

Book Reviews

A Genealogy of Bamboo Diplomacy: The Politics of Thai Détente with Russia and China.
By Jittipat Poonkham. Canberra: ANU Press,
2022. ISBN: 978-1-7604649-9-8

This book provides an explanation of the origins of Bamboo diplomacy and an exploration of Thailand's détente politics with major countries, especially Russia and China. Similar to other countries that have distinctive forms of diplomacy, the author provides an in-depth analysis to understand the form of Thai diplomacy, Bamboo Diplomacy, within the framework of Thailand's foreign policy discourse. To trace the history of Thai diplomacy and Thai Détente politics in the book *A Genealogy of Bamboo Diplomacy: The Politics of Thai Détente with Russia and China* by Jittipat Poonkham, its history is explained from the Cold War era to the present and is also explained in the practice of Thai détente in three leadership periods, namely under Minister Thanat Khoman (1968–1971), M. R. Kukrit Pramoj (1975–1976), and General Kriangsak Chomanan (1977–1980). This explanation relates to how Thai elites strategize to balance relations with major countries in order to maintain the stability of the country against changes in geopolitical dynamics that occur in ASEAN.

Chapter 1 explains the introduction of the term “Bamboo Diplomacy” which reflects the flexible nature of Thailand in implementing foreign policy strategies to survive under political pressure from major countries. Some refer to this form of diplomacy as ‘flexible diplomacy’, while others call it ‘bamboo diplomacy’. Chapter 2 explains the origins of bamboo diplomacy which explores the

discursive hegemony that challenges the anti-communist and pro-American narratives that prevailed in Thailand during the Cold War. This anti-communist discourse is one of the many discourses of Thailand’s foreign policy. A genealogy of Thai détente demonstrates a history of rupture. Thailand at that time was able to direct alliances and competition by managing relations with the United States and communist bloc countries. The book *A Genealogy of Bamboo Diplomacy: The Politics of Thai Détente with Russia and China* by Jittipat Poonkham can contribute to international history during the Cold War, especially the study of Thai détente, how a small power like Thailand initiated alternative strategies beyond superpower politics, and how successful these strategies were.

The next two chapters explain the first episode of Détente under Ministers Thanat Khoman (1968–1971) which is considered as the initial period of Thailand's flexible diplomacy practice with communist powers, especially the Soviet Union and the PRC in the context of America's withdrawal from the region. Seeing the uncertainty of America's position in the ASEAN region, under Thanat Khoman's leadership, alternative policies began to be reviewed in the event of American retrenchment. The policy options include non-alignment, bandwagoning, neutralization, bipolarization and regional cooperation. So the concept related to flexible diplomacy created under Minister Thanat in 1968 consists of three characteristics, namely increasing doubts on Americanism, regional cohesiveness, and détente with great powers. In short, Thanat Khoman showed a major change in Thailand's foreign policy from previously anti-communism where the Soviet Union and China



as "enemies" changed to "friends". In chapter 5, it explains the transition period from the military coup in 1971, which was originally intended to reduce tensions and start Thailand's relations or détente with the Soviet Union and China, but in reality the discourse of anti-communism still continued. In this chapter it is explained that the old discourse on anti-communism began to fade, but Thailand's détente was still not properly implemented.

In chapter 6 examines the second episode of détente practice under M. R. Kukrit Pramoj and Chatichai Choonhavan regarding the restoration of relations with China and relations with the Soviet Union between 1975 and 1976. In chapter 7 examines the third episode of détente under General Kriangsak Chomanan (1977–1980) where in this episode the term "equidistance" began to be known in determining Thailand's foreign policy with major countries. At this time anti-communism was no longer a discourse because Sino-American diplomatic relations began to be established. Thai détente became a defining characteristic of Thailand's foreign policy and began to be implemented maturely.

And the final chapter is explained by reflecting on the importance of a genealogical approach to Thai diplomacy. Poonkham argues that the genealogy of Thai détente can be explained as a history of rupture and the history of the present which are sequentially to reassess the changes in discourse and practice of Thai diplomacy. A history of rupture shows the emergence of détente discourse that developed into three episodes, namely under Thanat Khoman (1968–1971), M. R. Kukrit Pramoj (1975–1976), and General Kriangsak Chomanan (1977–1980). The history of

rupture also emphasizes that détente occurred in a discursive struggle against the hegemony of anti-communism in Thailand.

This book provides many views on Thailand's foreign policy theoretically and empirically. The study of the history and practice of Thai diplomacy in the 1970s through bamboo diplomacy and the concept of Thai détente which is closely related to the political construction in determining Thailand's foreign policy. The history of Thai détente that occurred in the long term from the 1970s to the present is a moment when the unthinkable- the normalization of diplomatic relations with the communists- began to become thinkable in the present. In the present, Poonkham shows how Thailand continues to utilize its strategic position to maintain national stability amidst the complex rise of China and the continuing influence of Russia. This book certainly contributes to the study of international relations as a science, where studies related to the genealogy and formation of bamboo diplomacy, how and in what ways knowledge can be discursively shaped by changes in the practice of bamboo diplomacy. Through the study of genealogy, this book can help in conducting research on Thailand's position in international history from the Cold War era to the present.

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