Anchoring Ambitions. A Global Value Chain Perspective on China’s Maritime Economic Power Development

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Abstract

"The past decennia have been characterized by a trajectory towards an increasingly intense reliance on the ocean and its resources. As will be evidenced in this dissertation, attention for the (economic) maritime domain is growing among both academics and policymakers. With the changes in the global economic architecture resulting from globalization, a renewed focus on the salience of the ocean economy for a state’s maritime power is needed.

This work therefore examines the dynamics between the ocean economy and maritime power by looking at maritime power through the lens of Global Value Chains (GVC) theory. It does so in particular for the People’s Republic of China (PRC), a state that has explicitly broadcasted its haiyang qiangguo (strong maritime power)-strategy since 2012 (and already paid attention to the maritime economic domain in the context of global value chains (GVCs) since the 2000s). Extensive textual analyses of primary Chinese-language sources are the main methodology utilized in this thesis to analyze the development of policies regarding the Chinese ocean economy. To examine the extent to which these policies have been successfully implemented and have led to tangible growth, this research additionally relies on descriptive statistical data, retrieved from Chinese statistical yearbooks and a range of databases (such as UNCTAD, Orbis, PATSTAT).

This work consists of five chapters.

The first chapter evidences the applicability of Global Value Chain theory to China’s build-up of its ocean economy in the context of its haiyang qiangguo-strategy.

The four chapters thereafter are case studies that specifically focus on one aspect of the policy framework or on the development of one specific sector within China's ocean economy.

The dissertation highlights the significance of the maritime domain in International Political Economy, emphasizing that China's maritime power build-up relies heavily on its position within GVCs related to the ocean economy. It also notes that China's strategic focus on upgrading within maritime GVCs spans across its entire ocean economy and has been evident since at least 2012.

Finally, the growth in China's global market share in maritime goods and services suggests potential shifts in maritime power dynamics for other leading states."