The “Hidden Dragon”: Explaining Chinese Aggressive Foreign Policy on the South China Sea Dispute

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Xiaoyu Zhao
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Since 2009, the increasingly assertive and aggressive behaviors of China with respect to the South China Sea have led to much analysis by researchers. Arguments include the historical significance of the South China Sea, the role of international law, and international negotiation and cooperation. The South China Sea dispute is not simply a regional maritime dispute but also a signal of China’s growing economic power and the challenges it brings to world politics. Its significance not only lies in fascinating historical stories associated with it, but also that it is a contemporary issue that is prominent in both the real and academic worlds. China has always been claiming that disputes over the South China Sea are leftover historical issues. This claim is largely because of the history of the Middle Kingdom and the Chinese self-image of being a powerful and influential country in the region, and the fact that China has perceived the islands in the South China Sea as belonging to the country as early as in the Qin Dynasty (221 BC). In classic Chinese literature, there is a decent amount of evidence proving that the ancient Chinese discovered, managed to explore, named, and ruled the region of the South China Sea. China considers its sphere of influence as the rule of defining its sovereignty and ownership instead of abiding by modern international laws. Hence, China considers the ownership rights a settled issue; thus, the validity and intentions of the disputes brought by other claimants are questionable. Chinese media—such as the China Daily, Beijing Review, Xinhua News Agency, and other favorite websites Sohu, Sina, Baidu, Tianya, and Douban—often regard the South China Sea dispute as a historical issue.

This thesis aims to prove that the Chinese foreign policy on the South China Sea has been aggressive, in contrast to its peaceful approaches in the international arena. However, this aggression is hidden in Chinese domestic contexts and has rarely been revealed in the previous decade. Throughout this thesis, several factors that have driven this increasing hidden aggression of China are presented and analyzed based on original sources in Chinese and in English. It aims to providing pieces of evidence that prove the presence of the hidden aggressive behavior of the Chinese and, thus, depicts a more provocative China in world politics.

The Puzzle

The South China Sea Dispute is not merely a regional maritime dispute but a signal of China’s growing economic power and the challenges it may bring to world politics. Its significance not only exists in fascinating historical stories but as a contemporary issue that is prominent in both the real and academic worlds. China proposed the “double-track approach” to solve the dispute over the South China Sea. The “double-track approach” asserts that claimants should solve their disputes bilaterally, while all ASEAN countries should cooperate to maintain the peace in issues related to the South China Sea. In essence, this approach is rather different from the policy of “joint development” that was proposed before. “Joint development” was a policy to all claimants with a focus on exploitation of natural resources; on the other hand, the “double-track approach” tends to concentrate on the joint development of peace in this region. Motives for Chinese assertive behavior are worth considering and analyzing.

From as early as 2006, there has been an increase in domestic and international news stories related to incidents in the South China Sea. While China has not been an assertive performer in the international arena, its attitude shift towards the South China Sea is noticeable. The Heritage Foundation listed 15 most noticeable aggressive Chinese behaviors related to the South China
Sea\textsuperscript{1}. These behaviors, although not provocative within the scope of every single year, are extraordinarily aggressive within the time range of past 10 years. The history of significant Chinese foreign policy on the South China Sea can be traced back to when Deng Xiaoping was in office. In October 1984, Deng Xiaoping addressed concern for foreign policy towards the South China Sea Dispute by proposing the idea of shelving differences and seeking joint development, during the Third Plenary Session of the Central Advisory Commission of the Communist Party of China. Since then, China has adopted relatively peaceful diplomatic foreign policy approaches and has created opportunities for dialogue among the claimants involved.

Since the arrival of the new president, Xi Jinping, Chinese attitudes toward the South China Sea appear to have been more assertive and compelling, but China still sends out a signal of being willing to cooperate with ASEAN countries to tackle the dispute over the South China Sea. This puzzling behavior is particularly distinctive when comparing Chinese domestic and foreign propaganda (i.e., the Chinese and English versions of their government website). Moreover, this contrast has been escalating, which further indicates the hidden aggression of China on the issue of the South China Sea. Therefore, a Chinese foreign policy shift is taking place from the old equilibrium to a new one. In the old equilibrium, Chinese foreign policy focused on “joint development” with other nations, pertaining to exploring natural resources in the South China Sea. However, in the new equilibrium, the “double-track approach” completely abandoned the exploration of the South China Sea with all other claimants involved, and the policy now focuses on joint efforts with ASEAN countries to maintain the peace in the South China Sea.

The “double-track approach” itself is a puzzling policy and is paradoxical to what China has been proposing since 1980s. China refuses any third party involvement in solving the South China Sea Dispute, while it opens up possibilities to deal with ASEAN (which comprises 10 countries). The essence of the “double-track approach” involves both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic mechanisms; it is puzzling which approach China adopts under different circumstances. China claims to be a peaceful rising power; however, through its foreign policies on the South China Sea and their implications revealed by scholars and researchers, China does not appear to commit to its peaceful rise. To find the missing links between the actual behavior of the Chinese government and its rhetorical expressions is critical. This thesis aims to solve the puzzle by providing explanations and evidence for the hidden aggressiveness in Chinese policy.

**Literature Review**

There exist copious amounts of theoretical analysis of the aggressive behavior of China in issues related to the South China Sea. Past research has summarized the significance of the South China Sea and states that China would gain greater security for its crucial supply lines of oil and other commodities; exclusive access to rich fishing areas and potentially vast undersea oil deposits; a much larger buffer against what it regards as US naval intrusions; and, last but not least, the prestige and standing it has long sought, in effect becoming the Pacific’s hegemon and positioning itself to press its decades-old demand that Taiwan come under its control\textsuperscript{2}.

One primary perception and assumption that is globally recognized is the region’s endurance


on sizeable misperceptions and mistrust amongst claimants due to its complex history. The region is "fraught with mistrust, animosity, and strategic uncertainty"\textsuperscript{3}, with misinformed perceptions toward each country. The mistrust is not one-sided; instead, it exists in all the claimants against other claimants. Due to the mistrust and negative perceptions of China’s behavior, the Philippines turned to the US for bilateral military help “to enhance its leverage vis-à-vis China.”\textsuperscript{4} According to the reports of the International Crisis Group, domestic politics in the Philippines dominates the situation and decides whether this cooperation will be expanded. One strategy that has been widely discussed is the delaying strategy, which asserts that China has no apparent response to the issues and has developed no real conclusions\textsuperscript{5}. Additionally, “a delaying strategy can allow a state to consolidate its claim and strengthen its control over disputed territory”\textsuperscript{6}.

\textit{Explanation 1: Instigation of nationalist movements, particularly netizens, intensifies tensions over the disputed islands}

Pragmatic nationalism is closely related to China's foreign policy behavior. On the one hand, from the viewpoint of analyzing Chinese citizens' behavior, it is based on the “economic and social realities of China”: while Chinese people are patriotic and would like to see China become stronger in all fields, they still pay much attention to their personal welfare and affluence; thus, Chinese people accept the positive influence of western countries, and would like to immigrate to western countries\textsuperscript{7}. On the other hand, pragmatic nationalism is rather useful in the analysis of foreign policy. According to Zhao (2004), "The adoption of a pragmatic strategy has significant foreign-policy implications, as pragmatic nationalism is a firmly goal-fulfilling and national-interest-driven doctrine, ideologically agnostic, having nothing, or very little, to do with either Marxism or liberalism"\textsuperscript{8}.

Further, Chinese aggressive behavior is both indirectly and directly perpetuated by its nationalists and because of the increasing nationalism among its citizens, particularly netizens. Nationalism is an ambiguous terminology that is extensively discussed among academia. In the past, scholars have proposed to specify Chinese nationalism, including “official nationalism,” “revanchist nationalism”\textsuperscript{9}, “ethnical nationalism,” “liberal nationalism,” “state nationalism”\textsuperscript{10}, and “pragmatic nationalism”\textsuperscript{11}. Currently, there is a new type of nationalism led by netizens in China. Chinese nationalism is now used as a double-edged sword, "wielding against perceived 'enemies' (e.g., Japan, the US, and the Philippines) or potentially against the state itself such as when Chinese citizens demand better governance, cleaner air, and [safe food]"\textsuperscript{12}. "Nationalists in China demand

\textsuperscript{6} Fravel, p. 297.
\textsuperscript{7} Cebastan, 2005.
\textsuperscript{8} Zhao, 2004.
\textsuperscript{11} Zhao; Cabestan
\textsuperscript{12} Baviera, p.138.
greater respect for China's higher status, especially after China overtook Japan to become the world's second-biggest economy.\(^{13}\) With regard to current regime insecurity due to a high level of nationalism calling for more responsibility to be taken by the Chinese government (e.g. in areas of air pollution, food security, government official corruption, and sex scandals), the relationship between upheavals caused by domestic nationalism and aggressive Chinese policy is under discussion. According to one viewpoint, Chinese President Xi Jinping's leadership faced high expectations from rival power groups and a watchful public; therefore, he had to demonstrate stronger nationalist credentials than previous leaders.\(^{14}\) However, China never compromised on issues related to the South China Sea. This is because "regime insecurity is unlikely to create incentives for cooperation in offshore islands disputes … during periods of regime insecurity, the only assistance that neighbors might offer in exchange for China's concessions would be diplomatic support, [thus] external factors are more likely to produce efforts to compromise\(^{15}\).

**Explanation 2: The Strategic Importance of the South China Sea and China’s “Core Interest”**

Strategically, natural resources and the geopolitical location of the South China Sea have driven China's aggressive behavior. The need for energy resources due to scarcity is one reason for China's aggressiveness. Currently, natural resources and environmental issues are "fundamental to [China's] grand strategy."\(^{16}\) Since the South China Sea is given the name of "the New Persian Gulf," China views the critical status of the South China Sea as crucial to its development. "Chinese surveyors have estimated those resources to be between 105 billion barrels and 213 billion barrels, of which between 10.5 billion barrels and 21.3 billion barrels are recoverable, in addition to high volumes of natural gas."\(^{17}\) Irrespective of whether these statistics have been exaggerated by China, the release of these numbers has possibly made countries such as Vietnam and Philippines more interested in the South China Sea. The unchangeable fact is that the economic value of the South China Sea has increased. "Energy industry players in China are pursuing a more ambitious energy-acquisition program (thus the continuing interest in joint resource development in the South China Sea)\(^{18}\).

However, China has never claimed the South China Sea as a “core interest,” as they did for the issue of Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet. However, in 2011, a *New York Times* article reported China’s claim of South China Sea as their “core interest” for the first time. In particular, China “labeled the South China Sea a core interest, on par with Taiwan and Tibet.”\(^{19}\) Alastair Iain Johnston argued that there is “corroborating evidence that the South China Sea was a ‘core interest’. ” In his interview with well-connected scholars in China, he suggested, “the islands China occupied in the South China Sea or that the islands were related to China’s territorial integrity, which, in turn, was a core interest.”\(^{20}\)

**Explanation 3: National Interests of External Powers in the South China Sea**

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13 Baviera, p.140.
14 Ibid.
16 Rogers, p. 86.
17 Rogers, p.87.
18 Baviera, p.140.
19 Wong
20 Johnston, p. 18.
External powers play a significant role in escalating China’s aggressiveness and assertiveness in dealing with the dispute. Four major foreign powers have demonstrated their interests in the South China Sea to varying degrees, and these decisions may have pushed China toward adopting a more aggressive attitude. Based on past research, all the actors involved in the dispute support and advocate a multilateral solution to the dispute, except China. China's reactions to diplomatic components and its strategy related to the South China Sea are puzzling. Although, "China maintains that [the South China Sea Dispute] is open to negotiations … [but] China calls for a bilateral talks with each claimant, not multilateral ones"21. In 2002, China signed a declaration with ASEAN states on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. It "focused only on broad confidence-building measures, not sovereignty and dispute settlement"22. Multilateral talks have not taken place in the real sense; bilateral talks have never "gained traction"23. As mentioned earlier, the Philippines initiated jurisdiction cases against China and made efforts to internationalize the dispute. “Tensions between the Philippines and China over the South China Sea have steadily increased since President Benigno Aquino III took office in 2010”24. After Aquino III took office, he had to "undo the damage by his predecessor's accession to the failed Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU)." The JMSU had expired in June 2008. The Philippines began to act unilaterally ever since the expiration25. Internationally, “China refused to participate in the arbitration case filed by the Philippines under Annex VII of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS)”26.

The US-China standoff has always been at the center of discussion on external powers and regional instability. In 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that a peaceful resolution of territorial disputes in the South China Sea was of “national interest” to the United States. The United States has pushed forward a multilateral peaceful solution to the dispute, which has been warmly welcomed by Vietnam and the Philippines27. It was the Philippines and Vietnam that reached out for help from the United States. The United States is concerned about the balance of power in Asia; thus, it adopted a firm security posture. However, China refuses to involve itself with the United States in the dispute, feeling that the dispute is a form of “containment”. “Beijing utterly rejects the role of third parties in the dispute, particularly the United States, which it has accused of interference or ‘meddling’”28. In addition, “Chinese officials told senior American officials privately that China would brook no foreign interference in its territorial issues in the South China Sea.” In response to the greater presence of the United States in the region, China has a threefold strategy: “deepening claimant countries’ economic dependence on China; keeping them from developing the disputed area; and avoiding outright confrontation with the US”29.

America's position on the South China Sea Dispute is rather firm—pushing multilateral negotiation among countries and increasing military presence. Thomas Christiansen has provided a detailed analysis and states, "a firm security posture toward China would not only hedge against a potential turn for the worse in Chinese domestic politics and foreign policy; it would also help

21 P.300
22 Fravel, p.62.
23 Storey, p.57.
24 ICG Report, p.6.
26 Baviera, p. 136.
27 Promphet
28 Storey, p.57
29 ICG Report, p. 27.
shape long-term Chinese political and diplomatic evolution in directions that reduce the likelihood of unwanted conflict and instability between China and its neighbors and reduce the probability of dangerous miscalculations and unnecessary spirals of tension in Sino-American relations” (83).

All listed literature has provided genuine insight into Chinese foreign policy on the South China Sea Dispute and the factors that have influenced this policy. However, they do not offer sufficient evidence to explain the puzzle of a China that is willing to cooperate but refuses to participate in multilateral negotiations. They also have not compared the actual Chinese attitudes through analysis of domestic Chinese newspapers and official government documents in order to study China’s behavior. In particular, the literature does not offer any explanation of why official Chinese government propaganda is inconsistent in its expressions, and how this is a piece of evidence that Chinese domestic propaganda is becoming increasingly aggressive on the South China Sea Dispute. This paper attempts to fill the gap of lack of evidence from the Chinese perspective, and reveals a hidden aggressive China on the South China Sea Dispute.

Explanations and Evidence for a Hidden Aggressive China

The missing link between Chinese announcements and actual behavior is the use of languages. The inconsistent tone, vocabulary choices, and translations in major newspapers are collectively one reason for uncertainties related to Chinese aggression. This section will provide large amounts of evidence from responses in domestic Chinese news and scholarly articles with regard to their authentic attitudes toward intervention from external powers. The contrast between two articles in different languages is remarkable. Before verifying Chinese hidden aggression through pieces of evidence, it is necessary to reconsider the reason for China to behave aggressively regarding the South China Sea. Therefore, this section will begin with an analysis of the Chinese situation of resource scarcity in order to propose economic incentive being the major reason for being aggressive. In the last part of this section, two existing and ongoing approaches will be provided: nationalism building and military modernization. These two domestic policies as crucial strategies have immense impacts on Chinese foreign policies on the South China Sea.

China in Need of Resources

China confronts a serious issue of resource scarcity. The energy resource distribution of China can be encapsulated as “abundant coal, moderate petroleum, and scarce natural gas.” Among the triple major natural resources, burning coal has caused a pollution crisis in recent years; reliance on importing petroleum is not stable; natural gas is not widely in use and has been rarely explored. Crude oil is accessible from the Middle East and politically stable states in Africa. Wars have alternately broken out in major oil-exporting countries such as Libya, Sudan, Syria, and Iraq, and the fragile political environment in the Gulf countries, Iran, and Venezuela bring uncertainty in these countries’ capability in exporting crude oil into China. With regard to the import of crude oil and the geological arrangement, China currently has constructed three major oil pipelines: China-Russia Oil Pipelines (North), China-Kazakhstan Oil Pipeline (West), and China-Myanmar Oil Pipeline (South). Along the east coast, multiple major harbors are transmitters of imported oil. Access to natural resources is one of the questions that have to be considered seriously in China.
Below is a table and a few charts describing the ensured reserves of major energy and ferrous metals:

Table 1: Ensured Reserves of Major Energy and Ferrous Metals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Petroleum (10000 tons)</th>
<th>Natural Gas (100 million cu.m)</th>
<th>Coal (100 million tons)</th>
<th>Iron (Ore, 10000 tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>336732.81</td>
<td>46428.84</td>
<td>2362.90</td>
<td>199.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>333258.33</td>
<td>43789.88</td>
<td>2298.86</td>
<td>194.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>323967.94</td>
<td>40206.41</td>
<td>2157.89</td>
<td>192.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>317435.27</td>
<td>37793.20</td>
<td>2793.93</td>
<td>222.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>294919.8</td>
<td>37074.2</td>
<td>3789.6</td>
<td>213.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>289043.00</td>
<td>34049.62</td>
<td>3261.44</td>
<td>226.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>283253.77</td>
<td>32123.63</td>
<td>3261.26</td>
<td>223.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that Chinese coal reserves have experienced a decreasing trend. China is one of the few countries that still uses coal as the major fuel. The loose control on the use of coal has caused a series of environmental problems like the pollution crisis in Beijing. Along with the growing demand and consumption for fuels, the reliance on coal and burning fossil fuels burden
the environment. In order to address the issue of inefficiency in using coal, the China National Energy Administration proposed the doctrine of “Controlling the East, Stabilizing the Middle, and Developing the West.” In order to fulfill this doctrine, new mines are not permitted in the East. In the Middle, one has to wait for an old mining project to cease before beginning a new mining project. In the West, mining projects need to pay attention to attaining a balance of energy resources and ecological environmental protection, focusing on delivery of electricity mainly to large coal bases and modern coal chemical projects, with the full use of the existing coal production capacity of the premise and development of new coal mine projects.31

In order to adjust the structure of the coal mining industry, the Chinese government has proposed that access to new mines must be strictly restricted, particularly to new coal mines of 300,000 tons per year and gas outburst mines of 900,000 tons per year. The government will close down coal mines of 90,000 tons and less per year, as well as support to close down qualified regional coal mines of 300,000 tons per year. In addition, the government supports the legal exit of coal mines with exhausted resources.32 Shutting down coal mines is one major remedy used by the Chinese government to tackle the issue of resource scarcity. Together with the data of declining ensured reserves of coal, China is at the transition point when they have to switch to new types of energy resources. Oceanic oil and natural gas is generating increasing interest in China, as China has begun releasing statistical yearbooks of oceanic economic value and marine industry report since 2010, which is a new government publication providing data and analysis of the Chinese oceanic oil and natural gas industry and fisheries (Table 2). Based on the data released by the State Oceanic Administration, the year 2012 witnessed a transition in the growth rate of the Chinese oceanic oil and natural gas industry.

Table 2: Output Values and Growth Rates of Oceanic Oil and Natural Gas Industry and Fisheries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Oceanic Oil and Natural Gas Industry</th>
<th>Fisheries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Output Value (In Billion ¥)</td>
<td>Growth Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>130.2</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>173.0</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>157.0</td>
<td>-8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>164.8</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Ibid.
Output Values of the Oceanic Oil and Natural Gas Industry and Fisheries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Output Value of Oceanic Oil and Natural Gas Industry (In Billion ¥)</th>
<th>Output Value of Fisheries (In Billion ¥)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>250.9</td>
<td>130.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>281.3</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>328.7</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>356.2</td>
<td>164.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Growth Rate of Oceanic Oil and Natural Gas Industry and Fisheries Output Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Growth Rate of Oceanic Oil and Natural Gas Industry Output Value</th>
<th>Growth Rate of Fisheries Output Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>-8.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
<td>6.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linear (Growth Rate of Oceanic Oil and Natural Gas Industry Output Value)
Therefore in this game, access to natural resources has a significant impact on the Chinese government’s choice on its foreign policy on the South China Sea. From the charts above, it is evident that the output values of the oceanic oil and natural gas industry and fisheries are increasing at a decreasing rate. The transition point was in 2013, when the growth rate of the oceanic oil and natural gas industry output value dropped to -8.7% and only jumped back to 0.1% in 2014. These statistics are alarming for the Chinese government, as they presented a China that is in an urgent situation of resource scarcity. The economic value of the South China Sea is enormous for China. Its geological location is beneficial for international trade, and it has massive potential for China regarding its fortune in ultra-deepwater. The charts also demonstrate the high utilities of why China would like to gain access to oceanic oil and natural gas.

External Powers: Bilateral Diplomacy vs. Multilateral Diplomacy

China’s diplomatic strategies pertaining to the South China Sea are both bilateral and multilateral. China uses both strategies in issues related to the South China Sea, and its announcements of its policies are absolute bamboozlement. Occasionally, China rigidly declares its refusal to enter into multilateral diplomacy and third party involvement. However, often, news of supporting multilateral diplomacy becomes widespread. To demystify this, based on evidence of Chinese foreign policies, bilateral diplomacy treats political and sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, and multilateral diplomacy encompasses economic and trading partnership with external powers. The South China Sea Dispute is not as convoluted a game as it may appear, and it does not include China as the sole player, but also other external powers such as Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and the United States. This section delivers pieces of evidence regarding hidden Chinese aggressive behavior as responses to the challenges put forth by external powers on the South China Sea Dispute, which implies an actual change in Chinese foreign policy.

Japan

Japan and China have an unpleasant history dating back to World War II; the legacies of this history remain influential in China until today. Anti-Japanese parades fever has become an epidemic in China, and owing to the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China, more TV shows were taken down, and the “gold hours” (黄金时段) are filled with Anti-Japanese TV theme shows. The tension between Japan and China over the East China Sea is a battle of resources, as Japan has limited access to resources, and China relies on importing resources from other parts of the world.

The influence of Japan not only lies in the dispute over the East China Sea. Japan is not a claimant in the South China Sea Dispute; however, due to the high level of tension that exists over Senkaku Island in the East China Sea, the role of Japan in the South China Sea Dispute is noticeable. The significance of the South China Sea to Japan is no less than that of the East China Sea, as Japan perceives Chinese foreign policy to be identical on these two maritime conflicts. In fact, these two disputes are "inextricably linked"33. Japan’s primary goal of foreign policy is to "preserve the existing maritime order in Asia"34.

34 Ibid. p150.
Recently, in Germany, G7 published a “G7 Foreign Ministers’ Declaration on Maritime Security in Lubeck.” Japan is the only Asian country in the G7, and this publication irritated numerous amounts of Chinese netizens. According to Sohu News (2015), this is not the first time when Japan has attempted to ally with great western powers to suppress China from growing. Joining G7 as the “Asian Representative” is Japan’s strategy, and Japan always manages to gain support from western advanced countries. Although this is a cynical report from a Chinese domestic news agency; however, it still implies that Japan is pushing China to pursue multilateral diplomacy and dialogue by involving other powers in identifying a solution for this dispute. In response to this Declaration, China believes, “For China, there is nothing to worry about the dispute for ‘the situation of this region is generally stable, and relevant cooperation has been moved forward with positive results’ … it expects relevant countries would fully respect the efforts by regional countries to safeguard regional peace and stability, and do more things that contribute to regional peace and stability’ … [in addition], disputes should be resolved through negotiation and consultation by countries directly concerned.”

Therefore, Japan’s behaviors generate more provocative domestic propaganda in China, as has been done by the Chinese government in previous decades. From the tone of Chinese domestic news on Japan’s move in G7, Japan is the one that is creating a messy situation in the South China Sea. Japan’s influence over the South China Sea is passive and annoying for the Chinese government. However, this influence propels a shift in Chinese foreign policy. This shift manifests through the generation of Chinese nationalism against the Japanese and provocative domestic propaganda.

A paradoxical phenomenon is with regard to the diplomacy between China and Japan. In 2004, China and Japan reached a “Four-Point Agreement”, which states that “The two sides have acknowledged that different positions exist between them regarding the tensions which have emerged in recent years over the Diaoyu Islands and some waters in the East China Sea, and agreed to prevent the situation from aggravating through dialogue and consultation and establish crisis management mechanisms to avoid contingencies,” and “The two sides have agreed to gradually resume political, diplomatic and security dialogue through various multilateral and bilateral channels and to make efforts to build political mutual trust.” In the most recent meeting between Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe, it was agreed to continue the principles laid down in the “Four-Point Agreement” and create more opportunities for dialogues.

In its relationship with Japan, China manipulates the generation of domestic nationalism against the Japanese, while exhibiting a friendly relationship with Japan with regard to the East China Sea Dispute. Although agreeing to promote a multilateral channel, the definition is ambiguous. In history, China and Japan have never been strong simultaneously; however, both countries ascertain the importance of a reciprocal economic relationship. From the perspective of the Chinese government, investment, technology, and capital from Japan are critical to its economic development. There have been more than 300 pairs of friendly cities between China and

38 Ibid.
Japan. Any disruption in the economic ties between China and Japan will cause catastrophic consequences for both countries. Protests against Japan have caused a negative impact on bilateral trading, which led to a decrease of 11% in Japan’s exports to China. However, China has successfully impelled Japan to consider smoothing their relationship.

The United States

The Asia-Pacific region has been at the center of US strategy since 2009, and the US government is concerned that the American navy is not entirely ready for the upcoming challenge in Asia-Pacific. This challenge will be how to preserve historic norms regarding freedom of navigation while adapting to the growing power and activity of regional actors, including China. This challenge is immense from the Chinese perspective, as there is evidence dating back more than two millennia to demonstrate that the South China Sea was discovered and populated by Chinese people. Denial of the presence of foreign countries in the China-claimed region implies that any of the strategies of the United States related to the South China Sea are not applicable.

In March 2015, American Navy Seventh Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Robert L. Thomas suggested, at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition, that “countries could streamline cooperation on maritime security while respecting sovereignty and coastal space, as was the case with counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden.” He promised to provide support for this potential coalition. One month ago, Thomas also welcomed Japan to expand its range of aviation patrol in the South China Sea and provide weaponry and exercises for the Philippines. [Thomas believes] allies, partners and friends in the region will increasingly look to the Japanese as a stabilizing function. As usual, China’s response deals with the peaceful approach and urges foreign powers to terminate investigation on the South China Sea affairs.

Confronting the challenges in the South China Sea, the United States has been operating various military and diplomatic strategies. These include “cooperative primacy,” “hub and spoke model of alliances,” building multilateral institutions over the long run, and further economic integration with the region. Unfortunately, none of these proposals or tactics has truly been compromised from the Chinese side. China is enraged by the US involvement in the South China Sea, and has warned the United States more than once to stay out of the South China Sea, in which it “demands the immediate withdrawal of personnel and equipment of countries which

45 Ibid.
were ‘illegally occupying’ China's island”46. These radical propaganda and rhetoric feature in newspapers and major websites in China, and rarely have they ever been translated into English.

In essence, the United States advances multilateral cooperation militarily and economically, which does not satisfy China. According to Chinese perception, the United States is an outsider on the South China Sea Dispute, and there should be no intervention from the country, as the presence of the United States only exacerbates, if not worse, the chaotic circumstances in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, there is no more than radical expressions toward the United States from China. China describes the United States as a western hegemonic power or the “devil” (yang guizi). Therefore, interventions from the “devil” cannot cause the Chinese position on the South China Sea to waver, and China is not willing to confront the United States with any threat. This leads to the hidden aggression of China in its approach to the South China Sea Dispute.

**Vietnam**

Due to the entangled history between China and Vietnam, the countries’ perceptions towards each other in domestic views are negative and pessimistic to a large extent. According to the Chinese, the Vietnamese are poor and noisy people. In Vietnam, the repercussions of the history of war can never be erased; however, China continues to have a trading relationship with Vietnam. Therefore, the tension between China and Vietnam is mainly escalated through the battle of nationalists, under manipulations of the parties in both countries. Both China and Vietnam have sought to mobilize diplomatic support abroad and manage rising nationalism at home. Vietnam has been more successful at courting international support, but in broadcasting its grievances it has aroused nationalist forces at home and abroad that could jeopardize a negotiated solution47. The relationship between China and Vietnam has worsened over the years. In the mid-2000s, Vietnam increased its offshore commercial activities (petroleum industry) in the South China Sea. When Vietnamese organized a violent riot against China’s behavior of building drilling platform 978, China submissively retreated and announced that they would be willing to have a friendly dialogue with the Vietnamese government; simultaneously, China claimed that they completed their drilling project in the disputed water, which is supposed to belong to China. However, the friendly dialogue indeed took place and both governments appeared friendly in the peaceful settlements48. China responded by issuing “eighteen diplomatic objections to foreign oil companies involved in exploration and development projects”49. In late 2011, China and Vietnam signed a bilateral agreement “on six basic principles guiding the settlement of maritime disputes, [mainly] referring to the water at the mouth of the Gulf of Tokin”50. The tension between 2009 and 2011 in China and Vietnam was “brought under control through the October 2011 Agreement on Basic Principles, which is a major development and can be considered as a de facto bilateral code of conduct between China and Vietnam”51. These bilateral agreements are tied to economic

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50 ICG Report, p.5.

51 Amer, p.28.
development rather than settling the dispute over ownership of the disputed water.

With regard to the actual dispute over sovereignty, China accentuates an extremely firm stance, particularly when Vietnam initiates claims to the South China Sea. Unfortunately, these articles on the official party propaganda with aggressive tones have no English translation. In one article, Associate Professor Gong Yingchun at the China Institute of Diplomacy intrusively criticized Vietnamese aggressive behaviors as “robberies” and a “change in face” (bian lian), and publicly questioned the international reputation of Vietnam. Nevertheless, on the same day, in the English version of People’s Daily, Ling Dequan quoted, “Vietnam says it has evidence to prove its claims in South China Sea but is ignoring own historical documents that vindicate China’s position”53. The mild tone in word choice in the latter article, although also allegedly clarifying the truth of the South China Sea, does offer a more neutral stance on the issue without being cynical and assertive.

China does pursue bilateral dialogue with Vietnam, as it promises internationally; however, it is only associated with economic ties. China’s voices in the world confuse the concepts of bilateral agreements with Vietnam; this confusion is taken advantage of in its domestic news to influence Chinese nationalists in developing their perception toward the Vietnamese. Due to the status of close international trade partners, the Vietnamese government involuntarily controlled its nationalist movements against China, and China wrangled through the strategy of hidden aggression.

The Philippines

Just in the manner that China has named the South China Sea after China, the Philippines refers to it as the West Philippines Sea. In January 2013, the Philippines initiated compulsory arbitration proceedings against China’s “maritime jurisdiction” in the ongoing dispute over the South China Sea. Paul Reichler, the lead counsel for the Philippines, lists two reasons for taking China to court: “(1) its reputation and the influence that comes with it; (2) many states understand it is to their advantage and the advantage of others, to live in a rules-based system”54. The Philippines intentionally provoke recognition and realization of the significance of the South China Sea due to their lack of capabilities to confront China economically and militarily. This arbitration aims at causing China’s international reputation to suffer as well. However, this arbitration did not generate much interest domestically in China, and news reports on this case were not very detailed.

China retorted with a position paper in December 2014, detailing, for the first time, the reasons that “the Chinese Government has subsequently reiterated that it will neither accept nor participate in the arbitration thus initiated by the Philippines.” The subsequent day, following the release of this position paper, the People’s Daily quoted an interview with Xu Hong from the

56 Ibid.
Xinhua Agency, which claimed that China had “a solemn and stern stance on its refusal to accept and participate in the arbitration.” The position paper is the most recent and the only officially unveiled Chinese document, for the first time, that rejects another nation's interference.

Without much surprise, the tricky situation lies in the position papers in Chinese and English. When both the official document and the interview were translated into English, there existed a prominent reduction in the tone of aggressiveness and sternness. For two most prominent instances, yanzheng (严正) was translated as “solemn” instead of serious and stern. In Chinese, Yanzheng is used as an extremely puissant diplomatic word to demonstrate the degree of the anger of China; however, it was translated using less aggressive vocabulary. Another example concerns their description of Pilipino behavior in the South China Sea, where tiaoxin (挑衅) was translated into “provocative” instead of “aggressive.” In Chinese, Tiaoxin matches exactly with “to be aggressive”, and this word is prone to the use of force. Provocative is often translated as shandong (煽动) in Chinese, which focuses more on rhetoric demonstrations than tiaoxin. The word choices in Chinese are authoritative, and these rhetoric expressions in Chinese breed sympathies among Chinese people, as they are convinced that their homeland is being verbally attacked by the Philippines.

**Bilateral Diplomacy as the Choice**

As the tension of South China Sea Dispute has been escalating drastically, the assertive Chinese position on its ownership rights is challenged by a handful of countries. As has been mentioned above, China is the only country involved that shows unwillingness to adopt a multilateral approach. Claimants such as the Philippines and Vietnam are too timid to confront the great power of China, and since the United States concentrates its power in the Asia-Pacific region, these countries have sought help from the United States for both increased weaponry and vocal advocacy. Japan is an ally of the United States and with its conflict over the East China Sea with China, as well as the recent blow to its reputation in the region due to its aggression to take back the military and denial of its crimes committed during World War II, Japan is facing great suppression and is under enormous amount of stress and in an awkward situation in Asia. Although this network has already been built up among all other four major external powers, China still maintains its posture of not being willing to have a third party involved. Choosing bilateral diplomacy to the largest extent simplified China’s policy making and bargaining process with other claimants. There has not been a real multilateral joint development plan that has been implemented, neither have there been any potential proposals for a formal bilateral talk between China and one of the external powers involved. Thus far, Chinese bilateral diplomacy is for the benefit of international trade, and its multilateral diplomacy is still a blank concept. While promoting the confusion of its behaviors and policies through the “double-track approach,” China continues to implement more domestic policies to serve its foreign policy behaviors.

**Hidden Chinese Aggression through Nationalism Building and Military Modernization**

**Benefits of Building Nationalism**

In the South China Sea Dispute, pragmatic Chinese nationalism accurately matches the two-way procedure, as described above, which are top-down and bottom-up. The two-way system is neither parallel nor intersecting. Instead, the two intangible processes congregate. From the
bottom, the agglomeration of Chinese domestic nationalists thrust the formation of an emotion in the society, where it forms empathy of the image of a victimized China and the desire for a stronger China on the international stage. While from the top, Chinese leaders take advantage of this sense of collective anxiety for the sake of manipulating its dialogs with foreign countries. This section will carefully examine and illustrate Chinese nationalism and its impact on China's inconsistent rhetoric expressions home and abroad.

**Top-Down Procedure**

China is a country that conducted furious nationalist movements as early as its foundation. The Communist Party was composed of massive amounts of nationalists when the desire for a stronger China was vigorous. “The most important feature of this pragmatism is the state’s emphasis on the instrumentality of nationalism for rallying support in the name of building a modern Chinese society”\(^57\). Historically, China has suffered from the physical hegemony of the western powers. However, in contemporary China, the government encourages nationalist movements that potentially benefit their implementation of policies domestically and internationally.

The South China Sea Dispute is a relatively recent disagreement among several countries over the more than 200 islands in the South China Sea. Overlapping claims to the ownership rights of the islands are significant, particularly in China, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Contradictory to the riots and protests against the Japanese on the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island, which is located in the East China Sea, the Chinese people have not reacted violently toward the dispute in the South China Sea. In the case of the South China Sea Dispute, “pragmatic nationalism is more defensive than offensive”\(^58\).

The Chinese education system can explain part of this. According to Suisheng Zhao (2005), “Patriotic education was a systematically and pragmatically executed national project. Under the banner of patriotism, pragmatic leaders made an all-out effort to rally support for the communist state after the decline of communism.”\(^59\) With regard to the strategy of patriotic education on the South China Sea Dispute, the Chinese government has been imposing the idea that the country has permanent ownership rights to the South China Sea to Chinese citizens as early as elementary school. Chinese children are taught that the South China Sea is the maritime border of China. In the most official Chinese elementary school textbook, an article entitled “Fertile Paracel Island” tells Chinese children about the natural resources of Paracel Island, in which it states:

> The Paracel Islands are a group of islands in the South China Sea, which is China's Chinese people have been living their generation after generation. With the development of a stronger China, the lovely Paracel Islands will become more beautiful and fertile\(^60\) maritime border. The fertile Paracel Islands are the home of our ancestors.

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\(^58\) Ibid.

\(^59\) Ibid.

This article also describes the abundant amounts of fish in the Paracel Islands; however, not a single word was mentioned about the overlapping claims by Vietnam and Philippines. This is done to create an ideology among generations of Chinese that the South China Sea is all Chinese, and it has never and will never belong to any other country.

Similarly, in a second widely used Chinese elementary textbook, there is another article named “Beautiful Spratly Islands,” in which the author writes:

When the fairy returned to the earth, she spread sparkling pearls on the South China Sea, which are presently known as the Spratly Islands. As early as two thousand years ago, our Chinese ancestors started sailing, fishing, and cultivating the Islands. The Spratly Islands are a national treasure of China since they have countless precious sea creatures and abundant mining resources. Additionally, due to the beautiful scenery of the Spratly Islands, they will become an attractive tourist spot in the future61.

Therefore, the Chinese government has created a perception among almost all Chinese citizens from childhood that the South China Sea belongs to China ever since its existence. Hence, when the "peaceful" South China Sea transfigured into a dispute, Chinese citizens who have been manipulated by the government’s patriotic education formed wretched perspectives of external powers such as Vietnam and the Philippines. Chinese citizens allege that it is the recent realization of the importance of the South China Sea with regard to its abundant natural resources that cause Vietnam and the Philippines to take steps to rob China of these resources.

However, only planting ideas among elementary school children has not resulted in this large wave of nationalism. The manipulation of the patriotic education system is rather sophisticated. The concept of a nation and civilization is mixed in the Chinese context. Instead of understanding ancient China as a long civilization with several separate countries, most Chinese people believe that China as a country has existed for more than 5000 years. Wars and conflicts in Chinese history are particularly emphasized in patriotic education. In addition, humiliation is most commonly used to describe the Chinese image in the past century. Moreover, this perception of humiliation generates extreme sensitivity and xenophobia when Chinese people perceive the South China Sea Dispute as a western hegemonic plan to weaken China's power in Asia. Chinese high school politics textbooks firmly assert, “We should watch for western hegemonic power and politics, as well as their cultural prevalence in China, which will definitely poison Chinese teenagers.”

The final critical perspective of the analysis from the government is China's national leaders. The new Chinese president, Xi Jinping, faces various types of pressure domestically and internationally. When President Xi assumed office, the degree of patriotism in patriotic education increased. One feature of President Xi is his linguistic style in his addresses, in which he quotes copious amounts of ancient Chinese literature, and this method has generated a welcoming attitude among Chinese citizens. President Xi enjoys a rather cordial nickname, Xi Dada, where Dada means "father" in northern Chinese dialect, and it also means significant. This nickname depicts a sense of sincerity from Chinese citizens in their attitudes toward President Xi, and the hope that they cherish for President Xi's achievements. Suisheng Zhao (2005) suggests, “Those in power and authority are at an advantage in creating and propagating a nationalism that would promote

their interest because they can marshal the institutional apparatus of the state." Xi Jinping has not been in the position of president long enough to have his ambitions of personal interests revealed; however, the leadership style is rather distinct from former generations of the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Since President Xi Jinping’s wife Peng Liyuan used to be a famous political singer in China, the evolution of political songs is worthy of consideration. The aesthetics of the CCP is largely reflected in its political songs since its foundation. The Chinese Spring Festival Gala each year is the major means for the CCP to market its political propaganda. Performances that will be presented at this stage usually undergo three rounds of censorship to guarantee that the content follows the major theme of CCP policies in the corresponding year. Noticeably, political songs have never been eliminated from the performance list, and these songs usually convey the pride of the Party, China, or the Chinese civilization. It is no exaggeration to enunciate that this is a tradition for the CCP since the era of Mao Zedong. China has witnessed the overflowing cult following of Mao when he was in office. Political songs such as “Sun is the Brightest; Chairman Mao is the Dearest” (太阳最红，毛主席最亲) and “On the Gold Mountain of Beijing” (北京的金山上) are so popular that people born in the 60s still consider this as their beautiful memories of teenage life. Since Deng Xiaoping came to office, the cult following gradually faded away; instead, exalting Chinese natural scenery such as mountains, rivers, and waterfalls became the main theme of Chinese political songs. These songs such as “the Song of Yangtze River” (长江之歌), “I Love You, the Snow of Saibei” (我爱你，塞北的雪), and “the Sea O My Dear Mother” (大海啊母亲) are all prominent examples for the integration of worshipping of the Party and the nation.

Peng Liyuan is famous for her song “China’s New Century” (中国新世纪), in which the lyrics sing “the great Mountain Tai tells you with the sunrise: China is destined to rise, to rise”. These political songs in the contemporary era are composed to serve the purpose of integrating the concept of a nation and the Party. Through widespread political songs, ordinary people who have been in patriotic education occasionally equalize the concept of the nation and the party. Quite a handful of Chinese people believe that obedience to the Party is equivalent of patriotism. All the interactions among the nation, the Party, nature, and ancient culture cause a chaotic relationship that has been purposefully established by the Party to unite its citizens, particularly when their sovereignty is “violated.”

**Bottom-up Procedure**

On the way toward Yaoqiang International Airport in Jinan, which is the capital city of Shandong Province, a peninsular province located in the east coast of China, one commercial post is extraordinarily eye-catching. The gigantic post on an oceanic blue background with the symbol of a nine-dashed line and the red characters “Nanhai Shi Zhongguo De! (The South China Sea Is Chinese!)”, catches the attention of all passengers who drive along the highway. This is only one of the many examples in China that avowedly enunciate the public ardency of Chinese zealot public opinion toward the sovereignty of the South China Sea. In addition to commercial posts, major popular websites and BBS such as Tianya, Sohu, Sina, and Douban have also had copious amounts of assertive public opinions similar to the one on the commercial post.

Nationalism plays a vital role in all recent Chinese domestic and foreign affairs. Since the late Qing Dynasty, China was forced to open up its harbors to the West and was invaded by western countries that were seeking additional resources. Chinese citizens have long considered China a

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62 Zhao
victim of western invasion. The history of the two Opium Wars, the Siege of the International Legations, and the Anti-Japanese War is regarded as national humiliation for Chinese people. Even in its national anthem, the lyrics start with “Stand up, those who are not willing to be slaves.” The self-determination of being a victim lays the foundation of the generation of nationalism in domestic Chinese society. Victimizing themselves produces congruous beliefs among Chinese citizens: western countries are powerful and intend to, by all means, separate or violate China. When confronting international disputes, particularly when there are western countries involved, this belief propels nationalism among the citizens.

Another aspect of nationalism is concerned with the status of the Philippines and Vietnam. This thesis is based on the assumption that China has accepted to define itself as a “nation-state.” However, the ideology of the Middle Kingdom is still embedded in a hidden corner of most Chinese people’s psyche. Tracing back thousands of years ago, the Philippines and Vietnam were those counties (63) that were required to relinquish taxes to the Empire China. Hence, according to the viewpoint of most Chinese people, the Philippines and Vietnam were small counties that were part of the Great Middle Kingdom. They share long Confucian perspectives of peace and order and maintained a high degree of inter-relationship with China. In accordance with this logic, these small counties or tiny countries (in today’s contexts) should not be altering with China over those islands that have historically been explored and claimed by China. According to Peter Gries (2005), “People become emotionally attached to the image they present to the world. If face is assaulted, feelings are often hurt. But maintaining face also means maintaining authority. He who ‘loses face’ loses status and the ability to pursue instrumental goals.” This statement not only indicates the situation of the authority, but also the sentiment of Chinese citizens. Having undergone patriotic education from elementary school to university, most Chinese people are easily irritated if they find out that Chinese sovereignty has been violated.

As has been mentioned above, due to the unimaginable role of political songs in Chinese society, people who have been under the influence of the Party propaganda are the most patriotic ones in the contemporary Chinese society. Middle-aged Chinese people worship the accomplishment of Chinese Communist Party. Newspapers, particularly party propaganda, are usually mailed every week to both state-owned firms and private companies. It is the major channel for acquainting middle-aged and elderly Chinese people with domestic and international news.

**PLAN Modernization and Capabilities**

Modernization of the Chinese Liberation Army (PLA), particularly its naval capabilities, has been drastically increased since 1949. In the late Qing Dynasty, the Qing Emperor decided to abandon all of its navies to celebrate Cixi’s birthday, which led to invasion from western countries that caused immense damage in China. Since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, the Chinese government has been devoting efforts in modernizing its navy. The policy is particularly noticeable after President Xi Jinping stepped into office.

In the policy of military modernization, President Xi Jinping summarized in one of his speeches that the capability of winning a war changes and develops with the practice of war. Being able to win in the past does not equal to triumph under the current circumstances. There are two problems in the modernization of the Chinese military: one is the lack of capabilities of directing modern war among officials; the other is the lack of capabilities of fighting a modern war. In 2012, Xi emphasized when visiting Guangzhou, “we have to make sure the military can be gathered as

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63 “Counties” (郡) in Ancient China means small areas that are located outside Chinese Empire boundary, but have to pay taxes to Chinese emperors for the sake of maintaining their safety and peace.
soon as we call on them. They should be fully prepared at any time, and be able to win every single
war.”64 For the purpose of adjusting the structure of the military, in 2014, Xi announced, “We must
solve the systemic barriers, structural contradictions, and policy issues that restrict the construction
of national defense and the armed forces, and deeply push forward the modernization of the armed
forces’ organization”65.

Building a stronger navy has been the new policy being implemented by new Chinese
leaders for several years. "China's increasingly assertive behavior in the South China Sea risks
compromising the image of a peacefully rising power that the country wishes to project"66, and
"the PLA-Navy becoming more intent on justifying its military modernization"67. Major Chinese
naval fleets are the South Sea Fleet, North Sea Fleet, and East Sea Fleet68. Due to limited access
to data and resources, information on ships in each fleet is no longer accessible. The most recently
released Chinese PLAN fleets information indicates that the South China Sea fleet has become a
growing power in the past several years. In accordance with all accessible governmental
documents, expansion and strengthening of the South China Sea Fleet is an obvious move in
Chinese military modernization.

Conclusion

“Hidden Dragon” (Cang Long) is an expression from ancient Chinese that is used to
indicate an extraordinary person with hidden capabilities that are never revealed publicly. This
word is usually used to describe those who have devoted a large amount of time privately in
difficult practice and training, while at the same time he does not demonstrate his capabilities to
the public. These people are usually determined and possess unknown potential for higher
achievements. At some point of their lives, they are likely to become noticeable figures when they
succeed and surprise everyone. China’’s policy on the South China Sea perfectly interprets the first
phase of striving to be a hidden dragon. With the above explanations and evidence, China enhances
its domestic strategies to deal with the South China Sea dispute. The core of this dispute lays in its
economic interests and natural resources, and China seems to have veiled strategies in dealing with
the issue of the South China Sea.

China seeks to reach a “communication equilibrium” through dialogue, which benefits the
country to the maximum. In order to reach this communication equilibrium, diplomatic
communication during crises can be viewed as the simplest crisis-specific extension in the strategic
bargaining process69. While concealing its radical domestic news and reports, on the international
stage, China aims to create an image of a peaceful country. Chinese strategy and approach to
solving the South China Sea dispute politically is through bilateral diplomatic dialogues, as China
has been relatively isolated on the issue and has had to put up diplomatic defense70. This thesis
concludes that ‘equilibrium strategies’ generate the game-changing momentum for China’s non-

64 Xi, Jinping. "Nine: Establishing a Military That Is Obedient to the Party and Winning Every War. 九、建
65 Tiezzi, Shannon. "China's Military Modernization: Why It Doesn't Mean What You Think It Means." The
66 Rogers, p.89.
67 Baviera, p.140.
68 See Appendix table 3.
70 Ciorciari and Weiss, p.65.
preference of multilateral diplomacy in dealing with the South China Sea Dispute. In matters of the theoretical concepts on China, the incentives that have been generated by the states aspiring to resolve the international crisis can be vital.

In conclusion, in desperate need of natural resources, China approaches the international arena in a different manner than in the past. Economically, it seeks cooperation within and outside the region; politically, it sticks to bilateral diplomacy and firmly refuses any mediation by the United States. The puzzle of the new “double-track approach” is solved to this end. However, this thesis only addresses one aspect of Chinese foreign policy in current world politics; whether this is a signal of termination of a peacefully rising China still requires more investigation.

Appendix

South China Sea Historical Timeline
In order to better illustrate the evidence from ancient Chinese historical records, a timeline is presented below. This timeline collects information from the main historical records and creates a representation of Chinese national perspective on the history of the South China Sea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty</th>
<th>Chinese National Perspective on the History of the South China Sea: Evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qin Dynasty</td>
<td>It is said that Chinese people found the islands of the South China Sea. Qinshihuang demarcated three counties—Nanhai, Guilin, and Xiang—all of which are close to the South China Sea. Wang Hengjie, a scholar at China Bianjiang University, found cereal planted from the Qin Dynasty on the Pacific Island, which proves that Chinese people were living on the islands for a long time. At that time, Spratly Islands did not belong to any territory; therefore, the Chinese people fairly gained the land a long time ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Han Dynasty</td>
<td>Han Wu Di demarcated counties—Zhuya and Dan’er (珠崖、儋耳郡)—in Hainan Island, which is located in the South China Sea, to protect the South China Sea. Further, there were no other countries in the South China Sea at that time. It has been recorded in the Overview of Hainan Province (《海南省况大全》) that General Ma Yuan (伏波将军马援) has been to the Paracel Islands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Han Dynasty</td>
<td>In Yang Fu’s book <em>Yiwu Zhi</em> (《异物志》), he recorded the geographical attributes of the South China Sea. In the book he states “Zhanghai Qitou, Shuiqian er Duo Cishi” (涨海崎头，水浅而多磁石), which is translated as “the South China Sea is shallow and magenic (is this the correct word) stones are everywhere.” This evidence shows when China first discovered the South China Sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three Kingdoms Period</strong> (220AD–265AD)</td>
<td>Wan Zhen from the Kingdom of Wu (吴国人万震) recorded in his book <em>Foreign Body in the Southern State</em> (《南州异物志》), “the County of Juzhui is 800 li away from Dianyou. There is a river mouth in Juzhi. Travelling towards the direction of the Southwest and following the route along the Northeast, there are extremely large islands and reefs … Hawkses are all around in the water” 句椎, 去典游八百里, 有江口, 西南向, 东北行, 极大崎头, 出多磁石。玳瑁如龟, 生南海” (Taiping Yulan 《太平御览》, Vol.790). This is a record of ancient Chinese people’s fishing activities in the South China Sea region, as well as their navigation directions, distances, and weather conditions on the sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eastern Jin Dynasty</strong> (317AD - 420AD)</td>
<td>Eastern Jin Dynasty (317AD - 420AD): When famous Chinese nun Faxian (法显) returned to China from India, he traveled through the South China Sea. In his book <em>Fo Guo Ji</em> (《佛国记》), he recorded his journey from India and Sri Lanka to Guangzhou. He recorded that the journey through the South China Sea from Java took only 50 days to complete. Chinese people perceive that this demonstrates routes in the South China Sea that were first explored by Chinese people as early as during the Eastern Jin Dynasty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern and Northern Dynasties</strong> (420AD–589AD)</td>
<td>Southern and Northern Dynasties (420AD–589AD): archaeologists found over 2000 pieces of ceramics from Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties (Hainan Shengkuang Daquan 《海南省况大全》)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sui Dynasty</strong> (581AD–618AD)</td>
<td>Emperor Suiyang (隋炀帝) dispatched Chang Jun (常骏) and Wang Junzheng (王君政) to travel to Chitu Kingdom (赤土国) across from the South China Sea.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tang Dynasty</strong> (618AD–907AD)</td>
<td>According to the book <em>Jiu Tangshu: Dili Zhi</em> (《旧唐书地理志》), “Sanya is adjacent to the sea to its south. It is 27 li from the southeast to the sea, and its southwest is thousands of li to the sea.” (振州 (今海南三亚) ……南至大海……，东南至大海二十七里，西南至海千里。) Here, this included the islands in the South China Sea. According to Chinese national perspective, this is the critical point that shows that China owns the South China Sea and has been developing the Sea ever since.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dynasty</td>
<td>Time Period</td>
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<td>Song Dynasty</td>
<td>960AD–1279AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yuan Dynasty</td>
<td>1279AD–1368AD</td>
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<td>Ming Dynasty</td>
<td>1368AD–1644AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qing Dynasty</td>
<td>1644AD–1911AD</td>
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Bibliography


