Accordingly, it is likely that the predominance of stable, mutually beneficial, and cooperative relations would assuage fears about a rising power, potentially even to the point where it would be recognized and supported as a legitimate global leader.

As this discussion shows, multiple plausible pathways by which regional and global interactions can impact each other exist. We now outline several factors at the bilateral (or, as the sum of all these relationships, regional) level and detail the effects we expect them to have on global policy alignment. This leads to the formulation of the working hypotheses tested in this paper's empirical section.

First of all, we contend that the quality of relations between China and Southeast Asian nations – that is, the extent to which bilateral exchanges are marked by cooperation or conflict – is the main explanatory factor for global policy alignment. We expect the quality of bilateral relations to impact behavioral alignment at the global level, with better relations leading to closer cooperation. Harmonious relations, partnerships, and stable mutual cooperation in general are all indicative of shared interests and norms, which should in turn provide a platform for cooperation in global affairs as well. From a general perspective, nations that maintain good relations with China view its role in regional and global politics positively, and those that derive material benefits such as aid and protection from it should be more inclined to back it in international fora such as the UN. The latter strategy was practiced by many client states of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Conversely, increased regional conflict, ranging from diplomatic to military disputes, eliminates incentives to align internationally for a variety of reasons: First, deliberately voting against another country's interests in international institutions may be a low-cost opportunity to punish it by isolating it and thwarting its global agenda. Second, in times of in-

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9 Destradi (2010) describes this strategy as "leadership," as opposed to "hegemony" based only on the material interests of the regional power and "empire," which is an attempt at outright domination in line with Mearsheimer's propositions.

creased conflict with China, Southeast Asian nations may seek, or have sought, to balance against this threat by strengthening their ties to external actors (most notably the United States and the Soviet Union). Accordingly, they may offer support for the global leadership ambitions of a rival great power by backing its agenda in exchange for protection. Finally, the causal relationship behind this factor may be reversed, with an element of global politics impacting the regional order. For example, increased tensions may result from a country's alignment with an external power, rather than the other way around. This needs to be kept in mind when we discuss the theoretical and conceptual implications of our findings, since our results are based on correlations and are not able to capture the exact causal effect. Taking the above arguments together leads to our first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* The better bilateral regional relations are, the more Southeast Asian nations will tend towards policy alignment with China at the global level. Conversely, higher levels of conflict in bilateral relations lead to the balancing of China's global interests.

Drawing on prior work on the foreign policy effects of trade relations between China and Africa and China and Latin America (Flores-Macías and Kreps 2013; see also Kastner [forthcoming]), we further expect that the increased economic dependence of Southeast Asian states on China leads to policy alignment. This is probably the factor that has changed most significantly over the observation period, as a result of China's unprecedented economic development and its increasing integration in regional production chains (Tongzon 2005). The hypothesis on the influence of economic dependence – that is, how much a nation's economy is intertwined with China's – on global alignment is based on two lines of argument.

First, economic integration gives rise to vested interests in maintaining the resulting profits. Accordingly, the stability of mutually profitable trade links is a high priority, and formally opposing a partner at the global level could mean risking this relationship. This is the essence of modern interdependence theory, which dates back to Kant's thoughts on the peace-preserving effects of trade. At the extreme end, trade relationships may also take the form of one-sided dependence, which should make a country especially sensitive to the wishes of its partner, perhaps to the point of making it susceptible to blackmail.<sup>10</sup> This could be particularly pronounced in the case of many Southeast Asian nations, whose economies are generally much smaller than China's and which are consequently less significant partners for China than China is for them.<sup>11</sup>

Second, economic integration is perhaps the most important catalyst for international exchange and contacts, allowing participants from both sides to meet their counterparts in a

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10 See, for example, Lampton's discussion of the economic dimension of China's international influence (2008). For a general account of the tools of economic statecraft see Baldwin (1985).

11 According to statistics compiled by China's Customs Department, trade in goods with all ASEAN nations together amounted to only slightly over 10 percent of China's total trade in 2013. Conversely, for Southeast Asian nations, China has in most cases become the most important partner in recent years, with a share of 20 percent to 30 percent of their trade, making for highly asymmetric relationships (see the data section for detailed information on the trade data used).

cooperative context. This should serve to reduce prejudices and threat perceptions, two otherwise very potent drivers of international conflict. Over time, trade links may become conduits for a convergence of worldviews and norms, something that is often cited as a motivation for engaging China economically (summed up in the German slogan “*Wandel durch Handel*” “change through trade”). Based on the two lines of argument, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* The stronger the economic linkages between a Southeast Asian nation and China, the more the former will tend towards alignment with China.

We assume that the explanatory value of the two main hypotheses depends on Southeast Asian countries’ general pattern of diplomatic alignment, aside from their relations with China, and domestic-level factors. Formal coalitions (that is, the maintenance of an interstate alliance) with one of China’s great power competitors are expected to impact the global alignment pattern. On the one hand, Southeast Asian governments’ alignment with either the United States or Russia should entail higher degrees of foreign policy divergence, since the global agendas pushed by the two superpowers have often been at odds with Chinese foreign policy preferences (e.g. Powers 1980; Voeten 2000). On the other hand, the maintenance of an alliance with an external superpower that is either an outright opponent of China (as was the case for the Soviet Union after the Sino–Soviet split) or a peer competitor at the global level – for example, with respect to the power of interpretation and negotiation of the norms and rules of the global order (as could be said of the United States; see Breslin 2013; Clark 2011; Foot and Walter 2011) – can be seen as a very clear example of resistance. We thus hold that Southeast Asian nations that maintain a formal alliance with the United States or Russia will tend to oppose Chinese interests in international politics more often than states without such an alliance.

In addition to external factors such as economic and diplomatic ties that might contribute to foreign policy alignment, support for another nation’s agenda can also stem from political and socioeconomic similarities at the domestic level. Two factors we control for in our quantitative analysis are of particular interest when comparing Southeast Asian nations to China: first, domestic political regimes and, second, the overall level of economic development.

Regarding domestic political structures, we control for the effects of a country’s position on the democratic–authoritarian axis on global policy alignment. Previous studies on voting similarity in the United Nations General Assembly have shown that the more similar political regimes are, the more nations will tend towards policy convergence (e.g. Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele 2008; Voeten 2004). For one, liberal democracies have long exhibited substantial alignment in the UN, although the ultimate cause behind this is hard to determine due to the considerable overlap between this group and nations that maintain formal alliances with the United States. Additionally, democratic and authoritarian regimes are often at odds over issues like human rights and civil liberties or the competing norms of noninterference in sovereign states versus a “responsibility to protect” (e.g. Kim and Russett 1996).

Since these are also among the most pronounced areas of conflict between China and the US-led bloc of Western democracies, the behavior of democratic (or transitional) Southeast Asian nations that subscribe to the sovereignty-espousing “ASEAN way” and the norm of noninterference is particularly interesting (Acharya 2004). We thus expect that the more similar Southeast Asian countries’ domestic political regimes are to China’s, the more they will tend towards alignment with it.

Additionally, a major feature that determines a nation’s status, position, and involvement in global economics and politics – and, arguably, a great deal of its related interests – is its state of socioeconomic development. In recent years, much has been written about China’s unique status as a developing country that has nevertheless established itself as one of the most influential nations in world economic affairs due to the vastness of its population and overall economic output. Accordingly, developing countries on a similar trajectory could look to China as an influential advocate on the global stage, and be induced to align with it. When the interests of poor and developing countries have been pitted against those of advanced economies, as perhaps best exemplified by the international negotiations to mitigate climate change, China has played a leading role in organizing and articulating the position of the former group (Christoff 2010). Conversely, we would expect Southeast Asian nations that are significantly richer to be less likely to identify with China as a natural ally. Rich nations arguably have more in common with the OECD block and may even formally join it to signify their transition from a developing to a developed economy (for example, South Korea).

#### 4 Data and Research Design

In order to empirically assess the extent to which different aspects of bilateral relations impact the likelihood of alignment between Southeast Asian countries and China in global affairs, we use a data set encompassing all countries in the region<sup>12</sup> and effectively covering a period from 1979 to 2012 due to listwise case exclusion.<sup>13</sup> The start date of our observations is determined by the availability of data for our measurement of the quality of bilateral relations and coincides with the beginning of the reform era in China. Since the PRC was not officially recognized as the government of China until 1971, our observations also cover most of the period that would have been theoretically possible. For each of the hypotheses outlined above, we have derived a quantitative measurement in order to investigate the relationship. Indicators and control variables are then entered into a regression model, allowing us to estimate the relative strength of our different predictors and to draw tentative conclusions about the underlying causal mechanisms.

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12 The 11 Southeast Asian countries are Brunei Darussalam (since 1984), Cambodia, Timor-Leste (since 2002), Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

13 The descriptive statistics are reported in Table A-1 of the Appendix.

#### 4.1 *Dependent Variable: Policy Alignment in Global Affairs*

In order to explore foreign policy alignment in global affairs and generate an indicative measurement of the appeal of China's global political agenda for Southeast Asian governments, we draw on the respective countries' voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Using roll-call votes from the UNGA to derive metrics of bilateral interest similarity has a long tradition in the study of international politics and has received renewed scholarly attention in recent years. Similarity indices have been employed either as independent variables – for example, in studies of interstate military conflict – or as dependent variables in analyses of socialization and policy convergence, among other things (for an overview, see Voeten 2012). With regard to Chinese foreign policy and the PRC's rise in international politics, indices of voting similarity have been applied to show the foreign policy consequences of Latin American and African countries' trade with China and to explore the effects of diplomatic linkages as well as domestic factors on individual countries' foreign policy alignment with China (Flores-Macías and Kreps 2013; Strüver [forthcoming]). Other authors have relied on these metrics to explore patterns of growing policy convergence between China and Latin American governments (Domínguez 2006; Strüver 2014).

Following up on these studies, we use ideal point estimates in our empirical analysis to measure the similarity of foreign policy alignment between China and the Southeast Asian states (Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2013; Strezhnev and Voeten 2013b). Ideal point estimates were introduced only recently to the analysis of voting behavior in the UNGA by Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2013) as an alternative way to measure state preference. Contrary to the commonly used *S*-score, estimates of states' ideal points are particularly suited to describing long-term shifts in national preferences regarding the US-led international order. This is achieved by taking US voting decisions (or United Kingdom decisions in cases where the United States did not vote) as a reference point in estimating ideal points. In order to account for the effects of preference shifts due to changes in the UNGA agenda rather than a government's revision of foreign policy priorities, the estimation process of ideal points further uses a set of resolutions that have been put to vote repeatedly in different UNGA sessions (Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2013: 11–12). In our analysis we take the absolute distance of China's and Southeast Asian states' ideal points and multiply it by -1 to obtain a measurement of similarity. A value of 0 thus indicates matching foreign policy interests, while negative values indicate growing levels of policy divergence.<sup>14</sup>

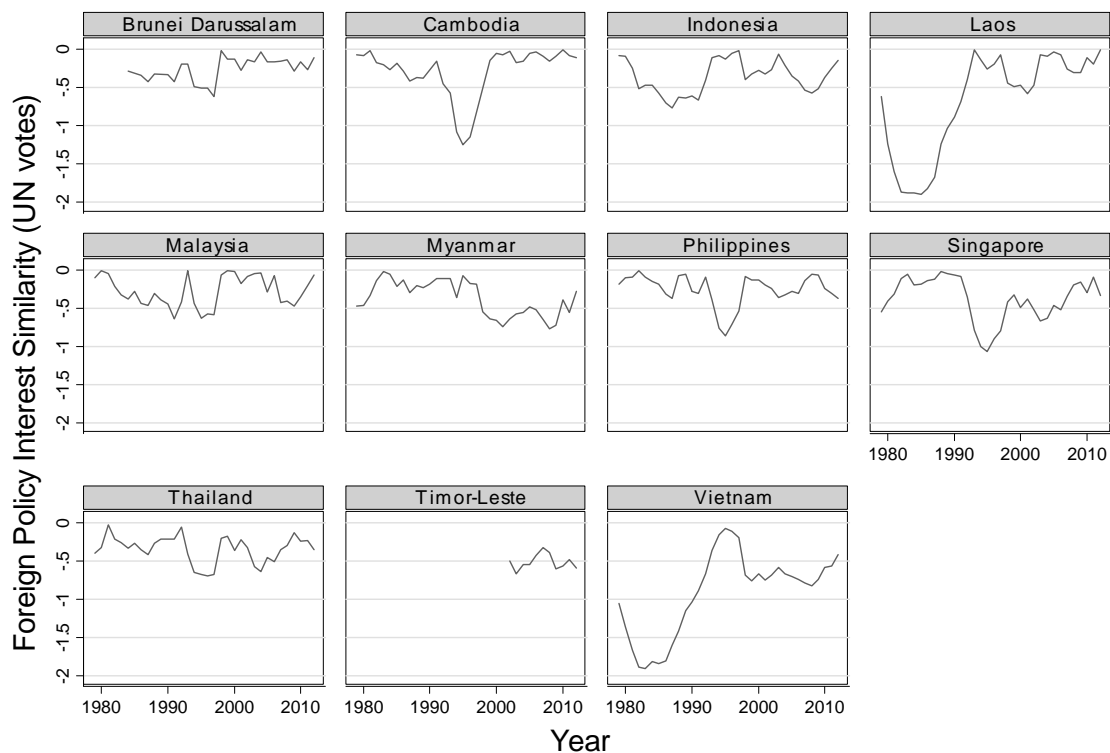
Given the topics of the UNGA resolutions, the ideal point estimates allow for the comparison of countries' foreign policy preferences and Chinese vote choices with respect to Western positions on a wide range of topics including human and social rights, international

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14 The resulting index of *foreign policy interest similarity* is reported in Figure 1. The data and a corresponding codebook see online: <<http://hdl.handle.net/1902.1/12379>> (Strezhnev and Voeten 2013b). The coding and estimation procedure is described in Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2013). Southeast Asian states' and China's individual ideal point estimates are reported in Figure A-1 in the Appendix.

disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation, the situation in the Middle East, and broader political issues such as decolonization. One has to bear in mind, however, that the data yield little or no information on preferences with regard to international trade and financial politics or global climate change, as these topics are rarely discussed within the General Assembly. Figure 1 plots the development of Southeast Asian nations' *foreign policy interest similarity* based on ideal point estimates with China over the last three decades.

**Figure 1: Foreign Policy Alignment of Southeast Asian Nations with China (based on ideal point estimates)**



Source: Authors' compilation based on data from Strezhnev and Voeten (2013), Bailey et al. (2013).

The voting data depicts relatively diverse foreign policy alignments between Southeast Asian countries and China (see Figure 1). For instance, the voting behavior of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, and, with the exception of a downturn around the years 2008 and 2009, Malaysia was quite similar to that of China during most of the decade from 2000 to 2010 – particularly in comparison to the generally lower degrees of convergence in the 1990s. Further, the years after 1990 showed a considerable increase in alignment with China in the cases of Indonesia, Laos, and Vietnam. Of these, the two former Soviet client states in Southeast Asia (Vietnam and Laos) showed the most rapid increase in alignment with China following the demise of their patron. Finally, the data suggests that the appeal of the political agenda that China represents in global affairs dropped temporarily around the mid-1990s and the middle of the following decade in several countries (for example, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). The most obvious explanation for this shift, and one which our

model is designed to explore, would be that it was a reaction to periods of resurgent territorial conflict in the South China Sea, although decreases in voting alignment can also be observed for countries which were never engaged in such struggles with China (for instance, Thailand).<sup>15</sup>

## 4.2 Explanatory Variables

### 4.2.1 Quality of Bilateral Relations

Assessments of the state of bilateral relations between China and its neighbors abound in the qualitative literature, but devising a quantitative indicator for this concept is considerably more difficult. For one, the topic is highly multidimensional, encompassing a vast variety of issue areas that may be marked by divergent trends (for example, economic cooperation and security competition), and thus hard to reduce to a single metric. However, new developments in tracking international interactions have made it possible to devise an indicator for this concept – specifically, the GDELТ database, which was introduced to the public in early 2013 and which comprises over 200 million interstate events that have occurred between 1979 and the present (Leetaru and Schrodt 2013). This database contains the full span of interactions between states – diplomatic agreements, official statements, military clashes and many others – as well as aggregated categories classifying them as “cooperative” and “conflictive” and weighted measures of their relative importance, thus offering us a chance to devise an overall metric for the quality of relations. Due to the novelty of our indicator and the data set from which it was derived, we describe our process for deriving it here in greater detail.

We used a slightly adapted version of the Python scripts included with the raw GDELТ data to isolate all events between China and one of the Southeast Asian countries at the interstate level, without regard to who initiated it. Since we are only interested in the overall quality of bilateral relations, the sources and targets of individual events are of no concern in our study, and a review of the data makes it doubtful whether GDELТ’s automated coding scheme is sufficiently accurate in capturing these details. The subsample thus included a total of 278,265 interactions, which were very unevenly distributed over time as well between cases (see Table 1 for details).

Since our dependent variable consists of yearly data for each country, we aggregated the GDELТ events at the same level then proceeded to calculate the mean Goldstein score for all interactions between China and a Southeast Asian nation within a year as an indicator of the quality of relations between them. This score builds on a survey of political scientists (Goldstein 1992), who were asked to rate all event categories in the original WEIS database by in-

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15 Figure A-1 in the Appendix reports the ideal point estimates for each country on which our similarity score is based. In particular, Myanmar, Vietnam, and to a lesser extent also Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Laos, and Malaysia had lower-level ideal point estimates than China during the first decade of this century. Conversely, the remaining five Southeast Asian countries tended to be more in line with the established norms and values of a US-led global order.



tensity of cooperation or conflict. The score used in the GDELT database ranges between -10 for the most conflictive events (military attacks, clashes, or assaults) and +10 for the most cooperative (surrendering or retreating militarily) (GDELT 2013).<sup>16</sup> We use the mean rather than the sum of these scores, primarily in order to avoid distortions that would inevitably arise from the strong increase in recorded events over time.<sup>17</sup>

Before we present our arguments in favor of the validity of this metric and compare its estimates for the development of Chinese–Southeast Asian relations to descriptions found in the qualitative literature on the topic, a few issues with the GDELT data that may affect the results need to be pointed out. First, the data in the subsample shows the same kind of skewed temporal distribution as in the whole database, due to the inclusion of much more extensive sources (especially Google News) in recent years. Although this should not be an issue when computing an aggregate score for events occurring in each year, earlier years may show a stronger variance due to single events having a stronger impact on the overall ratio. In order to minimize this effect, we only consider country-years in which at least 10 events took place in our subsequent analysis.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Event Data**

	Events including China		Variance in quality of relations (based on the mean Goldstein score per year)			
	Number	Share of total (%)	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>Brunei</b>	11,256	4	-4.97	4.45	0.829	1.838
<b>Cambodia</b>	16,347	5.9	1.00	3.73	2.48	0.565
<b>Indonesia</b>	25,876	9.3	-1.07	3.02	2.009	0.893
<b>Laos</b>	6,766	2.4	-1.06	4.62	2.549	1.422
<b>Malaysia</b>	29,742	10.7	0.86	3.58	2.317	0.516
<b>Myanmar</b>	20,639	7.4	1.03	3.64	2.502	0.671
<b>Philippines</b>	52,372	18.8	-0.17	3.79	1.433	1.119
<b>Singapore</b>	20,735	7.5	1.01	4.55	2.743	0.667
<b>Thailand</b>	29,523	10.6	1.38	2.99	2.523	0.358
<b>Timor-Leste</b>	959	0.3	-0.83	4.09	2.635	1.383
<b>Vietnam</b>	64,050	23	-3.75	3	0.589	1.808

Source: Authors' compilation.

Second, the data is also unevenly distributed between the Southeast Asian nations involved in these interactions, which is unsurprising given their differences in size, media coverage, economic importance, and geographical proximity to China. Vietnam stands out in particular: its turbulent relationship with China accounts for 23 percent of all interactions in the sample. The Philippines account for an additional 18.8 percent, despite the absence of a land border between the two nations. At the other extreme is Timor-Leste, with less than 0.5 per-

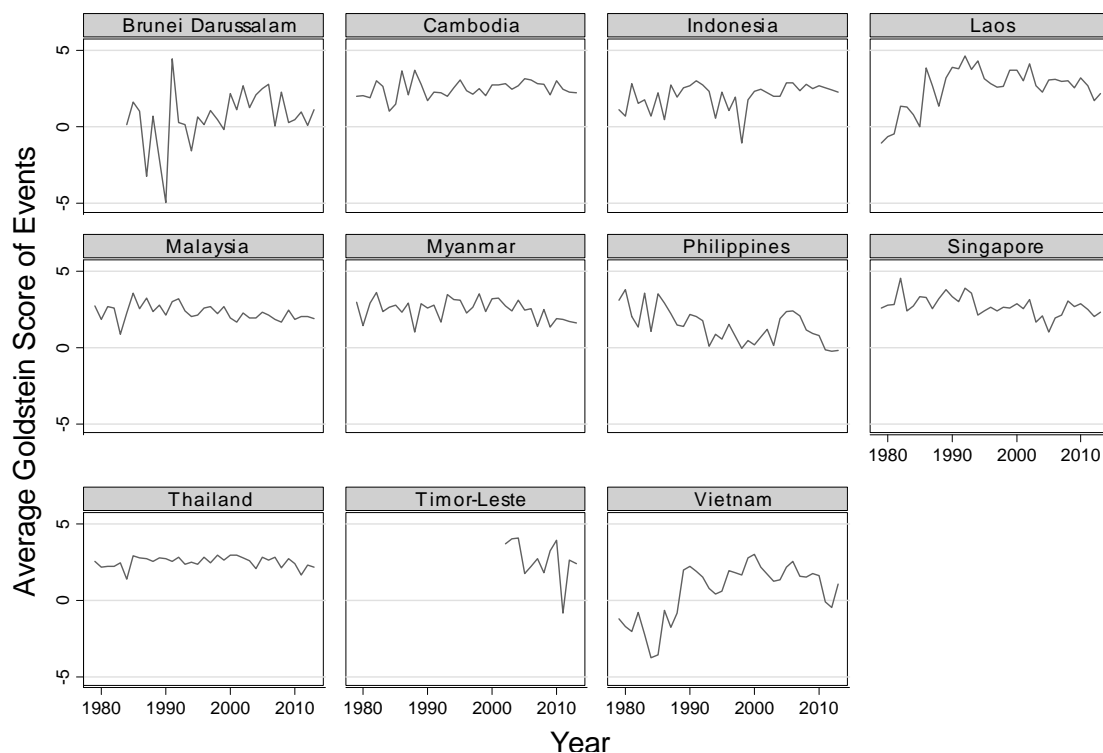
<sup>16</sup> The score is rounded to the first decimal point for all other event categories between these extremes.

<sup>17</sup> On the choice between the means and sums of Goldstein scores as well as other issues in working with event data, see Yonamine (2012).

cent of all interactions, due to the country's recent independence, very small size, and great distance from China (see Table 1 for details).

Third, there are some open questions regarding the quality of the GDELT data, particularly the accuracy with which events are classified based on the automated coding of news reports. For example, there is reason to believe that the source and target of each event – that is, who is acting on whom – are not always correctly extracted, which sometimes leads to nonsensical patterns in the data. There is, for instance, an estimation that China is a frequent contributor of development aid to Singapore, one of the richest countries in the region. Additionally, exact geocoded locations for each event are always given, although these are frequently based just on the geometric center of a nation rather than the actual site where an action took place. None of these specific examples should be an issue for our design and level of aggregation, but they do point to the necessity of checking the data thoroughly. Despite these caveats, we found the GDELT data to be a very useful tool for deriving a metric for the quality of relations between China and its Southeast Asian neighbors. Figure 2 plots the data for each of these bilateral relationships between 1979 and 2012.

**Figure 2: Quality of Relations between China and Southeast Asian Nations based on GDELT Data (mean Goldstein scores)**



Source: Authors' compilation based on the GDELT database (Leetaru and Schrodt 2013).

In order to demonstrate the validity of our approach, we now undertake a brief discussion of how our event-based indicator captures well-known turning points in key relationships. Taking Vietnam as one example, the data depicts nicely the general improvement of Sino–Vietnamese relations in the 1990s, something which has also been described in the qualitative

literature (e.g. Tønnesson 2003). The observed setbacks in Sino–Vietnamese relations around the years 1994, 2003, and 2011/2012 can also be matched with known flare-ups in the South China Sea dispute: For instance, China’s decision to reengage in oil exploration activities in maritime territories claimed by Vietnam in 1992 seems to have led to the deterioration of overall relations by triggering a show of military force and sea blockades by Chinese warships and the seizure of Chinese fishing boats by Vietnamese naval vessels (Tønnesson 2003: 61).<sup>18</sup> Again in 2003, both sides clashed over the South China Sea issue, and Vietnamese vessels attacked Chinese fishing boats navigating in the disputed territories. The latest decline in the quality of bilateral relations corresponds with renewed tensions and China’s growing assertiveness regarding territorial claims in the South China Sea, which led, for instance, to the seizure of Vietnamese fishing boats by China (in 2010) and clashes between Vietnamese survey and exploration boats and Chinese naval vessels (in 2011). Chinese–Philippine relations have been similarly fraught with conflict, although the trajectories have been different, with low points occurring during the 1994/1995 confrontations over Mischief Reef and once more in the years from 2010 to 2012. Indonesia is another interesting case, with generally stable relations noticeably punctured by a drop-off in the temporal context of anti-Chinese riots in the late 1990s, followed by a robust rebound under the post-Suharto government (Sukma 2009). Finally, Singapore can be seen as an example of a case that has maintained friendly relations with China, with a significant drop and subsequent recovery in the middle of the decade 2000–2010 following Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s visit to Taiwan and the resulting backlash.

There are also pronounced differences not just in the overall quality but also in the stability of bilateral relations, as measured by variance metrics (see Table 1 for details): Notably, China’s relations with three nations in continental Southeast Asia (Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar) as well as with Malaysia have been the most steady, or the least susceptible to sudden shocks and recoveries. In cases such as Timor-Leste, Laos, and Brunei, greater variance is likely at least partially an artifact of the overall low intensity of interactions, as pointed out above.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the same thing cannot be said about Vietnam, which indicates that our measurements are able to pick up on notable upswings and downturns in high-intensity subsamples as well.

#### 4.2.2 *Political Alignment with the United States and the USSR*

Superpower alignment is captured by checking whether a country had a formal bilateral alliance with either the United States or the USSR for that year, using data obtained from the Alliance and Treaty Obligations Project (ATOP) (Leeds et al. 2002).<sup>20</sup> This results in a dummy variable that is coded 1 for each year in which a country was formally allied with a super-

18 For details on the military dispute incidents see the Dispute Narratives of the Correlates of War MIDv4.0 Project (Ghosn, Palmer, and Bremer 2004), online <[www.correlatesofwar.org/COW2 Data/MIDs/MID40.htm](http://www.correlatesofwar.org/COW2 Data/MIDs/MID40.htm)>.

19 In order to reduce the effect of less frequent interactions on year-to-year variance, we exclude all cases with fewer than 10 total events per year from our analysis.

20 ATOP is maintained by Rice University; the database see online: <<http://atop.rice.edu/home>>.

power (something which concerns only Vietnam and the Philippines, for varying lengths of time) and 0 for those years where this was not the case.

#### 4.2.3 *Economic Dependence*

Economic dependence on China is measured as the share of bilateral trade with China (imports and exports) in a nation's GDP for each year. Data on the value of trade flows (imports and exports) in current US dollars was obtained from the Correlates of War trade data set, which mainly uses the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) *Direction of Trade Statistics* yearbooks as a source (Barbieri and Keshk 2012; Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins 2009).<sup>21</sup> As the original data is only available for the years until 2009, we updated the most recent years. GDP data in the same format was taken from the World Development Indicators provided by the Quality of Government data (Teorell et al. 2013; World Bank 2013). We do not measure the prevalence of imports or exports, nor do we attempt to analyze trade flows in specific sectors that might signify a particular dependence (for example, crucial natural resources). The indicator *economic dependence* is theoretically distributed between 0 (no trade with China) and 1 (total dependence) and ranges in our data from the minimum of 0.07 (Vietnam in 1990) to the maximum of 0.32 (Singapore in 2008).

#### 4.2.4 *Domestic Regime Characteristics*

In order to estimate the effect of Southeast Asian countries' political regimes on alignment with China, we use the combined index of a country's imputed polity2 scores from the Polity IV Project's data set and a transformed average of Freedom House's political rights and civil liberties scores (Hadenius and Teorell 2005; Teorell et al. 2013).<sup>22</sup> In Southeast Asia, the variable *Polity2/Freedom House* ranges from 0.3 points (Cambodia during most of the 1980s) to a maximum of 8.6 points (Philippines in 1988) with low levels representing the least democratic states and higher scores the stronger democracies. Our measure of regime similarity – or, more accurately, dissimilarity – is derived by subtracting China's score from that of each Southeast Asian country for each year and recalculating it to feature only positive values. The latter step means that countries that are more authoritarian or democratic than China may receive similar scores, something which is intended to model the importance of regime differences in general rather than specific features like democracy. In practice, however, China consistently scores so low on this metric that only a few neighboring states have been slightly more authoritarian for any length of time. Of course, this only gives us a metric for how far

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21 For the years from 1999 onwards, this source provides two alternative measures of trade flows, one applied only to mainland China and one that includes the reincorporated SAR of Hong Kong. In order to maintain consistency and avoid introducing spurious variance, we opted to use the former data for these years.

22 To close the gap that is left due to missing Freedom House data for the year 1982, we carried forward the *Polity2/Freedom House* variable from the last available observation. In the original data the variable is named *fh\_ipolity2* and ranges from 0 (least democratic) to 10 (most democratic).

apart states are on the democracy–authoritarianism axis; it does not capture other political differences (for instance, ideological strife between far-right and far-left regimes).

#### 4.2.5 *Economic Development*

We measure economic development and thus the relative wealth of a country using the yearly figures for national GDP per capita at constant 2005 prices in US dollars. The variable *GDP per capita* is calculated by dividing the national GDP figures by the country's inhabitants. Both types of data are provided by the UN statistics division (Teorell et al. 2013).

#### 4.2.6 *National Capabilities*

Finally, we account for the material capabilities of Southeast Asian nations in an effort to replicate the findings of Dreher and Sturm (2012) on the determinants of alignment in UN voting. The authors argue that stronger nations should demonstrate more independent voting behavior, as they may not feel a pressing need to align with powerful peers and have greater diplomatic room to maneuver. We measure the material strength of a country using the Comprehensive Index of National Capabilities (CINC), which is maintained as part of the Correlates Of War project (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972; Singer 1988). The variable *capabilities* represents a nation's unweighted share of global capabilities across six dimensions (iron and steel production, energy consumption, military expenditures, military personnel, total population, and urban population). This indicator is available for each year up to 2007 and is distributed between 0 and 1 depending on a country's total share of the global sum of capabilities.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4.2.7 *Omitted Variables*

We would also have liked to control for the influence of foreign aid on behavioral alignment in global politics. When channeled through G7-dominated institutions like the IMF and World Bank, foreign aid has previously (Dreher and Sturm 2012) been shown to have a positive correlation with UNGA voting alignment with these nations. It would have been very interesting to investigate the effects of similar flows from China to Southeast Asian recipients, but since China has only emerged as a major donor in the region relatively recently and does not publish detailed breakdowns of its foreign aid, the respective data could not be obtained. The PLAID (Project-Level Aid) project and its new AidData database (online: <[www.aiddata.org](http://www.aiddata.org)>) offer some data on Chinese foreign aid, but not for the time frame and set of cases we selected. Official Chinese publications on the country's aid programs are (except for the most recent years) sparse and incomplete. Schüller et al. (2010) have estimated the amount of Chinese aid to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam based on information about individual ongoing projects, but we would have been unable to replicate this effort for all

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23 We carried forward the average of the last two years with available *capability* scores in order to be able to include more recent years in our models. Since CINC scores vary little over time due to their calculation as a share of world capabilities, this should be justifiable.

countries and years in our own study. The GDELT data also contains information on aid provision as part of its “material cooperation” category, but this data is similarly sparse, lacks information about the volume of each contribution, and is probably unreliable.<sup>24</sup>

## 5 Empirical Results

Our model, shown in Table 2, covers a total of 282 observations or country-years.<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that the model's overall explanatory power is limited, with an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.76, despite the inclusion of country effects (a plain OLS model featuring only the explanatory variables introduced in Section 4.2 yields a value of 0.22). Nevertheless, our model identified a number of highly significant correlations between the explanatory factors and the dependent variable, featuring effect directions that are in line with the expectations formulated in our hypotheses.

**Table 2: Results of LSDV Regression**

	<b>Dependent variable: Global policy alignment</b>
<b>Quality of bilateral relations</b>	0.073*** (0.016)
<b>Superpower ally</b>	-0.456*** (0.152)
<b>Cold War ongoing</b>	-0.146*** (0.053)
<b>National capabilities</b>	-30.366 (28.805)
<b>Domestic political regime (democracy)</b>	-0.043*** (0.013)
<b>Economic dependence on China</b>	0.835** (0.333)
<b>Economic wealth</b>	-0.00002** (0.00001)
<b>Observations</b>	282
<b>R2</b>	0.780
<b>Adjusted R2</b>	0.766
<b>Residual Std. Error</b>	0.275 (df = 265)
<b>F Statistic</b>	55.293*** (df = 17; 265)

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Source: Authors' compilation.

24 According to the database, Singapore is the most frequent recipient of Chinese economic aid, which is highly implausible given the massive wealth disparity between both nations. This may be indicative of a coding issue leading to incorrect appraisal of an action's source and target. This is highly problematic for actions like aid provision where the directionality is crucial, but less so for our general indicator on the quality of bilateral relations.

25 As discussed above, exclusions due to missing cases are mainly connected to our indicator for trade dependence, since its GDP component is unavailable for Myanmar, excluding this case altogether.

First off, we find that our event-based estimate of the quality of bilateral relations has a pronounced and highly significant positive effect on global alignment. Of the independent variables entered into this model, it is the strongest predictor of voting alignment.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that neighboring states are indeed sensitive to recent developments at the regional level when deciding whether or not to align with China in the United Nations, although it is beyond the scope of our study to determine the exact causal mechanism behind this pattern.

The formal alliances that the United States and the USSR maintained with their respective partners in the region are also estimated to have had a highly significant negative effect on alignment with China, even when we control separately for the effect of the Cold War. This effect would be even more pronounced if we considered Laos a Soviet ally, since it was a highly dependent client state despite never signing a formal alliance treaty. As shown in our graphical depiction of voting alignment in Figure 1, the end of Sino–Soviet strategic contention produced the most clearly pronounced swing in voting alignment between China and Laos.

Regarding the effects of regime (dis)similarity and the level of economic development (or wealth), we also find significant correlations in line with our expectations: greater differences in political institutions along the democratic–authoritarian axis and higher levels of wealth both seem to result in less alignment with China, with the effect of the former being more pronounced. This appears to confirm our assumptions about shared interests arising from similar domestic considerations, and thus the importance of this contextual factor in analyzing international interactions.

We also find a relatively weak relationship between economic dependence on China and global alignment with it. China’s steadily growing role as a driver of regional economic development and the sometimes highly asymmetric trade relationships it has built with its neighbors seem to have some impact on voting behavior, but clearly not to the extent that they overshadow the influence of any of the factors described above. Put differently, China’s economic leadership in the region cannot offset the negative impacts of worsening relations, alignment with external actors, or fundamental differences in domestic regimes and is thus not sufficient to inspire followership – at least when it comes to Southeast Asian nations.

In terms of our control factors, the impact of the Cold War on voting alignment was significant and, as expected, the end of the superpower struggle has apparently benefited China’s efforts to obtain international support. On the other hand, the national strength of Southeast Asian nations does not show a systematic correlation with their voting behavior vis-à-vis China. While the study by Dreher and Sturm (2012), which did yield a positive result for this factor, examined alignment with G7 countries rather than with China, we expected the same

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26 In addition, we found that alternative measurements of the quality of relations, such as the event-based scores of verbal and diplomatic conflicts as well as militarized disputes, are also statistically significant but negatively correlated with policy alignment and corroborate our findings. Thus, periods of bilateral conflict indeed bring about foreign policy repercussions for China at the global level. The results are available on request.

underlying mechanism to have an impact on these relationships as well. Since we have worked with a subset of cases rather than analyzing the voting behavior of all UNGA members, sampling bias may be an issue, although it is not immediately obvious how. The Southeast Asian nations are skewed – first slightly and then, over time, more strongly – towards the high end of the spectrum, most likely due to their large populations: for 1979, three cases (Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand) were in the top quartile of nations with the highest capabilities; by 2007, six out of 11 achieved the same feat (Singapore, Malaysia, and Myanmar in addition to the three previous ones), while only the two smallest (Brunei and Timor-Leste) were in the bottom quartile.

Of course, China itself also became much more powerful over the same time frame, boosting its CINC score from 0.119 to 0.199 and moving from third to first in the global ranking, thereby exhibiting much more dynamism than the G7 nations in Dreher and Sturm's study. It is possible that deviating from these authors' methodology by using a metric of relative rather than absolute strength as an independent variable would actually have yielded results more in line with their findings, although this inconsistency would also have made it hard to directly compare the results of the Dreher and Sturm study and with those of our analysis.

Finally, some of the country-specific effects are estimated to correlate significantly with the dependent variable as well, suggesting that Southeast Asian countries' alignment with China is influenced by idiosyncratic factors that are not included in our general model. The most visibly pronounced of these factors concerns Chinese–Laotian relations and can perhaps best be explained by the fact that Laos was a Soviet client state during the Cold War despite never entering into a formal alliance with its patron. This relationship is thus not captured by our respective indicator. Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, Laos's alignment with China quickly followed the same trajectory as Vietnam's.

## 6 Conclusion

As we noted in the introduction, Chinese–Southeast Asian relations have been subject to very divergent impulses over the last three decades. This is what our model was designed to analyze and disentangle as much as possible. Notably, some of the biggest breakthroughs in regional integration and (economic) cooperation and serious military confrontations have occurred virtually back-to-back. For instance, 2010 saw both the establishment of CAFTA and the beginning of the latest round of clashes in the South China Sea. In the minds of many experts and the general public, these countervailing trends have established Chinese–Southeast Asian relations as a crucial test case for what kind of major power China will ultimately turn out to be, and whether its rise will inspire followership or resistance. Based on the results of our model, there is reason to believe that the answer to the latter question will also determine China's ability to mobilize broad support for its global policy agenda. Since China's interac-



tions with its neighbors at the regional level have attracted so much international scrutiny, these developments will also be taken into account by many other states that have to decide whether or not to support it, likely causing additional reverberations on the global stage.

This study has aimed not only to shed some light on a very interesting test case for interactions between the global and the regional level but also to demonstrate the utility of bringing a quantitative approach to a field that has already been exhaustively covered in the qualitative literature. Since there are so many competing plausible theoretical approaches that claim Chinese–Southeast Asian relations as a case in point, investigating the relative strength of the various factors these approaches focus on can add to our understanding of the problem. Additionally, the development of new tools in this field has increased opportunities to measure concepts like the “quality of bilateral relations,” which lends itself intuitively to qualitative discussions but is hard to fit into quantitative approaches.

We therefore believe that a research agenda that aims to bridge the existing gaps between regional and global studies, as well as those between area studies and quantitative approaches to IR, is a promising way to yield insights in future. While China may be the most prominent example of a new rising or regional power, it is not alone in this regard. For example, numerous other studies have already examined Brazilian, Indian, and South African attempts to organize their respective regional environment while simultaneously bidding for increased global influence. It would be very interesting to see if an investigation of their interactions with neighbors at both levels confirms the findings of this study and allows us to establish general patterns for how the behavior of a regional power impacts its global status. In the meantime, China's immediate relevance as the most likely peer competitor for US leadership, as well as the fact that the country has been consistently singled out as a test case for how power shifts affect global orders, should justify its suitability as a starting point.

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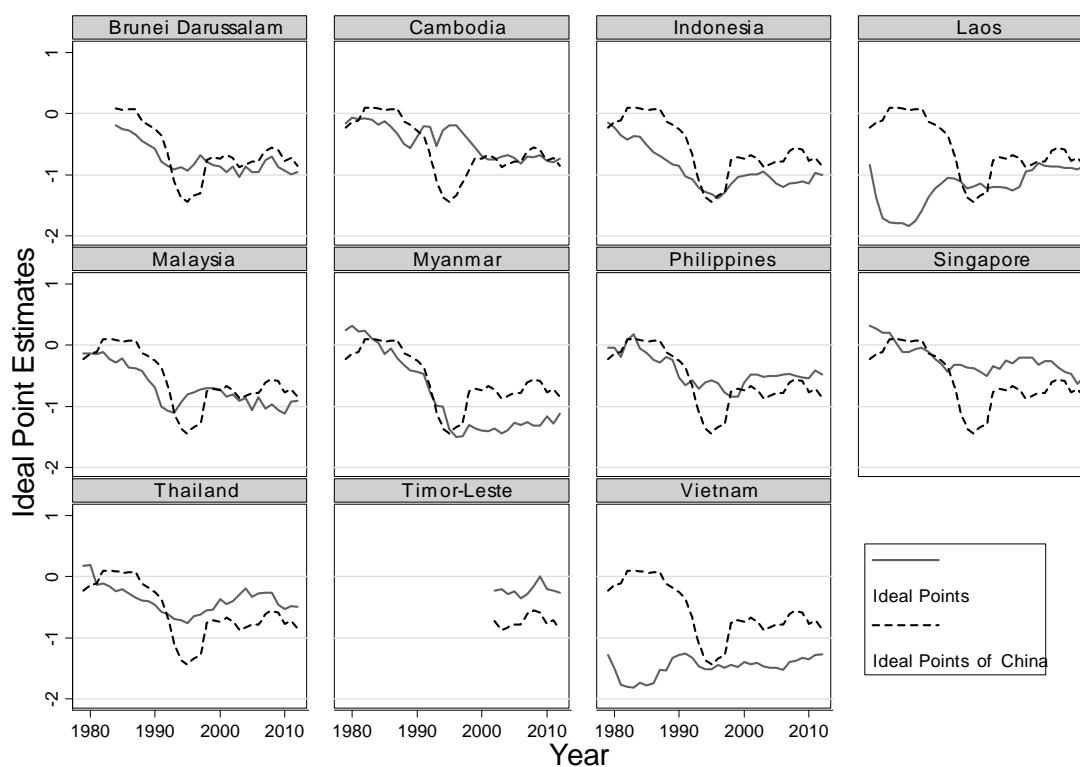
## Appendix

**Table A-1: Descriptive Statistics**

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Global policy alignment	352	-0.420	0.388	-1.907	-0.002
Quality of bilateral relations	370	2.034	1.351	-4.971	7.000
Superpower ally	385	0.125	0.331	0	1
Cold War ongoing	385	0.400	0.491	0	1
National capabilities	355	0,005	0.004	0.0001	0.016
Democracy	355	2.736	2.417	0.000	7.500
Economic dependence	292	0.060	0.073	0.000	0.323
Economic wealth	344	5,253.884	9,227.625	81.207	35,938.570

Source: Authors' compilation.

**Figure A-1: Ideal Point Estimates of China and Southeast Asian Countries**



Source: Authors' compilation based on data from Bailey et al. (2013).

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