

CHINA'S TERRITORIAL CLAIMING POLICY IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA: POWER VS. NATIONAL IDENTITY?

By
Nicha Watthanatidpong

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Supervisor: Professor Michael Merlingen

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Abstract

Due to China's expansive sovereignty claim, combined with recent reclamation and construction work in the South China Sea, the country's policy in this contested area has gained attention. This increases tensions in the region among the six claimants, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, and also the U.S.A. Apart from its recent 'assertive' rhetoric and behaviors, China's rapid economic growth and increasing military expenditure strengthen perceptions of a 'China threat', opposite to an image the country has sought to project, one of 'peaceful rise or development'. This thesis seeks to explain why Beijing has framed its territorial claiming policy to cover almost the entire South China Sea, and why it has behaved in 'assertive' or 'provocative' ways whilst rhetorically insisting on peaceful settlement. The thesis will use both realism and constructivism to answer these two questions. From a realist view, China's rhetoric and behaviors are considered 'defensive' at the present time. Constructivism shows how history shapes the scope of Beijing's sovereignty claim and strategic culture offers a better understanding of continuity in Chinese policy. Continuities include efforts towards joint development, cooperation and maintenance of regional peace and stability, while insisting on sovereignty and firmly responding to any provocations.

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List of Abbreviations

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
COC	Code of Conduct
DOC	Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
IEA	International Energy Agency
NHM	New Historic Missions
NPC	National People's Congress
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication Security
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UN	United Nations

Introduction

The South China Sea maritime dispute encompasses various aspects including the material, ideational, historical, legalistic and normative.¹ Six Asian countries: China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, claim either partial or full sovereignty over the resource-rich sea, which is also a strategic sea lane of global significance. The Chinese submission of the so-called ‘nine-dash line’ to the United Nations in 2009 increased regional tensions toward the issue.² Beijing recent building developments in the South China Sea, including artificially created islands or lighthouses, also boost anger and threaten its neighbors and worry the U.S. The U.S. and ASEAN countries perceive China’s recent development as ‘assertive’ or ‘provocative’. In contrast, China regards its actions as ‘legitimate’ because the country considers the South China Sea as an ‘indisputable area’ of its sovereign territory. This corresponds with China’s rapid economic growth and increasing military expenditure. So the situation encourages the perception of ‘China threat’, contradicting the image Beijing has projected of a ‘peaceful rise or development’.

The South China Sea dispute can be of significance for two reasons. Firstly, it can provide grounds for judging whether China’s rise is peaceful or not. Secondly, the dispute can indicate the role of the U.S. in the region since the super-power’s allies are directly involved in the dispute with China. Moreover, the Obama administration

¹ Andy Yee, “Maritime territorial disputes in East Asia: a comparative analysis of the South China Sea and the East China Sea,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40 (2011): 169.

² Demetri Sevastopulo, “South China Sea Tensions Stem From ‘Nine-Dash Line,’” *Financial Times* April 24, 2014, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/eb77cdc0-cba3-11e3-a934-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3bANcASk6>.

expresses its willingness to engage with Asia through the policy of ‘Pivot or Rebalancing to Asia’.³ All of the mentioned factors show the significance of the dispute at a time when the current ASEAN Secretary General, Le Luong Minh, expresses his concern by stating that “the South China Sea issue is not just about competing claims; it is about peace and stability in the region.”⁴

This thesis seeks to answer the questions why China has framed its territorial claiming policy towards the area to cover almost the entire South China Sea, and why it has behaved in ‘assertive’ or ‘provocative’ ways whilst rhetorically insisting upon its peaceful development. Even though these research questions come from the author’s observation of a recent contradiction between China’s rhetoric and its behaviors, the study of related historical and past incidents is unavoidable because of the linkage between them and the continuity of Chinese policy in the contested sea since the Deng Xiaoping era.

The main challenge for scholarship posed by the South China Sea dispute is to find a theoretical framework which can explain a prolonged and complex mixture of tension and cooperation together with the influence of domestic politics. Both realism and constructivism offer complementary answers to why Chinese leaders frame their claim to cover almost the entire South China Sea and why they decide to respond in this way.

In this thesis, I will use discourse analysis, specifically, I will focus only on texts such as speeches, remarks, interviews, and press briefings available in English. Both

³ “The Obama Administration’s Pivot to Asia,” The Foreign Policy Initiative, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.foreignpolicyi.org/content/obama-administrations-pivot-asia>.

⁴ “China’s Maritime Disputes,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed May 23, 2015, http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#!.

primary and secondary sources will be used. Primary sources include speeches by the Chinese leaders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and Xinhua News Agency, the Chinese government's official news agency. My secondary sources are primarily articles from academic journals. Some statements are translated from Chinese to English by the authors of articles.

The main findings of this thesis are three fold. Firstly, China pursues a policy in line with the expectations of defensive realism at the present time. But this will, in all likelihood, shift towards realism's offensive variant in the future. Secondly, Chinese leaders have framed their sovereignty claim based upon historical narratives and Beijing's recent behavior is in continuity of its territorial claiming policy and its strategic culture since the Deng Xiaoping era. Lastly, the Chinese government regards its recent construction work in the South China Sea as 'legitimate' because it happens in, what they consider to be, an 'indisputable area' of Chinese sovereignty, even though both its neighbors and the U.S. perceive these to be 'assertive' or 'provocative' actions.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives a broad view of the two international relations theories that I utilize, realism and constructivism. It also explains how these two theories help clarify the research questions. Chapter two illustrates China's territorial claiming policy through a realist approach. In this chapter, I present the strategic significance of the South China Sea in economic and security terms, then, I move on to explore Chinese strategic policies such as 'offshore defense' and Sea Lines of Communications Security (SLOCs). Lastly, I examine past incidents between the claimants and conclude whether China is a defensive or an offensive state. Chapter three explains China's policy through the constructivist lens. I focus on how China's past

experiences influence the scope of its claim while its strategic culture and continuity with past policy explains why the country has handled the dispute in this way.

Chapter one – International Relations Theories

The research question this thesis seeks to answer is why China has framed its territorial claiming policy towards the South China Sea to cover almost the entire South China Sea, and why it has behaved in ‘assertive’ or ‘provocative’⁵ ways whilst rhetorically insisting upon its peaceful development. Realism has two different positions through which to view the rise of China and its behavior towards the South China Sea issue. Realism focuses on material factors such as power, security, and economic, etc. On the other hand, constructivism provides an alternative explanation for Chinese behaviors. Constructivism emphasizes ideational factors such as national identity, history, past humiliation, recognition, sovereignty, and strategic culture, etc. These two theories seem to be incompatible. However, in reality, these two theories are complementary. Elements from both views are required should we wish to explain and properly understand the motivations and factors behind the Chinese territorial claiming policy in the contested water.

1.1 Realism

Realism is a longtime International Relations theory which has several sub-theories. In general, realists’ assumptions are based on a pessimistic view on human nature, a conviction that world politics are essentially conflictual and wars can solve conflicts, a high concern over national security and survival within an anarchic environment, and “a basic skepticism that there can be progress in international politics

⁵ Use of the loaded terms ‘assertive’ and ‘provocative’ behaviors of China which are perceived by its neighbors and the U.S. will be elaborated more in the conclusion part of this thesis.

that is comparable to that in domestic political life.”⁶ Neorealism is one of Realism’s sub-theories, primarily associated with the thought of Kenneth Waltz. In neorealism, the central analytical focus is the structure of the system. Actors are less important in neorealism. Neorealists believe that international systems more or less determine actors to behave in certain ways.

For Waltz, the main concerns of states are survival and security in the international system. He believes that in terms of a legal basis, all states are equal while they can be unequal in terms of substantive or material bases.⁷ A rise of a new powerful state is a classic source of conflict in international politics and also historically leads to wars.⁸ Any change in international system comes from a rise and fall of great powers and also a shift in the balance of power. It can be implied that an international change will only occur because of a war between great powers.⁹

Neorealism has two variants which are offensive realism and defensive realism. Offensive realists believe that conflict is unavoidable because security is scarce. States’ fundamental concern is survival and the way to survive is expansion in order to access scarce resources. They see the international system as a zero-sum game since one’s gain means the other’s loss. Concerning power, the more power a state possess, the more secure the state is. The way to increase security is to enhance power.¹⁰ More military

⁶ Robert Jackson and George Sorensen, “Realism,” in *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 59.

⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill; Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁸ G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Wright, “Rising Powers and Global Institutions,” *The Century Foundation Report* (2008): 4.

⁹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 97.

¹⁰ Klaus Heinrich Raditio, “China and the Tension in the South China Sea: A Defensive Realist Perspective,” accessed April 25, 2015, <http://aacs.ccny.cuny.edu/2014conference/Papers/Klaus%20Raditio.pdf>.

power will lead a state to become a hegemon with hegemonic status guaranteeing it survival in the anarchic world.

John Mearsheimer believes that states want to become a hegemon, however, the world is too big to have a global hegemon. Hence, a state can become only a regional hegemon. According to Mearsheimer, what all states want is to become regional hegemons.¹¹ He is considered an offensive realist whose assumption is that great powers always seek out opportunities to gain more power than their rivals in order to achieve their final goal as hegemons.¹² Nevertheless, Jonathan Kirshner sees the main failure in Mearsheimer's argument "to distinguish between *being* a hegemon and *bidding* for hegemony."¹³ Mearsheimer's main argument is that to be a hegemon is a way to survive in the anarchic world while Kirshner points that to make a bid for hegemony can make states less likely to survive since states bidding for hegemony will face a coalition against them and it can lead to "the loss of their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order, the two things Mearsheimer says states hold most dear."¹⁴ G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Wright argue that the current international system is much different from the previous world order. We are living in much more institutionalized world order, and given such high levels of economic interdependence it is no longer so easy for a rising power to challenge an existing one without destroying its own interests in the process, at least economically.¹⁵

¹¹ Jackson and Sorensen, "Realism," 86.

¹² John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 29.

¹³ Jonathan Kirshner, "The tragedy of offensive realism: Classical realism and the rise of China," *European Journal of International Relations* (2010): 7, accessed on April 20, 2015, http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/18/1/53.full.pdf%3Forigin%3Dpublication_detail.

¹⁴ Kirshner, "The tragedy of offensive realism,".

¹⁵ Ikenberry et al., "Rising Powers and Global Institutions," 5.

Mearsheimer builds his offensive realism with five ‘bedrock assumptions’; His first assumption is that the international system is defined by anarchy. Secondly, great powers naturally possess some offensive capability which they can use to harm each other. Relating to the second assumption, the third one says that states cannot be sure about other states’ intention with regard to their offensive capabilities. States can be motivated to be aggressive at anytime. The fourth assumption is survival. It is the main goal, according to Mearsheimer, if states do not exist, they cannot pursue other goals. The last assumption is states are rational. They think about how their behavior would affect other states and vice versa. Mearsheimer concludes that none of these five assumptions alone dictate that states would be aggressive to each other. However, these five assumptions are complementary and they lead to three general patterns of behavior: fear, self-help, and power maximization which results in offensive behavior towards each other.¹⁶

In contrast, defensive realists suggest that conflict is evitable because resources are manageable among states. States are restrained by interdependent interests, international laws and norms. Hence, expansion is not easy in the current international system. Moreover, defensive realists also perceive that expansion would decrease an aggressive state’s power rather than increase balancing behavior by coalition of other states. Regarding power, the goals of states are not power, but security and sustaining their positions in the international system. Defensive realists do not see power maximization as a way to survive. Defensive realism recognizes that states must seek power for their security and survival but also perceives that excessive power gives a

¹⁶ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 30-32.

counterproductive result. An excessive power provokes hostility from other states. For Waltz, it is not logical to struggle for excessive power beyond which is essential for survival and security.¹⁷

In other words, “what states need is an ‘appropriate amount’ of power in order to achieve their goals.”¹⁸ To have limited or excessive power drives insecurity because the former leads to defeat while the latter stirs a balancing coalition by other states. Put in a nutshell, offensive realism is power maximization while defensive realism is security maximization.

Defensive realists explain that a cause of conflict in the first place comes from either domestic factors or a security dilemma which “makes states behave as if they were revisionists.”¹⁹ The security dilemma is a core assumption of defensive realism. However, defensive realism could be misinterpreted to be offensive. The defensive actions and tools are hardly distinguished from the offensive ones.

In defensive realism’s perspective, if a state increases its power, it will be confronted with balancing rather than bandwagoning because other states are also concerned for their security and survival and they are not certain what will be the powerful state’s intention. Balancing decreases the aggressive state’s power instead of increasing its power. The uncertainty and fear in the aggressive state’s military build-ups are motives for balancing and this situation also creates distrust and suspicion among them which leads to a security dilemma.²⁰

¹⁷ Jackson and Sorensen, “Realism,” 85.

¹⁸ Raditio, “China and the Tension in the South China Sea,”.

¹⁹ Colin Elman, “Realism,” in *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction*, ed. Martin Griffiths, (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 18.

²⁰ Raditio, “China and the Tension in the South China Sea,”.

John H. Herz defined a security dilemma in his book *Political Realism and Political Idealism* in 1951 as “a structural notion in which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening.”²¹

Misperception can come from uncertainty and fear about the other state’s intention. When a state perceives that a security-seeker state’s military build-ups is not driven by security concern, but by power or greedy concerns. “The misperception could happen not only in terms of an arms race, but also in a conflict of interest among states.”²² According to Robert Jervis, states are concerned primarily about direct attack. So states seek to control their border areas or create buffer zones. These actions provoke surrounding states to react. Jervis describes the security dilemma as “many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security or decrease the security of others.”²³ He illustrates the security dilemma with the Four Worlds. His Four World is comprised of two variables – “whether the offense or the defense has the advantage, and whether offensive postures can be distinguished from defensive ones” – can be formed into four possible scenarios.

²¹ Adam Winkworth, “Is the Security Dilemma Still Relevant in International Relations?,” *E-International Relations* (2012), accessed April 28, 2015, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/12/21/is-the-security-dilemma-still-relevant-in-international-relations/>.

²² Raditio, “China and the Tension in the South China Sea,”.

²³ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the security dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 169.

Robert Jervis's Four Worlds

	OFFENSIVE HAS THE ADVANTAGE	DEFENSE HAS THE ADVANTAGE
OFFENSIVE POSTURE NOT DISTINGUISHABLE FROM DEFENSIVE ONE	1 Doubly dangerous	2 Security dilemma, but security requirements may be compatible
OFFENSIVE POSTURE DISTINGUISHABLE FROM DEFENSIVE ONE	3 No security dilemma, but aggression possible. Status-quo states can follow different policies than aggressors.	4 Doubly stable

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(c) 2008, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, PhD

Figure 1: Robert Jervis's Four Worlds

(Source: <http://ocw.tufts.edu/Content/58/lecturenotes/726832/726843>)

From figure 1, a security dilemma appears on the upper right box which indicates that an offensive posture cannot be distinguished from a defensive one but defense has the advantage over offense. Jervis states that in a security dilemma, “an increment in one side’ strength increases its security more than it decreases the other’s.”²⁴ He explains that even though it is hard to distinguish between defense and offense from the kinds of weapons that states use, the level of military expenditures can give a sign. However, only the level of military expenditures cannot definitely indicate which state is implementing

²⁴ Jervis, “Cooperation under the security dilemma,” 212.

offense or defense, the way a state responds to a confrontation can tell whether it is an aggressor or not.²⁵

Both defensive and offensive realists see the importance of material factors. In this globalized and economically interdependent world, realists also want to maximize their economic interests. They definitely do not want to depend on other states because they are not certain that other states would supply them all the time. If they have a conflict with each other, other states may stop supplying what they want. So the resource-rich South China Sea becomes a disputed water between China and other ASEAN claimants. According to Zheng Bijan, the Beijing government is looking for a way to decrease its dependence on energy resources imported from other countries and to depend upon its own supply. “The objective is to build a ‘society of thrift.’”²⁶

Regarding the rise of China, there are two opposite views on this issue. The optimist believes that China is more likely to be moderate and be a status quo power because its power is rising and the Chinese leaders feel more secure with the country’s position in the region while the pessimist perceives the rise of China in the opposite way. Realists perceive the rise of China as threatening. The Chinese government has implemented contradictory policies oscillating between ‘peaceful rise or development’ and ‘assertive or provocative’ behaviors regarding the South China Sea. Realists suggests that talk is cheap. Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., as a pessimist, notes that the provocative and assertive behavior displayed by China coincides with its increasing military spending.²⁷ Mearsheimer, as an offensive realist, simply explains that China cannot rise

²⁵ Jervis, “Cooperation under the security dilemma,” 212.

²⁶ Zheng Bijan, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005): 18-24.

²⁷ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., “How to Deter China: The Case of Archipelagic Defense,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2015): 79.

peacefully. On the contrary, he believes that China would be more aggressive and become a revisionist state in order to achieve regional hegemony. Mearsheimer derives from comparable historical precedents that, in all likelihood, a rising China will seek to compel the U.S. to 'leave' Asia, as the U.S. barred the European powers from the Western Hemisphere. He also suggests that China would create its own form of the Monroe Doctrine, covering the East and Southeast Asia as Japan did during the 1930s.²⁸ Alastair Iain Johnston argues that what Mearsheimer predicts is the mere replication of historical analogies, which in themselves are not explanations. And every state has particular characteristics which are different from other states. China's foreign policy has unique characteristics which derive from its particular historical experiences.²⁹ Kirshner states that in Mearsheimer's model, "states 'act as realists' and things like domestic politics and ideology are irrelevant."³⁰ However, in my perspective, the Chinese decision-makers take domestic politics and ideology into account when they make a decision in foreign policies. We will see how constructivists explain this below.

1.2 Social Constructivism

Constructivism is different from Realism which focuses on materialist aspect. "Constructivism recognizes the importance of 'inter-subjective structures that give the material world meaning,' including norms, culture, identity, and ideas on state behavior or on international relations more generally."³¹ Realism emphasizes how to distribute material power such as military forces, economic capabilities, and balance of power among states, etc. In contrast, constructivism focuses on "human awareness or

²⁸ John Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* 105 (2006): 162.

²⁹ Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?," *International Security* Vol. 27, No. 4 (2003): 28.

³⁰ Kirshner, "The tragedy of offensive realism,".

³¹ Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture: From Clausewitz to Constructivism," *Strategic Insights* IV, issue 10 (2005).

consciousness and its place in world affairs.”³² The primary focus of constructivism is social structure, especially the role of norms in world politics.³³ However, constructivism shares a common ground with neorealism, which is that states’ fundamental goals are survival and security.³⁴ Constructivism comes to fulfill what materialist theory like realism dismisses. Realism does not pay close attention to the ideational side of the international system such as “values and identities in shaping the decision of policy makers.”³⁵ Constructivist theorists also reject one-aspect focus on material. They insist that the most significant aspect that we should focus upon in international relations is social, not material. In a nutshell, they claim that “the study of international relations must focus on the ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene as well as the shared understandings between them.”³⁶

Consequently, constructivist theorists believe that the international system is constituted by ideas. It is not related to material or physical aspects. In other words, the international system is one of human inventions or creations. “It is a set of ideas, a body of thought, a system of norms, which has been arranged by certain people at a particular time and place.”³⁷ Briefly, a change in the international system comes from new thought or ideas creating new norms in the international system.

According to Anthony Giddens, structures can constrain states’ action (the same assumption as neo-realism). However, states have power to change the structures by

³² Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 160.

³³ Lantis, “Strategic Culture,”.

³⁴ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 167.

³⁵ Liu Qianqian, “China’s Rise and Regional Strategy: Power, Interdependence and Identity,” *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 5, no. 2 (2010): 85.

³⁶ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 160.

³⁷ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 160.

changing how they think about the structures and then act in different ways.³⁸ Alexander Wendt gives a clear example which is complementary with Giddens' belief. He states that "500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons because the British are friends and the North Koreans are not."³⁹ The implication of his aforementioned statement is that international politics is partly constituted by material resources and partly by ideas. The numbers of material resources are driving forces in shaping international politics. However, what is more important is ideas, belief, and perception. The high numbers of British nuclear weapons does not make the United States feel insecure. In contrast, a very small number of the North Korean nuclear weapons can frighten the United States. This is because the United States perceives Britain and North Korea in different ways.

Hence, Wendt affirms that "the distribution of material capabilities also matters, especially if offense is dominant, and military build-ups will of course concern other states. Again, however, the meaning of power depends on the underlying structure of shared knowledge. A British build-up will be less threatening to the United States than a North Korean one, and build-ups are less likely to occur in a security community than in a security dilemma."⁴⁰ He points out to us how important 'ideas' and 'perceptions' are in international politics.

Furthermore Wendt suggests that constructivism is not only adding an extra element which is 'ideas' to the existing international relations theories but also presenting that anarchic world is evitable by social interaction between states. While he emphasizes

³⁸ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

³⁹ Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security* 20, no.1 (1995): 73.

⁴⁰ Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," 78.

social interaction between states, Martha Finnemore adds a new perspective. She thinks that the norms of international society can form states' identities and interests and then, states' identity and interests will shape their behavior.⁴¹

Moreover, constructivism also emphasizes the role of domestic formation of identity and norms. While Wendt and Finnemore focus on how international system shapes states' identity and norms, other constructivists such as Peter Katzenstein, Alastair Iain Johnston, Ted Hopf, etc. focus more on domestic factors in shaping states' identity and norms. These constructivists see that identity, norms, and culture play an important role in shaping national security and interests.⁴² In other words, Hopf believes that which factors form national identity also defines national interests and foreign policies.⁴³ Robert Jackson and George Sorensen put it in a nutshell that "state identity is expressed through key decision-makers."⁴⁴

Lastly, Jackson and Sorensen conclude that the difference on the relative significance of domestic formation versus international system should not be overstated because all constructivists believe in the influence of norms, identity, and culture. Also, shared beliefs, not material entities, create international system.⁴⁵

Most of China's behavior has been interpreted through reliance upon realist perspective. Only a few constructivists apply their theory to China. However, if they do, they will see only how the ideational factors influence China's behavior. On one hand, some constructivists see the importance of national identity in shaping China's foreign

⁴¹ Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁴² Jackson and Sorensen, "Social Constructivism," 173-175.

⁴³ Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ Jackson and Sorensen, "Social Constructivism," 174.

⁴⁵ Jackson and Sorensen, "Social Constructivism," 175.

policy. Gilbert Rozman defines national identity as ‘a statement of the uniqueness of a particular nation-state, investing it with authority and separating it from other states that may seek to influence it.’ and there are two elements shaping national identities which are present interactions with other states and its own history. Regarding China’s behavior, he believes that China has pursued a ‘great power identity’.⁴⁶ On the other hand, history also plays a role in forming China’s great power identity. The Chinese have mixed feelings toward their history. They are proud of the Chinese civilization while they also feel ashamed by ‘the century of humiliation’.^{47, 48}

The rise of constructivism in the 1990s has activated the study of strategic culture and also significantly influences “theoretical work on strategic culture, domestic structures, and organizational culture.”⁴⁹ Johnston emphasizes the importance of strategic culture as an “ideational milieu that limits behavioral choices, from which one could derive specific predictions about strategic choice.”⁵⁰ It means that to understand the strategic culture of a state allows us to predict what policy the state would implement in terms of security. There are two paradigms in the Chinese strategic culture: a Confucian-Mencian paradigm which represents peaceful and harmonious view and a Parabellum paradigm which perceives the world with a *realpolitik* view.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Liu, “China’s Rise and Regional Strategy,” 86.

⁴⁷ The Century of Humiliation refers to from the First Opium War in 1840 to the founding of the People’s Republic of China by Mao Zedong in 1949. It is humiliated because China suffered under the hands of foreign powers; Britain and Japan. (Source: Matt Schiavenza, “How Humiliation Drove Modern Chinese History,” *The Atlantic* (2013), accessed May 25, 2015, http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.)

⁴⁸ Liu, “China’s Rise and Regional Strategy,” 86-87.

⁴⁹ Lantis, “Strategic Culture,”.

⁵⁰ Lantis, “Strategic Culture,”.

⁵¹ Shivanarayan Rajpurohit, “China’s Strategic Culture: Today, Tomorrow, and Yesterday,” *Counter Current*, October 12, 2013, accessed May 16, 2015, <http://www.countercurrents.org/rajpurohit121013.htm>.

Regarding the South China Sea dispute, constructivism emphasizes the role of domestic formation of identity and norms. China's historical narratives frame where China draws the line of its claims. Nationalist sentiment drives the government to protect it as a core interests with the notion of sovereignty. The Beijing government has firmly insisted on its sovereignty over the South China Sea since Deng Xiaoping. What the Xi Jinping government is doing, either by rhetoric or by behaviors, presents the continuity of the Chinese foreign policy.

1.3 Conclusion

Constructivism is different from Realism which focuses on materialist aspect. "Constructivism recognizes the importance of 'inter-subjective structures that give the material world meaning,' including norms, culture, identity, and ideas on state behavior or on international relations more generally."⁵² Realism emphasizes how to distribute material power such as military forces, economic capabilities, and balance of power among states, etc. In contrast, constructivism focuses on "human awareness or consciousness and its place in world affairs."⁵³ The primary focus of constructivism is social structure, especially the role of norms in world politics.⁵⁴ However, constructivism shares a common ground with neorealism, which is that states' fundamental goals are survival and security.⁵⁵ Constructivism comes to fulfill what materialist theory like realism dismisses. Realism does not pay close attention to the ideational side of the international system such as "values and identities in shaping the decision of policy

⁵² Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture: From Clausewitz to Constructivism," *Strategic Insights* IV, issue 10 (2005).

⁵³ Jackson and Sorensen, "Social Constructivism," 160.

⁵⁴ Lantis, "Strategic Culture,".

⁵⁵ Jackson and Sorensen, "Social Constructivism," 167.

makers.”⁵⁶ Constructivist theorists also reject one-aspect focus on material. They insist that the most significant aspect that we should focus upon in international relations is social, not material. In a nutshell, they claim that “the study of international relations must focus on the ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene as well as the shared understandings between them.”⁵⁷

Consequently, constructivist theorists believe that the international system is constituted by ideas. It is not related to material or physical aspects. In other words, the international system is one of human inventions or creations. “It is a set of ideas, a body of thought, a system of norms, which has been arranged by certain people at a particular time and place.”⁵⁸ Briefly, a change in the international system comes from new thought or ideas creating new norms in the international system.

According to Anthony Giddens, structures can constrain states’ action (the same assumption as neo-realism). However, states have power to change the structures by changing how they think about the structures and then act in different ways.⁵⁹ Alexander Wendt gives a clear example which is complementary with Giddens’ belief. He states that “500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons because the British are friends and the North Koreans are not.”⁶⁰ The implication of his aforementioned statement is that international politics is partly constituted by material resources and partly by ideas. The numbers of material resources are driving forces in shaping international politics. However, what is more important is

⁵⁶ Liu Qianqian, “China’s Rise and Regional Strategy: Power, Interdependence and Identity,” *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 5, no. 2 (2010): 85.

⁵⁷ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 160.

⁵⁸ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 160.

⁵⁹ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁶⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security* 20, no.1 (1995): 73.

ideas, belief, and perception. The high numbers of British nuclear weapons does not make the United States feel insecure. In contrast, a very small number of the North Korean nuclear weapons can frighten the United States. This is because the United States perceives Britain and North Korea in different ways.

Hence, Wendt affirms that “the distribution of material capabilities also matters, especially if offense is dominant, and military build-ups will of course concern other states. Again, however, the meaning of power depends on the underlying structure of shared knowledge. A British build-up will be less threatening to the United States than a North Korean one, and build-ups are less likely to occur in a security community than in a security dilemma.”⁶¹ He points out to us how important ‘ideas’ and ‘perceptions’ are in international politics.

Furthermore Wendt suggests that constructivism is not only adding an extra element which is ‘ideas’ to the existing international relations theories but also presenting that anarchic world is evitable by social interaction between states. While he emphasizes social interaction between states, Martha Finnemore adds a new perspective. She thinks that the norms of international society can form states’ identities and interests and then, states’ identity and interests will shape their behavior.⁶²

Moreover, constructivism also emphasizes the role of domestic formation of identity and norms. While Wendt and Finnemore focus on how international system shapes states’ identity and norms, other constructivists such as Peter Katzenstein, Alastair Iain Johnston, Ted Hopf, etc. focus more on domestic factors in shaping states’ identity

⁶¹ Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” 78.

⁶² Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

and norms. These constructivists see that identity, norms, and culture play an important role in shaping national security and interests.⁶³ In other words, Hopf believes that which factors form national identity also defines national interests and foreign policies.⁶⁴ Robert Jackson and George Sorensen put it in a nutshell that “state identity is expressed through key decision-makers.”⁶⁵

Lastly, Jackson and Sorensen conclude that the difference on the relative significance of domestic formation versus international system should not be overstated because all constructivists believe in the influence of norms, identity, and culture. Also, shared beliefs, not material entities, create international system.⁶⁶

Most of China’s behavior has been interpreted through reliance upon realist perspective. Only a few constructivists apply their theory to China. However, if they do, they will see only how the ideational factors influence China’s behavior. On one hand, some constructivists see the importance of national identity in shaping China’s foreign policy. Gilbert Rozman defines national identity as ‘a statement of the uniqueness of a particular nation-state, investing it with authority and separating it from other states that may seek to influence it.’ and there are two elements shaping national identities which are present interactions with other states and its own history. Regarding China’s behavior, he believes that China has pursued a ‘great power identity’.⁶⁷ On the other hand, history also plays a role in forming China’s great power identity. The Chinese have mixed

⁶³ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 173-175.

⁶⁴ Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁶⁵ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 174.

⁶⁶ Jackson and Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” 175.

⁶⁷ Liu, “China’s Rise and Regional Strategy,” 86.

feelings toward their history. They are proud of the Chinese civilization while they also feel ashamed by ‘the century of humiliation’^{68, 69}.

The rise of constructivism in the 1990s has activated the study of strategic culture and also significantly influences “theoretical work on strategic culture, domestic structures, and organizational culture.”⁷⁰ Johnston emphasizes the importance of strategic culture as an “ideational milieu that limits behavioral choices, from which one could derive specific predictions about strategic choice.”⁷¹ It means that to understand the strategic culture of a state allows us to predict what policy the state would implement in terms of security. There are two paradigms in forming the Chinese strategic culture: a Confucian-Mencian paradigm which represents peaceful and harmonious view and a Parabellum paradigm which perceives the world with a *realpolitik* view.⁷²

Regarding the South China Sea dispute, constructivism emphasizes the role of domestic formation of identity and norms. China’s historical narratives frame where China draws the line of its claims. Nationalist sentiment drives the government to protect it as a core interests with the notion of sovereignty. The Beijing government has firmly insisted on its sovereignty over the South China Sea since Deng Xiaoping. What the Xi Jinping government is doing, either by rhetoric or by behaviors, reflects continuity of the Chinese foreign policy.

⁶⁸ The Century of Humiliation refers to from the First Opium War in 1840 to the founding of the People’s Republic of China by Mao Zedong in 1949. It is humiliated because China suffered under the hands of foreign powers; Britain and Japan. (Source: Matt Schiavenza, “How Humiliation Drove Modern Chinese History,” *The Atlantic* (2013), accessed May 25, 2015, http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.)

⁶⁹ Liu, “China’s Rise and Regional Strategy,” 86-87.

⁷⁰ Lantis, “Strategic Culture,”.

⁷¹ Lantis, “Strategic Culture,”.

⁷² Shivnarayan Rajpurohit, “China’s Strategic Culture: Today, Tomorrow, and Yesterday,” *Counter Current*, October 12, 2013, accessed May 16, 2015, <http://www.countercurrents.org/rajpurohit121013.htm>.

Chapter Two – China’s Territorial Claiming Policy

Towards the South China Sea: Realist Approach

*China “will not attack unless attacked, but will counterattack.”*⁷³
(*Chinese Military Strategy white paper, 2015*)

This chapter will explain the Chinese territorial claiming policy through a realist perspective. Realism explains state practice through placing emphasis on survival and national security in an anarchic world. Based on neorealism, we can see how the international system influences states’ behavior in international relations which means their foreign policy. If states apply realism to their foreign policy, then it will tend to increase their power and security and protect their interests. States will also pay attention to material interests such as military and economic capacities.

As Ralf Emmers addresses in his book *Geopolitics and Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia* (2010), which studies both the East and South China Seas. He argues that “three drivers of conflict – territory, energy, and power – determine if there is escalation or de-escalation.”⁷⁴ His three driving forces of conflict are compatible with realist idea as territory, energy, and power count as national interests from a realist perspective. States struggle for these scarce resources as a means to survive and secure their position in world politics.

There are two hypotheses which emerge from the realist approach towards China’s policy. The first hypothesis is based on defensive realism. That is, China’s

⁷³ “Chinese Navy to Focus on ‘Open Seas’, Paper Says,” BBC, accessed May 27, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-32880477>.

⁷⁴ Ralf Emmers, *Geopolitics and Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010).

concerns over its national security and crucial interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The country perceives the South and East China Seas as a ‘maritime buffer’⁷⁵ between itself and the United States. The Chinese government also considers territorial integrity to be one of its national interests.

The second hypothesis comes from offensive realism. Offensive realists believe that China has implemented its territorial claiming policy in the South China Sea, which is perceived as assertive and provocative behaviors by the U.S. and other claimant states because China realized its rising power. When states gain more power, they are likely to exercise it. China wants to maximize its power in the Asia-Pacific region and wants to be equal with the U.S. in the future, according to John Measheimer. The situation in the South China Sea, from the Cold War period until the present, can tell whether China follows a defensive or an offensive realist strategy.

In this chapter I will present empirical evidences, from both China’s rhetoric and its actual behaviors, to test whether China is operating as a defensive or an offensive realist. Specifically, I will look at China’s military build-up, its strategic policies, its strategy of managing the dispute (either escalation or delaying) during the past incidents, and its recent ‘dual-track’ approach alongside its 2015 Military Strategy white paper. In the conclusion of this chapter, I clarify which rhetoric and behaviors are considered as defensive and which as offensive.

⁷⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33 (2011): 296.

2.1 The South China Sea: a disputed water. What has happened, and is it worth fighting for?

In September 2012, HSBC analysts led by Thomas Hilboldt, Asia-Pacific Head of Oil, Gas & Petrochemicals Research, stated that China and other claimant states, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan, claim their possession in the South China Sea, either entirely or partly. The South China Sea is strategically significant because the disputed water contains 10 percent of the world fisheries catch and half of the global shipping trade, \$5 trillion passing through this water annually. Analysts believe that tensions among the claimant states would be intensified because of their increasing needs for natural resources like oil and natural gas in the seabed.⁷⁶

The strategic significance of the South China Sea can be presented in numbers. As mentioned above, the total yearly trade passing through the South China Sea amount to \$5.3 trillion, 23 percent of which is U.S. trade.⁷⁷ According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, there are 11 billion barrels of oil in the South China Sea out of 1.47 trillion barrels worldwide and, there are 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the South China Sea out of 6.7 quadrillion cubic feet worldwide.⁷⁸ Moreover, the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that 90% of Middle Eastern fossil fuel exports are projected to go to Asia by 2035.⁷⁹ From the Chinese side, the Ministry of Land and Resources estimates that the South China Sea's continental shelf possesses "23

⁷⁶ Sri Jegarajah, "Waters' Complicate Oil Exploration Efforts," *CNBC*, September 27, 2012, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://www.cnbc.com/id/49189414>.

⁷⁷ Ben Rhodes, Robert Willard, "Press Briefing by NSA for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes and Admiral Robert Willard, U.S. Pacific Command," Press Briefing, Press Briefing by NSA for Strategic Communications from the White House, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 13, 2011.

⁷⁸ "International Energy Statistics," U.S. Energy Information Administration, accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.eia.gov/cfapps/ipdbproject/IEDIndex3.cfm?tid=5&pid=57&aid=6>.

⁷⁹ International Energy Agency, "World Energy Outlook 2012," *World Energy Outlook 2012*, accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.iea.org/media/workshops/2012/energyefficiencyfinance/1aBirol.pdf>.

to 30 billion tons in oil reserves and 20 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. That is enough to supply China's hydrocarbon demand for more than 50 years based on 2011 crude and natural gas consumption.” This can explain why Beijing is very determined to acquire maritime rights in the contested area.⁸⁰ Even though the estimated quantities of oil and natural gas in the South China Sea varies, the shown numbers from different sources, either the U.S. or China, proves the richness of the disputed sea.

From the facts mentioned above, it is clear that the key to guarantee and secure the rights to access and exploitation of natural resources, the safety of seas lines of communication and regional naval power is to control these islands in the contested waters.⁸¹ The Chinese leaders have seen the strategic significance of the East and South China Seas since the second generation of leaders led by Deng Xiaoping. He decided to break “the traditional coastal defense concept of ‘alongshore defense’ and proposed the strategic concept of ‘offshore defense’”. This change from Deng Xiaoping’s initiative comes from his far-sight and security concern because most of China’s economic and military capacities are concentrated in its coastal areas.⁸² One of the reasons behind the change from ‘alongshore defense’ to ‘offshore defense’ is that Chinese leaders expect its power to increase and see their country’s capacity to expand. The strategic change of coastal defense is also related to issues of Chinese history and national identity, which I will elaborate more in the next chapter on China’s territorial claiming policy as seen through a constructivist perspective.

⁸⁰ Jegarajah, “Waters’ Complicate Oil Exploration Efforts,”.

⁸¹ Andy Yee, “Maritime territorial disputes in East Asia: a comparative analysis of the South China Sea and the East China Sea,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40 (2011): 166.

⁸² Sun Lixin, “Chinese Maritime Concept,” *Asia Europe Journal* Vol. 8 Issue 3 (2010), accessed May 24, 2015, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10308-010-0282-7>.

From a realist perspective, China has concerns over its own power in the region and also over the allocation of scarce resources in the South China Sea. These material and power factors contribute to the Chinese decision-making process with regards to the disputed waters. Due to its growing economic development, China became an energy-hungry country. In 1994, the country became a net importer of oil and this also made China pass Japan from 2003 to be the second-biggest oil importer in the world. Furthermore, China overtook Japan becoming the second-largest economy in the world in 2010.⁸³ China's rapid economic growth since 1990s has stimulated the Beijing government to search for natural resources from external sources in order to fulfill its energy need. Its rapid economic growth makes the country eager to increase its military expenditure and modernize its military equipment. Since 2002, the Chinese government under Hu Jintao has been regarded as assertive because of the rise of China. Gilbert Rozman thinks that its assertiveness started increasing in 2008 when Beijing hosted the 2008 Olympic Games and again during the global financial crisis. "Growing confidence in economic and military power underscores arrogant rhetoric from many Chinese officials."⁸⁴ This can be used to project China's increasing power in world politics.

Apart from Measheimer's historical analogies applied to the rise of China (mentioned in Chapter One), the rapidly increased military expenditure of China contributes to other nations perception of China as a threat. Michael Swaine stressed that the final goal of China's military expansion is to counter the U.S. in the region. China

⁸³ David Barboza, "China Passes Japan as Second-Largest Economy," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2010, accessed May 20, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/16/business/global/16yuan.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁸⁴ Gilbert Rozman, "Chinese Strategic Thinking on Multilateral Regional Security in Northeast Asia," *Orbis* 55, issue 2 (2011): 299.

possesses the world's largest standing military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and also became the world's second-highest military spender in 2008, which is still far behind the U.S. The country has increased its military expenditure with double-digit for a few years. Bates Gill points out that China has dramatically increased its military budget during the past two decades which has doubled from 1989 to 2000, and "then it increased by 17 percent in 2001, 17.7 percent in 2002, and 9.6 percent in 2003."⁸⁵ According to SIPRI, China increased its military expenditure by 194 percent from 1999 to 2008.⁸⁶ A spokeswoman for China's annual parliament session, the National People's Congress (NPC), Fu Ying, said that "China's military budget will rise by about 10% in 2015."⁸⁷ A BBC news reporter, Martin Patience also states that China is investing in "hi-tech equipment such as submarines and stealth jets... and it has also been investing in naval forces, including an aircraft carrier."⁸⁸

Natural resource acquisition is one of the driving forces behind the Chinese territorial claiming policy in the South China Sea, especially when one perceives the Chinese government has developed oil and gas fields in the disputed water in order to secure its access to the area's natural resources. In contrast, Rozman contends that securing its exclusive access to the seabed resources in the South China Sea should not be a reason for China to alienate its neighboring countries, given the fact that China is successful in extracting natural resources from other parts of the world.⁸⁹ Nevertheless,

⁸⁵ Bates Gill, "China's Evolving Regional Security Strategy," in *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, ed. David Shambaugh (London: University of California Press, 2005), 131.

⁸⁶ "SIPRI Yearbook 2009: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, accessed May 27, 2015, <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2009>.

⁸⁷ "China Military Budget 'To Rise 10%," BBC, accessed May 26, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-31706989>.

⁸⁸ "China Military Budget 'To Rise 10%."

⁸⁹ Rozman, "Chinese Strategic Thinking," 312.

Rozman's argument does not sound convincing from a realist perspective, neither the defensive nor offensive variants.

Hans-Dieter Evers proposes a different view from Rozman that the need for energy resources such as oil and natural gas "may be the driving force behind China's claim." However, he believes that a negotiation can solve a problem of resource allocation but it is an unpleasant idea to Chinese leaders and their concept of bounded space.⁹⁰ With a realist mindset, states do not want to divide their interests with other states. Moreover, states' perceptions such as concept of space or sovereignty can influence their policy to more firmly protect their interests. Regarding the South China Sea dispute, China does not want to let other claimants have control over the contested water even though the amount of natural resources in the seabed has not been confirmed yet.

The South China Sea is not only vital in economic terms, but also for Chinese national security. Former People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Commander, Admiral Liu Huaqing, states that "whoever controls the Spratlys will reap huge economic and military benefits."⁹¹ In terms of economics, any state that has jurisdiction over the area has rights over natural resources, hydrocarbons and fish, in that area. China estimates that there would be around 105 billion barrels of hydrocarbon near the Spratly Islands and a large amount of China's yearly catch of fish in the South China Sea.⁹² Moreover, 80 percent of China's imported oil is transferred through this water, including most Chinese

⁹⁰ Hans-Dieter Evers, "Understanding the South China Sea: An explorative cultural analysis," *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 10, no. 1 (2014): 89.

⁹¹ Fravel, "China's Strategy in the South China Sea," 296.

⁹² Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall At Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 49.

sea trade.⁹³ In terms of security, Taylor Fravel notes that Beijing regards the South China Sea as a maritime buffer for the southern part of China and as a strategic area in case of conflict over Taiwan with the U.S. “Any effort to blockade China in wartime would also occur in these waters.”⁹⁴

Regarding security issues, Christopher Sharman, a National Defense University Pacific Command Scholar, states that in 2004, the PLAN is assigned a new conduct from President Hu Jintao a so-called New Historic Missions (NHM). One of the missions in NHM is “safeguarding national economic development, which was always a Chinese military duty.”⁹⁵ This issue became forefront because of the 2012 defense white paper which gives an emphasis on the safeguarding of strategic sea lines of communication. The PLAN is fulfilling the strategic guidance which also matches the concept of ‘far seas defense’ as a part of maritime strategy.⁹⁶ The Chinese government has concerns over Sea Lines of Communications Security (SLOCs). Recently, Zhang Kunsheng, the Chinese assistant foreign minister, attended the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Seminar on Sea Lines of Communications Security in December 8, 2014. He mentions the significance of SLOCs for China that “SLOCs provide the main channel for China’s foreign trade and energy import. Maritime transport accounts for as much as 90% of our trade, and six of the top ten container ports in the world are in China.”⁹⁷ From his remark, SLOCs is vital to China both economically and strategically. There is no surprise that the Chinese

⁹³ Michael Lelyveld, “Mideast Oil Drives China Disputes,” *Radio Free Asia*, July 18, 2011, accessed May 13, 2015, http://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/energy_watch/oil-07182011103202.html.

⁹⁴ Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” 296.

⁹⁵ Wendell Minnick, “China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy,” *Defense News*, April 12, 2012, accessed May 26, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/04/11/taiwan-china-one-belt-one-road-strategy/25353561/0>.

⁹⁶ Minnick, “China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ Strategy,”.

⁹⁷ Zhang Kunsheng, “Remarks by Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Kunsheng at the ARF Seminar on Sea Lines of Communications Security,” Remarks, ARF Seminar on Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) Security from ASEAN Regional Forum, Beijing, December 8, 2014.

government wants to control the areas as much as it can and protect the SLOCs as its core national interest (see Map 2). The country needs a military build-up in order to pursue this goal.

Chinese military leaders insist that the purpose of China's naval build-up is self-defense. A Chinese deputy commander of the East Sea Fleet, Rear admiral Zhang Huachen, gave an interview with Xinhua News Agency stating that "with our naval strategy changing now, we are going from coastal defense to far sea defense, with the expansion of the country's economic interests, the navy wants to better protect the country's transportation routes and the safety of our major sea lanes. In order to achieve this, the Chinese Navy needs to develop along the lines of bigger vessels and with more comprehensive capabilities."⁹⁸ The Beijing government has expanded its definition of self-defense to include crucial maritime and economic interests because the country has realized its increasing power and interests. The 'far sea defense' strategy, sharply breaks from defending China's coastal area or preparing for war over Taiwan to cover escorting commercial vessels with warships from the Gulf of Persia to the Strait of Malacca and also securing China's interests in the South China Sea.⁹⁹

Very recently, on May 26, 2015, the Beijing government released a strategy document emphasizing four strategic areas; the ocean, nuclear force, outer space, and cyber space, of which the naval force is the most controversial. The strategic document suggests that the PLAN is moving from offshore defense to "open seas protection" since China's goal is to be a maritime power and will shift from "territorial air defense to both

⁹⁸ Edward Wong, "China Expands Naval Power to Waters U.S. Dominates," *New York Times*, April 23, 2010, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/world/asia/24navy.html?_r=0.

⁹⁹ Wong, "China Expands Naval Power to Waters U.S. Dominates,".

defense and offense.”¹⁰⁰ Beijing also warns its neighbors against provocative actions which threaten Chinese maritime rights and interests, saying that China “will not attack unless attacked, but will counterattack.”¹⁰¹

According to Robert Jervis’ security dilemma, neither the kinds of weapons nor military expenditure can answer whether a state is a defensive or an offensive realist. However, the way that state responds to a conflict can reveal this. Hence, the past incidents in the South China Sea between China and other claimants are good analytical tools for answering this question. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had implemented a delaying strategy towards the maritime disputes in the South China Sea since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Nevertheless, due to the increased importance of offshore islands and potential seabed resources from the 1970s, the ASEAN claimants occupied more islands and reefs in the contested sea.¹⁰² South Vietnam started exploiting off-shore oil in 1974 and then other claimants began to capture features in the disputed area.¹⁰³ Following a clash between China’s and South Vietnam’s naval forces, China occupied the Crescent Group located in the Western part of the Paracels from South Vietnam. Before the 1974 incident between China and South Vietnam, China was never prone to adopt a strategy of escalation. But China waited to capture the islands when North Vietnam defeated South Vietnam because North Vietnam recognized “China’s claims to the Paracels and the Spratlys in a series of diplomatic

¹⁰⁰ Simon Denyer, “Chinese Military Sets Course to Expand Global Reach as ‘National Interests’ Grow,” May 26, 2015, accessed May 31, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/chinese-military-sets-course-to-expand-global-reach-as-national-interests-grow/2015/05/26/395fff14-3fb1-4056-aed0-264ffcbbcd4_story.html.

¹⁰¹ “Chinese Navy to Focus on ‘Open Seas’, Paper Says,”.

¹⁰² Yee, “Maritime territorial disputes in East Asia,” 177.

¹⁰³ M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong borders, Secure nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s territorial disputes* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008): 277-278.

notes in 1956 and 1958.”¹⁰⁴ China had no need to use force and be regarded as an aggressive state in order to occupy the islands.

During 1980s, there was a series of events which decreased China’s claim strength. In the first half of 1980s, Malaysia claimed a 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which contains 12 features in the Spratlys and then the Malaysian government went further by occupying four reefs in the Spratlys. The Philippines started its move by expanding its military presence in the disputed area and the Filipino Prime Minister Cesar Virata under President Ferdinand Marcos visited the islands in the area in 1982. Also, Vietnam started to occupy further features.¹⁰⁵ So China shifted to follow a strategy of escalation. The Chinese government decided to occupy nine features including Fiery Cross Reef and Johnson Reef in 1987-1988 because of the occupation of features by other claimant states and the increasing interests in maritime rights in the region.

In 1994, China seized the Mischief Reef in the Spratlys which was claimed by the Philippines before. The occupation escalated into an incident between the Beijing and the Manila governments in the early 1995. Fravel believes that China occupied the Mischief Reef because the country wanted to increase its claim strength in the South China Sea. The Mischief Reef is located in the eastern part of the archipelago. This can be implied that China tried to expand its claimed area. At the same period, other claimants also made moves to show their possession in the South China Sea, as Brunei announced its claim to an EEZ while Vietnam signed a contract on drilling rights with a consortium for blocks where the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) had also earlier awarded

¹⁰⁴ Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” 298.

¹⁰⁵ Fravel, *Strong borders, Secure nation*, 289-290.

oil drilling rights to the Crestone Energy Corporation of Denver.¹⁰⁶ The Chinese government also gave an interview in 1993 that “it would protect the company’s activities by force if necessary.”¹⁰⁷ The Mischief Reef incident in 1995 is a new critical juncture and led to a change in China’s strategy in the South China Sea. The ASEAN reaction with a united condemnation from the incident surprised Chinese leaders and provoked a new change in Chinese policy toward the disputed water. The Beijing government switched to a strategy of delaying since the Mischief Reef incident with the Philippines until the present time.

In a nutshell, there were more serious armed conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s and then these declined through the 1990s.¹⁰⁸ The past incidents in the South China Sea offer some insights. Firstly, Fravel addresses that China uses force as a result of its declining claim strength.¹⁰⁹ The country had implemented a strategy of escalation only when the country wants to strengthen its claims in the disputed water in order to respond to other claimants’ occupation of contested features.¹¹⁰ However, he believes that China’s limited military capabilities were the main factor in its delaying strategy. Secondly, the rapprochement between China and the U.S. in 1972 when President Richard Nixon visited Beijing¹¹¹ and the establishment of their diplomatic relationship in 1979 is one of the reasons why the Chinese government responded to other claimants’ occupation with force. The Beijing government was confident that the U.S. would not interfere or play hard ball in the disputes during a time of improving diplomatic relationship. Thirdly, how

¹⁰⁶ Fravel, *Strong borders, Secure nation*, 297.

¹⁰⁷ Philip Shenon, “China sends warships to Vietnam oil site,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1994, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/21/world/china-sends-warships-to-vietnam-oil-site.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Yee, “Maritime territorial disputes in East Asia,” 177.

¹⁰⁹ Fravel, *Strong borders, Secure nation*, 277-278.

¹¹⁰ Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” 298-299.

¹¹¹ Asad Latif, “Sino-American Peace Benefits South-east Asia,” *The Straits Times*, December 4, 2010, accessed May 12, 2015, http://www.viet-studies.info/kinhte/China_US_peace_benefits_Seasia.htm.

united ASEAN is can affect the level of China's aggressiveness or accommodation. The 1995 Mischief Reef incident offers a good lesson learnt for both China and ASEAN. China learns how assertive it can be and the country wants to avoid the worst case scenario, its aggressiveness pushes ASEAN into the U.S. side. ASEAN should know that its unity can decrease China's power in the region while increasing its bargain power.

Even though the Chinese government has always issued statements emphasizing the idea of sovereign equality, that all states are equal regardless of size or power, talk is cheap from a realist perspective. In November 2010, Xi Jinping stated that 'China sees all countries, big and small, as equals.' But, Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi said in July 2010 at the Asian Regional Forum that 'China is a big country and other countries are small countries and that is just a fact.'¹¹²

Owing to China's rapid economic growth, the country has provided economic benefits and opportunities to ASEAN countries. However, all ten ASEAN countries have unequal benefited from China. Moreover, not every ASEAN country has the maritime dispute with China over the South China Sea. These two points lead to disunity among them. Beijing takes advantage of their disunity, giving it superior power. Andy Yee emphasizes the important role of asymmetric power in developments in the South China Sea among China and other ASEAN claimants. Concerning the South China Sea territorial dispute, China is the most powerful state compared to other ASEAN claimants and Taiwan. So China prefers bilateral negotiations as a way of settlement to multilateral ones. In bilateral negotiations, China is likely to prevail over weaker states because China

¹¹² Latif, "Sino-American Peace Benefits South-east Asia,".

has more bargaining power than any individual ASEAN country, not only in economic terms but also militarily.

The Beijing government's territorial claiming policy and its concerns over its power and security are not limited only to the South China Sea, but also encompass the East China Sea. From the Chinese perspective, the two disputed seas are its maritime buffer areas. "Both the South China and East China Seas are geopolitically significant and represent an intersection of history, sovereignty and territory, geostrategy, and energy security, impacting China's relations with its neighbors."¹¹³ The Chinese government has implemented the same territorial claiming policy and strategy towards both the South and East China Seas. China's policy towards the two disputed waters could be interpreted to suggest that Beijing is concerned over its rising power and economic and strategic interests in the region, and accordingly exercises power in the same way in both places.

Beijing has taken a hard stance in both disputed seas and this represents how the country exercises its superior power. The Chinese government has implemented conflictual policies towards other claimant states in the South and East China Seas. "In March 2014, Chinese coast guard boats blocked the Philippines from accessing its outposts on the Spratly Islands. Two months later, China moved an oil rig into Vietnam's exclusive economic zone, clashing with Vietnamese fishing boats."¹¹⁴ China's recent conflictual policies in the South China Sea echoed what happened earlier in the East China Sea. In September 2010, China temporarily stopped supplying rare-earth elements to Japan which is vital for cell phone and computer manufacturing because Japan

¹¹³ Shelly Zhao, "China's Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea," *China Briefing*, May 31, 2011, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.china-briefing.com/news/2011/05/31/chinas-territorial-disputes-in-the-south-china-sea-and-east-china-sea.html>.

¹¹⁴ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "How to Deter China: The Case of Archipelagic Defense," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2015): 79.

detained a Chinese captain of a fishing boat who struck two Japanese coast guard vessels. Furthermore, in November 2013, “China unilaterally declared an ‘air defense identification zone,’ subject to its own air traffic regulations, over the disputed Senkaku Islands and other areas of the East China Sea, warning that it would take military action against aircraft that refused to comply.”¹¹⁵ Even though Japan has relatively similar power to China comparing to an individual ASEAN claimant, the Chinese government has implemented the same policies towards both contested seas. Both the South and East China Seas form what the Beijing government calls the ‘first island chain’.

Apart from the ‘far sea defense’ strategy, the Chinese government also follows the ‘second island chain’ naval strategy which goes beyond the South China Sea and the Philippines to the Pacific. The maritime area where China has currently claimed is so-called ‘first island chain’. The Chinese ‘second island chain’ overlaps with U.S. naval power in the Pacific (see Map 3). In June 2013 at the Sino-U.S. bilateral meeting, the Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that “the vast Pacific Ocean has enough space for the two large countries of China and the United States.”¹¹⁶ His remark shows that China regards itself as a major power and is also willing to equal the U.S. Bernard Cole, a former American naval officer and currently a professor at the National War College, told the *New York Times* that at the present time, most of the U.S. nuclear-powered attack submarines are stationed in the Pacific, having been recently transferred from the Atlantic.¹¹⁷ The United States expresses their concern over the South China Sea dispute. In July 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated in the ASEAN foreign

¹¹⁵ Krepinevich, Jr., “How to Deter China: The Case of Archipelagic Defense,” 79.

¹¹⁶ Barack Obama, Xi Jinping, “Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting,” Remarks, The U.S.-China Bilateral Meeting 2013, Palm Springs, California, June 7, 2013.

¹¹⁷ Wong, “China Expands Naval Power to Waters U.S. Dominates,”.

ministries' meeting in Hanoi that "the US had 'a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons and respect for international law in the South China Sea.' She also expressed support for a 'collaborative diplomatic process' regarding territorial disputes in the South China Sea."¹¹⁸ The U.S. action is interpreted as an effort to 'internationalize' the maritime dispute and "a direct challenge to China."¹¹⁹ The US is also contributing to increased tension in the South China Sea by providing the joint naval and air drills to other claimants. This presents the U.S. concern over the increasing Chinese military build-up on the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. concern and suspicion would lead to a security dilemma in the region.

Nevertheless, The Chinese government expresses its willingness to handle the dispute with peaceful settlements even though the peaceful settlement has to follow China's rule which is through bilateral negotiations. In the Boao Forum for Asia in 2013, the Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that "on the basis of firmly upholding its sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, China will maintain good relations with its neighbors and overall peace and stability in our region. China will continue to play a constructive role in addressing regional and global hotspot issues, encourage dialogue and talks for peace, and work tirelessly to solve the relevant issues properly through dialogue and negotiations."

In December 2014 at the ARF Seminar on Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) Security, Zhang Kunsheng states the situation in the South China Sea that even though there are disputes over territorial and maritime rights and interests in the area, in

¹¹⁸ Yee, "Maritime territorial disputes in East Asia," 166-167.

¹¹⁹ Mark Landler, "Offering to Aid Talks, U.S. Challenges China on Disputed Islands," *New York Times*, July 23, 2010, accessed May 12, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/24/world/asia/24diplo.html?_r=0.

general, the situation is still stable. He also makes reference to the Chinese ‘dual-track’ approach as a realistic and effective way to peacefully handle the dispute. The ‘dual-track’ approach means that “disputes are solved through negotiations by countries directly concerned while peace and stability in the South China Sea is maintained jointly by China and ASEAN countries.”¹²⁰ The ‘dual-track’ approach is also mentioned by the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi during a luncheon in the China Development Forum in March 23, 2015 that:

China calls for peaceful handling of disputes over territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. China has completely settled boundary issues with 12 out of its 14 neighbors on land. China has advocated a ‘dual-track’ approach regarding the issue of the South China Sea, believing that relevant disputes should be settled peacefully by countries directly concerned through dialogue and consultation and that peace and stability of the South China Sea should be maintained by China and ASEAN countries working together. Such an approach has received understanding and support of most countries in the region.¹²¹ (Wang, 2015)

2.2 Conclusion: China as a defensive or an offensive realist?

In this chapter concerning the realist approach, the main debate is whether China is pursuing policies of power maximization or security maximization in the South China Sea. From China’s rhetoric and behaviors towards the South China Sea, outlined in this chapter, I conclude that China is still pursuing defensive realism, at the present time. However, the country is prone to become an offensive one in the future because there are

¹²⁰ Zhang Kunsheng, “Remarks by Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Kunsheng at the ARF Seminar on Sea Lines of Communications Security,” Remarks, ARF Seminar on Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) Security from ASEAN Regional Forum, Beijing, December 8, 2014.

¹²¹ Wang Yi, “Toward a New Type of International Relations of Win-Win Cooperation,” Speech, China Development Forum 2015 from Development Research Center of the State Council, Beijing, March 23, 2015.

a few Chinese policies which could be interpreted as a defense or an offense according to these following observations.

Even though the Beijing government has insisted that its military build-up and strategic policies are for self-defense, its ‘far sea defense’ which is moving towards ‘open seas protection’ and ‘second island chain’ doctrines could be misunderstood and interpreted as offensive strategies. The mere existence of military equipment cannot indicate whether a state pursues a defensive or an offensive approach and China’s recent military build-up is regarded as a means to counter the U.S. China’s claim to half of the Pacific, articulated through the idea of the ‘second island chain’, overlaps the U.S. sphere of influence and could be perceived as a sign of power expansion and maximization and also a bid for regional hegemony. Lastly, China’s strategy of delaying can also be seen as either defense or offense because China may delay the dispute until it gains more power, then shifts to an escalation strategy.

Nevertheless, there are more signs indicating that China is still pursuing a defensive realist strategy, and peaceful settlement (which accommodates to China’s preference and advantage) is very welcome. The past incidents with other claimants occurred when Beijing’s strength claims declined and its use of force are responses to other claimants’ occupation. China did not attempt to change the status quo in the contested water. Secondly, China’s recent strategic document mentions that China would not attack but only counter attack. It means that China would not start using force against other claimants if they did not first threaten China’s rights and interests. Thirdly, China has sought cooperation and joint development with other claimants such as the 2005 Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking among China, the Philippines and Vietnam. Beijing signed

the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) with ASEAN in 2002 even though there is no sign for a code of conduct (COC) soon. Furthermore, China's 'dual-track' approach presents its willingness to solve the dispute peacefully and its effort to maintain peace and stability in the region without threatening its national interests. Lastly, the most recent controversial development in this contested sea, the artificially created islands, lighthouses and other buildings are regarded as 'assertive' or 'provocative' actions by the U.S. and its neighbors. The U.S. and ASEAN countries are afraid that the recent construction in the sea would be used for military purposes. In contrast, China perceives its recent development as 'legitimate'. Articulated in legal terms, China's building developments in the disputed water are an attempt to increase its credibility and maritime rights and to establish jurisdiction by showing a presence.

In the next chapter, I will examine China's territorial claiming policy in the South China Sea through constructivist perspective. This IR theory, constructivism, will fill gaps which realism dismisses and offer a proper understanding of its policy.

Chapter Three – China’s Territorial Claiming Policy

Towards the South China Sea: Constructivist Approach

“Sovereignty is ours, set aside disputes, pursue joint development.”
(Deng Xiaoping)

This chapter will discuss China’s territorial claiming policy towards the South China Sea issue through the constructivist lens. Even though Constructivism shares a common ground with realism on states’ basic goals; security and survival, it points out the influence of norms, identity, ideas, and culture in shaping states’ behavior. Constructivists also regard that states’ identity defines its national interests and behaviors. Alexander Wendt states that “identities are the basis of interests.”¹²² He recognizes the importance of material power by noting that “material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.”¹²³ Constructivism helps to fill a gap which realism misses by better understanding “how these states choose their interests and preferences.”¹²⁴

There are two hypotheses regarding this issue. The first is based on China’s national identity. Its history, past humiliation, nationalist impulses, the idea of the ‘Middle Kingdom’¹²⁵, notion of sovereignty and struggle for recognition form its core

¹²² Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* Vol.46, No.2 (1992): 398, accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

¹²³ Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security* 20, no.1 (1995): 73.

¹²⁴ Liu Qianqian, “China’s Rise and Regional Strategy: Power, Interdependence and Identity,” *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 5, no. 2 (2010): 86.

¹²⁵ The term ‘Middle Kingdom’ which refers to China “shifts throughout history, from referring to a small collective region to eventually encompassing the nation and its people as a whole. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the term Middle Kingdom shifted to mean the country as a whole instead of describing individual

interests and influence the policy decision of Chinese leaders towards the disputed water. Also, they frame ‘China’s sovereignty’. This hypothesis operates on a national level.

The second hypothesis concerns China’s continuity of foreign policy and its strategic culture. Chinese leaders have followed its policy towards the South China Sea derived from the second generation led by Deng Xiaoping. Its strategic culture offers a better understanding of the China’s use of force which reinforces the realist thinking. Strategic culture is related to military identity.

In this chapter, I will examine how the Chinese national identity, derived from its past experiences, has shaped the country’s idea of sovereignty. In other words, where does the ‘nine-dash line’ come from? Then, I will present just how Chinese strategic culture can explain the Chinese response to the South China Sea issue. It also shows the continuity of Chinese policy towards the disputed water. In order to demonstrate this hypothesis, I will look at China’s similar rhetoric and past incidents which correspond with Deng Xiaoping’s classic statement, ‘Sovereignty is ours, set aside disputes, pursue joint development’. I will also look at how Beijing has handled the dispute with the combination of a Confucian-Mencian paradigm and a Parabellum paradigm. Lastly, and in conclusion, I will show how Chinese identity and its strategic culture correspond with one another.

states in an attempt to give solidarity to the Chinese people. By referring to their country as the Middle Kingdom, the people of China imply their significance in the world and use the term as a form of pride to be a collective group and single nation.” (Source: “Why Is China Called The Middle Kingdom?,” The Middle Kingdom Traditional Kung Fu School, accessed May 26, 2015, <http://www.learnmartialartsinchina.com/kung-fu-school-blog/why-is-china-called-the-middle-kingdom/>).

3.1 Where does the 'nine-dash line' map come from?

States may claim their jurisdiction over land and maritime space by their entitlement under relevant international law e.g. UNCLOS or by their historical rights relating to that area. Legally speaking, it is necessary to establish a physical presence in contested areas such as in the South China Sea, in order to justify effective jurisdiction.¹²⁶

The Paracel Islands have been bilaterally contested between China and Vietnam while the Spratly Islands have been disputed either entirely or partly by China and the other five claimant states; the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. All of them except Brunei have a physical presence in their claimed areas in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, their physical presence on rocks or shoals contradicts the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, specifically UNCLOS Article 121, paragraph 3^{127, 128}.

According to UNCLOS, states can indicate a 12 nautical mile territorial sovereignty boundary from its coastline and also a 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zones (EEZs), which includes the seabed natural resources from its shoreline to that sphere. This demonstrates that the claimants have sovereignty and control over the islands because they can also possess the natural resources surrounding them.¹²⁹ Apart from sea lanes, the untapped oil and gas under the contested waters is one of the reasons which make the islands geopolitically and strategically significant.

¹²⁶ Gilbert Rozman, "Chinese Strategic Thinking on Multilateral Regional Security in Northeast Asia," *Orbis* 55, issue 2 (2011): 310.

¹²⁷ UNCLOS Article 121, paragraph 3: "Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf." (Source: "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – Part VIII Regime of Islands," United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea, accessed May 24, 2015, http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part8.htm.)

¹²⁸ Hans-Dieter Evers, "Understanding the South China Sea: An explorative cultural analysis," *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 10, no. 1 (2014): 80.

¹²⁹ Viboonpong Poonprasit, "Law of the Sea," Class lecture, International Law from Thammasat University, Bangkok, November 15, 2010.

Use of ‘History’ underpins the main territorial claiming policy of the Chinese government towards the South China Sea. However, China has ratified UNCLOS in 1996¹³⁰ which it by and large rejects territorial claims based on history. In the contemporary period, the Chinese government uses a historical base for its claim towards the South China Sea issue. The Beijing government’s claim refers to its prior discovery and to the 1951 San Francisco Conference which demands that Japan return some islands in the East China Sea to the PRC.¹³¹ A statement issued by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai in August 1951 during negotiations with Japan for the San Francisco treaty declared China’s claim over the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Again, “in September 1958, China reaffirmed its claim to these islands when it asserted rights to territorial waters during the Jinmen crisis. The 1958 declaration marked the first time that China linked its claims to territorial sovereignty with the assertion of maritime rights, in this case, rights to territorial waters.”¹³² Premier Wen Jiabao mentions the South China Sea as “China’s historical territory since ancient times.”¹³³ Again, Chinese foreign minister, Yang Jiechi told Hillary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State in September 2012 that “there is plenty of historical and jurisprudence evidence to show that China has sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters.”¹³⁴

Mohan Malik presents China’s contradicting historical claims by noting that Chinese claims over Taiwan and the entire South China Sea are based on the past, dating from both the Manchu or Qing dynasty, however, in the Qing dynasty maps, the

¹³⁰ M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33 (2011):299.

¹³¹ Evers, “Understanding the South China Sea,” 80.

¹³² Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” 293.

¹³³ Mohan Malik, “Historical Fiction: China’s South China Sea Claims,” *World Affairs* (2013), accessed May 19, 2015, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/historical-fiction-china%E2%80%99s-south-china-sea-claims>.

¹³⁴ Malik, “Historical Fiction,”.

southern-most border of China is Hainan Island. “In this version of history, any territory conquered by ‘Chinese’ in the past remains immutably so, no matter when the conquest may have occurred.”¹³⁵ He continues to state that Chinese leaders, both Nationalists and Communists, have used historical narratives “to promote national unity and regime legitimacy” which are high-priority issues for each. History is an instrument of statecraft or ‘cartographic aggression’ refined by media, research and educational institutions controlled by states.¹³⁶

Nationalism has always been used as an instrument of the CCP, as mentioned above. ‘Illegitimate’¹³⁷ regimes always use nationalist impulse to gather support as a means to maintain their power. Nationalism is also used to divert attention away from the regime’s incapacity on good political institutions, economic growth, and social demands.¹³⁸ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has played the nationalist card when suited to its interests at that moment. From the Sino-Vietnamese oil rig incident in May 2014, the Chinese government attempted to prevent a nationalist movement against Vietnam because China already controlled the Paracels and the country does not want to anger Vietnam and handle any further attack. In contrast, the CCP led an anti-Japanese demonstration in September 2012 after the Tokyo government bought the Senkaku in Japanese or the Diaoyu in Chinese from private Japanese owners. The reason behind it is

¹³⁵ Malik, “Historical Fiction,”.

Mohan Malik gives a definition of ‘Chinese’ in his article that “Official Chinese history today often distorts this complex history, however, claiming that Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus, and Hans were all Chinese, when in fact the Great Wall was built by the Chinese dynasties to keep out the northern Mongol and Manchu tribes that repeatedly overran Han China; the wall actually represented the Han Chinese empire’s outer security perimeter.”

¹³⁶ Malik, “Historical Fiction,”.

¹³⁷ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has ruled the country since 1949. However, its power does not come from election as the West prefers. The CCP claims its ‘legitimacy’ by noting that the Party has increased economic growth, improved quality of life, and rejuvenated the China’s greatness.

¹³⁸ Andy Yee, “Maritime territorial disputes in East Asia: a comparative analysis of the South China Sea and the East China Sea,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40 (2011): 184.

that if the CCP did not permit the demonstration, the Party would face the demonstrators' anger itself. However, the Chinese government allowed the protest take place for a few days and then stopped it because the country does not want to destroy a good economic relationship with Japan.

The CCP has stimulated nationalist sentiment in the mainland from the four main ethnic groups; Tibetans, Uighurs, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong, and the Party recognizes itself as 'a guardian of national pride.'¹³⁹ This can be observed as an element in the South China Sea issue as one of the CCP's core interests that the CCP will protect Chinese 'national pride' and 'territorial integrity'. The Chinese government has followed its policy on territorial integrity. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the website shows a statement of the Chinese President Xi Jinping asserting that "we are strongly committed to safeguard the country's sovereignty and security, and defending our territorial integrity."¹⁴⁰ The CCP has benefitted from stirring up nationalist feeling as a means to legitimize and sustain its power by promoting the greatness of the 'Middle Kingdom'.

The notion of Middle Kingdom has played a significant role in both Chinese beliefs and in its foreign policy decision-making. Chinese textbooks emphasize the notion of Middle Kingdom, as the oldest and most advanced civilization located at the center and surrounded by other Sinicized states. The Chinese government has always played its high-valued history card in order to achieve its foreign policy goals with the notion that "those who have mastered the past control their present and chart their own futures".¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Perry Link, "What It Means to Be Chinese," *Foreign Affairs* 94 (2015): 30.

¹⁴⁰ "China's Maritime Disputes," Council on Foreign Policy, accessed May 21, 2015, [http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#/?](http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#/).

¹⁴¹ Malik, "Historical Fiction,".

Gilbert Rozman states that “after all, sinocentrism is permeating national identity discourse, even as the Chinese military is forcefully pressing for maritime control that comes at the expense of neighboring states.”¹⁴² The Chinese government is willing to protect a national identity shaped by interpretations of Sinocentric History rather than compromise with its neighboring countries in terms of sovereignty. In *When China Rules the World*, Martin Jacques notes that “Imperial Sinocentrism shapes and underpins modern Chinese nationalism.”¹⁴³ His statement presents how strongly Chinese history and the central idea of Middle Kingdom influence present nationalist feeling. China’s nationalist feeling drives the CCP to firmly protect its sovereignty and interests in the South China Sea. If the Party did not do so, it would lead to domestic resentment.

According to Martha Finnemore, international norms shape states identities and interests. They are conveyed to states through international organizations and shape what states’ interests are.¹⁴⁴ China submitted its ‘nine-dash line’¹⁴⁵ which loses two dashes that pass through the Gulf of Tonkin between China and Vietnam map to the UN in 2009.¹⁴⁶

Beijing submitted the map indicating its sovereignty in order to comply with international

¹⁴² Rozman, “Chinese Strategic Thinking,” 313.

¹⁴³ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009, 2012).

¹⁴⁴ Robert Jackson and George Sorensen, “Social Constructivism,” in *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 169.

¹⁴⁵ “Both Taiwan and China use this map as the basis for their South China Sea Claims. The map was first used by the Nationalist Government of the Republic of China and was created in 1947. The map includes 11 dashes outlining the extent of China’s claims in the region. After the Nationalists fled to Taiwan during the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the victorious communists formed the People’s Republic of China, which continued to use the 1947 map as the basis for its South China Sea claims. In 1953, the PRC removed two dashes around the Gulf of Tonkin to allow it to come to an agreement with Vietnam, leaving 9 dashes on the map. The so-called 9-Dash Line has formed the basis of China’s claims in the region for several decades. The most recent PRC maps of the region have 10-dashes to include Taiwan. Neither China nor Taiwan has clarified whether it claims only the land features inside of this line, or the seas as well. Because it predates UNCLOS by almost four decades, the 11 or 9-Dash Line bears no relation to an EEZ.” (Source: “11-Dash Line Map,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1347513-prc-img-eleven-dotted-line-1947.html>.)

¹⁴⁶ Demetri Sevastopulo, “South China Sea Tensions Stem From ‘Nine-Dash Line,’” *Financial Times* April 24, 2014, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/eb77cdc0-cba3-11e3-a934-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3bANcASk6>.

law. “Sovereignty is a post-imperial notion ascribed to nation-states, not ancient empires.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, China submitted the map in order to protest Malaysia and Vietnam’s map submission on May 6, 2009.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Taylor Fravel suggests that China’s claims over the South China Sea so-called ‘nine-dashed line’ is ambiguous in terms of maritime rights or jurisdiction. The land features which China claims its possession in the South China Sea are not qualified as islands.¹⁴⁹ The international norm teaches China both that sovereignty is instrumental for broader national interests and how to protect its sovereignty through the medium of international law.

China recently stated in public that the country considers sovereignty over the South China Sea as one of its core national interests.¹⁵⁰ In April 2010, the *New York Times* also reported that China had considered the South China Sea as one of its core interests.¹⁵¹ The Chinese government has never mentioned the South China Sea as its core interest in public as they do with Taiwan or Tibet issues. However, China has described it in these terms during private meetings with the U.S.¹⁵² Chinese officials said to Jeffrey A. Bader and James B. Steinberg, two visiting senior officials under the Obama administration in March 2010 that “China would not tolerate any interference in the South China Sea, now part of China’s ‘core interest’ of sovereignty.” This is the first time that the Chinese government mentioned the South China Sea as a core interest, equal to

¹⁴⁷ Malik, “Historical Fiction,”

¹⁴⁸ “Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) Outer Limits of the Continental Shelf beyond 200 Nautical Miles from the Baselines: Submissions to the Commission: Joint Submission by Malaysia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” *Oceans & Law of the Sea United Nations*, accessed May 30, 2015, http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_mysvnm_33_2009.htm.

¹⁴⁹ Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” 294.

¹⁵⁰ Yee, “Maritime territorial disputes in East Asia,” 167.

¹⁵¹ Edward Wong, “China Expands Naval Power to Waters U.S. Dominates,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2010, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/world/asia/24navy.html?_r=0.

¹⁵² Michael D. Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior – Part One: On ‘Core Interests,’” *China Leadership Monitor* 34 (2011).

Taiwan and Tibet issues.¹⁵³ The Xinhua News Agency, an official news agency of the People's Republic of China, reported in August 2011 that "China has always made itself loud and clear that it has indisputable sovereignty over the sea's islands and surrounding waters, which is part of China's core interests. That is based on unambiguous and undeniable historical facts."¹⁵⁴ Due to increasing tensions in the contested area following the 'nine-dash line' map submission, the Chinese government can publicly indicate that Beijing now regards the South China Sea as its core interests and will firmly protect it.

3.2 China's current territorial claiming policy: Xi government assertiveness or the continuity of China's policy?

Alastair Iain Johnston highlights that structural realism is not enough to explain Chinese strategic behavior. Structural realists do not give much attention to Chinese strategic culture with its emphasis on "a structure of symbols and ideas about values of using force and interstate relations."¹⁵⁵ Even though Beijing is stronger and superior than other claimants in military terms, the country does not wish to start using force to occupy the islands. It has recently developed infrastructure in the contested area as a means to increase the legitimacy of its claims. Chinese leaders have tried to achieve its goal with peaceful means rather than military force. The Chinese security policy is more nuanced than many commentators realize because they sometimes miss the understanding and influence of strategic culture. From Goh Kong Yong's perspective, structural realism and strategic culture must complement one another in order to understand and explain

¹⁵³ Wong, "China Expands Naval Power to Waters U.S. Dominates,"

¹⁵⁴ "China-Philippines Cooperation Depends on Proper Settlement of Maritime Disputes," *Xinhua News Agency*, August 31, 2011, accessed May 13, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/indepth/2011-08/31/c_131086932.htm.

¹⁵⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995), 248-266.

Chinese security policy because strategic culture gives a good understanding of the pattern of Chinese behaviors and its inclination to use force.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Colin Gray linkage bridge between history and strategic culture by suggesting that different national styles, derived largely from “deep roots within a particular stream of historical experience,” influence strategy-making process. Gray defines strategic culture as “referring to modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derives from perception of the national historical experience, from aspiration for responsible behavior in national terms and [also] from the civic culture and way of life.”¹⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, China’s unique historical experiences and culture contribute to its particular strategic culture.

Gray notes that in order to understand a state’s behavior and its role in world politics, learning about its ‘cultural thoughtways’ is crucial.¹⁵⁸ The Chinese strategic culture has two opposite paradigms. One is a Confucian-Mencian paradigm which perceives the world as a harmonious place rather than a conflictual one. The other is a Parabellum paradigm which comes from the Sunzi perspective and regards the world with a *realpolitik* view. The use of force is necessary in order to survive. “Historical background in the formation of strategic culture shapes a country’s response, which is more or less true for China.”¹⁵⁹ In a nutshell, when China is strong, it is likely that China implements the Confucian-Mencian paradigm. In contrast, the Parabellum paradigm

¹⁵⁶ Goh Kong Yong, “Is China Predisposed to Using Force? Confucian-Mencian and Sunzi Paradigm in Chinese Strategic Culture,” *Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces* Vol. 25 No. 4 (1999), accessed May 18, 2015, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/safti/pointer/back/journals/1999/Vol25_4/16.htm.

¹⁵⁷ Colin Gray, “National Style in Strategy: the American Example,” *International Security* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1981): 35-37.

¹⁵⁸ Colin Gray, *The Geopolitics of Superpower* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 42-43.

¹⁵⁹ Shivnarayan Rajpurohit, “China’s Strategic Culture: Today, Tomorrow, and Yesterday,” *Counter Current*, October 12, 2013, accessed May 16, 2015, <http://www.countercurrents.org/rajpurohit121013.htm>.

predominates when China is ‘weak’.¹⁶⁰ This is compatible with what Fravel notes, i.e. that China is prone to use force when it feels inferior in its claims relative to other claimants.

Johnston, in *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, adds that China’s leaders tend to use force in the issues which they either perceive as zero-sum games or issues endowed with high value. Territorial disputes are zero-sum games in the Chinese leaders’ point of view.¹⁶¹ “Chinese decision-makers tended to see territorial disputes as high-value conflicts, due in part to a historical sensitivity to threats to the territorial integrity of the state.”¹⁶² Johnston also argues that there is an augmentation in the Chinese use of force in the post-1949 world, in which he sees the linkage with China’s improved military capacities, and also as consistent with the conceptions of the Parabellum strategic culture.¹⁶³ Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Michael Brecher, and Sheila Moser simply state that China tends to behave in conflictual ways during crises since its power is growing.¹⁶⁴

Beijing has firmly protected its interests by combining economic benefits with military assertiveness, which forms the unalterable part of the Chinese strategic thinking. With this strategic thinking, China can follow two principles: a parabellum strategy and Confucian doctrines. The Chinese government can maintain economic interests based on the peaceful and harmonious Confucian doctrines while behaving in assertive ways when

¹⁶⁰ Goh, “Is China Predisposed to Using Force?,”.

¹⁶¹ Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 256.

¹⁶² John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁶³ Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 257.

¹⁶⁴ Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Michael Brecher, and Sheila Moser, *Crises in the Twentieth Century Vol. 2: Handbook of Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1988).

its core national interests are placed in risky position.¹⁶⁵ Beijing's economic policy contributes to maintaining a good relationship with its neighbors and also partly reduces the perception of China as a threat.

Under the fifth generation of Chinese leaders led by Xi Jinping, the leadership has promoted the 'Belt and Road Initiative' and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Chinese leaders regard the 'Belt and Road' Initiative and AIIB as public goods, a point stressed by Yang Jiechi, a Chinese State Councilor in 'Jointly Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road'. He says that "the 'Belt and Road' initiative will be a public good China provides to the world."¹⁶⁶

Chinese foreign policy regarding the South China Sea has continuity since the second generation under Deng Xiaoping. Fravel notes that the Beijing government has used the same language when they mention territorial claims in the South China Sea from the mid 1970s until the present time. Its territorial claim statements are always formulated as "China has indisputable sovereignty over the Spratly Islands (or South China Sea islands) and adjacent waters."¹⁶⁷

From 2002, the Chinese government under Hu Jintao has been regarded as assertive because of the rise of China. However, Gilbert Rozman thinks that its assertiveness started increasing in 2008 due to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the global financial crisis. "Growing confidence in economic and military power underscores arrogant rhetoric from many Chinese officials."¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, he argues that there is no

¹⁶⁵ Rajpurohit, "China's Strategic Culture,".

¹⁶⁶ Yang Jiechi, "Jointly Build the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road By Deepening Mutual Trust and Enhancing Connectivity," Speech, The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, March 28, 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Fravel, "China's Strategy in the South China Sea," 294.

¹⁶⁸ Rozman, "Chinese Strategic Thinking," 299.

consistency in the messages from Chinese officials.¹⁶⁹ From my perspective, the reason behind his opinion is that the Chinese government's rhetoric has not only support peaceful settlement and joint development and cooperation but also warns other claimants of consequences from their threatening actions to China's interests and likelihood of use of force. Li Keqiang, at Boao Forum for Asia Conference in April 2014, states in his speech that "I wish to emphasize that China is committed to peaceful development. We will give full support to initiatives that help strengthen maritime cooperation. On the other hand, we will respond firmly to provocations that undermine peace and stability in the South China Sea. We Chinese believe in repaying kindness with kindness and meeting wrongdoing with justice."¹⁷⁰

From Li Keqiang's speech, some may argue that Xi Jinping's foreign policy is more assertive or provocative than that of previous leaders. Zhang Jian perceives that China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping becomes more 'assertive' or 'provocative' and also is willing to play a greater role in international affairs.¹⁷¹ Swaran Singh also shares this idea with Zhang that China's foreign policy of the fifth generation is one of the most active periods.¹⁷² However, this may not be because of his personality, but simply because China has 'risen' and the Chinese leadership can now realize the power they possess, and so they are confident exercising it in world politics. In the past, China played a low-profile role in foreign policy and world politics. The Chinese foreign policy broadly divides into three periods; before becoming an UN member in 1971, China did

¹⁶⁹ Rozman, "Chinese Strategic Thinking," 299.

¹⁷⁰ Andrew Browne, "Chinese Premier Li Warns Southeast Asia Nations Against 'Provocations'," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2014, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303873604579492832444031614>.

¹⁷¹ Zhang Jian, "China's New Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'?", *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27:1 (2015): 6.

¹⁷² Swaran Singh, "Xi's Provocative Foreign Policy Fruitful," *China's Daily*, March 19, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-03/19/content_17360607.htm.

not engage with international community, from 1971 to 2000, China started learning international norms and became a norm or rule follower, then from 2000 onward, China started shaping international norms and becomes a norm creator.¹⁷³

The Chinese leaders retain the continuity of their foreign policy which we can notice from China's policy towards the South China Sea. In a nutshell, since Deng Xiaoping, China has firmly protected its sovereignty, attempted to maintain peace and stability in the region, offered peaceful settlement (which accommodates to China's preference and advantage) and joint development and cooperation. All of these is stressed in Deng's classic statement, 'sovereignty is ours, set aside disputes, pursue joint development'. The Chinese territorial claiming policy and the country's actions in the South China Sea are undoubtedly influenced partly by strategic culture. Strategic culture is a central part of foreign policy decision-making processes. Jeffrey S. Lantis states that strategic culture emphasizes "the role of domestic conditions in shaping national security policy behavior."¹⁷⁴

The historical experiences of the past humiliation such as the territorial occupation by foreigners in the 19th and early 20th century has shaped core Chinese strategic beliefs, David Blair points out.¹⁷⁵ This means that history can influence states' strategic beliefs and their foreign policy. Strategic culture also plays a significant role in

¹⁷³ Chulacheeb Chinwanno, "Chinese Foreign Policy," Class lecture, Foreign Policy of China from Thammasat University, Bangkok, August 28, 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture: From Clausewitz to Constructivism," *Strategic Insights* IV, issue 10 (2005).

¹⁷⁵ David Blair, "The Clash of Historical Memory: The 'Century of Humiliation' vs. the 'Post-WW II Liberal World Order,'" *China Research Center* 12, no. 2 (2013), access May 19, 2015, http://www.chinacenter.net/2014/china_currents/12-2/the-clash-of-historical-memory-the-century-of-humiliation-vs-the-post-wwii-liberal-world-order/.

states policy decision-making concerning security. China is like other states. It has its own strategic culture. Strategic culture is reflective of a states' military identity.

3.3 Conclusion: What has influenced China's contested water policy, identity or strategic culture?

Regarding the constructivist view, this chapter proves that either China's national identity or its strategic culture has contributed to its territorial claiming policy in the South China Sea and its behaviors related to this. I conclude that both of them are complementary and support one another. In a nutshell, the first hypothesis is based around historical narratives, nationalist feeling, and how the idea of the 'Middle Kingdom' has shaped the nature of Chinese sovereignty as a specific core interests. In other words, they frame the spatial scope of where Beijing's sovereignty claim. The second hypothesis relates to foreign policy and strategic culture, it explains how the Chinese government has handled the dispute in order to achieve its final goal. The Chinese strategic culture is influenced from its unique past experiences.

China's claim is based on historical narratives suggesting that the contested area is a part of China since the Qing dynasty or contemporarily, China refers to the 1951 San Francisco Conference. The CCP has used historical narratives to stir nationalist feeling by pushing the notion of a Middle Kingdom for its own aims of regime legitimacy and national unity. China's national identity is shaped by interpretation of 'History'. The submission of the 'nine-dash line' map is a means to comply with international law, respond to the prior Vietnamese and Malaysian submission, and publicly announce its core interests.

However, China's recent active claiming behaviors in the South China Sea is not something new or surprising if we look to the track record of Chinese foreign policy and its strategies towards the issue. Both China's rhetoric and behaviors do not change from the ones during Deng Xiaoping which is to open for peaceful settlement, initiate joint development and cooperation, maintain peace and stability in the region but respond firmly to its core interests' threats. The mixture between keeping peace and using force derives from its two strategic culture paradigms; Confucian-Mencian and Parabellum. Briefly, China uses force when the country feels weak or inferior. In the context of the dispute, Beijing uses force to respond to other claimants' further moves in order to counterattack, not attack.

Put simply, history informs where China draws the line of its claims while strategic culture is its tool to affect such claims. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will present how both IRs theories, realism and constructivism, complement and strengthen one another to offer a proper understanding of China's territorial claiming policy in the South China Sea and explain its use of force in the past incidents.

Conclusion

This thesis seeks to answer why China has framed its territorial claiming policy towards the South China Sea to cover almost the entire South China Sea, and why it has behaved in ambiguous ways whilst rhetorically insisting upon maintaining peace and stability. From a realist view, I conclude, by observing how it responded to past incidents and open opportunities for joint development and cooperation, and how it expresses its willingness not to attack except in self-defense, that China is still a defensive state at the present time. However, there is a likelihood for it to become an offensive state because of certain ambiguous policies such as ‘offshore defense’, which is moving to ‘open seas protection’ and ‘second island chain’ and also its continuing strategy of delaying, which can be interpreted as both defensive and offensive.

Complying with the assumptions of constructivism, historical narratives, a strong nationalist impulse, and the notion of the ‘Middle Kingdom’, have shaped the scope and exact boundaries of China’s sovereignty claim. Apart from the nationalist impulse, material factors such as power, security, and economics make the area a core interest. Its strategic culture provides a proper understanding of China’s continuing policy towards the dispute, characterized by openness to a peaceful resolution underpinned by joint development and cooperation, efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region while insisting upon sovereignty and a firm response to any threats. However, China’s recent construction development in the contested islands is labeled as ‘assertiveness’ or ‘provocation’ by its neighbors and the U.S. In contrast, Beijing perceives its action as ‘legitimate’ because the developments occur in an ‘indisputable area’ of Chinese

sovereign territory. Legally speaking, these constructions are a means to increase its credibility and its maritime rights and jurisdiction by showing a physical presence.

The South China Sea dispute can also provide further implications. China does not want to push ASEAN to side with the U.S. and how the country manages the dispute can be good evidence of whether China truly abides by the doctrine of the ‘peaceful rise’ or not. The current situation in the South China Sea could also lead to a regional security dilemma, as China has developed military capacities which could sow distrust and suspicion amongst its neighbors and the U.S. The U.S. and Chinese neighbors such as the Philippines and Vietnam have responded by increasing their diplomatic relations and military cooperation.

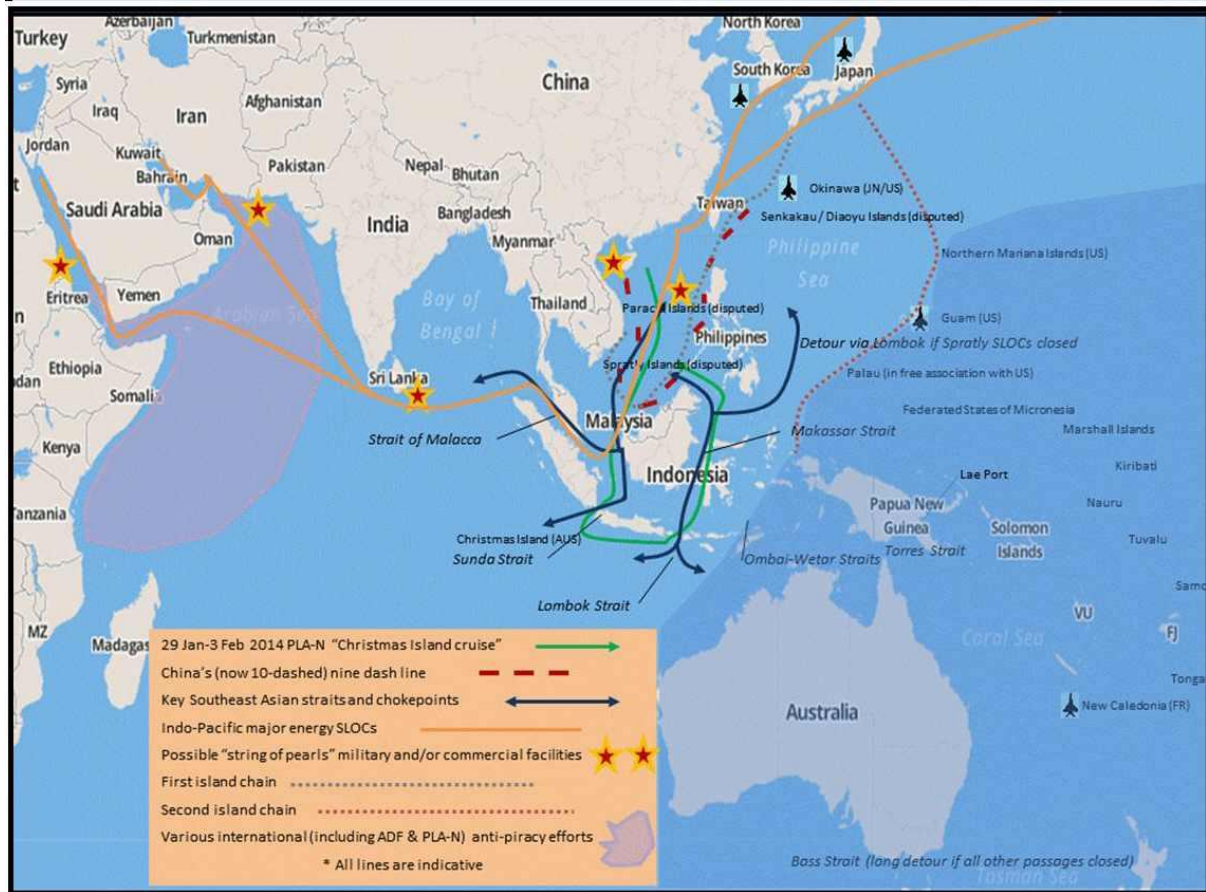
The nature of the dispute is complex and reflects various aspects, which make it difficult to find a solution. Nevertheless, there are some actions which can decrease tensions and maintain peace and stability in the region. Firstly, every claimant should maintain the *status quo* in order to decrease tensions. Secondly, China should reassure other claimants that it will not start any attack or make any further aggressive moves. The country should also be transparent in terms of its military expenditure and development. From the U.S. side, America can help to reduce tensions by opening a way for China to ‘rise peacefully’, whilst guaranteeing security to its allies in the case China does go too far.

Appendices



Map 1: Who claims what in the South China Sea?

(Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>)



Map 2: Sea Lines of Communications Security (SLOCs)

Regarding this thesis, this map is also used to illustrate China's 'nine-dash line', major energy Sea Lines of Communications Security (SLOCs), the 'first and second island chains'.

(Source: <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/chinas-sea-lines-of-communication-implications-for-the-south-pacific/>)



Map 3: China's 'first island chain' and 'second island chain'

(Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/plan-doctrine-offshore.htm>)

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