



The Securitization of Trade: Economic Interdependence and Non-Traditional Security in China-Malaysia Relations

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Abstract. Taking the competition of major countries as the background and the Chinese durian trade dispute as an example, this article explores how "interdependence on weaponisation" and "security" can build a dynamic interaction mechanism in non-traditional security fields. The research has built a circular model of "security-weaponisation". State actors use discourse technology to define economic problems (such as durian quarantine) as "national ecological threats" and legalize security. State actors use their asymmetric advantages in the market structure to formulate specific policy tools (such as standard control and market access restrictions) and implement "weaponisation" actions. Research shows that although there are inherent conflicts between the two theories, they constitute a complementary logic - weaponisation relies on objective material structures, while security focusses on subjective discourse production. The reality of the interrelationship between material power and discourse authority in contemporary geopolitics is fully reflected in this tension and the example of durian shows how the state uses its structural authority through securitisation of economic dependence, transforming it into a tool for deterrent policies. Regarding methodology, this work utilizes a theory-driven case analysis approach, seeking for an effort to close the gap between weaponization theory and non-traditional security theory at the micro level. It provides a fresh analytical means for understanding great power strategic behavior in the context of economic interdependence by introducing "structural deterrence" as the primary mechanism driving their interaction.

Keywords: Securityisation Theory, Weaponised Interdependence, Durian, 'Securitisation-Weaponisation Spiral' Model.

1 Introduction

In modern times, systemic dangers and broad economic interdependence coexist in a contradictory environment. One of the best instances is the global financial crisis of 2008, which showed the basic weaknesses hiding behind interdependent networks. In considering this, China's Belt and Road Initiative has grown into an innovative ap-

proach to governance and addressing the idea that "connection fostering stability and cooperation, mitigating risks."

One could start with a durian to understand the internal workings of this massive undertaking.

Because China's consumption has increased, durian has shifted from a tropical fruit to a popular "national delicacy". Meanwhile, Malaysia is taking high-quality durian varieties such as Cat Mountain King as an important part of its agricultural transformation strategy. Under the framework of the "Belt and Road", "durian diplomacy" should have written a chapter of mutual benefit and win-win results according to the common needs of the two countries. However, this close economic connection has raised mutual security concerns: China regards the durian ban as a "biosafety line of Defence", while Malaysia regards market access as an "economic lifeline".

The focus of this study is to explore how actors can use security strategies to transform low-political security issues into high-political security issues in the asymmetrical interdependence structure between countries. This research aims to reveal the basic mechanism of this process, and take durian trade as a micro-case to provide an innovative analytical perspective for understanding the contemporary non-traditional security situation.

2 Literature Review

From a micro perspective, the durian trade between China and Malaysia provides an excellent case for understanding economic interdependence and non-traditional security dynamics. This chapter traces the evolution of the theory and discusses how the theory of economic interdependence has developed from a cooperative framework to a power struggle and how the theory of security has evolved into a political tool for countries to achieve their goals.

2.1 Context: Systemic Risk and Strategic Alignment

The 2008 global financial crisis highlighted the systemic risks inherent in extensive economic integration: threats beginning in one economy can spread rapidly through intricate financial and trade networks, leading to a crisis in global governance [1]. By enhancing interregional infrastructure connections and economic flows, the Belt and Road Initiative, as an investigation of a new governance concept, provides an ideal environment for interdependence and risk interaction among the countries involved [2]. Meanwhile, the specific performance of this dependence is also influenced by domestic industrial policies. For example, Malaysia's national agricultural and food policy has promoted the durian industry to the strategic level of national economic security and supported the export of high-value agricultural products [3]. Moreover, the specific restrictions of the General Administration of Customs of China on the quarantine regulations on the import of Malaysian fresh durian also reflect how governments deal with the potential risks brought about by relying on technology super-

vision [4]. This section provides an efficient basis for this investigation by combining macro-level context with micro-level policy analysis.

2.2 Theoretical Framework I: From Interdependence to Power Dynamics

Analyses of power dynamics have displaced early cooperative models in the theoretical examination of economic interdependence. Keohane and Nye were the first to point out that asymmetrical dependencies inevitably lead to disparities in "vulnerability," which in turn serve as sources of power. Maoz's quantitative research further shows that although economic interdependence tends to avoid conflict, the foundation of state-to-state cooperation is its inherent power imbalance [5,6]. The "weaponized interdependence" theory proposed by Farrell and Newman methodically illustrates how countries that hold primary positions in global relationships transform interdependent relationships into tools of coercion [7]. The causes of structural power in this case are explained by this theoretical framework. Its emphasis on tangible power structures, however, fails to adequately explain how certain political processes and discourses legitimize and utilize power.

2.3 Theoretical Framework II: 'Securitisation' as a Discursive Strategy

Waever's "securitization" discursive process is what actually makes "weaponized interdependence" legitimate [8]. Under the securitization theory, security is a "speech act" in which state actors declare specific issues (such as the quarantine of durian) as "existential threats" in order to justify emergency actions that go beyond accepted political norms. Various uses for this concept can be studied in non-traditional security sectors. Andrade et al. proposed the idea of "food defense" based on this theory, while Fung et al. tied food safety to problems with public health. Markiewicz, by introducing the concept of 'the vulnerability of securitisation', provides a critical lens to examine the potential failures of such framing attempts [9-11].

These studies present important theoretical frameworks for understanding how Malaysia and China frame SPS policies as biosecurity risks. Securitization theory is excellent at analyzing discursive strategies, whereas it frequently overlooks the material power bases that support them, finding it difficult to explain why certain states' securitization methods are more successful and influential than others' [12,13].

2.4 Intersectional Perspective: Food as a Convergence Point of Politics and Security

As the intersection of politics and security, food has the dual attributes of cooperation and conflict. Malaysia's durian trade case shows that supply chain and logistics challenges give rise to "food defense" strategies, turning agricultural safety into "strategic assets"; at the same time, market competition has made it a tool for "food diplomacy" [14,15].

To understand China's food security strategy, it is necessary to be based on the concept of "general Security", that is, security is "a shared order that presents a har-

monious state", and it is necessary to coordinate economic ecology and other fields with "miscellaneous disciplines" [16]. Under this framework, food security has become a practical carrier for the country to achieve "preferential coexistence" in "competition-harmony". However, existing research mostly discusses the strategic and diplomatic roles of food, and lacks a Dynamic analysis framework to explain the conscious role switching of a single commodity (such as durian) in practice.

2.5 Synthesis and Commentary

Firstly, there is a theoretical divide between power at the macro level and practices at the local level. While the theory of "weaponized interdependence" sheds insight into material power dynamics in global networks, it fails to analyze specific policy implementations. Moreover, the theory of "securitization" analyzes discursive construction processes quite well, while it frequently ignores the power underpinnings of those processes [7,8]. These two systems have ineffective dialogue.

Second, the levels of analysis are not aligned. Micro-level research generally lacks theoretical depth, while macro theories find it hard to explain micro-level specific negotiations (such as SPS standard discussions). Additionally, there are fragmented narratives in food politics research.

There currently exists no explanatory framework for the role shifts of the same commodity (like durian) within dynamic games; instead, existing studies either emphasize the cooperative features of "food diplomacy" or focus on the conflictual aspects of "food defense."

Thus, an integrated "dependence-securitization" analytical framework is proposed in this study. By methodically explaining how states use power advantages within imbalanced interdependence, this attempts to connect the macro and micro levels. They promote strategic goals by converting economic problems into security risks through securitization actions. This study develops an innovative theoretical framework for comprehending non-traditional security dynamics by examining the China-Malaysia durian trade case.

As figure 1 shown, this study utilizes the trade in durian in China and Malaysia as a "key" case study to illustrate how asymmetrical power dynamics caused by economic interdependence—such as the significance of the Chinese market to Malaysia and the distinctive features of Malaysian durian varieties—cause both countries transform "security" issues into political negotiating chips to maximize their own interests. The study's goal is to bridge the gap between macroeconomic power structures and micro-economic dialectical practices. It discusses the increasingly widespread existence of "microeconomic security games" in the contemporary non-traditional security domain by developing a more specific and dynamic interpretive framework.

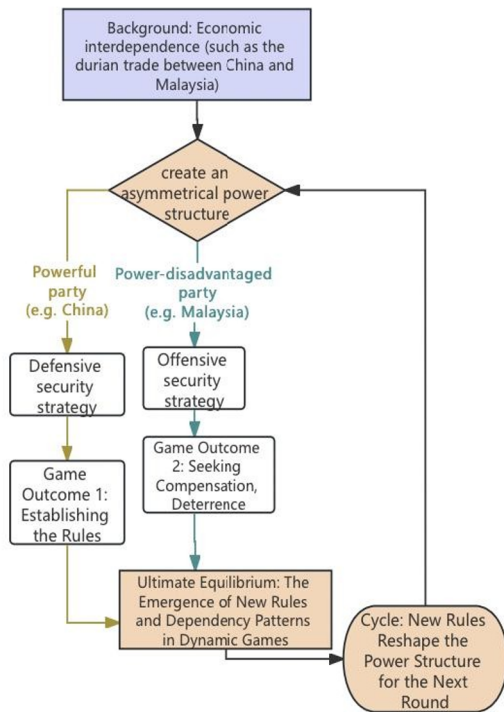


Fig. 1. Economic Dependency - Security Dynamic Balance Diagram

3 Research Methodology

Using a qualitative case study approach, this chapter discusses the "China-Malaysia durian trade" to methodically analyze the causal mechanisms through which state actors, in a setting of economic interdependence, adopt securitization strategies to transform trade and economic issues into non-traditional security concerns and ultimately achieve a dynamic policy balance.

3.1 Research Design and Case Selection

This study uses a research strategy that combines process tracing methods with in-depth analysis of a specific case. Three main factors are taken into consideration while selecting a case:

High political sensitivity: challenges, including quarantine access and supply chain control, often result in bilateral political-security discourse interactions.

High economic dependency: Durian is a high-value strategic agricultural product for Malaysia that shows significant export reliance on the Chinese market.

Typicality of the policy process: It perfectly demonstrates the whole chain of interactions encompassing "standard setting – discourse construction – policy output – industrial feedback."

The three stages of the analytical process have been implemented according to the theoretical mechanism of "asymmetric dependency → securitization strategy → policy outcomes":

The discovery of structurally asymmetrical dependency in the Sino-Malaysian durian trade.

Analysis of how both sides use specific discourses to present technical issues (like quarantine) as security threats.

Monitoring how securitization narratives are translated into real policies, shifting supply chain configurations and patterns of bilateral interaction.

3.2 Data Collection and Sources

A multi-source triangulation technique is used in this study to guarantee research dependability, based on:

Theoretical literature: both conventional and modern studies on weaponized interdependence and securitization theory.

Policy texts contain statements from China's General Administration of Customs, Malaysian agricultural policy documents and bilateral quarantine agreements between China and Malaysia.

Official declarations include speeches by leaders, press conferences by pertinent ministries and white papers from both countries.

Media Coverage: Discourse analysis and process validation based on supply chain adjustments and trade frictions reported by mainstream news agencies (e.g., Xinhua News Agency, The Straits Times).

3.3 Data Analysis Methodology

Identifying securitization discourse: identifying the occurrence and implementation paths of securitization by extracting discourse markers including "economic security," "national biosecurity," and "existential threats".

Policy process tracking: examining official statements and policy texts from different periods to find policy turning points and how they relate to securitization narratives.

Verification of the mechanism: The theory chain's "interdependence-securitization-policy outcomes" dependability and ability to elucidate the case study must be verified using policy and discursive evidence.

3.4 Research Limitations

Additionally, this study has some limitations. Firstly, conclusions about securitization motivations are based mainly on open-access texts and discursive manifestations, which makes it difficult to fully capture non-public factors in the decision-making

process. Secondly, considering this is a qualitative case study, the generalizability of the results needs to be tested via various instance types.

4 Case Study

Through the specific example of the durian trade between China and Malaysia, this chapter tries to back up the previously proposed "economic dependency-security protection" theory. In considering asymmetric power dynamics, the study explores the complicated competitive relationship between China and Malaysia.

Both countries employ both "defence" and "offence" strategies to negotiate two connected domains: supply chain control (survival competition) and market access (rule-based competition). This chapter goes into more detail about the particular dynamics of these games and how they reinforce one another, providing a cyclical chain of game theory. This instance offers a definitive response to a core query: how do states use securitization strategies to reach their political-economic targets?

4.1 Game One: China's 'Defensive Security Measures' – Reinforcing the Biosecurity Barrier

By showing how two countries employ securitization discourses to frame technological challenges as security threats, this section attempts to link theoretical frameworks. China has adopted typical defensive securitisation measures to raise the quarantine risk of durian to the biosafety level.

On the legal basis of the Entry and Exit Animal and Plant and Their Product Quarantine Law [17], the important announcement of the General Administration of Customs of China [4] obviously links "maintaining national biosafety" with "preventing the introduction of foreign harmful organisms". Through this discourse construction, "durian quarantine" has changed from a technical requirement to a measure to prevent "survival threats".

Concrete policy tools are an outgrowth of this securitization discourse. The institutionalization of securitization logic can be seen in the measures outlined in the 2024 Protocol on Quarantine Requirements for Imported Frozen Durian from Malaysia [4], which include quarantine lists, orchard registration and intensified inspections.

China used its structural power as the main export market for durian in Malaysia (as shown in the export statistics of 2023 [18]) to successfully transform security claims into market access regulations, showing the power dynamics under asymmetric interdependence [5].

Malaysia responded that China's actions are "non-tariff barriers" and emphasised its impact on the livelihood of durian growers [19]. This action is taken by the less powerful party and securitised the issue of market access into an issue of "economic security" and sought remedies through political channels such as WTO appeals.

4.2 Game Two: Survival Game in Supply Chain Control and Economic Security

This part links the theoretical framework and shows how supply chain control is affected by economic interdependence beyond market regulation. Both sides have turned the struggle for industrial superiority into an issue of economic sovereignty through investment and countermeasures.

China applies its "defensive security" theory to upstream supply chains as well as market access. Chinese capital has deliberately engaged in Malaysia's durian industry chain through investments in durian cultivation facilities, joint ventures building processing units and control over cold-chain logistics, all based on strategic evaluations of supply chain disruption risks. These supposedly business investments serve as a component of a proactive security plan to expand capital overseas and internalize supply chain control, seeking to lower the risks of reliance that come with isolated external supply chains.

Malaysia swiftly implemented a counter-security mechanism focused on "economic sovereignty" due to the increasing influence of Chinese finance. The government converted "Musang King D197" from a commercial brand into a national cultural asset and a sign of economic sovereignty that needed to be safeguarded by registering it as a protected geographical indicator trademark. In order to establish a strategic balance in the capital structure, Malaysia actively encourages domestic capital to increase investment through policies and measures to balance China's shareholding and operational influence in key supply chain links.

This wave of strategic layout shows that the goal of securitisation now covers the control of the entire industry, the distribution of value and specific commodity quarantine standards. China's capital outflow reflects its strategic intention to use security to ensure the resilience of the supply chain, while Malaysia's capital strategy and brand protection laws are the essence of defensive.

4.3 Summary: The Spiral Evolution of Securitisation

The two-stage game reveals a gradual and in-depth process of securitisation. In the first stage, China has formed a dominant regulatory position by disguising technological risks as biosecurity threats and focussing on market access supervision. Malaysia uses brand protection to maintain its economic sovereignty; while China uses capital controls to ensure supply security in the next stage and expands to the supply chain.

Regulatory restrictions trigger the demand for supply chain inspection, and capital infiltration triggers sovereign Defence, forming a spiral of self-reinforcing securitisation. The logic of securitisation has evolved from explicit supervision to an implicit framework, accelerating the continuous transformation of financial challenges into security issues.

The next chapter will explore the strategic balance and policy impact of this dynamic process in depth.

5 Discussion

By analysing the case of durian trade between China and Malaysia, this chapter systematically verifies the theoretical framework of the "security-weapon spiral". Research shows that economic interdependence fails to ease conflicts, and gives rise to a new type of great power competition through the combination of weaponised forces and security discourse.

5.1 Operational Mechanisms of the Securitisation-Weaponisation Cycle

China's durian trade clearly shows how weaponisation and security interact. First of all, China has characterised technical inspection as a "biosafety threat" and makes it necessary to have strict access rules. Malaysia called market access a "economic security threat" and eased tensions and opened up space for political action. Later, China used capital controls to weaponise its market dominance, while Malaysia relied on brand protection and capital guidance to defend its own security, forming a more balanced pattern.

This study believes that security gives weapons legitimacy and weaponisation gives security power, thus forming a vicious circle.

At the end of 2024, in the face of trade tensions with China, Malaysia will remain silent on the South China Sea issue - which is different from the Philippines' continued confrontation with China[20]. Because Malaysia's durian industry depends on the Chinese market so that its restraint plays a structural deterrent role, showing how economic policies affect foreign behaviour.

5.2 Comparative Validation: Multidimensional Manifestations of Structural Power

In the digital trade friction between the United States and Europe, the European Union characterises data privacy issues as "guarantee of fundamental rights" (securitisation), legalising strict laws such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The European Union later used the model of "digital single market" to support local enterprises (defensive weaponisation). The United States uses its structural advantages in the fields of cloud computing and semiconductors to implement export restrictions (offensive weaponisation), which has raised the EU's security concerns about "technology dependence risks", forming a spiral upward pattern similar to the structure of the situation in China and Malaysia.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions and Applicability Boundaries

This study created the "security-weapon spiral" model and brought about three theoretical progresses:

I. Narrowing the theoretical gap between international political economy and security research.

- II. It reveals the dual characteristics of power in economic interdependence (dis-course construction ability + structural positioning).
- III. The dialectical link between weaponisation and security is explained.

6 Conclusion

Taking the durian trade between China and Malaysia as an example, this study systematically analyses how countries can use securitisation to turn economic problems into security concerns, and reveals how securitisation has become an important tool for countries to transform their structural power into policy tools in the era of economic interdependence.

6.1 Research Findings

The case describes quarantine regulations as a "biosecurity threat", showing how China uses a defensive securitisation strategy and uses its market dominance to build rule-making power. Malaysia has implemented a radical securitisation strategy, describing market access as an "economic security threat" and using capital guidance and brand protection as a means of Defence. This process forms a typical securitisation-weaponisation spiral, reflecting the power dynamics in the unbalanced interdependence relationship.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study has achieved three theoretical innovations through the development of the "securitisation-weaponization spiral" model: first, it shows that the theory of securitisation can be applied to the microeconomic field from the macro-strategic level, reflecting its value as a tool for daily policy analysis; second, it reveals the connection between securitisation strategy and power status, and links the macro-power structure with micro-policy practice; third, the proposed spiral model provides a dynamic analytical framework for understanding the intricate relationship between economy and security.

6.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions

This study has two main limits. First, the case results should be checked by comparing them with other cases, such as the China–Thai Land fruit trade. Second, the analysis of policy motives is mostly based on public documents.

Future research can go in three directions: comparing different political systems to see how securitisation strategies change. Adding the business view to study how companies react in larger power games. Testing this model in new areas like digital technology and energy.

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