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The Dragon in the Sea:  
A Case Study of Chinese Foreign Policy in the South China Sea

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By

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*Abstract:*

The South China Sea is a territory of ongoing international dispute because of its multiple overlapping sovereignty claims, valuable resources, and highly traveled sea-lanes that are crucial to all states' economic prosperity. As China, an aspiring regional hegemon, continues to assert its claim over approximately ninety percent of the Sea, the international relations schools of Realism and Neoliberalism attempt to demystify China's contradicting behavior, as it simultaneously militarizes man-made islands in the South China Sea and verbally assures the international community of its peaceful rise through its increased institutional involvement. While both international relations theories credibly explain China's actions in the Sea, both fail to recognize the importance of domestic factors such as economic development, public opinion, and Chinese nationalism. The domestic politics perspective asserts that these internal factors influence China's late authoritarian regime, which is circumscribed by the maintenance of the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy among Chinese citizens. Using examples from recent history involving China's altercations with other South China Sea claimants, China's interactions with the United States, and also the opinions of the Chinese public, I argue that the domestic politics perspective best explains China's actions in the South China Sea as a result of its leadership's sensitivity to domestic demands.

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Figure 1: Regional Map of Asia



This map displays the layout of Asia and the strategic importance of the SCS, as it provides a visual of how many states will utilize the SCS's sea-lanes (Cornell University Library 2016).

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The South China Sea<sup>1</sup> is a hotspot for international conflict. As China continues to develop as a main actor in the international system, the global community seeks to understand its goals both globally and closer to home. In no better place is their behavior more dynamic and concerning than in the SCS. Set against the backdrop of a rising China, this project analyzes Chinese foreign policy in the SCS.

First, I explain what is at stake in the SCS, including what comprises the territory, why it is important, and the states involved in the sovereignty dispute. Because of the SCS's natural resources, accessibility to shipping lanes, and proximity to many Southeast Asian countries, the increasingly heated SCS conflict will reveal China's security policy preferences, the manner in which it pursues its national interests, its attempt or lack of attempt to reshape the power structure in the region, and also China's policy path to act aggressively or peacefully in an increasingly competitive environment.

Second, the thesis frames the argument by first reviewing competing theories of international relations. The first perspective, Realism, predicts that China's foreign policy in the SCS will be aggressive due to scholars' current knowledge of great power politics, states' pursuit of national interests, and states' revisionist intentions. The opposing school of thought, Neoliberalism, acknowledges the importance of economic interdependence and institutional integration, maintaining that these arrangements ultimately promote peaceful relations among states, even in contentious conditions. While both theories offer convincing explanations of China's behavior in the SCS, I argue that both are incomplete.

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<sup>1</sup> The South China Sea will be abbreviated to "SCS."

<sup>2</sup> "Nan Hai" translates to "South China Sea."

Rather, I argue that an alternate point of view, which is offered by the domestic politics perspective, most accurately describes China's behavior in the SCS.

While the domestic politics perspective compliments certain aspects of both Realism and Neoliberalism, the domestic politics perspective's understanding of foreign policy values national identity through the varying opinions and interests of a given nation's people which cause a state's leadership to make specific foreign policy decisions. While national identity and the public's interests are recognized by Realism and Neoliberalism, these schools of thought fail to capture the possibility of domestic pressure's direct influence on a state's foreign policy. Consequently, understanding the interworking of Chinese nationalism among the Chinese population is imperative to understand the reasoning and chief interests of those who create and influence China's foreign policy. These factors are responsible for China's current and future foreign policy trajectory. The domestic politics perspective recognizes the variables of nationalism and regime legitimacy as critical when analyzing China's behavior in the SCS. Without analyzing the factors of nationalism and regime legitimacy, Chinese foreign policy in the SCS cannot be fully understood.

The SCS is also part of a larger United States security umbrella established WWII and therefore United States' role in Asia, hence US-China relations are examined in the third chapter. The United States has played the role of security umbrella precisely because the region is rimmed by China and the former Soviet Union. Beyond this, the United States and China have a long and at times contentious relationship, evoked by

nationalist sentiment and the Chinese public's backlash. There are two incidents used to underscore the complexity of this relationship.

Chapter four clarifies China's relationships with the other states with claims in the SCS, as well as recent encounters among claimants that resulted in increased tensions in the region. After analyzing these incidences, I conclude that the domestic politics perspective best explains China's interactions with these states and its overall behavior in the SCS, followed by measures that have been taken in attempt to resolve the SCS dispute.

*The South China Sea: The "Cockpit of Geopolitics" in Asia:*

*"Rival countries have wrangled over territory in the South China Sea for centuries - but a recent upsurge in tension has sparked concern that the area is becoming a flashpoint with global consequences" (BBC News 2015).*

The SCS is the body of water located south of Mainland China and Taiwan, north of Borneo and the islands of Bangka-Belitung, west of the Philippines, and east of Cambodia, Malaysia and Vietnam. As displayed in Figure 1, countries that border the SCS include China, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam, and Singapore. The territory of the Sea ranges from the "Strait of Malacca in the southwest, to the Strait of Taiwan in the northeast. Over 500 million people in China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam live within 100 miles of its coastline" (Rosenberg 2010, 1). This territory contains hundreds of small island chains, including the Paracel and Spratly islets. Like the ocean territory, these island chains are the focus of an intense dispute over sovereignty. Aside

from its strategic location, the SCS is home to valuable resources, shipping lanes, and institutions.

As a result of the SCS's unmatched value, many states stake sovereignty claims over the region. Involved in the sovereignty dispute are China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Singapore. Also involved in the conflict are the United States, Japan, and Australia. In order to assert its sovereignty claim, each state has actively engaged in either offensive or defensive strategic policy. The most powerful actor that has projected sovereignty claims is China. Though China is the most powerful claimant in the region, the United States remains extremely influential.

*Resources, Sea-lanes, and Institutions:*

The SCS is home to an abundance of natural resources, "including over 30% of the world's coral reefs and many valuable fisheries. It is also thought to contain abundant oil and natural gas, a prospect of vital interest to the energy-importing countries around the region" (Rosenberg 2010, 2). Further, it provides one of the world's most traveled sea lanes, this region is rich in oil reserves and harbors a plentiful amount of marine biodiversity, which is important for fishing enterprises as well as the ecosystem at large.

The SCS's international sea-lanes lead to many of the world's most active shipping ports: "these 3.5 million square kilometers of water that are roughly bounded by Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam, where annual commerce totals \$5.3 trillion. About half the world's oil tanker shipments transit its waters. Six of the world's 10 busiest ports dot its coasts" (Chang 2). In 2010, China exported 31.3



million dollars worth of containerized cargo, with the United States trailing a second at 11.2 million dollars worth of cargo. Also in the top twelve ranked exporters were Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, and Vietnam. Additionally, seven of the top ten reported busiest container ports are located in China, with fifteen of the top twenty busiest ports located in Asia, with the United States' port in Los Angeles also appearing in the top twenty. Quantifying this relationship, the World Shipping Council reported that the Asia-North America shipping route was the most utilized shipping route as it generated 23,125,000 dollars worth of trade in 2013 (World Shipping Council 2015).

Moreover, the SCS “is a strategic maritime link between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and therefore of paramount importance to major naval powers” (Rosenberg 2010, 3). According to the White House, \$5.3 trillion in total trade passes through the South China Sea every year, 23 percent of which is United States trade. As shared by the United States Energy Information Administration, the SCS harbors “11 billion barrels of oil...out of 1.47 trillion barrels worldwide,” as well as “190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (of 6.7 quadrillion feet worldwide” (Council on Foreign Relations 2013).

As a consequence of the South China Sea's valuable resources, essential shipping routes, and contribution to the global economy, the SCS is also the focus of countless regional and global institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations. For these reasons, the sovereignty of the South China Sea is highly contested as explained, the “South China Sea is an area of growing concern over conflicting territorial claims, piracy,

poaching, resource depletion, pollution, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and terrorism threats” (Rosenberg 2010, 4).

*Numbers, Dashes, and Dots:*

Aside from sovereignty claims, the dispute over territory in the SCS also has several names reflecting the claimant country’s geographical position vis a vis the Sea. For example, China calls the sea “Nan Hai,<sup>2</sup>” while sitting to the east of Vietnam it is called “Bien Dong<sup>3</sup>” by the Vietnamese. Just opposite is the Philippines, who call it the “Dagat Kanlurang Pilipinas.<sup>4</sup>”

The dispute involves Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, as well as China (PRC), and Taiwan (also known as the ROC). Outside powers are also involved in these waters, primarily in the shape of the U.S. and, also India, Japan, and Australia” (Scott 1019).

*China’s Dotted Map:*

*Using the nine-dotted line as a marker of their sovereignty, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated, “We are strongly committed to safeguarding the country’s sovereignty and security, and defending our territorial integrity” coincides with SIPRI Trends in Military Expenditure’s 2012 measurement of a “175 % increase in China’s military spending since 2003” (Council on Foreign Relations 2013).*

Historically, “The PRC is the central player in the South China Sea conflict, an energy- seeking actor asserting the widest-ranging claims over the widest-ranging areas

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<sup>2</sup> “Nan Hai” translates to “South China Sea.”

<sup>3</sup> “Bien Dong” translates to “Eastern Sea”

<sup>4</sup> “Dagat Kanlurang Pilipinas” translates to “West Philippines Sea.”

of the waters. The PRC's position is based on assertions of the South China Sea as 'an inalienable part of Chinese territory since ancient times,' an area lost to British and French colonialism in the 19th century during the so-called Century of Humiliation but to be recovered in full" (Scott 1034). Currently, China presents the largest claim by standards of its "nine-dash line,"<sup>5</sup> which Beijing claims was established in 1947, in which a map depicts the Paracel and Spratly islands as parts of the Chinese nation. The "nine-dash line" is measured hundreds of maritime miles from the province of Hainan. The "nine-dotted line," originated on December 1914 when "Hu Jinjie, a Chinese cartographer, published a map with a line around only the Pratas and Paracels, entitled the Chinese Territorial Map Before the Qianglong-Jiaqing Period of the Qing Dynasty (AD 1736–1820)' ...In 1949, the newly-established People's Republic of China (PRC) published a 'Map of China' with the eleven-dotted line. In 1953, following Premier Zhou Enlai's approval, the two-dotted line portion in the Gulf of Tonkin was deleted. Chinese maps published since 1953 have shown the nine-dotted line in the South China Sea" (Rosenberg 2013, 7).

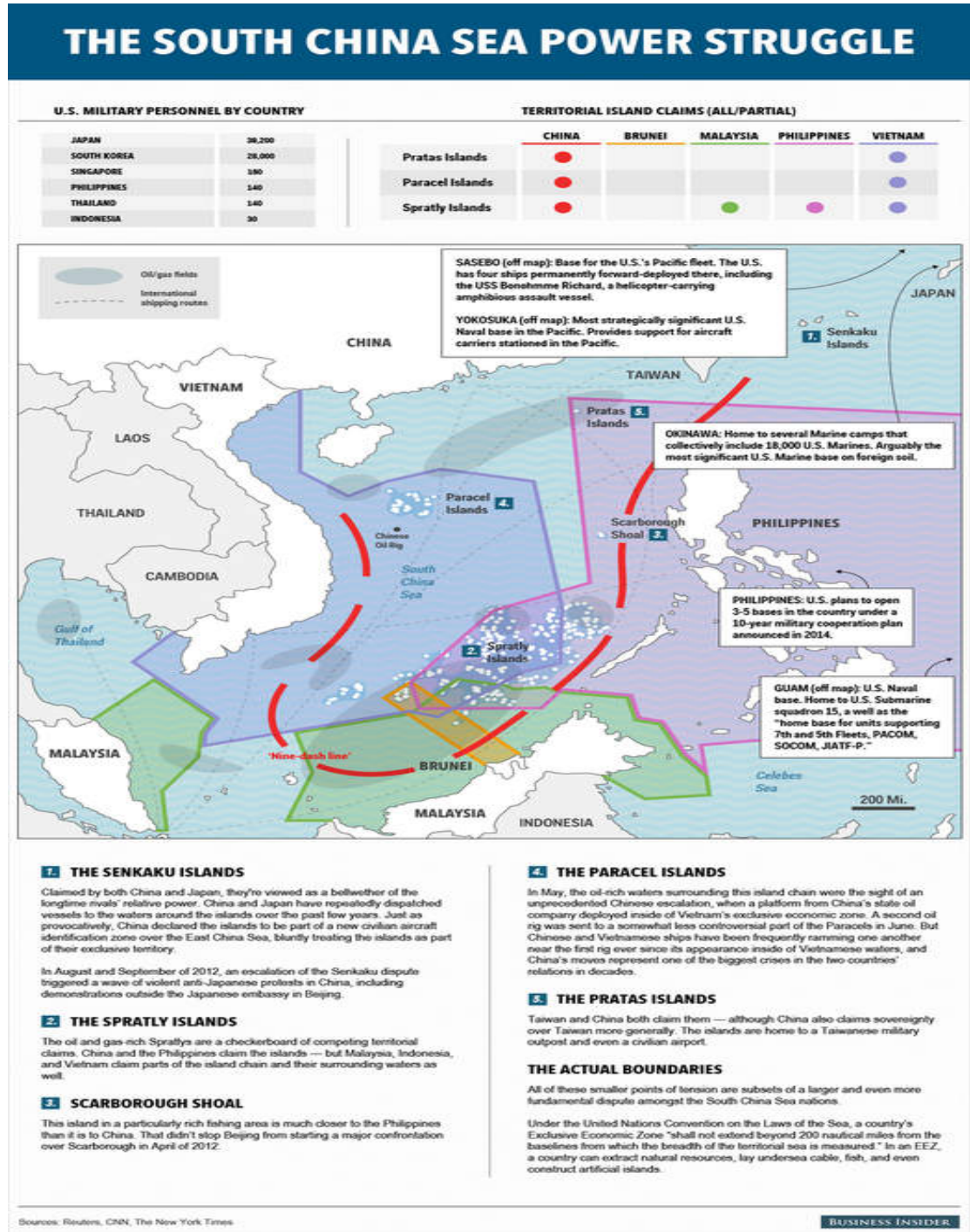
Revealing variation in China's assertions, it has also been noted, "Beijing claims as sovereign territory the largely uninhabited Spratly Islands and virtually all the other

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<sup>5</sup> China's claims are visualized in Figure 2. Note that China's claim consists of almost the entirety of the SCS, followed by the claims of the Philippines and Vietnam. The map also highlights five key locations in the SCS that are among states' top interests in the region. China's claim, once again displayed as the largest, is challenged by the Philippines and Vietnam, and also in competition with Brunei and Malaysia. The map demonstrates China's struggle for power as it displays nine red dashes, meant to imitate the nine-dash line, marking China's claimed territory. China's claim, which according to the map composes the majority of the SCS, displays China's exercising of power now that it possesses the capacity to do so.

atolls, shoals, rocks, and reefs in the South China Sea. Official Chinese maps contain either nine or 10 “dashes” forming “the cow’s tongue” of its self-declared boundary, covering some four-fifths of South China Sea water. The tongue hugs the coastlines of Taiwan and five other countries and extends about 1,800 kilometers from China’s closest shore” (Chang 4).

Figure 2: The SCS Power Struggle



*Conclusion:*

Because of its overlapping sovereignty claims, strategic location, and valuable resources, the SCS is a unique area to conduct foreign policy. As a result, each state's sovereignty claims are highly controversial and foreign policy conducted within the region is the source of escalating tension. In order to understand the nature of each state's foreign policy strategy, particularly the foreign policy tactics utilized by China, the international relations theories of Realism and Neoliberalism are of high significance, and will be discussed next.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Approaches to Explaining China's Behavior in the SCS:**

### **Realism and Neoliberalism**

Two schools of thought in international relations provide clear and compelling explanations of Chinese foreign policy in the SCS—namely Realism and Neoliberalism. After discussing each in turn I introduce a third approach, which I argue best captures the dynamics of Chinese foreign policy and best explain what China is doing in the SCS.

#### *Realism and China's Rise:*

*“International politics is a nasty and dangerous business, and no amount of goodwill can ameliorate the intense security competition that sets in when an aspiring hegemon appears” (Mearsheimer 2006, 160).*

Originating from Europe's realpolitik statesmanship, Realism operates according to its key assumptions. First, states act according to their interests as rational actors. Second, in an anarchic world with no higher form of government to administer rules to govern states, Realism assumes that in order for a state to survive it must have power. States' quest for power is often fueled by national interest as well as a state's overall sense of nationalism among its people. Realism's concepts of states' power acquisition, revisionist intentions, and regional hegemony provide a unique understanding of China's policy behavior in the SCS.

One core Realist interpretation of China's rise predicts China to behave aggressively as a result of its increase in power. While most scholars agree that China is beginning to project its power because it finally possesses the capacity, Realists differ on the aggression variable. One Realist perspective upholds that China's rise will be forceful

because it will act in accordance with the pursuit of its interests, or as the Chinese maintain, the restoration of China's rightful place in the world order. This restoration can also be viewed as China's desire to achieve "great power" status.

One method of exerting national power is for a state to evoke nationalist sentiment. The rise of nationalism in the Realist perspective calls for confrontation, as nationalism is narrowly viewed as being part of power assertion.

Analyzing great power politics, John Mearsheimer asserts, "Although the intensity of their competition waxes and wanes, great powers fear each other and always compete with each other for power. The overriding goal of each state is to maximize its share of world power, which means gaining power at the expense of other states...Their ultimate aim is to be the hegemon" (Mearsheimer 2). Accordingly, it is predicted, "states will be acutely sensitive to the balance of power and will look for opportunities to increase their own power or weaken rivals' power (Mearsheimer 329).

This Realist perspective of the international system recognizes the goal for states to gain power at the expense of their rivals because "Great powers...are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal" (Mearsheimer 29). Due to states' desire to increase relative power, cooperation is not always achievable, which causes violent interactions between states as they pursue international power. Accordingly, a state such as China views power in national interest terms and "Maoist China's quest for great power entitlement is now seen as being fulfilled" (Foote 52). In short, Realism upholds that China would not cooperate when cooperation does not support its interests. However, while Realism recognizes the "zero-



sum qualities and competition for power” (Mearsheimer 19) among states, it fails to recognize the benefits China receives from cooperation and the benefits enjoyed by other states as China becomes more powerful.

The Realist explanation does not hold when explaining China’s rise, as China’s pursuit of international power can, and as demonstrated below, has been served through peaceful behavior: “China cooperates when its interests—still defined quite narrowly in terms of national power—are served by cooperative action” (Moore 128). Waltz argues that states possess revisionist intentions, and are therefore wired to act offensively, there are circumstances in which conditions are too costly for a state to engage in offensive tactics. Consequently, this can cause states to remain peaceful for a period of time. For this reason,

“(P)eace is sometimes linked to the presence of hegemonic power, sometimes to a balance among powers...Hegemony leads to balance, which is easy to see historically and to understand theoretically...the United States still has benefits to offer and many other countries have become accustomed to their easy lives with the United States bearing many of their burdens” (Waltz 77).

Snyder, for instance, asserts, “Counterproductive aggressive policies are caused most directly by the idea that the state’s security can be safeguarded only through expansion. This...was the major force propelling every case of overexpansion by the industrialized great powers...the belief in security through expansion persisted tenaciously despite overwhelming evidence that aggressive policies were actually undermining state’s security” (Snyder 1-2). China, it would appear, has learned from the great powers.

Along similar lines, defensive nationalism adds the nationalist impulse to challenge the simple notion that nationalism will lead a country to act aggressively in a perceived self-interest. But, as Zhao argues, the defensive nationalism found among the Chinese population is “assertive in form, but reactive in essence” (Zhao 289). Defensive nationalism influences a state’s foreign policy when national identities are voiced through the elites’ policymaking, which is more than likely to react aggressively if threatened or provoked. In a Realist understanding, Chinese nationalism can cause China to act aggressively in a manner that is entirely defensive. Mearsheimer highlights China’s harmless intentions towards the United States in the region as he explains,

“(R)ather than pursue a militant course, China will want to dictate the boundaries of acceptable behavior to neighboring countries, much the way the United States makes it clear to other states in the Americas that it is the boss...Why would a powerful China accept US military forces operating in its backyard...Why would China feel safe with US forces deployed on its doorstep?” (Mearsheimer 2006, 162).

Rather than raise the specter of aggression, Kaplan reasons that although China’s military build up is often perceived as a threat, “The very buildup of military power by China means that paradoxically China can wait and not use force...Beijing’s goal is not war—but an adjustment in the correlation of forces that enhances its geopolitical power and prestige” (Kaplan 2014), to which it is agreed, “China wants influence, not to undermine the global system” (Nathan and Scobell 347). As a result, China’s aggressive buildup does not guarantee violent behavior. Rather, China’s military buildup reflects its quest for regional and international power.

Moving down the continuum from a conventional understanding of Realism to a

more flexible understanding, the Realist perspective, in addition to a defensive orientation, also views China's pursuit of power as a kind of offensive tactic, termed by Kurlantzick as a "charm offensive,"<sup>6</sup> which "relies on the capacity to motivate through the force of ideas and win compliance through creating group norms with which individuals wish to identify" (Lampton 10). In order to further secure its defense and improve its international standing, China's recent foreign policy has utilized soft power<sup>7</sup> tactics to peacefully promote its policy goals and objective of regime hegemony and individual standing. In order to do so, China must achieve a global economic relationship "beyond a simple export driven model" (Kurlantzick 89), and must utilize foreign direct investment, win-win economics, business diaspora, and economic aid programs to improve its international standing. Because "soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others...It is leading by example and attracting others to do what you want...Beijing offers the charm of a lion, not of a mouse" (Kurlantzick 5-6).

Revealing its true intentions, "China joins such organizations to avoid losing face and influence. But Beijing does not allow these organizations to prevent it from pursuing its own economic and security interests. Chinese analysts often view international organizations and their universal norms as fronts for other powers" (Christensen 2004, 38). As China devotes its attention to enhancing its bilateral and multilateral relationships with other smaller, less prosperous states in Asia, these states develop

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<sup>6</sup> Kurlantzick explains China's charm offensive as a policy tactic of using good behavior and assisting smaller, weaker states in order to benefit its own foreign policy interests.

<sup>7</sup> Soft power accompanies China's charm offensive. It is a means to achieve policy interests through methods of persuasion, coercion, and bargaining, rather than achieving its interests through the use of military force or violence.

“China Fever.”<sup>8</sup> The Realist approach, championed by China’s leading international relations scholar, Wang Jisi, credits “China’s ‘soft power’ for expanding Chinese influence in international affairs” (Wang Jisi 2004, 4). Increased global presence and engagement in multilateral relationships is simply part of a strategy of whatever is necessary. Similarly, as it continues to compete with the United States, China has engaged in a “maxi-mini”<sup>9</sup> economic aid strategy in which it promises the “maximum return for the minimum outlay” (Kurlantzick 99). Wang Jisi notes,

“soft power represents more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though this constitutes a crucial part of this kind of power. Soft power also includes the ability to entice and attract. In behavioral terms, it means attractive power...That attraction may in turn produce desired policy outcomes” (Nye and Wang 18).

China receives more credit than Western countries because China is a new donor, and is seen as using aid for goodwill and its often able to relate to countries that were once objects of Western colonialism. Brautigam describes China’s strategy:

“(T)he Chinese stressed that their aid was primarily a tool for building self-reliant countries...This drummed home the message that developing countries such as China needed to rely primarily on themselves. Premier Zhou Enlai pointed this out in a 1964 discussion of Chinese aid: ‘It is not our intention to make them dependent on us...They need to rely on their own efforts.’ This, said Zhou, will free them from the control of capitalism. And, he finished, this would be of immense help to China in its own effort to build an alternative to global capitalism’s sticky embrace” (Brautigam 35).

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<sup>8</sup> China Fever, mentioned by Kurlantzick, refers to smaller states’ eagerness to establish an economically benefitting relationship with China. States with China fever dedicate their support to China in exchange for China’s assistance and partnership in economic development.

<sup>9</sup> Maxi-mini is a strategy used to achieve maximum benefit with minimum exertion. As an economic strategy, maxi-mini serves to attain the maximum economic wealth or development at the lowest cost.

Despite Realism's expectation that rising powers are more likely to become involved in war, as discussed above, many Realists argue that Chinese foreign policy in the SCS, will uniquely enable China to pursue its power and security interests in a way that could create conflict but conveniently avoid war. Kazianis terms this approach "the Keep Calm and Build On Doctrine" (Kazianis 1). In brief, Realism fails to account for the understanding by Beijing that Chinese aggression would jeopardize its security because it is economically and institutionally well integrated into the international community.

*Neoliberalism:*

*"One senior Chinese scholar put it this way: "China's rise depends on trade, investment, and a high rate of [domestic] savings. China can control only the savings rate, not the other two factors, so this is leverage on China"...China confronts interdependence risks along many fronts...the high dependence on foreign trade for revenue and employment, foreign exchange risk, and energy dependence" (Lampton 234).*

The second approach to explain state behavior is Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism operates under three assumptions: First, this perspective rejects Realism's belief solely in power politics and instead asserts that, secondly, states engaged in international cooperation will enjoy mutual benefits. Finally, Neoliberalism maintains that nongovernment actors and international organizations and institutions influence states' foreign policy interests. By creating economic and cultural interdependence through the use of international institutions and diplomacy, Neoliberals uphold that states are able to reduce conflict and increase cooperation in the international arena. Below I examine the Neoliberal perspective of complex interdependence created from economic integration

and trade dependence in order to analyze Chinese foreign policy regarding the SCS conflict.

Rather than viewing China's rise as aggressive, China's future behavior can also be understood as a peaceful emergence into the international community. Neoliberalism recognizes that high levels of economic interdependence among states, also understood as complex interdependence, creates conditions in which it becomes implausible for states to engage in aggressive behavior. Further, active involvement in international institutions heightens the chances of cooperation among states, which, as a result, lessens the probability of war.

For example, because China has become a dominant actor in the global market, its economic success has advanced the state in becoming an influential international actor. While China's development has made impressive strides in the past couple of decades, it remains a developing country, or as some put it, "a middle-income country" (Foote 6). Neoliberalism upholds that in order to better its position in the international community, a rising power like China must continue to replicate its economic success. Thus, it is more likely that rising powers focus on gaining power through the creation of wealth rather than encouraging war.

As a rising power becomes more active in the global market, its economy becomes intimately engaged with the economies of its many "rivals," on which each state's individual prosperity depends. Although rising powers could potentially enter a trade war with another state, the state's dependence on the global economy makes violent interactions highly unlikely. In fact, Neoliberals uphold that China has been more

beneficial than damaging to the global community because of the dynamics of economic interdependence. Along with Foote and others, Swaine asserts, zero-sum thinking, “undermines the goals of continued peace and prosperity toward which all strive” (Swaine 1). Alternative perspectives to zero-sum games and great power reformism are what Foote terms “benevolent pacifism and harmonious inclusionism,”<sup>10</sup> which never perpetrate the same agonizing experience on other countries, but include other countries “in a process of achieving common security, development, and prosperity based on open multilateralism and mutually beneficial cooperation” (Foote 49).

Lampton explains the importance of inclusionism:

“In the case of China, a rising power, skilled diplomacy is particularly important because, in the words of Joseph Nye, “A rising power must avoid creating fear and countervailing coalitions. It wants to create a bandwagon, not produce balancing [offsetting] behavior.” The concept of “peaceful rise” or “peaceful development” is aimed at this end” (Joseph Nye cited in Lampton 125).

Neoliberalism’s perspective of China’s rise points to China’s efforts at multilateral institutional involvement and its economic interdependence with its neighbors and other world powers, as demonstrated in its expansive organizational involvement. In achieving its goals Beijing uses “multilateral organizations to reassure other nations, to constrain the big powers acting in the region, and to achieve other objectives best obtained through cooperation...dominated bilateral interactions when possible...provide economic inducements through trade, finance, and

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<sup>10</sup> Harmonious inclusionism is a term used by the Chinese leadership in assuring China’s neighbors that China’s rise will benefit them as well. In short, China’s neighbors will succeed as a result of China’s success.

assistance...emphasize ideational power...when all else fails, be willing to use coercive measures” (Lampton 174).

China, promoting a new way of discussing its rise, seeks to reassure the world of its peaceful rise with its new security diplomacy,<sup>11</sup> which derives from a type of new thinking<sup>12</sup> that will assist in a peaceful rise in direct contradiction to the Realist predictions. In order to uphold the notion of its peaceful rise, China has engaged in a new security diplomacy that calls for mutual development and security among states in the form of multilateral relations. As a result, China’s new security diplomacy intentionally includes institutional interdependence.

While Chinese foreign policy during the 1980s was often viewed as safeguarding,<sup>13</sup> today, China has a new face<sup>14</sup> as it continues to be increasingly active in international affairs. China seeks to reassure its neighbors of its peaceful rise through its promise and practice of mutual benefit and security. In order to improve its multilateral relationships with countries in the region of Northeast Asia, China has implemented tactical soft power policies. China’s pursuit of its foreign policy goals is demonstrated through its adoption of economic integration and domestic policy, what some in the West

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<sup>11</sup> China’s security diplomacy seeks to reassure other Asian states of China’s peacefulness by including their security interests in China’s security policies. Security diplomacy consists of multilateral relations involving security issues that China claims will benefit itself and also its neighbors and allies in the region.

<sup>12</sup> China’s new thinking refers to its policies which it upholds are mutually beneficial, peaceful, interactive, and cooperative.

<sup>13</sup> Safeguarding is when a state practices conservative foreign policy to prevent the destruction of its interests. While China used to be more defensive in its policy practices, today China’s policy has opened to engagement with the international community.

<sup>14</sup> China’s new face in foreign policy aims to depict China as friendly, cooperative, and benign, as opposed to its diplomacy when it was ruthless, power-hungry, and closed off from foreign relations.



call the “Beijing Consensus.”<sup>15</sup> While one can debate the so-called Beijing Consensus as a policy of economic development, it nonetheless has resulted in robust growth. As a result, Neoliberalism suggests that even economic wars are improbable due to each modern state’s goal of increasing its prosperity and asserts that complex interdependence and economic interests ultimately deter rising powers from acting in a manner that is likely to provoke war.

China’s economic integration, as described in Neoliberalism, into the global economy is demonstrated by its involvement in many regional and international organizations. China’s complicated history of border disputes and mutual mistrust with its regional neighbors has been largely mended through its participation in regional forums such as ASEAN and ARF,<sup>16</sup> which serve to build confidence among members, engage in preventive diplomacy, and contribute toward conflict resolution. Becoming more engaged in the regional community,

“(T)he purpose of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are: strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborliness and friendship among member states; to encourage Member States to cooperate effectively in the political, economic and trade, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection and other fields; working together maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; promote the establishment of a democratic, just and rational international political and economic new order” (SCO 2001).

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<sup>15</sup> The Beijing Consensus stands opposite the Washington Consensus, which centers in open, robust capitalist growth while ensuring Western values of property rights and individual freedom. The Beijing Consensus, ironically termed by the West, characterizes economic policy as state driven and political rights as secondary to growth, hence the authoritarian character as well as Eastern rather than Western norms.

<sup>16</sup> “ASEAN” is an acronym for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. ASEAN is currently the largest institutional extension of the United Nations operating in the Asia-Pacific, and serves to promote regional development. “ARF” is the acronym for the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Additionally, what some have called China's "good neighbor policy"<sup>17</sup> is China's participation in regional and global economic organizations such as APEC, SCO, TRADP, ASEAN, and WTO, which contributes to the country's peaceful rise and integration into the globalized economy. Economic interdependence as a source of Chinese foreign policy has produced beneficial regional stability, but has presented the challenge of "balancing economic interests with sovereignty, independence, and socialist virtue" (Moore 126).

However, Scott criticizes the United Nations, a key actor in the international system, for its lack of involvement in the SCS dispute. Consequently, many countries have expressed discontent with the United Nations' lack of involvement after its passing of Article 87(1)a of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>18</sup> Despite UNCLOS, the United Nations has not made any significant contributions that help to solve the predicament, which reveals, "UNCLOS in itself cannot be applied to solve existing territorial disputes because it leaves overlapping claims unresolved, has no binding enforcement features, and "does not address how to resolve sovereignty disputes" (Scott 1021). As a result, China's role as a Permanent 5 member of the United Nation's

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<sup>17</sup> China's good neighbor policy seeks to reassure the countries bordering China of China's peaceful rise. In other words, China wants its neighbors to trust its intentions and view China as an ally as it continues to gain power and international status.

<sup>18</sup> UNCLOS upholds, "The high seas are open to all States, whether coastal or land-locked. Freedom of the high seas is exercised under the conditions laid down by this Convention and by other rules of international law. It comprises, *inter alia*, both for coastal and land-locked States: (a) freedom of navigation...These freedoms shall be exercised by all States with due regard for the interests of other States in their exercise of the freedom of the high seas, and also with due regard for the rights under this Convention with respect to activities in the Area" (UNCLOS 1994).

Security Council prevents the United Nations from taken action against China in the SCS, ultimately serving China's interests as it embeds itself in international institutions.

However, despite economic and institutional interdependence, China has clearly not stopped its efforts in the SCS, which leaves the Neoliberal approach incomplete in explaining China's behavior in the SCS.

**Figure 3: International Organizations Involved in the SCS**

- Working Group on Ocean and Fisheries
- Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC)
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
- ASEAN Review of Biodiversity
- Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA)
- Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN)
- PEMSEA-Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- China Fisheries
- Leading Group for Deepening Reform Comprehensively and the National Security Commission
- Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF)
- Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA)
- Hainan Research Institute for the South China Sea
- IMB Piracy Reporting Centre
- Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP)
- Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs
- Environmental Conversation (ARBEC)

The following non-governmental organizations are also active in the SCS:

- Advanced Institute for Monsoon Asia
- Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Law (APCEL)
- Ex Anambas & The Biodiversity of the South China Sea
- Institute for International Policy Studies
- Maritime.com
- Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
- Maritime Conflict in Asia
- Reefbase.org
- The South China Sea Informal Working Group
- Southeast Asia Regional Center for START (SARCS)
- WorldFish Centre

### Chapter 3: The Domestic Politics Perspective

*“There would be no truly modern China unless the people were given back their voices” (Spence 747).*

Although Realism and Neoliberalism offer sound explanations for states' behavior in the international arena, both omit an important variable: the domestic politics of a country. Realists have long thought of inter-state relations as a realm apart from domestic politics...Realists do not deny that domestic politics influences foreign policy, but they contend, “the pressures of [international] competition weigh more heavily than ideological preferences or internal political pressures” (Zakaria 1992, 179-180). The domestic politics perspective accounts for domestic factors such as nationalism and public opinion placed on a regime. The study of *Innenpolitik*<sup>19</sup> criticizes Realism's undivided focus on the international arena and therefore rejects the Realist assertion, “states conduct their foreign policy for ‘strategic’ reasons, as a consequence of international pulls and pushes, and not to further domestic ends” (Zakaria, 1992, 180). *Innenpolitik*'s emphasis on nationalism and the legitimacy of a state's leadership become essential to the formation of foreign policy and a state's overall behavior.

Rose, Zakaria, Powell, and Lynn-Jones all uphold that internal factors such as political and economic ideology, national character, partisan politics, or socioeconomic structure determine how countries behave toward the world beyond their borders. As a result, this perspective offers a more complete understanding of international affairs and move beyond Realism's “billiard-ball model of state behavior” (Schweller 267) found in

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<sup>19</sup> *Innenpolitik* is a German term meaning “domestic affairs.”

the Realist approach. Attacking Realism's model, Innenpolitik theory maintains, "States may be billiard balls, but each is made of a different material, affecting its speed, spin, and bounce on the international plane" (Zakaria 1998, 35). The different pieces in the state consist of "absence of central authority, the potential for joint or cooperative gains, the distributional conflict these potential gains engender, and the roles of coercion and institutions in realizing and allocating these joint gains...constitutional design, governing the commons, and state formation" (Powell 344).

In short, a regime's political legitimacy is a central factor in the domestic politics perspective. In order to carry out its interests and desires, a state's leadership must maintain control over the state and its people. In order to remain in power, however, a state's leadership must also preserve its legitimacy both externally and internally. The CCP's preservation of legitimacy is driven by a long enduring fear of the Chinese leadership: "*nei luan, wai huan*, a relaxed translation of which is "When there is turmoil within, the barbarians from without inflict disasters." Or, as the scholar-general Zeng Guofan put it positively in the mid-nineteenth century, "If you can rule your own country, who dares to insult you?" (Zeng Guofan cited in Lampton 208). As a late authoritarian system, the party-state, though it is well controlled, must still take public opinion into account. As a result, the CCP must "maintain a balance between the demands being placed on the system by the populace and the international community and the system's institutional capacity to meet those demands" (Lampton 208-209). Therefore, when executing foreign policy, the Chinese leadership must take into account the desires and opinions of its increasingly well informed citizens. Rose and Christensen argue that this

explains the CCP's use of "domestically popular but unnecessary policies in a secondary arena...as a cover for unpopular but necessary policies" (Rose 164). These popular policies serve to solidify the leadership's legitimacy among its citizens.

As characterized by Lampton, China's regime legitimacy "currently rests on two pillars—rapid economic growth and vigorous defense of nationalistic values. While nationalism can be a prop strengthening the legitimacy of a regime, it also can become a spear that the populace aims at leaders who are perceived to be weak in the face of external challenge" (Lampton 144). The domestic politics perspective acknowledges both the importance of economic prosperity and nationalist sentiment in assessing foreign policy challenges. Both national identity and nationalism are often evoked by international events, such as perceived insults, which then pressure a state's leadership to appease national demands or otherwise risk backlash from the people. Further, although the majority of a state's people demonstrate nationalist sentiment, the different groups that comprise a state's population offer different responses to their leadership's policy decisions. It is beneficial for the maintenance of legitimacy to observe the people's contrasting responses to government policies and also identify which group of people the government is willing to satisfy. Public opinion is a valuable tool in crafting foreign policy, as evidenced in China's behavior in the SCS. When observing public opinion, it is imperative to understand the triangular relationship between the government, its people, and the media. Its increasing reliance on a nationalist narrative during the advent of public opinion in the reform era creates unique challenges for the Chinese Communist

Party.<sup>20</sup> In China's case, the party-state's long stated goal of economic development is guided in light of public opinion and nationalism. These two pillars are addressed in turn below.

*The Chinese Communist Party and Economic Development:*

The domestic politics perspective asserts that internal factors influence Chinese foreign policy. As a result, it is important to identify the causes of a state's foreign policy shifts. Although the CCP possesses total control, the leadership seeks to develop foreign policy that will maintain legitimacy among the Chinese population, especially as development creates new winners and losers.

While the CCP serves to achieve China's international interests, it must ensure China's security. Because China's "vulnerability to threats is the main driver of China's foreign policy" (Nathan and Scobell 3), the state desires to mitigate these threats by being viewed as a defender of China's national interest. Because the leadership is threatened both domestically and internationally, the CCP must appease two audiences in its foreign policy; however, "the leadership has not always opted (or been able) to satisfy its domestic audience at the expense of external demands" (Pei 168), but is often able to do so.

Addressing domestic threats to the legitimacy of its rule, the CCP's largest constraint is imposed by China's business sector because its economic development manipulates political change. In order for the Chinese population to support its policies,

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<sup>20</sup> The Chinese Communist Party will be referred to as the CCP. The CCP began in 1921 and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949. The CCP is still in power today.



the CCP must replicate China's economic success, which keeps its people pleased. In addition, because the leadership possesses more resources when it is wealthy, their policies and overall rule becomes more legitimate among China's people, who benefit from economic success. This was demonstrated by Deng Xiaoping's attention to political reform in 1986, when China's economic growth was decelerating.

Like all modern authoritarian systems, the survival of the CCP depends on economic success; therefore, Chinese policy is "constrained by the dominant preferences of a powerful private domestic and multinational firm coalition" (Pei 164), and the Party-State, "if determined to defend its political monopoly, does have the means and adaptive skills to confront its new challenges and contain the threats posted by rapid economic modernization and social change" (Pei 95). As a result, internal factors such as economic success has a high impact on policy and regime legitimacy, as predicted by the domestic politics perspective. In times of economic prosperity, China's people will be more willing to support the CCP's policies rather than in times of economic hardship. As a result, Innenpolitik variables such as China's economic health will contribute to the nature of China's policy in the SCS.

#### *The Chinese Communist Party and Nationalism:*

While economic factors are a large part of domestic politics, the Innenpolitik perspective also recognizes the importance of other domestic influences on foreign policy, such as nationalism. The nationalism that drives policy decisions is a second key variable to understand China's foreign policy moves. For example, when forming policy,

a “loyal identity is a resource. It inspires group action; so governments tend to try for as full a monopoly of it as they can arrange” (Dittmer and Kim 154). However, these identities are not entirely controlled by the leadership in Beijing. As a result, “foreign policy decisions cannot be reduced to rational cost-benefit calculations; a variety of emotions also drive those who make them” (Gries 140). As exemplified by the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, “people do learn to identify with their state, but they also project their own aspirations onto it; and when those aspirations are not met, dismay is likely” (Dittmer and Kim 22). For instance, while some citizens support the government, others articulate, “we love our country, but we hate our government” (Dittmer and Kim 125). After 1989, the CCP was ostracized internationally and feared domestically.

Subsequently, members of the CCP “desperately want to regain their social standing lost after the Tiananmen massacre...Chinese military officers, like professional soldiers around the world, take pride in their work. The chance to show that their main mission is defending national integrity, not shooting unarmed civilians, will not be forfeited lightly (Christensen 2004, 47). Consequently, as the people challenge the state’s authority, they also influence China’s foreign policy.

To prevent another uprising, the CCP has taken the desires and interests of China’s people into consideration. The CCP is compelled to acknowledge the interests and demands of the people when shaping its foreign policy agenda. Unwisely, “Western analysts have too frequently dismissed popular nationalists as puppets in the hands of the Communist elite...This view is a grave mistake” (Gries 134). Despite the authoritarian nature of its leadership, the Chinese Constitution states, “all power in the People’s

Republic of China belongs to the people” (Nathan and Scobell 38). The power of the people is exhibited through the demonstrations held at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Since June 4, 1989, nationalism “reaches every corner of the land and involves every person...No government-sponsored patriotic campaign...can compare with the latest surge in patriotism in the suddenness with which it occurred and in its intensity and longevity” (Zhao 8-9). However, there are variations of Chinese nationalism that the CCP must manage; they are Chinese victimization theory and Chinese exceptionalism.

*Chinese Victimization:*

Since reform and opening, China’s people assert a right to attempt to influence policy. There are many competing interests among Chinese citizens, which exemplifies, “A nation is not merely a megacollectivity; it is a “nation-state,” defined only partly by the dimensions of the group, partly also by the group’s subordination to sovereign authority” (Dittmer and Kim 6). Because the CCP is responsible for the function of sustaining “the state by unifying the population, at least psychologically” (Dittmer and Kim 32), the leadership must be sure to please its citizens. In order to maintain its legitimacy and ultimately remain in power, the CCP must adhere to the demands and the opinions of the people.

In addition to competing interests, China’s citizens also possess different notions of national identity. National identity is significant because it “relates to the way in which a people, and especially a policy-making elite, perceive the essence of their nation in relation to others” (Dittmer and Kim 215). As a result, the manner in which Chinese

citizens view China's policies determines the backlash or support the leadership will encounter when carrying out policy decisions. For example, when emphasizing the concept of face,<sup>21</sup> the century of humiliation still resonates among Chinese citizens today, as it is explained, "Until they achieve a rebirth, and their emotional scars have thoroughly healed, the Chinese people will carry their memories with them as they confront themselves, others, the present, and the future" (Gries 19). This perspective, as voiced by Zhao and Foote, maintains that Chinese nationalism does not lack threats of hostility toward other states.

Referencing historic Chinese literature, Gries emphasizes, "Excessive concerns for face can be self-deflating, making those who harbor them appear as foolish as Ah-Q" (Gries 115). The view of China as a victim of a Western dominated system, in addition to the understanding of China's rise as a peaceful reentry into its rightful position in the current world order, is another interpretation of Chinese national identity. Examining victimization theory, the Century of Humiliation<sup>22</sup> largely impacted China's people, who previously viewed China as the sick man of Asia.<sup>23</sup> When asked if Chinese citizens support China's nine-dash line claim in the SCS, Chinese citizen Felix Lou<sup>24</sup> explains,

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<sup>21</sup> Face is understood as a cultural aspect in Chinese society that values status, respect, and honor. Maintaining one's face means to uphold one's reputation or dignity.

<sup>22</sup> The phrase, "Century of Humiliation," arose in relation to a wave of nationalism in China. It refers to China's history of domination by foreign imperial powers, which caused one hundred years of national humiliation.

<sup>23</sup> The metaphor of China as "the sick man of Asia" refers to China's inability to defend itself from imperialism during the Century of Humiliation.

<sup>24</sup> Felix Lou is a Chinese native now living in Canada. His quote was posted on February 20, 2016, and is found as a comment on the blog, Quora.com. The second commenter, Li Liu, is also a native Chinese citizen. This comment was posted on March 7, 2015.

“(D)o average Chinese citizens support it? Absolutely, due to indoctrination through education and propaganda, and it's working magic. Most Chinese citizens do believe the official rhetoric, which elaborates how China is the "victim" in all of this where her "rightful" territories were taken away. Very typical PR stuff really. Since China has grown more powerful economically and militarily, an imperial arrogance and ultra-nationalism is rapidly emerging among the urban population, enhanced by patriotic propaganda coming from the media. As a result, South China Sea belongs to China has been established as the irrefutable truth and taken for granted, anything that deviates from this truth is unacceptable. The same goes for the Senkaku/Diayu fiasco” (Felix Lou 2/20/16).

Another commenter states,

“(The) Chinese population will revolt and overthrow the communist party if they back down on this issue. So the party will have to decisively show effort and that they are moving in the right direction in order to remain power. Chinese has been resentful of the CCP in giving up on almost all of its territory disputes in the last 50 years. One more step back is certainly not acceptable in the current climate and will toggle the balance. So the CCP will have to spend financial and military resources on this issue regardless of whether it is worth it or not” (Li Liu 3/7/15).

This perspective of China displays “the traumatic confrontation between the East and West fundamentally destabilized Chinese views of the world and their place within it” (Gries 47). Because war plays a large role in shaping national identity, “Chinese national identity was based on culture and an extension of hierarchical social relationships to foreign relations” (Dittmer and Kim 56). As it was constantly dominated by foreign powers, China received little honor or recognition from both the international community and its citizens. When manifested through anger, nationalism can “transform the wholesome simulative rivalry of varied national types into the cutthroat struggle of competing empires...A nationalism that bristles with resentment” (Hobson 11).

Stemming from the loss of face that resonates in victimization theory, Swaine suggests, “as its overseas power and influence grow, its foreign interests expand, and its domestic nationalist backers become more assertive, Beijing will naturally become less willing to accept unconditionally military, political, and economic relationships and structures that it believes disproportionately and unjustly favor Western powers” (Swaine 2).

Swaine argues that this is displayed by Chinese President Xi Jinping’s “bottom-line” concept<sup>25</sup> of foreign policy. Because of China’s historical weakness, many of China’s people believe China to be “too accommodating or passive in dealing with perceived challenges to China's vital national interests...The more extreme variants of this nationalist viewpoint threaten to transform China's long-standing “peaceful development” policy...into a more hard-edged approach aimed at more actively undermining U.S. influence in Asia” (Swaine 2). Because of China’s history, defensive or victimization nationalism in China can cause its people to act out against foreign powers; the domestic politics perspective argues that this nationalism is often successful in influencing the leadership’s foreign policy decisions.

*Chinese Exceptionalism:*

On the other hand, the notion of Chinese exceptionalism<sup>26</sup> also evokes nationalist incentive and influences foreign policy. Chinese exceptionalism, which is bounded both

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<sup>25</sup> Xi Jinping’s bottom-line concept of foreign policy emphasizes the need for China to uphold a firm stance on its sovereignty disputes as a form of standing up to foreign powers on the international stage.

<sup>26</sup> Exceptionalism is the notion of differing oneself or one’s culture from the norm in a way that makes the individual or culture outstandingly unique.

by China's history and culture, accentuates a positive concept of face. Because China's intellectual awakening enabled Chinese intellectuals to be more involved than those in Western societies, it is proclaimed that Western exceptionalism is exploitative and aggressive, while Chinese exceptionalism is peaceful as it derives from mythical and factual traditions, ideology, and Confucian tradition. Pursuing a different path than its historical abusers, China "is said to condemn the evil of hegemony and cherish the value of peace" (Foote 52). Therefore, Chinese exceptionalism can be comprehended as consistently peaceful and accommodating.

In China's case, nationalism is constrained by what the Party-State allows to be known. The domestic politics perspective argues that the leadership's policies take on the role of the national identity portrayed by the people. In this case we've seen two forms, the notion of Chinese exceptionalism and the concept of victimization. As a result, Chinese foreign policy reflects both chosen glory and chosen trauma. Chinese citizens exhibit chosen glory as they express national pride and commend China and its leaders on the obstacles that it has so gloriously overcome. For example,

“(T)o safeguard its sovereignty, China was forced into two wars in the South China Sea, but the Chinese Government has always adhered to settling territorial disputes through peaceful negotiations” (Shi 11).

This statement demonstrates China's reluctance to become involved in two wars, which reveals this citizen's understanding of the Chinese government's morality and dedication to peaceful behavior. On the other hand, chosen trauma depicts Chinese citizens' belief in China and the Chinese as

victims of foreign aggression since imperial times. An example of chosen trauma is:

“(I)t was only until the end of World War II that an international law-based order began to take shape in East Asia. Before then, the United States and Japan were imperialistic and colonial countries. China has indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands and adjacent waters in the South China Sea, but colonial powers infringed on China’s sovereign right to the region. China, with the backing of the international law, took back its jurisdiction over the islands after WWII. In 1947, the then Chinese government set the country’s maritime delimitation line in the South China Sea and made the line officially public the following year” (Shi 9).

This example of chosen trauma asserts that prior to 1947, there was no international law protecting China from the abuse of foreign powers such as the United States and Japan; therefore, these countries exploited China by blatantly disregarding its sovereignty claims in the SCS. This point of view also upholds that after 1947, international law began supporting China’s sovereignty claims that still exist today. This viewpoint accentuates the importance of China’s historical struggles.

Recognizing all societal influences on foreign policy, Zhao upholds “the historical development shows that Chinese nationalism is a product of the mixture of national revolution and social revolution” (Zhao 20). Bringing solace to China’s various moods of nationalism, Dittmer concludes, “multiple identities coexist; in peripheral situations, they are mutually reinforcing” (Dittmer and Kim 190). Yun Sun’s work exemplifies China’s rise in nationalism:

“expressions of Chinese nationalism are becoming increasingly vocal and frequent, and that Beijing has to stand up against “hostile foreign forces” or it will lose legitimacy in the eyes of its own citizens.



Ample cases of this dynamic have been identified, including...China's "aggressive" behavior against Southeast Asian claimants to areas of the South China Sea. More often than ever, especially in private conversations, Chinese officials and scholars seem to play the public opinion card to justify externally unpopular foreign policy moves" (Sun 1).

Finally, Chinese international relations scholar Wang Jisi explains that China's successes "are well received by Chinese leaders and ordinary citizens alike and arouse their sense of national pride. Chinese official speeches, reports, and media coverage for domestic consumption are inundated with descriptions of success stories that have proved the accountability of the Communist Party and the correctness of its policies. They call for the Chinese people to unite and work together to realize the "great revival" of their nation by the middle of the 21st century (Wang Jisi 2004, 2). Chinese nationalist sentiment is crafted by the Party-State, which then reacts to demands than enhance its legitimacy.

*Maintaining Image to Maintain Control:*

The CCP censors information available to the public in order to protect the legitimacy of its leadership. After the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, the CCP lost much of its popularity with the Chinese people, which also threatened its legitimacy. Van Evera explains, "Unpopular regimes are more vulnerable to subversion or revolution inspired from abroad...Frail regimes are more frightened of unfriendly neighbors, making them more determined to impose congenial regimes on neighboring states" (Van Evera 20). The government lost support after the incident in 1989, and consequently, the CCP has taken action to restore its image with the public.

By framing itself in a positive light while also drawing on the population's national pride, the CCP unceasingly works to protect its image and please its people, therefore bolstering its legitimacy. This strategy became evident in January 2011, when "In some extreme and sensitive cases, such as incidents in the South China Sea, even Xinhua is required to use reports that it receives directly from the State Council...In these cases, media coverage is determined by the policy, and it is intended to shape public opinion" (Sun 4). Therefore, it is obvious that the CCP must attempt to control nationalist sentiment and public opinion, as both are a threat to the legitimacy of the party-state.

Sun questions whether Chinese public opinion is shaping China's foreign policy, or shaped by it. Similarly, Andrew Chubb, via email correspondence raises a similar question as he shares,

"As for propaganda policy, this is of course designed to shape public opinion, but it also unavoidably involves responding to how public opinion actually is. So we can certainly say that public opinion and popular nationalism affect the propaganda and information management aspects of China's policy on the South China Sea issue" (Chubb 4/7/16).

While the Chinese government undeniably regulates media sources it is able to control, the CCP, as a late authoritarian regime, remains sensitive to public opinion as a means to uphold its legitimacy among the Chinese population. Although the CCP aims to sculpt and manipulate public opinion through its use of propaganda, television, and other censored media outlets, the advent of the Internet has made overarching control over public opinion impossible for the Chinese government. Based on the previously discussed comments and opinions shared by Chinese citizens, it is evident that the Chinese public

influences the leadership's maritime decisions, which will be further discussed when analyzing China's recent encounters with other SCS claimants.

Attempting to regain its maintenance of the people's perception of the CCP, the Party's control over the information that is accessible to its people, in addition to its crackdown on human rights lawyers and activists, has intensified. Since July 10, 2015, at least 233 human rights activists and lawyers have been taken into custody, while Chinese authorities claim, "the topic is meaningless to most Chinese people because President Xi Jinping's campaign against corruption, and his effort to expand China's international influence, have won a wide support, especially among the grassroots" (Cole 2). However, the CCP's censoring and arrests are not enough; in an era dominated by the Internet, Chinese public opinion and nationalist sentiment is not entirely compromised and remains a threat to the late authoritarian party-state.

Through the multiple public opinion polls the CCP has produced, it has "claimed to embody and express the will of the masses. Now it is increasingly seeking to...shape at least some of the party's policies... the party must respond to concerns in order to retain its legitimacy" (The Economist 2015). In order to combat its domestic challenges, the Chinese leadership continues to sculpt and drive public opinion, which, "also can be effective externally: stirring up domestic public opinion helps Beijing to strengthen tough policy positions abroad and serves as leverage in negotiating concessions from foreign governments. Therefore, the causal relationship must be carefully examined in any assessment of public opinion as a force driving Chinese foreign policy" (Sun 17). While

the CCP is successful in swaying public opinion from time to time, the CCP's unrelenting focus on shaping public opinion demonstrates the forcefulness of public opinion.

Although the Party tends to downplay international events to its citizens,

“(T)he Chinese state’s intentions are far from the singular determinant of the public’s response to foreign policy controversies. In the Internet era, citizens can publicize their viewpoints directly through various social media platforms...to equate frothing nationalism with overall Chinese public opinion is to overlook solid evidence for the wider public’s basic rationality. Thus, it is also worth considering bottom-up explanations” (Chubb 2015, 9).

The CCP further boosts its image through its media outlets. Because the government filters the information that is accessible to its people, the CCP's Propaganda Department, which “has almost absolute authority over what the public will read and see through its control of the sources of information, such as Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television (CCTV)” can drive public opinion (Sun 3). The Propaganda Department's control is exerted through warning against blogs' and forums' posting of “problematic” information, monitoring the content that can be accessed by Chinese citizens, and also paying netizens to post pro-government opinions in order to shape public opinion (Sun 5).

Cole accuses, “it is surely not by accident that their views tend to align perfectly with whatever campaign the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked upon. According to this version of the “truth,” the 1.3 billion Chinese are perfectly fine with their freedom of expression being further curtailed, their access to the Internet increasingly limited, bloggers being silenced, magazines being censored or shut down, instant messaging (e.g., WeChat) coming under greater scrutiny, and lawyers and

activists being arrested, disappeared, and possibly subjected to harsh interrogation—as long as Xi fights corruption and expands China’s presence internationally” (Cole 3). As it abuses the rights of its citizens, the CCP has been described as both, “paternalistic and omniscient—and in that order, most conveniently...Therefore, what the CCP and its apologists are telling us isn’t what ordinary Chinese think, but rather what they will say publicly, which are two very different things. One is free will, which under Xi has tended to be caged, while the other is survival and necessary avoidance” (Cole 8). The CCP’s overwhelming control over the information that is emitted through Chinese media ultimately displays the insecurity that plagues the Party.

However, the CCP’s insecurity is not unreasonable. Despite the government’s control over Chinese media outlets, citizens continue to express opinions opposite those launched by the Party. For example, Although China’s testing of its new J-20 fighter jet in 2011 concerned Robert Gates, the American Secretary of Defense during the event, Chinese President Hu Jintao was entirely uninformed the test. Despite “Guojiahua,”<sup>27</sup> the Chinese government was not aware of its military’s actions. In order to keep the Chinese citizens content with their government, Xi Jinping “needs to alleviate growing popular discontent and recover lost assets at a time when the economy is slowing somewhat and people are increasingly angry about entrenched inequality and anxious about the future...To incur the wrath of men with guns is not something to be undertaken lightly. A military coup, once unthinkable in the PRC, is now conceivable” (Khan 7). As a result, some scholars have predicted the upcoming demise of the CCP, as it is stated, “With

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<sup>27</sup> “Guojiahua” is the belief that the PLA could not have an agenda separate from that of the CCP.

rampant corruption at all levels of the party and the government — where a typist has taken bribes in the amount of four million yuan and a vice chairman of the Central Military Commission took cash bribes weighing more than one ton — the CCP seems unlikely to outlive its Soviet counterpart by a large margin” (Bo 2). Therefore, in addition to maintaining its legitimacy by catering to the demands of its people, the CCP must also acknowledge the desires and activities carried out by its military while continuing to fight corruption within the Party. As the CCP grapples to uphold its authority over its increasingly demanding population, nationalist sentiment and the media are as much of a tool in shaping public opinion, as a means to create foreign policy, as they are a threat to the government’s legitimacy. Consequently, the domestic politics perspective envisages the demise of the CCP if it cannot maintain its legitimacy with its people.

*Conclusion:*

Both Realism and Neoliberalism offer viable explanations for China’s behavior in the SCS. Realism asserts that is aggressively pursuing power in the SCS as a result of its new military and economic capabilities. However, Realism fails to acknowledge the influences on a state’s behavior that occur internally; Realism does not devote enough attention to domestic factors such as nationalism that are influential on Chinese foreign policy. On the other hand, Neoliberalism upholds that China is pursuing its interests as it embeds itself within the constraints of many institutions and both economic and diplomatic relationships. Though, Neoliberalism is weak in explaining the Chinese

leadership's coercive measures in the SCS as it responds to nationalist demands among its people.

The domestic politics perspective illuminates the influence that nationalist sentiment and public demands have on a state's leadership, and ultimately, a state's foreign policy behavior. In order to combat the potential threat posed by nationalism, the CCP has taken drastic measures to maintain its legitimacy through the upkeep of its image. In order to do so, the Party utilizes coercive tactics and aggressively manipulates the information available to China's people through its Propaganda Department and media outlets. Still, nationalist sentiment influences Chinese behavior in the international arena, especially in the SCS. Nationalism is manifested in multiple ways, as expressed through victimization theory and Chinese exceptionalism. Because the CCP must adhere to the desires of its people, these types of nationalism are often evident in Chinese foreign policy. Coinciding with the domestic politics perspective, the CCP, which is ultimately controlled by domestic forces, caters to Chinese nationalism throughout its policies, particularly in the SCS. This is further demonstrated through China's recent interactions with its economic partner and political rival, the United States. This relationship is a key component to understanding the dynamics of the SCS. It is to this relationship we now turn.

#### **Chapter 4: The Eagle and the Dragon in the South China Sea**

The SCS is a source of boiling tensions between China and the United States. While US-China relations have been relatively competitive regarding disputes in the SCS, both states remain peaceful as a result of their binding economic ties. Affirming China's desire to maintain an amicable relationship, Hu Jintao stated, "neither side gains if relations deteriorate" (Nathan and Scobell 112). Characterized by a complicated affiliation, the US-China relationship has intensified due to the United States' role as a security umbrella in the SCS, as well as its blatant disregard of China's warnings to remove itself from the dispute. As proven by the domestic politics perspective, it is imperative to understand the influence of Chinese public opinion and nationalism when discussing US-China relations in the SCS.

##### *Alliances and Treaties:*

Although its unrelenting presence in Asia is highly contested by those who are threatened by American influence, the United States is obligated to assist and protect its allies who are involved in the SCS dispute. The 1951 Agreement Between the United States and Australia and New Zealand, 1951 Philippine Treaty, and 1954 Southeast Asia Treaty, 1960 Japanese Treaty, and 1953 Republic of Korea Treaty all uphold that the United States, and other parties obliged, will act in accordance with its constitutional processes if any of these countries suffers an armed attack (United States Department of State). In addition, the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act "Declares that in furtherance of the principle of maintaining peace and stability in the Western Pacific area, the United States



shall make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capacity as determined by the President and the Congress. Requires such determination of Taiwan's defense needs to be reviewed by United States military authorities in connection with recommendations to the President and the Congress” (Library of Congress 1979). Although the United States opted to adopt a neutral position in the SCS dispute, the United States has promoted freedom of navigation in the Sea and strengthened relationships with its allies that fear China by sending “an unmistakable message of support by announcing plans to spend an additional \$250 million over the next two years to bolster the naval capabilities of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Japan” (The Editorial Board of the NYT 2015). As a result, the United States remains involved in the SCS dispute to assist its allies who stake claims in the SCS.

*The United States as a Security Umbrella and Defender of Global Interests:*

Not only is the United States present in the SCS, the United States has been present in Asia since World War II in order to serve as a security umbrella for its Asian allies. As it supports its allies, the United States’ national interests in the SCS include economic benefits acquired through freedom of navigation, access to resources, and its political and economic relationships with multiple Asian states, which are threatened by not only by China’s military alert zone, but also by China’s claims to the territorial waters in the region. US Secretary of State Clinton explained the importance of these interests

for all as she stated: “we share these interests not only with ASEAN members and ASEAN Regional Forum participants, but with other maritime nations and the broader international community” (U.S. Embassy 2011).<sup>28</sup> Despite China’s disapproval of the United States’ involvement, many of the nations involved in the dispute prefer the United States’ presence as it helps to offset China’s pursuit of power by maintaining balance in the region. In response to China’s rise, the 2011 National Military Strategy states that the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff “remain concerned about the extent and strategic intent of China’s military modernization, and its assertiveness in space, cyberspace, in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea” (Ikenberry and Liff 83-84). Without the presence of the United States as a security umbrella, it is feared that smaller nations involved will be susceptible to exploitation by China and the United States will be unable to secure its strategic interests in the region.

As an attempt to counter China’s dominance in the region, “China’s neighbors find themselves in a delicate balancing act—they seek the “water far away” (The United States) to help manage the “fire nearby” (China), all the while preserving all their

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<sup>28</sup> The United States government has affirmed Clinton’s statement on multiple occasions regarding freedom of seas in the SCS. The United States Congress’s Resolution 524 affirms the United States’ support for “U.S. Armed Forces operations in the Western Pacific, including in the South China Sea, in support of freedom of navigation, the maintenance of peace, respect for international law, and unimpeded lawful commerce” (Library of Congress 2012). Further, the United States Embassy reinforced this concept as it stated, “as a Pacific nation and resident power we have a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia’s maritime domain, the maintenance of peace and stability, and respect for international law in the South China Sea...These incidents endanger the safety of life at sea, escalate tensions, undermine freedom of navigation, and pose risks to lawful unimpeded commerce and economic development” (U.S. Embassy 2011).

positive economic interests with both America and China. Beijing knows these sentiments exist and tries to short-circuit the propensity of its neighbors to seek external balancers and arm themselves by engaging in reassuring diplomacy and other activities” (Lampton 169). For instance, “Singapore avoids any discourse that might paint China as a threat, but must remain uncertain about Chinese motives...Singapore’s basic strategy is a mix of economic engagement of China concomitant with tightening security ties with the United States, Japan, and others as a hedge against uncertainty— especially in the face of China’s rapid rise and military modernization” (Ikenberry and Liff 79).

Also realizing the threat to United States interests in the region, “U.S. political and military leaders increasingly express concern about China’s “assertive” and “aggressive” behavior vis-à-vis its vast and ambiguous claims in the South and East China Seas...Whereas in late 2013 National Security Advisor Rice referred to “the rise of maritime disputes in the East China Sea and South China Sea” as a “growing threat to regional peace and security—and U.S. interests” without mentioning China explicitly as the provocateur, several months later Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel implicitly accused China of “intimidation and coercion,” as well as “destabilizing, unilateral actions asserting its claims in the South China Sea” (Ikenberry and Liff 85-86). While the United States plays a significant role in mediating conflict and protecting its allies in the region, it would not be involved in the SCS if it did not have its own interests to preserve, which include freedom of navigation, access to resources, and its political and economic relationships with multiple Asian states.

As a result, Swaine predicts, “U.S. military power in Asia will almost certainly

remain very strong and that even increased Chinese regional military capabilities will not offer Beijing unambiguous superiority. Any Chinese attempt to establish predominance in Asia would fail, therefore, both because it would be difficult for China to surpass the United States and because a scenario of this kind would frighten bystanders and drive them into Washington's arms" (Swaine 3). As a result, China cannot afford to challenge the United States as the Realist approach claims it will not only because of economic interdependence, but also because of the nationalist backlash the CCP will receive should China fail in war or suffer economically.

*Recent Turmoil in the Skies and Sea:*

China's reactions to the United States' presence in the SCS reflect the nature of Chinese foreign policy. For example, when a United States reconnaissance plane flew over Chinese-claimed territory in the SCS in May 2015, the Chinese Foreign Ministry deemed this flight as "very irresponsible and dangerous and detrimental to regional peace and stability" (Chang 1). This statement follows China's eight messages sent warning the United States not to draw near the Spratly island chain, Fiery Cross Reef, which has a runway that spans approximately three thousand meters.

Prior to the fly-by, in June 2009, "A People's Liberation Army Navy submarine followed the USS John S. McCain destroyer and was suspected of colliding with and damaging the ship's sonar equipment" (Harress 9). Another source tells, "A Chinese submarine collides with the sonar sensor of a US warship off the coast of the Philippines" (Deutsche Welle 19). A few years later in February 2011, "A Chinese warship allegedly

fired warning shots at a Philippine vessel after ordering it to leave the area near Jackson Atoll in the Spratly Islands,” and in July 2011 when “Chinese soldiers reportedly assaulted a Vietnamese fisherman and threatened crew members before expelling them from waters near the disputed Paracel Islands” (Harress 13).

While the Realist approach deems these encounters as aggressive, the domestic politics perspective offers a more complete understanding of these events. Because the CCP promises its people a stronger China, the CCP cannot take a weak stance when China is challenged, as explained, “When Chinese and Americans perceive their identities to be in a state of “negative interdependence,” they will engage in “essential combat” to demonize each other. Dehumanization lays the psychological foundation for war” (Gries 147).

Following the collision in June 2009, “The Associated Press reported that a senior researcher with the People’s Liberation Army’s Navy Equipment Research Center, Yin Zhuo, said the collision was likely an accident. He said the American destroyer appeared to have failed to detect the submarine, while the Chinese vessel set its distance from the McCain assuming it was not carrying sonar arrays, according to the state-run China Daily...an unnamed U.S. military official attributed the array damage to an ‘inadvertent encounter’ with a Chinese submarine” (Carter and Slavin 2009). In order to control a rise in nationalist sentiment among its people and a demand for war against the United States, Chinese officials deemed the encounter an accident.

Two years later on January 11, 2011, the PLA tested its new J-20 stealth fighter jet, which was also perceived as aggressive by the international community, though this

act targeted no specific state as a victim. This aggressive behavior also arises from nationalism among the Chinese population as China harmlessly demonstrated an act of power by testing the jet to satisfy domestic demands, rather than engaging in violent behavior against an enemy. Consequently, the domestic politics perspective, which accredits domestic influences such as nationalism with the shaping of a state's behavior, best explains China's actions in these encounters with the United States in the SCS.

Following this, tensions in the region rose after the incident on October 27 when the USS Lassen, a United States destroyer, cruised within 12 nautical miles of Zhubi Reef, which is also claimed by China (Wang and Chen 2015). China advised the United States and Japan “not to show off military might and create tension in the South China Sea,” in response to Japan's Defense Minister, Gen Nakatani's agreement with the head of the United States Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, “to continue joint drills between the US military and Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, as well as helping Southeast Asian countries increase their capabilities” (China Daily USA 2015). Emphasizing the importance of peace in the region, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei explains, “We call on relevant countries to do things that contribute to peace and stability on the South China Sea and refrain from flexing muscles, creating tension or militarizing the area... China is willing to work with all sides to make relentless efforts for the peace and stability of the South China Sea, so as to promote the common development and prosperity of the region” (China Daily USA 2015).

However, the Chinese population expressed its own opinion of the incident, which interpreted the Lassen's patrol as a test of “China's willingness to defend its

“sovereignty” in the South China Sea and if China does not respond with the necessary toughness, such challenges will continue and become more serious in the future” (Bui 2015). Bui shares that Sina Weibo<sup>29</sup> uttered their discontent with the CCP’s soft response, questioning how Russia’s Vladimir Putin would have replied, while others desired a stronger stance against the United States. On the other hand, “The Chinese public appears to be inclined to frame the country’s maritime disputes in terms of national and personal humiliation, independently of official media cues. For the party-state this may be a “double-edged sword”. On one hand, the campaign to raise awareness of China’s history of humiliation does appear to be showing real results. At the same time, however, it also suggests the Mainland public’s interpretation of future events will probably be framed in this way, whether the official media emphasize the connection or not” (Dobell 2015).

Following these encounters, in 2015 the China Daily reported Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s warning to United States Secretary of State John Kerry: “The United States must stop flexing its military muscle in waters near China's Nansha Islands in the South China Sea” after the United States flew two Air Force B-52 bombers over an island claimed by China in the South China Sea, to which the U.S. responded that the plane had strayed off course (Wang Qingyun and Chen Weihua). Retaliating, the “American Boeing P-8 Poseidon was harassed by Chinese Shenyang J-11. Rear. Adm. Zhang Zhaozhong of the Chinese Navy calls on fighters jets to ‘fly even closer to U.S. surveillance aircraft”” in August 2014 (Harress 18). In response to these incidences, Wang Yi stated, “the US should respect China's core interest and major concerns...the US

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<sup>29</sup> Sina Weibo a Chinese social media website that is comparable to a combination of Facebook and Twitter.

owes China a clear explanation about the latest incident” (Wang and Chen 2015).

Because China was provoked by the United States, it was forced to warn the United States in order to satisfy the demands of domestic nationalists. However, China did not retaliate with force against the United States because doing so would also hurt its domestic agenda valuing economic growth, which therefore coincides with the domestic politics framework.

*A Complicated Relationship for Years to Come:*

Despite multiple high-tension interactions, China’s relationship with the United States is entrenched in strategic constraints placed on one another in order to prevent either state from pursuing a destabilizing relationship. Because China’s prosperity is interdependent on the success of global rivals such as the United States and Japan, the CCP understands that it cannot afford war with the United States. Rather, as it develops in an international system and region dominated by the United States, China will continue to pursue a strong, peaceful, and confident global emergence that will refrain from violently confronting the United States in the Northeast Asian region. Highly involved in trade with Asia, the United States “is the largest trading nation in the world and as such represents one of the largest markets for liner shipping companies and their customers. This makes the efficiency of the U.S. intermodal network very important to the efficiency of the global liner shipping network and to global supply chains” (World Shipping Council 2015). The economic constraints imposed on China are presumed to prevent it from engaging in war with the United States as it continues to rise.



Because many Chinese elites view America's actions as an attempt to curb the overall growth of China's power, China's domestic reforms work to secure. As the CCP implements new policies, China must preserve economic growth, which "is also necessary to maintain political stability. In the rise and fall of great powers, one lesson the Chinese always learn is that aggression will not pay...So the lessons we have learned are very consistent with the current policies" (Wang 2010, 1).

Analyzing the nature of the US-China relations, Wang Jisi further explains, "China benefits from a strong US economy and borrows from its technological know-how...The Obama administration says it welcomes a strong, prosperous China. But do they mean a stronger military power of China? These two countries share one thing in common: They wish each other well in economic terms but not necessarily in political and geostrategic terms" (Wang 2010, 8), which is why "Beijing has an ongoing incentive to work with Washington and the West to sustain continued economic growth...At the same time, it understandably wishes to reduce its vulnerability to potential future threats from the United States and other nations while increasing its overall influence along its strategically important maritime periphery" (Swaine 2).

While China wants the United States uninvolved in the SCS, the United States' role as the security umbrella for its allies in Asia will persist. This explains Realism's predictions of turmoil between the two states, and also acknowledges Neoliberalism's assumption of economic and institutional constraint. However, the CCP must also respond to United States power with enough strength to please domestic demands, as best explained by the domestic politics perspective and left unexplained by both Realism and

Neoliberalism. As a result, the domestic politics perspective is most applicable in explaining US-China relations because it accounts for China's pursuit of power, its economic engagement with the United States, and the influence of domestic factors such as nationalism on China's behavior in the SCS. Although the United States and China are capable of cooperating, the nature of the countries' roots remains competitive due domestic factors such as economic growth, nationalism, and regime legitimacy.

## Chapter 5: China's Rise and the South China Sea

Figure 4: Reclamation of Territory per State



Figure 4 identifies the hotspots that have led to further tension in the SCS. Previously mentioned locations listed on the map include: Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef. China has claimed ten of the locations, while Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines have each claimed one location.

*China's Most Recent Sparring Partners:*

As shown in Figure 4, China's sovereignty claims in the SCS have not prevented other states from expressing their own claims. Because of their close proximity to the SCS, Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia deny China's claims and assert their own sovereignty over various parts of the territory. For example, as it upholds that China failed to stake its control over the island chains prior to 1940, Vietnam maintains that it has exercised sovereignty over both islets with official documentation since the seventeenth century. Vietnam's 2009 defense papers flatly states, "Though there is sufficient historical evidence and legal foundation to prove Vietnam's undeniable sovereignty over water areas and islands in the East Sea, including the Paracels and the Spratlys...Vietnam advocates that all parties must restrain themselves...turning the East Sea into a sea of peace, friendship, and development" (Socialist Republic of Vietnam Ministry of National Defence 19-20).

Defending its sovereignty claims in the SCS, Vietnam's navy and air force remain the procurement budget's biggest recipients, as "the navy received 39% of capital expenditure, the air force 37%, and the army just 22%" (Grevatt 2015). Vietnam's increased defense expenditures, growing navy, and strategic diplomacy "suggest that Hanoi is engaged in an increasingly severe capabilities competition with China. There appears to be little evidence, however, that Hanoi's policy shifts are not driven by...a security dilemma resulting from a misunderstanding of Beijing's intentions. Rather, they appear more likely to be driven by...a concrete dispute over material and territorial interests" (Ikenberry and Liff 80-82).

However, because Vietnam is so closely integrated with China economically, Vietnam's "primary decision rule is not to offend core PRC interests if possible. On occasion Hanoi acquiesces to Chinese moves, as it did in 2005 to the seismic survey in the South China Sea agreed to by Beijing and Manila" (Lampton 190-191). However, while Vietnam occasionally complies with China's interests, it also revolts against China in particular situations, such as when it entertained offers from foreign oil companies to compete for exploration rights in the Phu Khanh basin in the Spratly Islands, which China condemned.

In order to defend itself from China, Vietnam seeks to become more involved in international institutions such as ASEAN. Striving to support the creation of infrastructure throughout Asia and increase its economic ties with its neighbors, "it seeks strength and safety in numbers and hopes to avoid overreliance on...China" (Lampton 191).

Similarly, the Philippines, located closest to the Spratly islands, also assert its own claim. Both China and the Philippines claim the Scarborough Shoal, which China has named "Huangyan Island," is closer to the Philippines than Mainland China. In order to protect its interests in the SCS, the Philippines Daily Inquirer shares, "\$110 million is the cost of ten coast guard patrol boats that Japan is donating to the Philippines" (Council on Foreign Relations 2013).

Further, both Malaysia and Brunei claim territory in the SCS as they insist that a portion of the ocean lies within their economic exclusion zones. While Brunei does not claim either of the island chains, Malaysia proclaims that it should have sovereignty over

a few of the Spratly islets. When asked how Malaysia will engage China about the sovereignty dispute, Malaysian Ambassador Awang Adek Hussin stated, “Malaysia has tried to persuade China through diplomacy, especially last year<sup>30</sup> when we were the Chairman of ASEAN. China says they will not militarize the islands, so we will monitor that, but it is quite a worry” (Hussin 02/05/2016).

In addition to its dispute with China over the Diaoyu-Senkaku Islands on China’s eastern flank that began during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, China and Japan disagree on multiple claims of sovereignty in the SCS. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe voices, “Provocations against Japan’s sovereign sea and land are continuing, but they must not be tolerated” (Council on Foreign Relations 2013). These ancient disputes were further complicated after Japan’s loss in World War II and remain a source of tension in Sino-Japan relations today.

While some countries, such as Cambodia, support China’s desire to not internationalize the SCS dispute, many countries, including Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, quietly disagree with China’s desires. Countries whose interests counter those of China, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, express different interests among themselves. Vietnam and the Philippines have both requested support from the United States and the United Nations. Allies such as Japan, Malaysia and Brunei also favor outside intervention but will not publicly announce this preference for fear of angering China. On the other hand, Indonesia and Singapore share no contrasting claims

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<sup>30</sup> Malaysia served as the chairman of ASEAN for the year of 2015.

with China, but also share the desire for maritime security and freedom of seas along with the United States.

*Recent Collisions:*

In 2015, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang announced a “five-pronged proposal,”<sup>31</sup> which encourages peace in the SCS and calls on all countries to refer to the United Nations Charter, protest the post-World War II world order, promote peace and stability in the world and region, emphasizing the South China Sea. Following this, Li asserted that countries directly involved in the SCS dispute should “abide by UNCLOS of 1982 and implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, while countries outside of the region should respect the actions taken by countries that are directly involved in the dispute, and all countries should uphold freedom of navigation in the region” (China Daily 2015). In accordance with what the domestic politics approach tells us, the Chinese leadership must either respond to domestic pressures that arise, or otherwise pursue an active role in shaping those measures especially around nationalism in order to prevent internal demands from driving Chinese foreign policy in a dangerous direction. There have been multiple encounters between China and the other SCS claimants; some have been peacefully negotiated while others have resulted in China

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<sup>31</sup>Premier Li Keqiang’s “five-pronged proposal” coincides with Premier Zhou Enlai’s Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence established in 1953. The five principles include: “mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty...mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit...and peaceful co-existence” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China 1998).

responding with action. In May 2009, “Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei claimed the continental shelf attached to their land should be extended so they could claim the economic rights to large areas of the South China Sea, including any energy discovered. China protested the claims” (Harress 15). Although China did not agree with these states, China responded with protest rather than violence because domestic pressures did not view these claims as a threat or demand the CCP to do so.

An example of negotiation is in October 2011 when a “Philippine warship rams a Chinese fishing boat in disputed waters. The Philippine Embassy immediately apologizes, calling this an accident” (Deutsche Welle 21). The next year, “In early 2012, China and the Philippines engaged in a lengthy maritime standoff, accusing each other of intrusions in the Scarborough Shoal” (BBC News 2005), after China created an administrative headquarters named Sansha city on the Paracel islands. Later that year, Vietnam held anti-China protests when China disrupted two Vietnamese exploration operations. In these situations, China was not forced to respond aggressively, first because the Philippines apologized, and second because protests in Vietnam do not risk the CCP’s loss of legitimacy among the Chinese public.

Similarly, in April 2012, “Filipino surveillance aircraft identified Chinese fishing vessels at Scarborough Shoal, causing the Philippine Navy to deploy its largest warship, newly acquired from the U.S, to the area. In response, China sent surveillance ships to warn the Philippine Navy to leave the area” (Harress 11). Another incident occurred in January 2014 when, “China imposed a fishing permit rule in the South China Sea, defying the objections of the U.S., the Philippines and Vietnam” (Harress 17). Like



its reaction to the incidences involving Vietnam, China issued warnings instead of engaging in violent interactions because these states did not severely threaten its power or international image. Further, no domestic demands resulting from nationalist sentiment were evoked and the CCP could manage the encounters from a position of power, yet still avoid war. China's warnings therefore appeased its people's demands to project international strength while also preserving its diplomatic and economic ties with the Philippines and other states involved. These examples demonstrate that the CCP will steer Chinese foreign policy in a peaceful direction when Chinese public opinion does not desire an aggressive stance.

China remained peaceful yet again in April 2012, when eight Chinese fishing boats harboring illegal resources<sup>32</sup> entered the contested territory of Scarborough Shoal and were soon after detained by the Filipino Navy. Before the Filipino Navy could obstruct the Chinese boats, "two Chinese surveillance vessels blocked the frigate from pursuing any further action. Filipino and Chinese Foreign Ministry officials quickly moved to negotiate a diplomatic pause to the confrontation. But why did the Chinese fishermen venture so far into contested waters for illegal fishing in the first place? The simple and obvious answer is that it is profitable. The demand for fish has increased markedly in recent years, surpassing the fish catch supply in coastal waters, and encouraging fishermen to venture further abroad" (Rosenberg 2013, 3). China believes that the SCS is its sovereign territory; therefore, domestic demands by groups such as

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<sup>32</sup> The Chinese fishing boats were "in possession of a large illegal catch of coral, giant clams and live sharks" (Rosenberg 2013).

Chinese fishermen encourage the CCP to demonstrate its strength in the SCS by using these claims to fulfill domestic interests.

Though, if China is aggravated to the point where its leadership loses its legitimacy due to a lack of support from the Chinese public, such as when its sovereignty is severely threatened, China will respond violently. This occurred in 2010 when Beijing responded forcefully when two Japanese vessels collided with a Chinese fishing boat in a part of the East China Sea where both China and Japan stake sovereignty claims. When the Chinese captain was detained by the Japanese, China utilized coercive measures, such as the discontinuation of certain exports from China to Japan, in order to pressure Japan into liberating the captain. Reflecting on the anti-Japan protests that occurred throughout China, Shi Yinhong, a scholar of international relations at Renmin University, states, “If the government very consciously opposed or didn't want these demonstrations, if they resolutely didn't want them, then there would be nothing” (Sun 13). China’s encounter with Japan differs from its experience with the Philippines as a result of historical tension and the presence of nationalist sentiment. As China and Japan’s strained relationship continues,<sup>33</sup> the CCP is obligated to take a strong stance against Japan in order to appease public demand and nationalist sentiment.

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<sup>33</sup> Japan’s increased military budget and relationship with the United States reminds Chinese citizens of their country’s painful history with Japan, dating back to 1894 at the beginning of the first Sino-Japanese War. As a result, China’s 2014 Defense White Paper states, “Japan is sparing no effort to dodge the post-war mechanism, overhauling its military and security policies. Such development has caused grave concerns among other countries in the region” (PRC Ministry of National Defense 2015).

Affirming the intensity of nationalist sentiment among the Chinese population as explained above, the Perth USAsia Centre opinion poll<sup>34</sup> reveals,

“A majority of respondents expressed 10/10 agreement that the disputed maritime territorial features belong to China. However, those who were more certain of China’s claims were, on average, no less willing to see compromise through negotiation. This implies that while many respondents do believe China is in the right, such views do not automatically eliminate the possibility of their accepting a compromise...60% of respondents reported paying a high degree of attention to the Diaoyu Islands issue, while the figure was 53% for the South China Sea issue. Higher income and education levels were both strongly associated with increased attention on both South China Sea and Diaoyu issues, suggesting the Chinese public’s interest in these disputes will continue to rise with the country’s economic development. Respondents tended to see the maritime disputes as a bigger problem at present than cross-straits relations and economic growth” (Chubb 2).

These results explains the CCP’s willingness to negotiate, while remaining assertive, in their recent encounters with Vietnam and the Philippines. Additionally, the results display heightened attention to maritime issues, such as the dispute involving Japan, when levels of nationalist sentiment are also intensified. This survey also reveals the presence of victimization theory and nationalist sentiment among Chinese citizens:

“The Chinese public appears to be inclined to frame the country’s maritime disputes in terms of national and personal humiliation, independently of official media cues. For the party-state this may be a “double-edged sword”. On one hand, the campaign to raise awareness of China’s history of humiliation does appear to be showing real results. At the same time, however, it also suggests the Mainland public’s interpretation of future events will probably be framed in this way, whether the official media emphasize the connection or not. Still, the perception of state, national and personal dignity being at stake in the

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Chubb and the Perth USAsia Centre have conducted an opinion poll of 1,412 Chinese adults residing in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Changsha and Chengdu. The poll is titled ‘Exploring China’s “Maritime Consciousness” Public Opinion on the South and East China Sea Disputes.’

disputes was not strongly related to support for the use of military force, and had little effect on respondents' willingness to countenance compromise" (Chubb 2).

This finding not only credits victimization theory, but also reveals the CCP's failure to campaign and control its citizens' nationalist sentiment, which proves the CCP's need to remain sensitive to public opinion.

*The Domestic Politics Approach and China's Military Expansion:*

It is indisputable that China has increased its military presence in the SCS. After creating artificial islands on both Fiery Cross Reef and Mischief Reef in September 2015, China has constructed a "3,125 meter runway" on Fiery Cross Reef" (Harress 20). Improving its naval capability, "The Chinese Navy has commissioned three world-class guided missile destroyers...The latest of the Type 052D destroyers, the Hefei, was delivered to the South Sea Fleet of the People's Liberation Army Navy...at a naval base in Sanya, in the island province of Hainan" (Lei and Zhao 2015). Further, since 2014, Beijing has reinstated its claims and its dredging reefs and shoals, which have amounted to approximately 4 square kilometers of land to the Spratlys, which include Fiery Cross Reef. These islets are closer to Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and oil-rich Brunei than it is to China. Beijing's activity of building on the island chain has caused many nations to worry that China is creating an air-defense identification zone, especially since May 2015, when a Hong Lei, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, commented, "The Chinese side is entitled to monitor the situation in relevant waters and airspace" (Chang 12). Admiral Harry Harris, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet,

labeled this claim as China's "unprecedented land reclamation" by use of the "great wall of sand" (Chang 9).

**Figure 5: The Spratly Islands Build-up**



In Figure 5, an American think-tank, Jane's and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), displays China's increased military presence on Mischief Reef in the Spratly islands (The Economist, "Making Waves" 2015). The photograph on the left is the reef in August 2014, and on the right is the reef in May 2015.

On the other hand, China's increased military presence in the SCS can be viewed as China's modernization of "its military forces primarily to compensate for decades of neglect, and its leaders may sincerely view its policies toward its neighbors as reactive and defensive...regardless of China's actual intentions, to other states the objective reality of Beijing's growing military power, coupled with its rapidly expanding military capabilities and recent policies vis-à-vis disputed territory and features on its periphery, appear provocative and newly "assertive," even aggressive. As a case in point, however controversial and destabilizing, China's vast claims over islands and features in the South and East China Seas predate its current "rise" by decades" (Ikenberry and Liff 56). China's drastic increase in military spending is a result of China's desire to "modernize and professionalize the PLA after decades of neglect and military backwardness" (Erickson and Liff 807).

While many states view these actions as aggressive, China's behavior takes no measure of aggression toward a specific enemy or target. This is not the Realist aggression of development, rather China's behavior, while concerning to the international community, is the emergence of a power sensitive to the opinion of its people for continued economic development and display of national strength in its backyard. Further, at the Xiangshan Forum held in October 2015, the Academy of Military Science's Major General Yao Yunzhu questioned, "Why is China singled out as the culprit when the United States is the dominant military power in Asian waters? The United States maintains a naval presence in the Asia-Pacific that entails military cooperation with numerous regional powers, including other claimants to disputed

territory and maritime zones, such as the Philippines and Vietnam” (The Editorial Board of the New York Times 2015).

By building its military in the SCS, the CCP achieves a position of power in the region, just as it has promised its people that China’s international status and strength will be restored. China’s 2015 defense white paper states the need for this strength as it states,

“The seas and oceans bear on the enduring peace, lasting stability and sustainable development of China. The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests. It is necessary for China to develop a modern maritime military force structure commensurate with its national security and development interests, safeguard its national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, protect the security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests, and participate in international maritime cooperation, so as to provide strategic support for building itself into a maritime power” (PRC Ministry of National Defense 2015).

Therefore, China’s military expansion does not trump its desire for a peaceful outcome in the SCS. Similarly, spokesman Hong Lei maintains that it is “groundless to link China’s construction on its own islands and reefs in the South China Sea to militarization...China does not seek to ‘militarize’ the South China Sea...China opposes any country launching military operations that undermine regional safety, stability and mutual trust” (China Daily Europe 2015).

China’s military build up is part of its overall development, not an act of expansionist thinking. Its territorial ambitions are largely settled,<sup>35</sup> though in the case of the SCS still contested by other nations. In other words, China shows more features of a

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<sup>35</sup> There is still a contested border between China and India over the territory of Aksai Chin.



status quo<sup>36</sup> state than a revisionist state. This is exemplified through China's cooperation on many security issues in the previous decades. It is well established that developing nations reap more benefit by gaining power from creating wealth, rather than violently conquering territory. China's military expansion in the SCS ultimately reflects a common and classic desire for the increase international strength by nationalists, while avoiding a war that the Chinese leadership understands will damage China's economy and the legitimacy of its rule.

The involvement of the United States in international conflicts such as the predicament in the SCS is not welcomed by China, as Swaine argues, because "China has outgrown its subordinate status and now feels strong enough to press its case in the western Pacific" (Swaine 2). Indeed the Chinese have warned the United States not to use fabricated reasons to get further involved in the SCS. The Chinese Defense Ministry made this clear when spokesperson Wu Qian stated,

“(T)here is no problem with freedom of navigation. We urge the US not to be provocative under this pretext... The Chinese military will take all the necessary measures to safeguard national sovereignty, security and maritime rights” (China Daily USA 11/26/15).

Also arguing against the idea of defensive aggressiveness, Swaine puts China's actions in the terms of leverage: “Chinese leaders today are not trying to carve out an exclusionary sphere of influence, especially in hard-power terms; they are trying to reduce their considerable vulnerability and increase their political, diplomatic, and economic leverage in their own backyard (Swaine 3). China cannot afford to engage in a

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<sup>36</sup> A status quo state is a state is a country that reinforces the global laws and norms that are already in place. It is the opposite of a revisionist state, or non-status quo state.

war with the United States, nor does the evidence suggest they want one, but rather it suggests the leadership is reflecting domestic pressure for development and endorsed national standing for its people, and defend what are viewed as pieces of sovereign territory. Indeed, what is clear is China's commitment to the work within the context of the international community to which we now turn

*ASEAN AND ICJ:*

One of the most prominent government organizations involved in the dispute in the SCS is ASEAN, which ASEAN Secretary General Le Luong Minh explains is an issue that "is not just about competing claims; it's about peace and stability in the region" (The Philippine Star 2013). In 1992, ASEAN issued a Declaration on the SCS, composed of five resolutions that advocated for peace and restraint. A decade later, the 2002 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the SCS, signed between ASEAN and China, while creating some confidence building measures, "the maintenance of freedom of navigation at sea and in the air, and the conduct of negotiations in accordance with international law and with regard to UNCLOS in particular" (Scott 1026). However, the Declaration does not address sovereignty claims and is not a formal treaty. Despite ASEAN's recognition of multiple actors, Beijing has pursued a policy of bilateral negotiations. Malik has argued that despite the "six claimants to various atolls, islands, rocks, and oil deposits in the South China Sea, the Spratly Islands disputes are, by definition, multilateral" (Malik 1). But Beijing appears successful in its bilateral approach and "might succeed because of China's superior relative power and ASEAN's

fractiousness” (Malik 3). Going even further, Lohman argues, “ASEAN has sacrificed members’ interests to appease aggressive neighbors before—and will again...Southeast Asia needs America...ASEAN does not want to be left alone with China” (Lohman 2013). For example, “When the Philippines appealed to arbitration under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), its ASEAN partners went silent” (Lohman 2013). Clearly ASEAN has yet to make any progress in resolving the disputes over the SCS.

This fractiousness is captured in the breakdown of support for the competing trading organizations:

“Several littoral states (Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia) support the US-initiated Trans-Pacific Partnership, which excludes China. The mainland ASEAN states (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand) support the China-initiated Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which excludes the US” (Rosenberg 2013, 10).

Although China participates in ASEAN’s regional forums, China refuses to compromise with measures taken to resolve sovereignty disputes. China utilizes ASEAN as an informal track of multilateral policy-making and only participates in ASEAN dialogue “about joint development projects which would not infringe its sovereignty claims” (Suri 167). Going even further, ASEAN has yet to make progress in resolving the conflict in the SCS.

Evoking international arbitration, legal institutions such as the International Court of Justice<sup>37</sup> and International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea might be consulted in order to more effectively manage the issue. While the use of these organizations has been

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<sup>37</sup> The International Court of Justice is also referred to as the “ICJ.”

limited, both Malaysia and Indonesia have used them over a maritime border dispute in the Celebes Sea. Similarly, Singapore and Malaysia used these organizations concerning the small islands close to the Singapore Strait. However, “International Court of Justice (ICJ) involvement in the much bigger and more complicated South China Sea sovereignty disputes has not been forthcoming, not least because the PRC’s consent has not been forthcoming for such ICJ adjudication” (Scott 1021). China is reluctant to include the ICJ because “the Court’s decisions are final and binding on states but its jurisdiction is carefully crafted around the political realities of state sovereignty” (Hurd 191), which could result in unfavorable rulings for the PRC and evoke unmanageable nationalist sentiment among the Chinese population.

While China dismisses ASEAN’s attempts at resolving the SCS dispute, other ASEAN countries can agree on “China-proposed initiatives such as the Belt and Road, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Lancang-Mekong Cooperation framework (LMC)” (China Daily Africa 2015). Reflecting on this progress and also China and Thailand’s project involving railway coordination, Vitavas Srivihok, the Deputy Permanent Secretary of Thailand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated, “China is appreciated for its ‘constructive role’ in promoting regional connectivity through various initiatives including the establishment of the AIIB and the launch of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (China Daily Africa 2015). Still facing the key issues of a mix of advanced economies and economies that are still developing, as well as economically integrating divided countries, Northeast Asia is still in the “long march toward institutionalized regionalization” (Dittmer 360). Engaging in regionalization, China’s

political and security policies display that China is more cooperative today than ever before. China will not relinquish sovereignty over its claims in the SCS and attempts to resolve the conflict by institutions such as ASEAN and the ICJ will not be recognized by the Chinese leadership.

Indeed, “Chinese public appear to be less war-hungry on these disputes than commonly assumed. Only two policies failed to receive majority approval, one was the official shelve dispute policy, the other was send in the troops. Solid majorities supported compromise and arbitration, and even ‘nationalist’ public opinion is judged ‘surprisingly rational’” (Dobell 2015). However, these same Chinese citizens, “overwhelmingly agreed that the island disputes are matters of state and national dignity, representing a continuation of the ‘century of humiliation.’ And a majority said they felt personally humiliated by the status quo in the disputes” (Dobell 2015). As a result, it can be concluded that China’s behavior in the SCS is dependwnt upon Chinese nationalism and other domestic influences that must be appeased by the Chinese leadership.

*Conclusion:*

The SCS is one of the most contested regions in today’s discussion of international politics. Fighting for what each state believes to be its own sovereign territory in a strategically valuable location, small states such as Vietnam and the Philippines fight to defend their claims against a rising China.

After examining Realism and Neoliberalism, it is evident that China’s behavior in the SCS cannot be entirely explained by either lens of international relations. Although

China pursues power, it does not act in accordance with Realism's pessimistic perspective of great power politics. China has increased its military presence in the SCS, used methods of both coercion and soft power in engagements with its neighbors to further its interests, and warned other states of intruding upon what it deems as its sovereign territory. However, China has not taken measures in directly confronting a rival state with violence, nor has it been violent in its power pursuit. As a result, Realism cannot explain China's persistent, yet calculated behavior in the SCS, which ultimately arise from influences explained by the domestic politics perspective.

Likewise, China is constrained by Neoliberalism's concept of economic interdependence, having continuously become more involved in international organizations and institutions, in addition to becoming active in bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Through this increased involvement, China expanded both its economic and security relationships with its neighbors and other regional and international actors. However, because the potential deterioration of the conflict in the SCS will weaken economic relationships, these institutions cannot be relied upon to ensure stability in the SCS. Consequently, Neoliberalism's perspective of institutions and economic interdependence has not prevented China from riskily pursuing its interests as driven by internal factors. Filling in the gaps, theory that focuses more on domestic influences while attaining great power status has greater explanatory power because China's behavior must ensure that its leaders are able to execute reforms at home, increase power to secure interests abroad, reassure others of its nonthreatening rise, and project its influence around the world.

Therefore, the domestic politics perspective best explains China's behavior in the SCS. As with all nations, domestic demands influence policy. In an advanced authoritarian system where legitimacy is dependent largely on policy success and nationalist narratives, China's behavior in the SCS is consistent and predictable. Because the CCP cannot risk a loss of the legitimacy of its rule among the Chinese population, domestic demands influence Chinese policy, particularly China's actions in the SCS. Due to China's history of abuse by foreign powers, the CCP must present its people with an image of a strong, but peaceful, China abroad in order to appeal to nationalist sentiment. The CCP "will not compromise on the sovereignty issue—whether because of conviction or political realities at home. Chinese leaders cannot afford to appear soft in asserting their country's claims, not to mention 'negotiating away' what many Chinese see as their own territories. On the other hand, Beijing has not rejected dialogue and negotiations with other disputants" (To 165).

Further, the CCP as an authoritarian government relying on economic development to maintain legitimacy must ensure the continuation of China's economic growth, a driving force of China's domestic agenda, in order to appease a different set of internal demands. For this reason, China's leaders cannot risk waging war with its neighbors and have become increasingly involved in multilateral institutions, such as ASEAN, that support its peaceful rise. For the same reason, China cannot become entrenched in a war against the United States.

When analyzing the relationship between China and the United States, it is clear that both states will continue to fight for power in the SCS in order for each to preserve

its own interests. However, for China, it is a matter of legitimacy and nationalism as much as it is about its relationship with the United States. While China will uphold a civil relationship with the United States to benefit economically, China will continue to strive for authority over the United States in the SCS because it must conciliate nationalist sentiment at home, which desires China to become a strong regional power.

Domestic influences such as Chinese nationalism and the Chinese population's demands for economic prosperity shape Chinese behavior in the SCS. While China's behavior in the SCS is aggressive, yet peaceful, in the pursuit of its interests, the CCP will act in accordance to the demands of its people if they feel that the legitimacy of its leadership is being threatened.

Largely, China will carry on with both its involvement in multilateral institutions utilizing soft power tactics, while projecting power in the SCS in order to appeal to the Chinese public's nationalist sentiment, secure its economic relationships, and protect the legitimacy of the CCP's rule over China. In conclusion, China's behavior in the SCS will reflect the domestic pressures that drive its foreign policy.



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