

## A comparison of Malaysian and Philippine responses to China in the South China Sea

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Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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### **Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Kreuzer, P. (2016). A comparison of Malaysian and Philippine responses to China in the South China Sea. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 9(3), 239-276. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pow008>

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# **A Comparison of Malaysian and Philippine Responses to China in the South China Sea**

**Peter Kreuzer**

## **Abstract:**

The conflicts in the South China Sea have caught much attention in the past few years. The vast majority of academic studies focus almost exclusively on the Sino-Vietnamese and the Sino-Philippine conflicts in the South China Sea and the Sino-Japanese conflict in the East China Sea. By not considering the structurally fairly similar conflict between China and Malaysia and generally focusing on the past decade only those analyses neglect variation in Chinese conflict behaviour over time and between opponents. This article compares the high-profile Sino-Philippine conflict to the rather smooth relations between China and Malaysia. Whereas China has regularly challenged Philippine claims and activities in disputed regions, it has exhibited much more restraint towards Malaysia, even though the two countries' claims overlap and Malaysia, unlike the Philippines, has been extracting substantial resources (LNG) from regions disputed with China since the 1980s. I argue that much of the observable between-country and over-time variation in Chinese conflict behaviour is rooted in the approaches chosen by China's opponents for framing their overall bilateral relationships with China. Specifically, it is argued that China's opponents in territorial and maritime conflicts can assuage Chinese behaviour on the ground by signaling recognition and respect of China's overall self-role and world-order conceptions. Conversely, if they challenge the overarching Chinese self-role and world-order conceptions, China tends towards a coercive strategy. China will also tolerate higher levels of assertiveness of its opponent in the contest for sovereignty, when the opponent displays respect for China's recognition needs.

## **1. Introduction**

China's assertiveness towards its neighbors in the East and South China Sea has been a much debated topic in the international media and academic literature. After years of relative calm, disputes sharpened during the past few years.

The preliminary climax was reached in 2015 when China established a number of artificial islands in the South China Sea that are currently being furnished with harbors and airports. These are most probably geared towards supporting Chinese military power and enabling the Chinese coast guard to better enforce Chinese laws in the disputed areas.

Power transition theory would make us believe that Chinese conflict behavior in the South China Sea is to a significant extent an appendix of China's effort to dislodge the United States as the hegemonic provider of security for the East Asian region and establish a Chinese sphere of influence in its stead. Other analyses focus on China's domestic politics, pointing either to the leadership change

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* following peer review. The version of record „Kreuzer, Peter: A comparison of Malaysian and Philippine responses to China in the South China Sea. In: *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2016, volume 9, issue 3, 239–276“ is available online at <https://academic.oup.com/cjip/article/9/3/239/2352046> DOI: 10.1093/cjip/pow008.

from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping or a generally heightened nationalistic fervor that has to be taken into account by the national leadership in its choice of strategies for dealing with the conflicts in the South China Sea.

While both lines of explanation have their merits, neither of them offers a sufficient explanation of Chinese shifts in assertiveness. First, they cannot explain earlier displays of Chinese assertiveness when Chinese capabilities were still fairly low and popular nationalism of no significant political importance. Further, as most studies merely focus on China's high level conflicts with the Philippines and Vietnam and ignore the conflict with Malaysia that is managed rather smoothly, they tend to neglect variations in Chinese conflict behavior depending on opponent.

Addressing these research gaps, this article analyses variation in Chinese conflict behavior over time and towards different opponents. It compares one crisis-prone dispute with the Philippines with the rather crisis-free dispute with Malaysia. Further, it adds historical depth by analyzing not only the current relationships but by giving equal attention to earlier phases of the conflicts.

In both cases the disputes are about territorial sovereignty and sovereign rights. Both of China's opponents have established outposts on selected islands and atolls. Both explore for sub-sea resources, with Malaysia also extracting extensive resources in the disputed regions. Neither has compromised on any of its claims. Yet, whereas China has regularly challenged Philippine claims in the disputed regions, it has exhibited much more restraint towards Malaysia.

I argue that much of the observable between-country and over-time variation in Chinese conflict behavior is rooted in the approaches chosen by China's opponents for framing their overall bilateral relationships with China. Specifically, it is argued that China's opponents in territorial and maritime conflicts can assuage Chinese behavior on the ground, when they signal recognition and respect of China's overall self role conception and the core principles underlying Chinese foreign policy. Conversely, if they challenge the overarching Chinese self-role and world order concept, China will tend towards a coercive strategy.

Such informal issue linkage is beneficial to Chinese leaders, because it allows the Chinese elite to portray China (and by extension themselves) as a highly respected international actor and thereby enhance their domestic legitimacy. Such recognition can offset the costs associated with lowering the levels of Chinese assertiveness in the dispute on maritime rights and sovereignty. Chinese compromises with respect to dispute behavior will not be forthcoming, if its counterpart is not willing to grant recognition to core aspects of the Chinese self role and world order conceptions.

The empirical part of this study will focus on the two disputes pitting the Philippines and Malaysia against China. The main focus will be on the analysis of the signals of recognition, circumvention or challenge of Chinese self-role and world order conceptions sent out by the Malaysian and Philippine political leaders during the past four decades and correlate these to China's behavior in the disputed regions. Recognition can be subdivided into direct and indirect recognition. In the former case, China's opponent acknowledges the validity of Chinese conceptions through direct reference to those conceptions. Indirect recognition is understood as the proposition of alternative conceptions that carry similar meaning. Circumvention refers to a policy that ignores the Chinese normative pretensions. Government pronouncements and commentary refrain from relating to the Chinese self role and world order conceptions. Challengers actively advocate self-role and world-order conceptions that visibly conflict with Chinese understandings.

The following empirical parts of this study analyze, in how far China's opponents willingness to reciprocate to the overarching Chinese self role and world order conceptions engenders positive repercussion with respect to Chinese conflict behavior in the disputes about maritime and territorial claims. It sets on with a description of Malaysian and Philippine attitudes towards China in the mid 1970s, when China embarked on the physical assertion of its maritime and territorial claims by occupying Vietnamese held western part of the Paracel islands, without however, directly challenging the claims of two claimants focused on in this study. Subsequent sections focus on periods following the first occupation of elevations in the Spratlys by China in 1988 and the occupation of Mischief reef in 1995. It follows an analysis of the cooperative interlude in Sino-Philippine relations from 2002 to 2008. The final empirical chapter focuses on Sino-Malaysian and Sino-Philippine relations during the past few years since approximately 2010.

Before turning to the empirical analysis I will provide a short overview of the theoretical perspective employed, followed by a sketch of core tenets of China's self role and world order conceptions. Here I only focus on those aspects that are unambiguously signaled to the international community by the political elite in official statements and will not deal with the much more complicated domestic Chinese discourse.

## **2. Recognizing, circumventing or challenging an opponent's self-role and world-order conceptions: Effects on Conflict Behavior**

The following analysis is broadly anchored in role-theory. Put simply it is argued that China's behavior towards others varies with the degree of the other's recognition of Chinese self-role and world order conceptions.

The term self role conception is utilized in the sense of Holsti's classical study of national role conceptions, i.e. "ego's own conception of his position and functions, and the behavior appropriate to them."<sup>1</sup> This understanding is similar to "role identity" as employed by Harnisch for "conceptions of [...] states about themselves as role players". They "do not encompass the role proper because the role identity does not include the expectations and actions of others as such."<sup>2</sup>

Strictly speaking, world order conception cannot be conceived independently from self role conception, as the imagination of the ego-role creates the alter-roles together with the web of normative expectations and relationships that link the various actors. Insofar any self-role conception is constitutive of a comprehensive world-order.<sup>3</sup> Yet in practice it makes sense to differentiate between the

<sup>1</sup> Kalevi Holsti. 'National Role Conceptions in Foreign Policy,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1970, p. 239..

<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Harnisch. 'Role Theory and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy,' in Sebastian Harnisch, Sebastian Bersick and Jörn-Carsten Gottwald, eds. *China's International Roles: Challenging or Supporting International Order?* (New York/London: Routledge, 2015), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> World order and world order conception belongs to those concepts that are widely utilized but hardly defined. I understand world order conceptions in the sense of "visions of world order, with their evolution over time coloured by the country's distinctive moral, social and political legacies" (Pichamon Yeophatong, 'Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6 No. 4, 2013, p. 332). World order conceptions are normatively grounded and differ between countries and cultures as well as over time. World order conceptions define "a desirable world order and the means by which it might be achieved" (Andrew Hurrell, "Foreword to the Fourth Edition," in Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2012, p.xvi). World order conceptions also entail a multitude of roles, differentiating between actors and defining their responsibilities and patterns of legitimate and appropriate behavior. Abstract role concepts like leader or

two on account of their foci, with the former centering on the self and radiating outward from there and the second providing a notion of the assumed and desirable characteristics of the overall system and the interrelationships between its constituent parts.

While self-role conceptions may be espoused unilaterally the respective roles rest on recognition. Roles are “not owned by those who play them: they are part of the structure or ‘culture’ of the international system.”<sup>4</sup> This means that new roles or role change is only possible, if the respective role concepts and the associated visions of world order are recognized and accepted as valid by others. Recognition in this context goes beyond “thin recognition” (i.e. the acknowledgment of the others’ juridical status as an independent, sovereign entity). I focus on “thick recognition” that refers to actors’ success in getting certain qualities of the imagined self and world-order conceptions acknowledged.<sup>5</sup> This in turn is the basis for the development of a we-group consciousness that binds the two parties through shared narratives, values, norms, professed aims and practices. Thick recognition closely resembles what Reinhard Wolf denotes as respect, a behavior that “confirms one’s self-ascribed value and importance” and in turn “promotes sympathy, trust, mutual identification, and open deliberation – all of which increase a cooperative attitude. Disrespect, on the other hand, challenges an actor’s self-respect or self-esteem [...]. As such, disrespect tends to arouse anger and a self-protective urge to re-establish one’s ‘rightful position’.”<sup>6</sup> Signals of respect have to focus on the respective state’s “subjective expectations and understandings, both of which are strongly affected by cultural settings.”<sup>7</sup> Given that order has “been differently conceptualized and pursued through a diverse range of institutional practices in different cultural and world historical contexts,”<sup>8</sup> it should not come as a surprise that visions of a desirable order and corresponding practices of international relations are constantly contested. Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century China was the apex of a tributary system that may be conceptualized “as an international society with its own social structure [...], [...] which has a particular set of institutions that help to define norms of acceptable and legitimate state behavior.”<sup>9</sup>

Small wonder, that the rising China of today is not content with taking the roles prescribed in the Western derived international system, but also aims at remaking its own role as well as the norms of the system itself. The success of this endeavor, however, depends on the willingness of other states to grant recognition to Chinese understandings. While denial of recognition (circumvention) already constitutes conflict, it becomes even more problematic, if it is coupled with explicit recognition of an alternative, competing framework that challenges the Chinese conceptions.

big power are largely devoid of meaning if not filled with concrete normative and behavioral expectations derived from the specifics of the world order conception in which they are embedded.

<sup>4</sup> David M. McCourt. ‘The Roles States Play: A Meadian Interactionist Approach,’ *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2012, p. 374.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Strömbom. ‘Thick recognition: Advancing Theory on Identity Change in Intractable Conflicts,’ *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2014, pp. 168-191.

<sup>6</sup> Reinhard Wolf, ‘Respect and disrespect in international politics: the significance of status recognition,’ *International Theory*, Vol. 3 No. 1, 2011: pp. 106. For a differentiation of respect from the related concepts of esteem, prestige, status dignity and honor see pp. 114-116.

<sup>7</sup> Reinhard Wolf, ‘Respect and disrespect,’ p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan. ‘The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice,’ *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, ‘The Tributary System,’ p. 8.

Loosely following Shih and Yin<sup>10</sup> I argue that China simultaneously pursues two partly contradictory goals: being respected or gaining recognition as a civilizational state and asserting itself as a territorial state. Other states are able to manipulate China's long-term interest in being recognized as a superior civilizational state or as normative power that provides highly valued conceptions of a desirable world order. Let us assume that China's opponents A and B will not compromise on territorial claims that clash with those of China. However, opponent A recognizes core aspects of China's cherished self role and world order conceptions mirroring them prominently in public pronouncements of its political leaders. Opponent A thereby creates a "we-group" based on shared values, norms and aims that is superimposed on the bilateral relationship, providing the overall framework, from which to evaluate the various dimensions.<sup>11</sup> In the language of respect, state A signals respect for China's overall self role and world-order conception,<sup>12</sup> while not compromising on its deviating appraisal of the specific views on maritime rights and sovereignty. Opponent B denies such displays of respect (or recognition) and instead chooses to challenge the Chinese conceptions, advancing others that deny the formers' legitimacy and worthiness. Thereby he not only denies "we-ness," but establishes a normative hierarchy between his (superior) and the Chinese (inferior) self. I argue that even though Chinese territorial interests with respect to opponents A and B are similar, and both opponents deny Chinese maritime and territorial claims, Chinese perceptions of the opponents will vary, and China will behave differently towards the two opponents on account of the variation in the others' willingness to respect the normative framework established and highly valued by China.<sup>13</sup>

The concrete argument underlying this study is straightforward and simple. China's opponents can either recognize, circumvent or challenge China's self-role and world-order conception. The level of recognition will influence China's behavior in the maritime territorial conflicts:

Hypothesis 1: The more a state grants recognition to China's self-role and world-order conceptions, the more will China restrain its assertiveness in the maritime and territorial disputes.

Hypothesis 2: Given similar acts of assertiveness of China's opponents, China will react less assertive towards the opponent that grants broader recognition to China's self-role and world-order conceptions.

<sup>10</sup> Shih Chih-yu and Yin Jiwu. 'Between Core National Interest and a Harmonious World: Reconciling Self-role Conceptions in Chinese Foreign Policy,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2013, pp. 59-84.

<sup>11</sup> Such a "common ingroup identity" is able to reduce intergroup bias and conflict as it partly transforms the cognitive representation of the two groups from a juxtaposition of "us" and "them" to an inclusive "we" (Samuel L. Gaertner, et al., 'The Common Ingroup Identity Model: Recategorization and the Reduction of Intergroup Bias,' *European Review of Social Psychology*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1993: 1-26.

<sup>12</sup> Reinhard Wolf, 'Respect and disrespect,' p. 113.

<sup>13</sup> This is amongst other also supported by social psychological research. Clearly, "perceptions of self are intimately bound up with how we feel we are perceived by others. By extension, our perceptions of the other are also likely to be influenced by how we feel we are perceived by them" (Viv Burr, Giliberto Massimo, and Trevor Butt, "Construing the Cultural Other and The Self. A Personal Construct Analysis of English and Italian Perceptions of National Character," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 39, 2014, pp. 53-65). Research based on social identity theory suggests that small nations should be hesitant to mirror a big power's self role and world order conceptions. Various studies showed that "people from smaller nations will denigrate larger nations because the smaller nations will have more difficulty in constructing and maintaining a high-status identity" (Viv Burr, Giliberto Massimo and Trevor Butt, 'Construing the Cultral Other and The Self', p. 54). This research would suggest that denigration of large nations by small nations is at least partly a result of the small nations problem to establish "positive distinctiveness" (Jan Pieter Van Oudenhoven et al, 'Asymmetric International Relations,' *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 32, 2002, pp. 275-289).

### 3 China's self role and world order conceptions

#### 3.1 Relational roles, Reciprocity and the Options of the Weak

Following Shih and others, I argue that the self and other role as well as world order conceptions China wants to “make accepted” by the international community of nation states does not aim at the extension and eventual universalization of substantive norms (as for example human rights, democracy, or capitalism). China “has no specific plan to change the world into the image of an ideal type.”<sup>14</sup> Instead it aims at the dissemination of norms governing relationships; i.e. procedural norms, that “only” regulate interaction between the autonomous subjects of international relations. This derives from China applying relationship logic to international relations:

“The logic of relationships is longitudinal. It assumes that while the future is unknown, the partners in the future are the same as in the past and present. Therefore the significance of any specific interaction lies in how it shapes a particular relationship. [...] As China applies relationship logic to international relations, its actions aim to optimize relationships rather than transactions. In this model China does not use preponderance of power to optimize its side of each transaction, but rather to stabilise beneficial relations.”<sup>15</sup>

The fundamental aim of such a relationship based order is for each subject to fulfill the “duties associated with relational roles”<sup>16</sup> and an effort “to achieve a reciprocal relationship.”<sup>17</sup> This focus on upholding reciprocal bilateral relationships results in an orientation on long-term stability: “China and its targets compose a greater self, to the preservation of which their proper and stable relationship is essential.”<sup>18</sup> Any interference in the other's internal affairs is avoided. Instead each country is supposed to handle its own affairs. Relationship-based roles and reciprocal relations inhibit abstract and universal standards and encourage instead context-specific standards. Interaction is not so much defined by shared or contested substantive values and norms, but by shared procedural norms that stipulate a mutual disregard for the other state and society's internal order.

In asymmetric relationships as between China and its Southeast Asian neighbors, reciprocity and stability can be achieved by trading autonomy for deference, as deference by the smaller power signals acceptance of the overall asymmetric relationship.<sup>19</sup> This in turn allows the stronger power to

<sup>14</sup> Huang Chiung-Chiu and Shih Chih-yu. The Identity and International Role of China: Relational Grand Strategy, in Sebastian Harnisch, Sebastian Bersick and Jörn-Carsten Gottwald, eds. *China's International Roles: Challenging or Supporting International Order?* (New York/London: Routledge, 2015), p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> Brantly Womack. ‘China as a Normative Foreign Policy Actor,’ in Nathalie Tocci, ed. *Who Is a Normative Foreign Policy Actor? The European Union and Its Global Partners* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008), p. 296.

<sup>16</sup> Brantly Womack, ‘China as a Normative Foreign Policy Actor,’ p. 267.

<sup>17</sup> Huang Chiung-Chiu and Shih Chih-yu, ‘Harmonious Intervention,’ p. 126.

<sup>18</sup> Huang Chiung-Chiu and Shih Chih-yu, ‘Harmonious Intervention,’ p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ringmar argues that at the core of the traditional China-centred tributary system was ritual, “through which the validity of their [the Chinese] worldview was internationally recognized.” The system, while being centripetal, entailed almost unlimited autonomy for the tributary states, as the “emperor did not claim sovereignty over the system as a whole and the constituent units were free to carry on their affairs as they pleased” (Erik Ringmar, *Performing International Systems: Two East-Asian Alternatives to the Westphalian System*, *International Organization*, Vol. 66, 2012, pp. 4-5).

grant autonomy to the weaker as it rests secure that the asymmetric relationship as such is respected. Deference then needs “not necessarily require submissive behavior. The minimum standard for deference is that [the weaker state] B pursues its interests in a manner that is respectful of [the stronger state] A’s relative status.”<sup>20</sup> Shih and his co-authors argue that China, preoccupied with upholding stable relationships and minimizing future uncertainty, will be willing to make compromises even with weaker opponents and to “sacrifice short-term interests for the sake of long-term interests.”<sup>21</sup> In a game-theoretical modeling of the traditional East Asian tributary system Zhou Fangyin showed, that in the asymmetric dyadic relationships between China and the surrounding weaker states, the latter could maximize their gains by “paying tribute and maintaining the facade of a tributary system,” while at the same time engaging in modestly assertive maximization of their immediate interests “in border areas.”<sup>22</sup>

### **3.2 Continuity and Change in China’s self role and world order conceptions since the early 1970s**

When China turned towards the South China Sea for the first time by conquering the western part of the Paracel Islands in 1974 several crucial foreign policy watershed had already happened: the admission of China to the United Nations and the visits of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and US President Richard Nixon in 1971 and 1972 respectively. Since its admission to the UN, China regularly presented its view of the world as it was and as it should be during the annual general assembly sessions.

From the early 1970s onwards Chinese statements at the general assembly have one unmovable core that to China clearly is the foundation of just international relations: the five principles of peaceful coexistence established in the bilateral agreement with India in 1954: i.e in the words of the then Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua: “mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.” This advocacy of absolute sovereignty and non-interference was accompanied by a strong stance against any form of hegemonism, be it in the form of “great-Power chauvinism” or “territorial expansionism.”<sup>23</sup> In the context of its anti hegemonial and anti colonialist position, China supported the establishment of a “New International Economic Order.”

Ritual signaled hierarchy, yet, the power of the centre was largely symbolical with the centre, tasked with upholding harmony, which was perceived as the natural state, whereas conflict was seen as an aberration. Peace therefore “was to be restored when misunderstandings were removed and virtue and manners improved” (Eric Ringmar, ‘Performing International Systems,’ p. 14). The focus on harmony signals a focus on the proper management of relations by fulfilling the reciprocal duties.

<sup>20</sup> Brantly Womack. ‘Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception: China, Vietnam and Cambodia During the 1970s,’ *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2003, p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> Huang Chiung-Chiu and Shih Chih-yu, *Harmonious Intervention: China’s Quest for Relational Security* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Zhou Fangyin. ‘Equilibrium Analysis of the Tributary System,’ *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2011, p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). *Official Records 2137<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting*, 1973, A/PV.2137, p. 2-3.



In line with the positions advanced by the Non-Aligned Movement China supported the establishment of nuclear(-weapon) free zones and called for the two great-powers to withdraw “their armed forces, both conventional and nuclear back to their own countries.”<sup>24</sup> Explicit Chinese support for the ASEAN initiated Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality for Southeast Asia (ZOPFAN) also aimed at neutralization and an insulation of the region against “interference by outside Powers.”<sup>25</sup> While China perceived alliances as hegemonial devices, it supported national self-strengthening of Third World Countries by building up “independent defense capabilities.”<sup>26</sup>

When China turned to the Spratly Islands in the late 1980s, these core principles that had been included into the preamble of China’s 1982 constitution remained unchanged, even though references to colonialism and imperialism had lost their status as reference points for Chinese world-order conceptions. China’s earlier confrontative stance towards the great-powers had given way to an appeal for the developed countries to show a more cooperative attitude towards the “Third World,” a perspective underscored by a new framework that analyzed international relations as moving towards “multipolarity,” which from the Chinese perspective was “conducive to peace.”<sup>27</sup> Dialogue had become the new framework for dealing with international conflict.<sup>28</sup> Confronted with the newly emerging discourses on the universalization of core concepts of modern Western statehood, i.e. democracy, human rights and liberal market capitalism, China strongly insisted on the principle of non-interference. The non-interference paradigm, however, was reframed as a positive “right of the people of any other country to choose their social system as they think fit.”<sup>29</sup> To China, this right took precedence over any effort to the protection of any of the above mentioned objectives. Any interference was sharply rebuked as a violation of the UN Charter.<sup>30</sup>

China’s overarching interest in absolute sovereignty as the foundation of any desirable international order became even more pronounced in the years following the Tiananmen incident, when China chafed under Western sanctions. Observance of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was deemed the sine qua non of two newly established guiding aims: international harmony and common prosperity. In the early 1990s “international harmony” had become a core theme of Chinese pronouncements on international relations. The desired development towards a multipolar order was supposed to rest on the attainment of international harmony, which “allows countries to make independent choices and seek common ground while putting aside differences.”<sup>31</sup>

Here we see the first expression of a link to traditional Confucian ideas on governance, that defines harmony (和谐, hexie) as a form of cooperation between non-uniform countries (和而不同, he er bu tong),<sup>32</sup> thereby again claiming the right of China to chose the own political, social and economic system while at the same time guaranteeing others against any Chinese interference into their

<sup>24</sup> UNGA. *Official Records 2051<sup>st</sup> Plenary Meeting*, 1972, A/PV.2051, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> UNGA. *Official Records 2363<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Meeting*, 1975, A/PV.2363, p. 214.

<sup>26</sup> UNGA. *Official Records 2252<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting*, 1974, A/PV.2252, p. 378.

<sup>27</sup> UNGA. *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Eighth Meeting*, 1988, A/43/PV.8, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> UNGA, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Eighth Meeting*, 1986, A/41/PV.8, p. 54; UNGA. *Provisional Verbatim Record*, 1988, A/43/PV.8. p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> UNGA. *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Forty Eighth Meeting*, 1985, A/40/PV.48, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> UNGA, *Provisional Verbatim Record*, 1986, A/41/PV.8; UNGA, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Eighth Meeting*, 1987, A/42/PV.8.

<sup>31</sup> UNGA. *Official Records 39<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting*, 1995, A/50/PV.39, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> This goes back to Confucius , who said that the gentleman aims at harmony and not at uniformity (君子和而不同, junzi he er bu tong; Lunyu 13.23).

internal affairs. This turn towards selective anchoring of world-order conceptions in traditional Confucian political philosophy also pervaded the continued Chinese opposition to “hegemonism” (霸权主义; baquan zhuyi) Now, however, hegemony was criticized from a Confucian standpoint as a violation of the fundamental principle of justice not to do unto others what you would not like others to do unto you (己所不欲, 勿施于人, Ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren).<sup>33</sup>

In the context of a rhetorical Confucianization of the Chinese world order conception the four principles of non-interference, anti-hegemony, multipolarity and harmony were further developed during the past two decades. In the mid 2000s, harmony was turned into the core principle of a desirable world order: a harmonious world (和谐世界; hexie shijie), which in turn was based on the idea of a harmonious society (和谐社会; hexie shehui).

Thereby China had established a model of the desired world order, which, in fundamental contrast to the Western conceptions (as conceived by the Chinese), does not aim at creating uniformity (similar systems, based on universal values), but enable diversity with international norms focusing on the regulation of the relationships between the dissimilar. Security, being a result of harmony has to be “comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable.”<sup>34</sup> As such, it arises from inclusion through “partnership rather than alliance.”<sup>35</sup>

By emphasizing harmony and the Golden Rule, the Chinese leaders put up behavioral norms that, while derived from a local (Chinese) context, claim universal validity. Consequently “the Chinese Dream and the world’s dream go hand in hand.”<sup>36</sup>

Put simply then, as Odgaard points out, the Chinese vision of world-order “can accommodate international relations characterized by co-management of global security issues between great powers that subscribe to different versions of international order.”<sup>37</sup> Thereby it provides a less demanding vision for international peace than the liberal vision propagated by the US and the Western democracies, which in the final analysis rests on a quasi-Kantian paradigm according to which international peace rests on the globalization of democratic governance. Whereas democratic peace requires the convergence of political orders, the Chinese vision is based on absolute sovereignty and non-intervention only requires consensus on core norms governing the co-existence of states.

#### **4. 1974 China dispels South Vietnam from the Western Paracel-Islands**

Since the early 1950s the People’s Republic of China and Vietnam had shared the control of the Paracel-islands. Whereas the PRC controlled the eastern Amphitrite Group, the Republic of Vietnam had troops deployed on the western Crescent Group. In late 1973, the US reduced its military assistance to the South Vietnamese regime and the South Vietnamese in turn reduced their troop presence on the Paracel Islands, only to discover in January 1974 that the PRC had moved part of its troops to the western Amphitrite Group. The armed clashes that followed ended after a few days with the

<sup>33</sup> UNGA. *Official Records 8<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting*, 1993, A/48/PV.8 CHINESE, P. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Xi Jinping. *Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind*, Statement at the General Debate of the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly 28 September 2015, UNGA, [http://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/70/70\\_ZH\\_en.pdf](http://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/70/70_ZH_en.pdf), p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> UNGA. *Official Records 15<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session*, 2014, A/69/PV.15, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Liu Xiaoming. ‘*Speech at the Book Launch of Xi Jinping The Governance of China*,’ London, 15 April 2015, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/EmbassyNews/t1255009.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Liselotte Odgaard, ‘Peaceful Coexistence Strategy and China’s Diplomatic Power,’ *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2013, , pp. 233-234.

defeat of the Vietnamese troops and the establishment of complete Chinese control over the whole Paracel Island group. While the 1974 military encounter did neither involve the Philippines nor Malaysia, it was the first signal, that China would be willing to use force to assert its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

#### **4.1 Malaysia: Establishing a relationship based on harmony but not uniformity**

Given that the vast Chinese claims in the South China Sea encompassed almost the whole sea beyond a few miles along the coast of East Malaysia the Chinese move in the Paracel Islands should have been viewed with apprehension by the Malaysian political elite.<sup>38</sup>

Yet, Malaysia chose to ignore the Chinese action in the Paracel islands. Less than three months after the armed clashes in the Paracel Islands, the Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak was the first of the ASEAN-states leaders to establish diplomatic relations with China.

Malaysian leaders offered a vision on the region that was clearly appealing to the Chinese side. In 1971 already Razak had envisaged for China “the right to play a role in regional affairs commensurate with her importance and dignity as a major power and the right to expect that the countries of the region do not act in ways which adversely affect her.”<sup>39</sup> Razak’s vision fit Chinese expectations also in so far as it opposed “security alliances with great powers which not only drag them [Southeast Asian nations] into external power conflict but more importantly sour the relations with each other to the detriment of the region as a whole.”<sup>40</sup> Finally Razak argued that Southeast Asia should become a zone of peace and neutrality “guaranteed by all the great powers,”<sup>41</sup> thereby positioning Malaysia at some distance to the US-centered and alliance-based concept of regional security.

The credibility of this stance was underscored by Malaysia’s non-accession to SEATO, as well as by its initiative for a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality for Southeast Asia and its active role in the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). Publicly, Malaysia opted for national self-sufficiency with respect to national defense, and a policy of insulating the region from superpower rivalry. Yet, Malaysia tried to hedge its bets by cooperating with the United States, if in an unobtrusive way. In 1975 Malaysian Foreign Minister Rithaudeen on a visit to the United States pointed out to the US Secretary

<sup>38</sup> For overviews of Malaysia’s China policies since the 1970s see for example: Stephen Leong, ‘Malaysia and the People’s Republic of China in the 1980s: Political Vigilance and Economic Pragmatism,’ *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 10, 1987, pp. 1109-1126; Joseph Chin Yong Liow, Malaysia-China Relations in the 1990s: The Maturing of a Partnership,’ *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2000: pp. 672-691; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, ‘Making Sense of Malaysia’s China Policy: Asymmetry, Proximity and Elite’s Domestic Authority,’ *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2013, pp. 429-467; Ngeow Chow Bing, ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partners but Prosaic Military Ties: the Development of Malaysia-China Defence Relations 1991-2015,’ *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2015: pp. 269-304.

<sup>39</sup> Tun Abdul Razak Bin Hussein, *Ucapan-Ucapan Tun Haji Abdul Razak Bin Hussein 1971* (Speeches by Tun Haji Abdul Razak Bin Hussein 1971), (Kuala Lumpur: Pemangku Ketua Pengarah Percetakan Semenanjung Malaysia, 1976), p. 129.

<sup>40</sup> Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, *Ucapan-Ucapan Tun Haji Abdul Razak Bin Hussein 1975 (Jilid II)* (Speeches by Tun Haji Abdul Razak Bin Hussein 1975, Vol. II), (Kuala Lumpur: Pemangku Ketua Pengarah Percetakan Semenanjung Malaysia, 1981), p. 251.

<sup>41</sup> The Editor, Razak’s China Triumph: Malaysian Leader Reshapes Regions Political Landscape, *The Asia Magazine*, September 22, 1974, p. 28.

of State that “Some kind of discreet association is helpful to us. [...] We are trying to be independent in our foreign policy, but there are things that we have to arrange discreetly.”<sup>42</sup>

This frame of an independent foreign policy and the vision of a resilient region that tries to hold hegemons at bay was eagerly supported by the Chinese side, and reframed according to the current Chinese understanding.<sup>43</sup>

Changing its past position, China explicitly repudiated the option of intervening in Malaysia’s internal affairs in defense of the interests of overseas Chinese. In the Joint Communiqué China declared that it does

“not recognize dual nationality. Proceeding from this principle, the Chinese government considers anyone of Chinese origin who has taken up of his own will or acquired Malaysian nationality as automatically forfeiting Chinese nationality.”<sup>44</sup>

Initiated by Abdul Razak’s visit to China in 1974 the two countries managed to establish a practice of frequent high level visits that was to become an enduring practice to the present. The years following the establishment of diplomatic relations saw a number of top-level meetings, with the most prominent being Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Malaysia in 1978 and the reciprocal visit of Malaysian Prime Minister Hussein Onn to Beijing in 1979. In 1981 Chinese prime minister Zhao Ziyang visited Malaysia, followed by the Chinese foreign Minister Wu Xueqian in 1982.

Despite the overall harmonious relationship, Malaysia did not hesitate to advance its territorial claims. In 1979 Malaysia made them public, when it published a first map that delineated the Malaysia claimed EEZ. In 1983 it occupied the first island within the EEZ. One year later it promulgated its EEZ Act. While these acts elicited diplomatic protest from China, high-level diplomacy continued unabated, with the Chinese foreign minister visiting Malaysia in 1984 and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir visiting China in 1985, where he was invited to give a prominent speech at Tsinghua University.

Knowingly or unknowingly the Malaysian leaders in their pronouncements on Chinese-Malaysian relations followed the Confucian notion of “harmony but not uniformity” (he er bu tong), which aims at “interactions premised on respect for (not agreement with) those different from us.”<sup>45</sup>

Mahathir Mohamad, who became Malaysian Prime Minister in 1981 was an especially convincing partner. He not only continued Malaysian advocacy of an independent foreign policy, the principles of non-intervention, peaceful coexistence, the rejection of collective security systems, and the establishment of a new international economic order and strengthened South-South cooperation. Mahathir also established himself as a prominent critic of Western double standards, Western dominated international organizations and concepts with universal pretensions like human rights and democracy. This position was developed in the 1990s into a normative alternative to Western world order conceptions based on supposedly “Asian values,” that closely fitted Chinese notions of a desirable international order. The credibility of this signaling was strengthened by the fit between the espoused

<sup>42</sup> US Department of State. Doc 300: Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, September 30, 1974, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976 Volume E–12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973–1976*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d300#fn1>.

<sup>43</sup> The Editor, Razak’s China Triumph, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> *Joint Communiqué of the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of Malaysia*, 31 May 1974, in FBIS-CHI-74-106, p. A29.

<sup>45</sup> Emilian Kavalski. ‘The Struggle for Recognition of Normative Powers: Normative Power Europe and Normative Power China in Context,’ *Cooperation & Conflict*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2013, p. 254.

conceptions and Malaysian foreign policy activities in the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement or the Organization of the Islamic Conference (later renamed into Organization of Islamic Cooperation) and its continued distance from military alliances and multilateral security institutions that included non-regional members.

## 4.2 The Philippines: beguiling China, looking for US support and an international alliance

Similar to Malaysia, the Philippines had no direct claim to the Paracel-Islands. However, whereas the Malaysian claim to territory and maritime rights in the South China sea was still “in the making” and not yet publicly stated, the Philippines had put up their claim to sovereignty over a large number and occupied several of the Spratly islands already in the early 1970s.<sup>46</sup>

While the Philippines hardly reacted to Chinese actions in the Paracels, they protested, when South Vietnam occupied several of the Spratly Islands in the aftermath of their expulsion from the Paracels. Therefore the Philippine government asked the US to restrain South Vietnam, something the American embassy in Manila seems to have endorsed.<sup>47</sup>

With respect to China, the Philippines followed the Malaysian lead by normalizing relations in 1975.<sup>48</sup> However, in fundamental difference to the Malaysian foreign policy decision, the Philippine change in policy lacked any overall vision of regional politics that could accommodate China. When Imelda Marcos, the Philippine President’s wife, visited China in 1974 she signaled consensus with respect to a number of issues that were at the core of the Chinese worldview. According to her, the Philippines and China “found common cause in furthering the interests of the Third World in the United Nations system” and also “share in the belief that respect for the sovereignty and the right to self-determination of peoples is the true cornerstone of harmonious international relations.” Imelda

<sup>46</sup> This drew an angry response by China that protested this as “a serious incident of flagrant violation of China’s territorial sovereignty committed by the Philippine authorities trailing after U.S. imperialism’s aggressive policy and war schemes in Asia. [...] The open violation of China’s territorial sovereignty by the Philippine Government is absolutely not to be tolerated by the Chinese Government and people” (NCNA International Service, *Philippines commits Flagrant Violation of PRC Territory*, 17. July, 1971, in FBIS-FRB-71-138, p. A14).

<sup>47</sup> US Embassy Manila, *Philippine Position with Respect to Spratley Islands*, February 8, 1974, 1974MANILA01522\_b; US Embassy Manila, *Philippine Position with Respect to Spratley Islands*, February 15 F, 1974, 1974MANILA01767\_b.

<sup>48</sup> For overviews of Sino-Philippine Relations see for example: Theresa C. Carino, ‘Philippine-China Relations in the Post-Cold War Era,’ *Asian Studies* (Quezon City), Vol. 31-32, pp. 50-63; Luis T. Cruz, ‘Philippine-China Bilateral Relations in the 1990s,’ *Asian Studies* (Quezon City), Vol. 31-32, pp. 79-85; Benito Lim, ‘*The Political Economy of Philippines-China Relations*,’ Makati City, Philippine APEC Study Center Network, Discussion Paper no. 99-16, 1999; Carl Baker, ‘*China-Philippines Relations: Cautious Cooperation*,’ Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, Special Assessment 2004, <http://www.apcss.org/Publications/SAS/AsiaBilateralRelations/China-PhilippinesRelationsBaker.pdf>; Aileen S.P. Baviera, ‘*The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy: The case of Philippines-China relations since 2004*,’ Singapore, Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Working paper No. 241, 2012; Renato Cruz De Castro, ‘The Aquino Administration’s Balancing Policy against an Emergent China: Its Domestic and External Dimensions,’ in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1, 2014: 5-27;

Marcos even praised Mao Zedong as “the beloved leader of China.”<sup>49</sup> One year later, President Ferdinand Marcos even seemed to query the future of the Philippine-US alliance by arguing that “We must review our alliances.” Marcos even declared China to be a role model to be emulated: “I believe that China, with the depth of the moral outrage she has shown for the iniquities of the past and the present, is the natural leader of the Third World. [...] As an Oriental, I cannot but be proud of your historic achievement.”<sup>50</sup>

Yet, these Philippine signals rang hollow, as they were contradicted by actual Philippine policies. Besides Thailand, the Philippines was the only Southeast Asian state that had actively supported the US war effort in Vietnam by a troop presence. It was also a member of the US led South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Further, it still was the most important regional US-ally. Finally, Philippine President Marcos had just proclaimed martial law in 1972, giving the armed conflict with the Communists insurgents as the core reason for this move. He explicitly accused the Philippine Communists of having “adopted Ho Chi Minh’s terrorist tactics” and “Mao’s concept of protracted people’s war.”<sup>51</sup>

Against this backdrop the quasi-revolutionary appeal of the speeches by the President and his wife seemed highly implausible. It certainly did also not escape Beijing’s attention that the review the Philippine-US alliance was not meant to abolish them, but to get a better deal by renegotiating them. Further, the Philippine efforts to coax the US to extend their security guarantee towards the non-metropolitan territories clearly signaled that the Philippines would not subscribe to a policy of regional neutralization. As a consequence, once having achieved diplomatic normalization, China-Philippines relations succumbed to a deep slumber. After the initial visit of President Marcos to China thirteen years would pass until Marcos successor, Corazon Aquino, would visit China in 1988. Simultaneously, Philippine-US relations thrived with US support proving crucial for the survival of the regime and the fight against internal insurgencies.

### **4.3 1974 as a prelude to future relationships**

Neither of the two neighbors envisioned China’s first move as a direct threat to its security. To both, Vietnam was the by far more important potential adversary. Initially both seem to have been equally willing to grant recognition to China’s self-role and world-order conceptions. Malaysia’s rhetoric of recognition was a logical derivative of the own national world order conception. In contrast, Philippine flattery was highly implausible, given the simultaneous efforts to oblige the US even stronger to its defense. This difference in fit of self-role and world-order conceptions with Chinese expectations was signaled in the following years in the density of state-visits. Whereas Malaysia managed to establish a fairly strong relationship that included regular high-profile visits, the Sino-Philippine relations were clearly lacking in such substance that may be utilized to signal mutual respect and interest in the case of good relations or used as venues for the confidential discussion of problems in strained times.

<sup>49</sup> Imelda Marcos, *Imelda Marcos Banquet Speech in Beijing*, September 23, 1974, in FBIS-CHI-74-186, p. A3.

<sup>50</sup> Ferdinand Marcos, *Speech at 7 June Peking banquet*, 7 June 1975, in FBIS-CHI-74-111, p. A14-A16.

<sup>51</sup> President of the Republic of the Philippines, *Proclamation No. 1081: Proclaiming a State of Martial Law in the Philippines*. 21 September 1972, <http://www.gov.ph/1972/09/21/proclamation-no-1081/>.

Malaysia from the 1970s onward provided plausible and active support for core dimensions of the Chinese self-role and world-order conceptions not only in its rhetoric towards China, but also in its actual conduct of foreign policy. This allowed China to perceive Malaysia as part of a we-group that not only centered on a shared vision of the desirable world-order.

At the same time, Malaysia self-assuredly advanced its interests in the South China Sea and thereby clearly violated the local maritime and territorial interests of China. While the Philippines acted in a similar fashion in the South China Sea, it did not balance this by a credible commitment to any of the dimensions dear to the Chinese self-role or world-order conception. They joined SEATO, held their distance from the NAM and related to the United States in a clientelist fashion, actively demanding that their patron defend them in case of a conflict with China. According to the theoretical perspectives introduced above, Malaysia's policy of recognition, its readiness to advance a highly compatible world-order conception and support core aims of Chinese overall foreign policy orientation should strengthen the Chinese willingness to reciprocate and "restrain its self-interests"<sup>52</sup> in the service of upholding the overall relationship. Contrariwise, the lack of credible Philippine support for Chinese self role and world order conceptions should result in a greater Chinese willingness to press its immediate interests.

## 5. China enters the Spratly Islands

Given the fact that up to the mid 1980s China had no physical presence on the Spratly Islands while the other claimants had already occupied many islands and atolls there, it should come as no surprise that China tried to consolidate its long-standing claims by occupying various elevations in this region in 1987/88.

In early 1987 China first protested against an alleged Vietnamese occupation of a further Spratly-Island feature. Directly following the criticism of Vietnamese action, Chinese navy patrols went as far south as Malaysian-claimed James Shoal in an effort to signal Chinese resolve.<sup>53</sup> Later that year, China sent a "scientific expedition" to the Spratlys.<sup>54</sup> From August onward, Chinese forces explored and later occupied several reefs in areas claimed by Vietnam and the Philippines (Fiery Cross Reef, Cuarteron Reef). Vietnam reacted by occupying additional reefs on its part. Finally, in March 1988 Vietnamese and Chinese forces clashed. In the following months both parties occupied further elevations, but evaded direct contact.

Given that all elevations occupied by Chinese forces lay within the Kalayaan Islands claimed by the Philippines one should expect the latter's strong opposition. Likewise Malaysia should have at least felt seriously threatened not only because Cuarteron Reef is very close to its own claims, but also, because of the various "visits" of Chinese Navy vessels to James Shoal, which is only 30 nautical miles (NM) from the Eastern Malaysian coast-line and in the south of the disputed maritime regions.

<sup>52</sup> Huang Chiung-Chiu and Shih Chih-yu, 'Harmonious Intervention,' p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Ang Cheng Guan. 'The South China Sea Dispute Re-Visited', Singapore (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Working Paper No. 4, 1999), <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/rsis-pubs/WP04.pdf>, p. 6; Jianchuan zhishi (Naval and Merchant Ships), South China Sea Naval Exercise. Jianchuan zhishi (Naval and Merchant Ships) February 8, 1988, trans. JPRS-CAR-88-034, p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Greg Austin. 'China's Ocean Frontier: International Law, Military Force and National Development,' (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 82; John W. Garver. 'China's Push through the South China Sea: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests,' in *The China Quarterly* No. 132, 1992, pp. 999-1028.

China's choice of elevations may provide a first tentative hint that the above established link can actually be observed in practice, as China exclusively choose atolls that lay within the Vietnamese and the Philippine claimed parts of the Spratlys. Yet, in the years preceding the Chinese move the most assertive acts had been undertaken by Malaysia that had officially promulgated its claims in the Exclusive Economic Zone Act of 1984, passed the Fisheries Act in 1985 and established military installations on several features in 1983, 1986 and 1987 (Swallow Reef, Mariveles Reef, Ardasier Reef and Louisa Reef). Further, Malaysia had prospected offshore oil and gas within disputed regions of the South China Sea since the 1960s. Offshore-extraction had been ongoing in East-Malaysia's Baram Delta, the central and the Greater Sarawak basin. While the first hardly overlaps, most of the latter lies squarely within the disputed regions. Compared to these extensive gas fields the Philippines had only explored one fairly small field (Reed Bank) within the perimeter of the Chinese claim off the coast of Palawan with meager results.<sup>55</sup> Yet, even though China in 1988 occupied Cuarteron Reef less than 40 km from the boundary of the EEZ claimed by Malaysia, it did not transgress into Malaysian claimed areas. Further, while it had protested the Philippine exploration at Reed-Bank in the 1970s, there has never been any corresponding effort to signal China's displeasure with Malaysia, even though the latter, in contrast to the Philippines, was already exploiting the subsea resources in contested areas off the coast of Sarawak.

### **5.1 Malaysia: speaking softly and strengthening the “we-group”**

While Malaysia issued a formal statement that reiterated its claims in the South China Sea, it abstained from commenting publicly on the Chinese moves. Malaysian reaction was devoid of political rhetoric that would have defined China as a possible threat. Likewise, the option of turning to the United States as a balancing power was ruled out. Instead, Malaysia chose to stick to its independent foreign policy line.

While the lack of any public comment by the Malaysian elite may seem odd at first sight, it is only the continuation of a pattern exhibited in 1983 when a Chinese PLAN-squadron sailed to James Shoal. Whereas Vietnam protested against this violation of its sovereignty, Malaysia seems not to have reacted at all. A similar pattern can be observed in 1992 when the vice-governor of Hainan province, on board of a Chinese warship conducted an “inspection” of Malaysian claimed James Shoal, which, however, did not elicit any public Malaysian reaction.<sup>56</sup>

With respect to the recognition of China's self role and world order conceptions Malaysia stuck to its well-established foreign policy line of non-interference even after the Tiananmen incident of 1989. In 1990, roughly half a year after the Tiananmen massacre Malaysia removed a long-standing ban on Malaysians who wanted to visit China. In the same year Kuala Lumpur received Chinese President Yang Shangkun and Premier Li Peng for state visits. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir

<sup>55</sup> Emil Attanasi and David H. Root, *Statistics of Petroleum Exploration in the Caribbean, Latin America, Western Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Non-Communist Asia, and the Southwestern Pacific*. U.S. Geological Survey Circular 1096, 1993, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/1993/1096/report.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> John W. Garver, 'China's Push.'



emphasized the Malaysian commitment to the principle of peaceful coexistence and non-interference. To him China had “won the trust of friends and at the same time the right to handle its own internal affairs. Therefore, the ‘4 June’ incident [i.e. the Tiananmen massacre] has not affected Sino-Malaysian relations.”<sup>57</sup> While endorsing democratic government, Mahathir also made clear that democracy should be perceived as a means to an end, and not an end in itself, used by western powers to subjugate “those who do not comply with the latest interpretation of their democratic faith.”<sup>58</sup> The “Asian values” advocated by him, demanded an Asian we-group of which China was to be a prominent part. Mahathir explained that

“[a]s Asians we intuitively understand what China is attempting to do. We intuitively understand why China is doing what it is attempting to do. We intuitively understand how China is going about the entire process of revolutionizing its society and building towards a place of pride and comprehensive prosperity for its people in the twenty-first century.”<sup>59</sup>

Li Peng in turn lauded Malaysia not only on its successful economic development strategy, but especially on its “neutral, and non-aligned foreign policy”, its safeguarding of the principles of the NAM, the leadership in the ASEAN-effort to establish a zone of peace in Southeast Asia and its promotion of South-South cooperation and a New International Economic Order.<sup>60</sup>

Despite its willingness to recognize Chinese overall world order conceptions and signal respect for China’s effort to establish for itself a “place of pride”, Malaysia upheld its assertive policy with respect to its EEZ claims. Directly following the 1988 occupations Malaysian politicians announced a number of projects aimed at strengthening national defense. However, they were at pains not to connect the military build-up to the Spratly-problem.<sup>61</sup> In late 1991 Malaysian Defense Minister Najib Razak announced that Malaysia would build an airstrip on one of the occupied atolls and install military equipment there. A few months later Malaysia and Vietnam agreed to jointly develop parts of the disputed area. Malaysia also significantly extended its capacity for offshore gas production and liquefied natural gas manufacturing and loading by extending its LNG Complex in Bintulu (Sarawak) that had taken up production in 1983 (mostly shipping to Japan). The new complex went operative in 1995 (shipping to Japan, Taiwan and Korea). The gas was supplied from the Central Luzonia fields “located between 125 and 275 km offshore” Sarawak.<sup>62</sup> In the early 1990s Malaysia also intensified further exploration in the Luzonia fields and reported the discovery of a number of new fields.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, ‘Prime Minister Mahathir’s Speech at Banquet in Honor of Premier Li Peng,’ *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily) December 10, 1990, trans. FBIS-CHI-90-238, p. 17-18, quote p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, ‘*Speech at the First Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the Summit Level Group for South-South Consultation and Cooperation*,’ Kuala Lumpur, June 1, 1990, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=mahathir&id=1129>; see also Mahathir Mohamad, ‘*Speech at the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement*,’ Belgrade, September 4, 1989, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=mahathir&id=993>.

<sup>59</sup> Mahathir, Mohamad, ‘*Speech at the 1994 China Summit Meeting*,’ Beijing, May 11, 1994, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=mahathir&id=1754>.

<sup>60</sup> See: ‘Li Toast Notes “Stable” China,’ *Xinhua* Domestic Service, December 10, 1990, trans. FBIS-CHI-90-238, pp.18-19.

<sup>61</sup> See various newspaper reports in *Berita Harian*, *Utusan Malaysia*, the *New Straits Times* trans. JPRS-SEA-88-028: 23, JPRS-SEA-88-029: 26–28 and JPRS-SEA-88-034: 34–35.

<sup>62</sup> Bintulu Development Authority. *Projects*. <http://www.bda.gov.my/pages.php?mod=webpage&sub=page&id=59>; see also Malaysia LNG Group of Companies. ‘*Our Facilities*,’ <http://www.mlng.com.my/#/>.

<sup>63</sup> U.S. Geological Survey, *World Petroleum Assessment 2000 – Description and Results*, 2000 (<http://pubs.usgs.gov/dds/dds-060/>); Specific data on the Central Luconia region see U.S. Geological Survey, *Central*

None of these moves, however, elicited adverse Chinese reactions. The earlier established dense web of contacts continued unabated with the above mentioned visits of Chinese President Yang Shangkun and Premier Li Peng in 1990. In 1991 the Malaysian head of state Sultan Azlan Shah visited China, and in January 1992 Chinese President Yang Shangkun paid his second visit to Malaysia. It was during these years, that the well established political relations were broadened to the military sphere with the Malaysian Chief of Staff visiting China in 1991, reciprocated by the visit of the PLA's Deputy Chief of Staff to Malaysia in April 1992. Shortly afterwards the then Defense Minister of Malaysia Najib Razak visited China with the Chinese defense minister in turn reciprocating in 1993.<sup>64</sup> 1994 saw a visit of Jiang Zemin to Malaysia on account of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. In Kuala Lumpur, he gave a programmatic speech that not only clearly outlined the Chinese self role and world order conception but accorded a prominent place to Malaysia.<sup>65</sup>

## 5.2. The Philippines: a client not being able to make use of the patron

To the Filipinos, the 1987/88 activities of the Chinese on the Spratly Islands came at a peculiar point in their modern history. They had just ousted their dictator Ferdinand Marcos and were experiencing a period of extreme internal instability. Further, the Philippine government grappled with a strong movement to declare the Philippines a nuclear-weapons-free-zone. Finally, the Philippines witnessed a political groundswell that eventually led to the abrogation of the Bases Agreement with the US, the Philippines' mentor, guarantor of external security and most important economic partner in 1991.

In this context, a small-scale skirmish in the Kalayaan islands was hardly a distraction from the overwhelming momentum of chaotic domestic politics. Given the public mood, turning to the US was clearly inappropriate. Lacking a tradition of self-reliance and a political will to develop a national capacity for external self-defense, options for the Philippines were limited.

Even though the Chinese occupation of reefs and atolls had taken place within the Philippine Kalayaan claim, the Philippine government did not show any visible reaction. A government spokesperson only remarked that the Spratlys could be mentioned during the planned visit of Philippine president Corazon Aquino to Beijing. He added, however, that "this is not going to be an issue."<sup>66</sup>

When Philippine President Aquino visited Beijing in March 1988, she exalted her hosts in any conceivable way. To her China was "the premier Asian state" and Beijing "the center of the Chinese universe, from where the Lord of Ten Thousand Years maintained the equilibrium, prosperity and harmony of the realm."<sup>67</sup> With respect to the Spratly problem she pointed out that "with regard to

*Luconia, Assessment Unit 37020101, <http://certmapper.cr.usgs.gov/data/PubArchives/WEcont/regions/reg3/P3/tps/AU/370211kp.pdf>.*

<sup>64</sup> Bing Ngeow Chow 2015, 'Comprehensive Strategic Partners but Prosaic Military Ties: The Development of Malaysia-China Defence Relations 1991-2015,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 37, No. 2, 2015, pp. 269-304.

<sup>65</sup> For the text of the Jiang Zemin's speech see FBIS-CHI-94-222, p. 3-6.

<sup>66</sup> 'Chinese, Viets clash over Spratly,' *Manila Standard*, 6 March, 1988, pp 1 and 6, quote: p. 6

<sup>67</sup> Corazon Aquino. 'A Truly Independent China,' Beijing April 15, 1988, <http://www.gov.ph/1988/04/15/banquet-speech-of-president-corazon-aquino-in-beijing/>.

possible conflicting claims [...] respect and lawful regard have been consistently maintained.”<sup>68</sup> In return Aquino got a Chinese commitment that “the Filipino troops garrisoning on several islands in the group will not be attacked,”<sup>69</sup> and probably more importantly also an agreement according to which “the question of the Nansha Qundao [Spratly Islands] may as well be temporarily shelved.”<sup>70</sup>

Whereas in its immediate reactions to the Chinese advance the Philippines stuck to its positive perception of China, this clearly changed in the following years. While the Philippines under President Aquino trod carefully with respect to the Tiananmen massacre and did not join the Western chorus of damnation, they avoided taking any position. This strategy of circumvention became much more pronounced after Ferdinand Ramos became President of the Philippines in 1992. During his visit to China in 1993 he lauded the Chinese for their economic success, but took pains not to comment on the political situation.

Yet, Ramos’ non-committed stand was sufficient for the two countries to sign a general agreement for a joint exploration. Further, China offered to assist the Philippines in the modernization of their armed forces. Both initiatives, however, were not followed up on. Instead only a few days after his return from China Ramos unilaterally authorized a marine survey of the Spratly Islands. A foreign affairs official conceded publicly that the timing had been deliberate, as the Philippines “didn’t want to risk ruffling any feathers before the state visit.”<sup>71</sup> Less than one year afterwards, the Philippines proposed to internationalize the conflict by invoking ASEAN and the UN, thereby directly challenging the long-standing Chinese preference for a bilateral management.<sup>72</sup>

Further, while avoiding any direct reference to Chinese self role and world order conceptions, the Ramos administration indirectly challenged both, by actively supporting the alternative world-order conceptions as propagated by the United States, Japan and the Western camp in general. President Ramos repeatedly anchored the Philippines in the democratic camp and supported the United States as “the undisputed leader of the Free World.”<sup>73</sup> To Ramos “the time for authoritarianism has passed – in our country and in the world.”<sup>74</sup> The constructed we-group to which the Philippines subscribed relied on the “common commitment to democracy and the rule of law.”<sup>75</sup> Regional security, in Ramos view, “certainly requires U.S. leadership” in a future security structure that, while established “under the auspices of the United Nations,” nevertheless should be “led by the United States.”<sup>76</sup> The

<sup>68</sup> Corazon Aquino. ‘*Mutual Respect for Sovereignty*,’ Beijing, April 15, 1988, <http://www.gov.ph/1988/04/15/speech-of-president-corazon-aquino-on-bilateral-relations-with-china/>.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Twas a Fruitful Journey to China,’ *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 18, 1988, in FBIS-EAS-88-074, p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Aquino holds Press Conference, *Xinhua*, April 16, 1988, translated in FBIS-CHI-88-074, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in: Jose G. Ebro. ‘Ramos Orders Survey of Spratlys’ Marine Resources,’ *Business World*, May 4, 1993, reprinted in: FBIS-EAS-93-084, p. 40.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Internationalization’ of Spratly Dispute Proposed. *Manila Standard*, February 18, 1994, in FBIS-EAS-94-035, p. 69.

<sup>73</sup> Fidel Ramos: ‘*Speech of President Ramos at the United States Military Academy*,’ West Point, November 12, 1993. <http://www.gov.ph/1993/11/12/speech-of-president-ramos-at-the-united-states-military-academy-november-12-1993/>.

<sup>74</sup> Fidel Ramos, ‘*Second State of the Nation Address*,’ Quezon City July 26, 1993, <http://www.gov.ph/1993/07/26/fidel-v-ramos-second-state-of-the-nation-address-july-26-1993/>.

<sup>75</sup> The American Presidency Project. ‘*The President’s News Conference With President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines in Manila*,’ November 13, 1994, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=49486>.

<sup>76</sup> Fidel Ramos, ‘*Speech of President Ramos to the Center for Strategic and International Studies*,’ November 22, 1993. <http://www.gov.ph/1993/11/22/speech-of-president-ramos-to-the-center-for-strategic-and-international-studies-november-22-1993/>.

Philippines and the United States were united by “the values that both Americans and Filipinos cherish deeply: the sanctity of human rights, the value of democracy and the efficacy of the free market.” Further Ramos not only opined that the “Philippine-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 [...] must be strengthened despite the changes in the global and regional security situation.” He also explicitly welcomed “America’s determination to oppose any resort to the use of force in the Kalayaan or Spratly area.”<sup>77</sup>

### 5.3 Comparing reactions

Despite the distinct southward thrust of the 1987/88 Chinese operations, the immediate reactions of the Malaysian government continued along its established policy line of publicly ignoring the Chinese activities while supporting Chinese world order conceptions and the benign Chinese self image.

The Philippines hardly reacted at all due to domestic constraints. President Aquino’s strategy of praising China and not publicly criticizing its conduct in the Spratlys during her visit to Beijing was successful in so far as it brought about some crucial Chinese commitments that took the form of unilateral concessions.

The differences below the superficial similarity in Malaysian and Philippine rhetoric became obvious after the Tiananmen massacre, the unraveling of the Eastern Bloc and the re-evaluation of the Vietnamese threat after Vietnam’s withdrawal from Cambodia.

The Malaysian government not only continued along its well-established independent foreign policy line but also stuck to its policy of non-interference, as it denied taking part in the moral outrage over the violence carried out in the course of crushing the Tiananmen demonstrations. Thereby Prime Minister Mahathir provided crucial support when Chinese leaders were on the defense in the global arena.

In contrast, as in the 1970s, the initial recognition advanced by the Philippines soon came to naught, when the Philippines chose to explicitly support the dominant world order conception advanced by the United States, a conception that not only championed democracy over autocracy, but also legitimized and (arguably) even demanded its global promotion. Further, by explicitly linking its own national security in the Spratlys to the continued US-hegemony the Philippines openly rejected any Chinese pretensions for an inclusive security concept for a multipolar region and the world at large.

## 6. China occupies Mischief Reef

In early 1995 the Philippine government made public that Chinese forces had occupied Mischief Reef, an elevation in the eastern part of the Spratlys that has been claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines, the PRC and Taiwan, but not Malaysia.

<sup>77</sup> The American Presidency Project. *The President’s News Conference With President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines*, November 22, 1993, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=46156>.

Similar to 1988, the rationale of China's choice is unknown. Occupying a feature more to the South of the Spratlys would have sent a much stronger message with respect to Chinese sovereignty claims than the occupation of Mischief Reef. Within the Malaysian claimed EEZ, a number of features were still unoccupied at the time, most prominently Erica Reef and Investigator Shoal.

As in 1988, the Chinese choice cannot be explained by differences in the opponents' assertiveness on the ground. From the Chinese point all opponents plundered the subsea oil resources that rightfully belonged to China.<sup>78</sup> Yet, while the Philippines had been fairly inactive in this respect, Malaysia had expanded its installations in the Greater Sarawak Basin and decided to jointly explore and exploit the subsea resources with Vietnam. Actually Malaysia was the country that most aggressively explored for oil and gas in the regions disputed with China.<sup>79</sup> Further, at the time it was already known that the Spratlys were comparatively poor in hydrocarbon-resources when compared to the Greater Sarawak and the Saigon Basin in the southernmost part of the Chinese claim. If China wanted to signal its opponents' to the continuing exploitation, clearly the Philippines were the wrong choice.

While the Philippines had not been more assertive than Malaysia, during the years preceding the Chinese move, the two states continued to differ significantly with respect to their positioning with respect to the Chinese self role and world order conceptions. While the Philippines adjusted its position towards an indirect challenge by positioning itself into the "Western" camp of liberal democracies and acknowledging the global mission to advance democracy, Malaysia continued to embed the conflict into an overarching framework of recognition and respect and an imagined we-group that drew heavily on core concepts advanced by the Chinese.

It seems plausible to assume that China probably did not want to estrange the only other claimant who had consistently shown that he was willing to accept and support the overall Chinese self-role and world order conception.

## 6.1 The Philippines: turning to its patron and the international public

In contrast to 1988 the Philippines imagined the 1995 occupation of Mischief Reef as a threat to Philippine security. In reaction, the Philippines opted for a strategy of internationalization that sought to establish a moral duty of the "free world" to support the Philippines. The new security-discourse focused on the own helplessness in the face of a superior rogue power. In the words of National Security Advisor Jose Almonte "we are David in front of a Goliath. Only this David doesn't even have a slingshot."<sup>80</sup>

The Philippine elite reframed the conflict into one that should be "a multilateral concern of all claimants and parties interested in the stability of the South China Sea and the East Asia region as a

<sup>78</sup> Ho Po-shi, 'Situation in Nansha (Spratly) Archipelagos Has Become Tense Again as Little Neighbors Are Taking Advantage of China's Tolerance,' *Tangtai*, May 5, 1990, p. 12, trans. in FBIS-90-090, pp. 15-16.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas W. Steinshouer, Jin Qiang, Peter J. McCabe and Robert T. Ryder, 'Maps showing Geology, Oil and Gas Fields, and Geological Provinces of the Asia Pacific Region,' U.S. Geological Survey Open- File Report 97-470F, Denver, 1997., <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/1997/ofr-97-470/OF97-470F/aspac.PDF>.

<sup>80</sup> Uli Schmetzer. 'Reefs In The China Sea Could Spark An Asian Battle,' *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1995, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-04-11/news/9504110172\\_1\\_mischief-reef-spratlys-south-china-sea](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-04-11/news/9504110172_1_mischief-reef-spratlys-south-china-sea).

whole.”<sup>81</sup> Top administration officials, put significant pressure on the United States by insinuating that the latter’s reaction to the Chinese actions would make visible, “whether the US has fully abandoned Southeast Asia after Washington dismantled its US military facilities in the Philippines.”<sup>82</sup>

Philippine political class also turned towards openly challenging the Chinese self role and world order conceptions, as they defined the conflict as one between good and evil. Chinese action was portrayed as a demonstration of might against right with the conflict over sovereignty being transformed into one between the forces of democracy and its opponents<sup>83</sup> The moral inferiority of China on account of its autocratic domestic political system was repeatedly used as a reference for differentiating between the morally upright self and the degenerate other. Senator Blas Ople threatened that China’s activities “may invite diplomatic quarantine reminiscent of world reaction to the massacre of students and workers at Tiananmen Square some years ago.”<sup>84</sup> Others argued that the occupation of Mischief Reef could be a first step towards the “‘Tibetization’ of the South China Sea.”<sup>85</sup> Philippine national security adviser Jose Almonte criticized China by expressing his hope that in the future “Beijing will come down in favor of more freedom for the Chinese people and of progressing together with its neighbors.”<sup>86</sup>

The Philippine establishment did not only turn to the US audience, amongst other by lobbying a number of congressmen, but also tried to catch the attention of the international public for example by inviting a large number of journalists for cruises to the Spratly islands, despite Chinese protests.

By mid 1995 the crisis slowly subsided with the onset of the Taiwan crisis<sup>87</sup> that led both parties to lose interest in continuing the dispute. The Philippines had, albeit slowly, succeeded in pressuring the US into a stronger commitment to regional security and China was confronted with a much bigger problem.

Shortly after, the two countries signed a bilateral code of conduct that, for the time being, put to rest the conflict over Mischief Reef and focused on both countries commitment to peaceful conflict behavior and confidence-building. The Philippines explicitly accepted that disputes “shall be settled by the countries directly concerned.”<sup>88</sup>

In November 1995, Chinese President Jiang and Philippine President Ramos met on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Osaka and reportedly discussed joint development of marine resources in the disputed regions. Despite this turn-around, the Philippines stuck to their focus on a community of shared values focused on the United States, their support for

<sup>81</sup> Ferdinand Ramos quoted in Fel V. Maragay, ‘Spratly troop buildup unconfirmed – Ramos,’ *Manila Standard*, February 2, 1995, p. 28.

<sup>82</sup> ‘China Not Testing RP, but what US might do,’ *Manila Standard*, March 11, 1995, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> ‘China Not Testing RP,’ *Manila Standard*, p.2.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Diplomatic Quarantine: China Courting Isolation over Spratlys – Ople,’ *Manila Standard*, May 20, 1995, p. 28.

<sup>85</sup> ‘China Not Testing RP,’ *Manila Standard*, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Merlinda Manalo, Stand Up vs Beijing Threat, Almonte Urges Southeast Asia,’ *Manila Standard*, May 27, 1995, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> From July 1995 onwards China conducted a number of missile tests and live fire exercises in the direct vicinity of Taiwan. These were on the one hand a reaction to the visit of Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to the United States and a “reminder” to the Taiwanese to think twice before pursuing independence from China. This crisis did not subside before March 1996, when the US ordered two aircraft carrier groups into the region.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Joint Statement Republic of Philippine-People’s Republic of China Consultations on the South China Sea and Other Areas of Cooperation,’ August 9-10, 1995. <http://docslide.us/download/link/joint-statement-prc-and-rp>; Joem H. Macaspac, ‘China Softens Spratly Stance,’ *Manila Standard*, August 12, 1995, p. 2.

continued US-hegemony and their normative distance to China and its rulers. In the words of Ferdinand Ramos:

“I ask you not to underestimate the power of America's democratic ideals to help shape East Asian political systems. [...] America's military hegemony in the post-cold war period gives it the historic opportunity to bring political morality to international relationships – to shape a moral world order. [...] Authoritarian regimes may seek their legitimacy by sponsoring capitalist growth. But economic development cannot – forever – substitute for democracy. And it is to the idea of America that East Asia looks – in its groping for freedom.”<sup>89</sup>

A more abrasive refusal of Chinese self role and world order conceptions is difficult to imagine in the world of international relations.

## **6.2 Malaysia: still speaking softly and upholding the “we-group” with China**

Malaysia stuck to the line it had already adopted in the 1970s and further developed in the 1980s and early 1990s. Neither the Chinese occupation nor the Philippine reaction received any major reporting or executive comment. Yet, Prime Minister Mahathir visited Malaysian occupied Swallow Reef to signal Malaysian resolve with respect to its territorial and maritime claims.

Barring such symbolic activities, Prime Minister Mahathir largely avoided the issue and instead regularly focused on the claimed joint preference of Asians for an Asian-style democracy. Continuing along the line espoused in Beijing a decade earlier, he argued that “democracy is a method of government. It is good only if the results are good.” Consequently, to Mahathir, “[e]ach country should be allowed to tailor its democracy to cater to the characteristics of its people and its needs.”<sup>90</sup>

With respect to regional security, Mahathir also stuck to the traditional Malaysian position of keeping the region clear from superpower competition with the accompanying threat of an extended arms race. Mahathir consistently repeated the normative cornerstones of the “we-group” that united Malaysia and China from the aim of achieving a multipolar and equitable world order to non-interference. These were also expressed prominently in official bilateral documents as the China-Malaysia Memorandum of Understanding of 1999.<sup>91</sup>

Any critique of China was balanced by criticism of the United States. Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi argued that China “must be able to temper the arrogance and assertive belligerence that can sometimes typify the demeanor of those who have just scaled new heights of power.” However he connected this with a critique of the US by calling for a regional order “which constrains the powerful from using illegitimate and unfair means to prevent others from pursuing legitimate aspirations and realizing their full potential.” Without mentioning names, he extended this criticism to the Philippines as one of those “who are wedded to the preferred imbalance of power” with the US as the supreme hegemon.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, Prime Minister Mahathir argued that China and Malaysia

<sup>89</sup> Fidel Ramos, ‘America's Role in East Asia,’ October 16, 1995, in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 141, No. 187, November 27, 1995, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-1995-11-27/html/CREC-1995-11-27-pt1-PgS17518.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> Mahathir, Mohamad, ‘No Freedom without Responsibility,’ in *New Straits Times*, May 20, 1995, pp. 14-15.

<sup>91</sup> For the text of the joint statement see ‘PRC, Malaysia Sign Joint Statement,’ *Xinhua*, May 31, 1999, <http://wnc.eastview.com/wnc/article?id=36975425>.

<sup>92</sup> S. Jayakrishnan, ‘Asia-Pacific Region ‘needs Code of Conduct,’ *New Straits Times*, June 7, 1995, p. 8.

shared an interest in “discouraging the formation of alliances in the region.”<sup>93</sup> Taking up the long-standing Chinese position, Malaysian leaders endorsed actual settlement exclusively “through bilateral friendly consultations and negotiations.”<sup>94</sup>

Again, this active recognition and support for Chinese self role and world order conceptions allowed Malaysia not only to continue its force modernization program and expand its hydrocarbon production in offshore areas disputed with China, but even to occupy two more reefs in 1999 without encountering any more than token Chinese protest.

### 6.3 Comparing reactions

The reactions to the 1995 occupation of Mischief Reef could hardly have been more different.

The Philippines strengthened their strategy developed in the early 1990s that increasingly focused on denying not only the Chinese pretensions to a benign self-role but also Chinese visions of a more just regional order. The challenge to Chinese self role and world order conceptions was clad in an exaltation of the values that bind the Philippines to the United States and an imagined community of democratic countries. This was contrasted with a publicly presented image of China as a normatively inferior rogue state whose actions contravened universal standards of international law and, even more importantly, international morality. At the same time, the Philippines did neither invest in national security nor an enhancement of their maritime domain awareness. Actual assertiveness on the ground remained fairly low. Instead, it chose to continue its dependence on the US-security umbrella. Utilizing the China threat, the conservative establishment managed to turn around the formerly anti-American mood, so that in 1998 a new Visiting Forces Agreement could be signed which was ratified in 1999.<sup>95</sup>

Malaysia in contrast continued its earlier policy of simultaneously supporting core dimensions of China’s self role and world order conceptions on the one hand while at the same time resorting to clearly assertive displays of its own territorial and maritime claims. Significantly, while Malaysia regularly voiced support for the Chinese preference for bilateral conflict management, Malaysia at no point in time reneged from its practice of unilateral hydrocarbon exploitation, to which China, however, seems to have succumbed.

## 7. A cooperative interlude in the Philippine-Chinese relationship

A temporary change in Philippine policy towards China in the early 2000s allows us to assess how China might have acted and reacted if the Philippines had constantly been more responsive to the Chinese need for recognition of its benign self role and world order conceptions.

<sup>93</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, ‘*Speech at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Malaysia-China Forum*,’ Beijing, August 19, 1999, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=mahathir&id=967>.

<sup>94</sup> ‘PRC, Malaysia Sign Joint Statement,’ Xinhua.

<sup>95</sup> On the domestic logic of the Philippine course see Greg Austin, ‘Unwanted Entanglement: The Philippines’ Spratly Policy as a Case Study in Conflict Enhancement?’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2003, pp. 41-51.



After 9/11 the new Philippine government under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo turned towards a strategy that aimed at getting more leverage in foreign policy and maximize Philippine options by balancing the two contending great powers, China and the United States. On the one hand the Philippines under Arroyo posed as one of the most ardent supporters of the US war against terror and thereby were able to maximize U.S. support for counterinsurgency against domestic Muslim and Communist rebels. At the same time the Arroyo government mended fences with China not only by toning down rhetoric, but also by having the national oil corporation, the Philippine National Oil Corporation sign a bilateral agreement on joint exploration in the South China Sea with its Chinese counterpart in 2004 to which Vietnam acceded in 2005. Thereby the Philippines not only took up the long-standing Chinese offer to jointly develop the resources while shelving the question of sovereignty, it also signaled accord with the Chinese preference for dealing with the subject on a bilateral basis. The later accession of Vietnam illustrated that such bilateralism need not be exclusive but can provide a first step towards more inclusive forms that bring together all concerned parties. This success was complemented by enhanced confidence-building measures between China and the Philippines. Further, Chinese companies successfully bid for several crucial infrastructure projects in the Philippines, with China providing large loans for their realization. Sino-Philippine bilateral trade sky-rocketed with the Philippines for the first time enjoying an enduring trade surplus.

The enhanced bilateral relationship was mirrored in mutual visits by politicians and military leaders of the two countries. Arroyo visited China in 2001 (two visits), 2004, 2006, 2007 (three visits), 2008 (two visits), and in 2010 (Government of the Philippines no year). China responded with visits of highest-ranking leaders to the Philippines, amongst them former Premier Li Peng and President Hu Jintao in 2002 and 2005 respectively. In 2007, the Chinese People's Daily, on account of a visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to the Philippines, opined that "Sino-Philippine Relations Enter a Golden Period."<sup>96</sup>

However, this "Golden Period" came to an abrupt halt in 2008, when the Philippine president's China deals came under a barrage of criticism in the Philippine media and politics. Even though the initial bi- and latter tripartite agreement for joint maritime research had been concluded between the national oil corporations and contained an explicit clause according to which "the Parties recognize that the signing of this Agreement shall not undermine the basic position held by the Government of each Party on the South China Sea issue,"<sup>97</sup> the government was faced by broad-based attacks from members of Congress and Senate, as well as from the vast majority of media for selling out Philippine sovereignty to China and agreeing to the contracts in exchange for huge sums of corruption money.<sup>98</sup> China, trying to preserve the positive dynamic, even made its Manila Embassy release a statement that the tripartite cooperation in exploration "complies with the principles of the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and is conducive to maintenance of

<sup>96</sup> Sino-Philippine Relations Enters a Golden Period,' *Xinhua*, January 16, 2007, <http://wnc.eastview.com/wnc/article?id=30980973>.

<sup>97</sup> China National Offshore Oil Corporation, Vietnam Oil and Gas Corporation, Philippine National Oil Corporation, 'A Tripartite Agreement for Joint Marine Scientific Research in Certain Areas of the South China Sea,' 2005, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, [http://pcij.org/blog/wp-docs/RP\\_China\\_Vietnam\\_Tripartite\\_Agreement\\_on\\_Joint\\_Marine\\_Seismic\\_Undertaking.pdf](http://pcij.org/blog/wp-docs/RP_China_Vietnam_Tripartite_Agreement_on_Joint_Marine_Seismic_Undertaking.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> A.M. Madrigal, 'Senate P.S. Resolution No. 315: Directing the Committee of the Whole to Conduct an Inquiry, in Aid of Legislation, on the Propriety of the Agreements Entered into by the Administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo Allwong China to Explore the Gas and Oil Deposits in Spratly Islands,' April 4, 2008, <https://www.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/69566196!.pdf>; Philippines Senate Committee on Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations, 'NBN-ZTE Scandal: Committee Report' no. 743,' 2009, <https://www.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/1293411633!.pdf>.

peace and stability in the South China Sea and the region at large,” and that joint development “serves the common interests of all sides concerned.”<sup>99</sup>

Fighting for its political survival, the Arroyo-government did not extend the Joint Maritime Seismic Undertaking after its initial phase expired in 2008. The other projects were aborted as well. The effort to balance the United States, China (and to a lesser extent Japan) “against each other to ensure national security”<sup>100</sup> had come to an end. The Philippines were back at what De Castro unflatteringly calls a “protectorate status”<sup>101</sup> to the United States. China was put under general suspicion, as having concluded all those deals only because it wanted to “be able to explore the Spratly Islands’ natural gas and oil deposits.”<sup>102</sup> In 2008 Hermogenes Esperon, the Chief of Staff of the Philippine Armed Forces, visited the disputed Spratly Islands. The Philippines announced that they would improve the runway on Philippine occupied Thitu Island in the Spratlys. Underscoring the return to the earlier framework Esperon first admitted that “We don’t have enough firepower to last a single day in battle,” in order to add that “this won’t happen now because the United Nations will not allow it.”<sup>103</sup>

In 2009 President Arroyo signed into law the Philippine Baseline Bill (Republic Act No. 9522) that established the baselines from which to measure Philippine maritime claims and explicitly included the Kalayaan Islands and Scarborough Shoal, a move that drew angry protest from China and even led to the cancelation of official visits.<sup>104</sup> When China announced that it had dispatched a patrol ship to the South China Sea, Philippine National Security Advisor Norberto Gonzales opined that such a move “should remind us that even in this era of dialogue and understanding in the world, there will always be nations that will show might and threaten perceived weak nations like us.”<sup>105</sup> Thereby Philippine politics had reintroduced the standard rhetorical device of David who, being threatened by the rogue Goliath, appealed to the international community in his quest for justice and the rule of law. While the Philippines had not turned to positive recognition of China’s benign self role and world order conceptions during the preceding years, the Arroyo government successfully circumvented the issue. By 2009 they had returned to their earlier position of challenging the dragon’s benign self image.

## 8. China’s “new assertiveness” in the South China Sea

Whereas earlier Chinese assertiveness hardly ever targeted Malaysia, this no longer holds true since Chinese government ships regularly ply the seas claimed by Malaysia. This first became public when the Chinese Armed Forces informed the public that a Chinese Navy flotilla had conducted patrol and high-sea training exercises near James Shoal less than 80 km off the East Malaysian coast

<sup>99</sup> The State Council, People’s Republic of China, ‘China worried about tendencies in Philippines having negative influence on ties,’ March 12, 2008, [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2008-03/12/content\\_918361.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2008-03/12/content_918361.htm).

<sup>100</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, , Weakness and Gambits in Philippine Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century,’ *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 4, 2010, pp. 697.

<sup>101</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, Weakness and Gambits in Philippine Foreign Policy, p. 708.

<sup>102</sup> A.M. Madrigal, ‘Senate Resolution No. 315,’ p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Military Chief Banking On UN To Defend Philippines’ Claim Over Spratlys,’ *Inquirer.net*, March 26, 2008, <http://wnc.eastview.com/wnc/article?id=40331038>.

<sup>104</sup> China had already established its Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone in 1992 and declared its baselines in 1996. However, this latter declaration was confined to the seas adjacent to the mainland and the Paracel Islands. Up to the present, the Chinese have not declared the baselines for their other claims in the South China Sea.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Manila’s Security Chief Calls Meeting To Discuss China Deployment of Patrol Ship,’ *Inquirer.net*, March 16, 2009, <http://wnc.eastview.com/wnc/article?id=39651239>.

in 2013. Shortly afterwards another Chinese government ship seems to have thrown sovereignty markers into the sea near the disputed Reef. In early 2014 Chinese warships appeared at James Shoal. In June 2015 Malaysia announced that it had detected a Chinese coast guard vessel at Luconia Shoal most probably had been anchored there for two years. This vessel only left the area in November 2015.

Chinese-Philippine relations had already soured with the enactment of the Philippine Baseline Bill in 2009 (Republic Act No 9522). Escalation on the ground commenced in 2011, when a Philippine navy vessel rammed a Chinese fishing boat. In the same year the Philippines decided to unilaterally commence oil exploration in the Northeast of the Spratly Islands around Reed Bank. Unsurprisingly the Philippine decision evoked protests from the PRC. Despite the protests the Philippines went along with the exploration. In early March, the exploration ship was forced to leave the area by two Chinese Marine Surveillance Force vessels.

In early 2012, the Philippines issued new invitations for investments in oil and gas fields in the South China Sea. Shortly afterwards, Chinese Maritime Security vessels confronted a Philippine Navy vessel that had tried to apprehend Chinese fishermen in Scarborough Shoal area. The situation escalated as the two contending forces opposed each other for several weeks. Even though both sides initially withdrew their vessels from the area, the Chinese returned and since then block the entrance to the shoal to Philippine fishermen.

In 2014, Chinese ships also temporarily blocked the resupply of a Philippine ship that has been run aground at Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 after the Philippines announced that the ship had been run aground deliberately “to serve as a permanent Philippine Government installation” in contravention to earlier statements that the grounding was an accident and the ship would be removed.<sup>106</sup> The Philippines in turn unilaterally initiated an arbitration case against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in early 2013. Although China does not participate in the case, the initial steps for arbitration have been completed, the arbitration court ruled that it has jurisdiction in October and commenced with the hearings in November 2015.

The year 2015 saw a further escalation, after it became publicly known that China has been creating artificial islands out of its outposts in the Spratlys. These islands are meant to harbor airports, ports, lighthouses and will most likely be equipped with military equipment. The first lighthouses started operation in October 2015 and the first airplane landed on Fiery Cross Reef in early 2016.

## **8.1 The Philippines: challenging China and going international**

In 2010 the new Philippine President Benigno Aquino assumed office on the basis of a highly reformist agenda. He presented himself as a leader who took up the burden to end “the silent suffering of the nation.” He promised establish the Philippines “as a reliable member of the community of

<sup>106</sup> Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, ‘*DFA Statement on China’s Allegation that The Philippines Agreed to Pull-Out of the Ayungin Shoal*,’ March 14, 2014, <https://www.dfa.gov.ph/index.php/2013-06-27-21-50-36/dfa-releases/2333-dfa-statement-on-china-s-allegation-that-philippines-agreed-to-pull-out-of-the-ayungin-shoal>.

nations.”<sup>107</sup> and put up the Filipino as a role model for the world. With the Filipinos ready to defend the Philippines: “It is not impossible for the Filipino [...] to stand with his head held high and bask in the admiration of the world.”<sup>108</sup>

In line with this new agenda, the new administration replaced the short-lived former president’s policy of equi-balancing China and the United States with a policy of external balancing of China through the traditional guardian of Philippine external security, the United States.<sup>109</sup>

Under Aquino Manila returned to its internationalization strategy turning to the US, ASEAN and the United Nations for support.<sup>110</sup> The Philippines supported its campaign by a moral crusade that again juxtaposed right and might.<sup>111</sup> The Philippines consistently portrayed themselves as standard bearer of fundamental universal principles underlying a just international order. Philippine opposition to China was interpreted as “an unwavering adherence to international law. Since international law must be observed, it behooves the Philippines to embrace this imperative to the fullest.”<sup>112</sup> The small Philippines were presented as fighting for a common good and in need of international support. Foreign Minister Del Rosario for example stated towards his ASEAN colleagues

that the Philippines has borne more than its share of the heavy burden for ASEAN and the international community on this issue. [...] Even as this issue is unfolding in our region, it invariably affects the entire global community. [...] On this most important issue, is it not time for ASEAN to finally stand up for what is right?”<sup>113</sup>

In a further challenge to China’s benign self role conception, the Philippine President repeatedly alleged that the current situation in the South China Sea resembled the situation in 1938 when the Western Great Powers allowed Nazi Germany to swallow the Sudetenland.<sup>114</sup> During his 2015 visit to Japan, he indirectly compared Japan, painted in the brightest colors, with an anonymous threatening other. Japan and the Philippines were described as

“the most vocal defenders of that stability, which has recently come under threat. [...] I see my people’s peaceful character reflected in the Japanese: We are both constantly willing to dialogue, bending over backwards to deescalate tensions despite repeatedly getting rebuffed, and still trying to resolve disagreements through peaceful means and internationally recognized norms. Perhaps I may share with you a question that I posed to a country that we both have had difficulties with: If all governments are there to serve the people from whom they derive their power, is it not incumbent upon all to maintain stability, which is a necessary prerequisite for prosperity? How does fomenting tension help us achieve the primary goal of bettering the

<sup>107</sup> Benigno Aquino, ‘*Inaugural Address of President Benigno S. Aquino III*,’ June 30, 2010, <http://www.gov.ph/2010/06/30/inaugural-address-of-president-benigno-s-aquino-iii-english-translation/>.

<sup>108</sup> Benigno Aquino 2012, ‘*Benigno S. Aquino III, Third State of the Nation Address*,’ July 23, 2012, <http://www.gov.ph/2012/07/23/english-translation-benigno-s-aquino-iii-third-state-of-the-nation-address-july-23-2012/>.

<sup>109</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, ‘The Aquino Administration’s Balancing Policy against an Emergent China: Its Domestic and International Implications,’ *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 4, 2014, pp. 697-717.

<sup>110</sup> Micah S. Muscolini, ‘Past and Present Resource Disputes in the South China Sea: The Case of Reed Bank,’ in *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, No. 8, 2013, pp. 80-106.

<sup>111</sup> Senate of the Philippines, ‘*Statement on the Reed Bank*,’ Press Release, March 8, 2011, [http://www.senate.gov.ph/press\\_release/2011/0308\\_angara2.asp](http://www.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2011/0308_angara2.asp).

<sup>112</sup> Albert F. Del Rosario, ‘A Rules-Based Regime in the South China Sea,’ *Inquirer.net*, June 7, 2011, <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/3411/a-rules-based-regime-in-the-south-china-sea>.

<sup>113</sup> Albert F. Del Rosario, ‘*Intervention of Secretary Albert F. Del Rosario Asean Foreign Ministers’ Meeting*,’ Kuala Lumpur, April 26, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/dfaphl/posts/459987644156075>.

<sup>114</sup> Benigno Aquino, ‘*Excerpts from the New York Times Interview with President Aquino*,’ February 4, 2014, <http://www.gov.ph/2014/02/07/for-the-record-excerpts-from-the-new-york-times-interview-with-president-aquino-february-4-2014/>.

lives of our people? [...] Ours is a partnership that can only grow stronger, because it is based not on mere practicality, but on shared values and mutual respect among equals.”<sup>115</sup>

The filing of a case against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in early 2013 was a further move to differentiate rogue China from the civilized and law-abiding Philippines. In Philippine eyes, not providing support for the Philippine claim amounts to betraying international law and justice itself. Addressing the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the Philippine Foreign Minister lauded the court for having “the courage to apply the law to a country like China.”<sup>116</sup> The Philippine case was presented as being:

“of the utmost importance to the Philippines, to the region, and to the world. In our view, it is also of utmost significance to the integrity of the Convention, and to the very fabric of the ‘legal order for the seas and oceans’ that the international community so painstakingly crafted over many years. [...] In the Philippines’ view, it is not just the Philippines’ claims against China that rest in your capable hands. Mr. President, it is the spirit of UNCLOS itself. [...] We call on the Tribunal to kindly uphold the Convention and enable the rule of law to prevail.”<sup>117</sup>

The extent of China’s perceived humiliation at the hands of the Philippines can be roughly gauged by the protocol of bilateral summitry. While President Aquino was welcomed to Beijing for a four-day state visit in 2011 despite the emerging dissonances in the bilateral relationship, he was explicitly disinvited by the Chinese hosts only hours after he had announced his intention to attend the 2013 China-Asean Expo in Nanning. China also all but ignored the 40th anniversary of bilateral relations in 2015. While Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi agreed to a working visit in the Philippines in late 2015, his Philippine counterpart had his first and only visit to China in 2011.

## 8.2 Malaysia: ignoring provocations and upholding the “we”

Even though the past few years saw significantly heightened Chinese activities in Malaysian claimed waters, the Malaysian government evaded informing the public. While the Malaysian government issued diplomatic protests, these were initially kept confidential. News eventually transpired through Chinese and international media. As Lockman notes: “In contrast to how such exercises are greeted in Hanoi and Manila, the Malaysian public response has been a deafening silence.”<sup>118</sup>

In several cases the Malaysian government seems to have been caught off guard by the public releases in international media.<sup>119</sup> When for example questioned about the January 2014 oath taking

<sup>115</sup> Benigno Aquino Benigno, ‘*Speech of President Aquino before the joint session of the National Diet of Japan*,’ June 5, 2015, <http://president.gov.ph/speech/speech-of-president-aquino-before-the-joint-session-of-the-national-diet-of-japan/>.

<sup>116</sup> Albert F. Del Rosario, ‘*Concluding Remarks of Secretary Albert F. Del Rosario Before the Permanent court of Arbitration*,’ November 30, 2015, <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/index.php/newsroom/dfa-releases/8087-concluding-remarks-of-secretary-albert-f-del-rosario-before-the-permanent-court-of-arbitration-peace-palace-the-hague-netherlands>.

<sup>117</sup> Albert F. Del Rosario, ‘*Why the Philippines brought this case to Arbitration and its importance to the region and the world*,’ July 7, 2015, <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/speeches/6820-statement-before-the-permanent-court-of-arbitration-peace-palace-the-hague-netherlands>.

<sup>118</sup> Shariman Lockman, ‘*Why Malaysia Isn’t Afraid of China (for now)*,’ *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, April 24, 2013, <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-malaysia-isnt-afraid-of-china-for-now/>.

<sup>119</sup> This seems to be a rather new situation, signaling that it becomes more difficult to uphold the heretofore preferred Malaysian strategy of controlling the domestic reaction to Chinese acts of assertiveness by withholding the respective

ceremony near James Shoal, the Malaysian Navy Chief Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Jaafar denied that it had happened in Malaysian claimed waters.<sup>120</sup> He also stated that Malaysia as well as the US had been informed in advance of the exercises and that there “has been no act of provocation on the part of the Chinese or threat to our sovereignty as they are conducting their exercise in international waters.”<sup>121</sup> A few weeks later, the Chief of the Malaysian Defense Forces further tried to defuse the situation by arguing that the Chinese ships “passed through James Shoal. They did not patrol James Shoal.”<sup>122</sup>

Malaysian Defense Minister Hishamuddin’s remarks regarding the earlier 2013 patrols signal the government’s overarching political framework for dealing with China. Distancing Malaysia from its neighbors, he stated that

“Just because you have enemies, [this] doesn’t mean your enemies are my enemies. [...] [The Chinese] can patrol every day, but if their intention is not to go to war [...]. I think we have enough level of trust that we will not be moved by day-to-day politics or emotions.”<sup>123</sup>

The Malaysian leadership continued to publicly advocate a prominent “role for quiet diplomacy – in the prevention of conflict, the containment of hostilities and the peaceful resolution of disputes.”<sup>124</sup> In an opinion piece published in both the (Chinese) People’s Daily and the (Malaysian) New Straits Times Malaysian Prime Minister Razak acknowledged that China has “re-emerged as a Great Power in a new, multipolar world order,”<sup>125</sup> thereby simultaneously underscoring his recognition of China as a great power and the Chinese vision of a multipolar world order. Razak argued that “the current trajectory towards global multipolarity is set to continue”, and that the current hegemon should take note of the new major powers interest in shaping outcomes “in ways that reflect their preferences and interests.” He made clear Malaysia’s preferences for re-negotiating the regional order by arguing that such “a transition towards an evolving strategic landscape, where power and influence are more evenly distributed, can be managed peacefully.”<sup>126</sup> To Razak:

“Malaysia and China share a similar vision. The ‘Chinese dream’ is of economic prosperity, peace and happiness; a dream of opportunity not instability. Malaysia’s ‘Vision 2020’ sees us become a developed and high income country, and one which plays a greater role in the promotion of global peace”.<sup>127</sup>

information. Whereas in the past decades, the Malaysian establishment politicians had a virtual information monopoly this no longer holds true in times of high-resolution satellite pictures that can be bought or may be distributed by interested parties.

<sup>120</sup> ‘China Claims its Vessels Patrolled James Shoal,’ *The Star online*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2014/01/31/china-claims-its-vessels-patrolled-james-shoal/>.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Malaysian Navy Chief Denies Chinese Incursion Claim,’ *The Rakyat Post*, February 14, 2014, <http://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2014/01/31/malaysian-navy-chief-denies-chinese-incursion-claim/>.

<sup>122</sup> Trefor Moss and Rob Taylor, ‘Chinese Naval Patrol Prompts Conflicting Regional Response,’ *The Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304914204579392720879214320>.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Malaysia Splits with Asean Claimants over South China Sea Threat,’ *Malaymail online*, August 29, 2013, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/malaysia-splits-with-asean-claimants-over-south-china-sea-threat>.

<sup>124</sup> Mohd, Najib Tun Razak, ‘Keynote Speech at the Dialogue on Diversity, Diplomacy and Peace,’ *ISIS Focus*, No. 11, 2013, p. 9, [http://www.isis.org.my/files/IF\\_2013/IF11/IF11\\_3.pdf](http://www.isis.org.my/files/IF_2013/IF11/IF11_3.pdf).

<sup>125</sup> ‘Najib says Malaysia-China ties will stay strong – Bernama,’ *The Malaysian Insider*, May 30, 2014, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/najib-says-malaysia-china-ties-will-stay-strong-bernama>.

<sup>126</sup> Mohd Najib Tun Razak, ‘Speech at the 29<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific roundtable,’ Kuala Lumpur, June 11, 2015, [https://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1676&news\\_id=765&speech\\_cat=2](https://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1676&news_id=765&speech_cat=2).

<sup>127</sup> Mohd, Najib Tun Razak, ‘The Malaysia-China Friendship Dinner,’ Beijing, May 31, 2014, [http://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1908&news\\_id=719&speech\\_cat=2](http://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1908&news_id=719&speech_cat=2); see also Mohd Najib

Clearly, with pronouncements like these Razak echoes Chinese pretensions on the sameness of the “Chinese dream” and the “world dream.”

That much of the responsibility for the current confrontation lies with the “old superpower” is most visibly made clear by semi-official actors as the director of the Malaysian Institute of Security and International Studies, who criticized the US effort “to preserve its hegemony position in this region” and argued that “instability can also be caused as much by a status quo power determined not to yield its dominant position and accommodate the rising power.” To him,

“China has managed its role as a rising power extremely well and much better and more responsible than any other rising powers [sic] of the past. [...] It manages its difficult situation quiet [sic] well. It has very constructive policy towards this region which gives utmost priority and primacy to the economic and social instruments and its military instruments place a very small secondary role and essentially to protect its immediate environment and its vital interests.”<sup>128</sup>

In a similar way, Chief of the Malaysian Armed Forces General Zulkifeli, albeit less openly criticizes the United States by arguing that “non-claimants must take caution on their actions especially in the disputed areas which may cause unwanted provocations and hinder the progress of the negotiations.”<sup>129</sup> He even asks whether Chinese moves in the Spratlys are not only a “rebalancing of pivot.”<sup>130</sup>

Obviously Malaysian politicians consciously emphasize the role of cognitive framing, as they feel that “it depends on us whether we want to look at relations positively or are we going to pursue and navigate the waters in a negative approach” (Hishammuddin in: IISS 2014).<sup>131</sup> As Cheng-Chwee Kuik quotes an anonymous Malaysian diplomat:

“The question of whether China is in fact a threat to the region [...] is a complex and debatable issue. But this point must not be confused with Malaysia’s conscious and deliberate policy of not viewing China as a threat.”<sup>132</sup>

Notably, Malaysia and China stuck to their long-standing pattern of dense bilateral exchange. In 2014 alone, Najib Razak paid two visits to China, meeting Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang on both accounts. Chinese President Xi explicitly “acknowledged that the quiet diplomacy approach adopted by Malaysia was the best method, as it stressed on discussion rather than confrontation or international liaison work involved.”<sup>133</sup> Xi Jinping in turn visited Malaysia in 2013 and Prime Minister Li

Tun Razak, ‘Speech at Boao Forum For Asia,’ Boao, March 28, 2015, [https://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1676&news\\_id=755&speech\\_cat=2](https://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1676&news_id=755&speech_cat=2).

<sup>128</sup> Mohamed Jahwar, ‘Speech, at the 2014 Xiangshan Forum,’ in China Association for Military Science. *Win-win through Cooperation: Building an Asian Community of Shared Destiny: Speech Collection of the Fifth Xiangshan Forum*, Junshi kexue zhubanshe (Military Science Publishing House: Beijing), 2015, p. 149.

<sup>129</sup> Tan Sri Dato Sri Zulkifeli, ‘Speech at the Third Plenary Session of the 6<sup>th</sup> Xiangshan Forum,’ Oktober 20, 2015, <http://www.xiangshanforum.cn/artsix/sixforum/speech/third/201510/1266.html>.

<sup>130</sup> The Xiangshan Forum 2015. *Question & Answer Session at the Third Plenary Session of the 6<sup>th</sup> Xiangshan Forum.* October 22, 2015, <http://www.xiangshanforum.cn/artsix/sixforum/speech/third/201510/1303.html>.

<sup>131</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, ‘The 13<sup>th</sup> IISS Asia Security Summit: The Shangri-La dialogue, Second Plenary Session Q&A,’ March 31, 2014. <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/2014-c20c/plenary-2-cb2e/qa-94d2>.

<sup>132</sup> Kuik Cheng-Chwee, ‘Making Sense of Malaysia’s China Policy: Asymmetry, Proximity, and Elite’s Domestic Authority,’ *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*. Vol. 6, No. 4, 2013, p. 463.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Chinese President Praises Malaysia’s Quiet Diplomacy on South China Sea issues,’ *Borneo Post online*, November 10, 2014, <http://www.theborneopost.com/2014/11/11/chinese-president-praises-malaysias-quiet-diplomacy-on-south-shina-sea-issues/>.

Keqiang in 2015. Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Malaysia several times during the past few years. Besides these bilateral events, the Malaysian side is also prominently represented on various other venues of symbolic importance to China, as for example the Boao and the Xiangshan forum. At the 2015 Xiangshan forum the 12 person strong Malaysian delegation was led by its Defense Minister and the Chief of the Defense Forces. In contrast the small Philippine delegation was led by the undersecretary for Defense Policy of the Department of National Defense only.

During the past years China also strengthened its policy of importing Malaysian liquified natural gas (LNG), the vast majority of which is pumped from wells in the Greater Sarawak Basin; i.e. in territories claimed by China as its own. While Chinese reports criticize that Malaysia “is the country with the lion’s share of oil resources from the Nansha Islands,”<sup>134</sup> China has become the third largest customer of Malaysian LNG at the same time.<sup>135</sup>

### 8.3 Comparing reactions

Given that the majority of assertive Chinese actions happened in maritime regions claimed by the Philippines it stands to reason that the reaction of the Philippines to China should have been more robust than the Malaysian,. Yet, at the same time, it is important to remember that this heightened assertiveness ensued only after the Philippines had changed their cooperative course in the South China Sea in 2008 and also returned to a political rhetoric that singled China out as a strong threatening Goliath.

The Philippines exhibited an even more confrontative stance than in the wake of the Mischief reef occupation of 1995. They embedded the territorial conflict into an imagined comprehensive confrontation between the Philippines as a representative of a law-based international order and China as an epitome of a bullying great power that uses its might to undermine right.

Malaysia continued to defuse the situation by highlighting bilateral trust and by focusing on the positive dimensions of the relationship while ignoring and later by downplaying the conflict-laden. Further, Malaysian officials signal “strategic empathy” to China by putting the latter’s current activities in the context of the US rebalancing towards Asia and by advocating a positive outlook on overall bilateral relations, which however, “is not lessons that Malaysia can teach Philippines or Malaysia can teach Vietnam.”<sup>136</sup>

Yet, compared to the days of Prime Minister Mahathir, Malaysian foreign policy rhetoric has become decidedly less ideological and the imagined “we-group” shallower. After the waning of “Asian values” as an alternative to liberal democracy in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of 1997

<sup>134</sup> Li Guoqiang, ‘China Sea Oil and Gas Resources,’ China Institute of International Studies, May 11, 2015, [http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2015-05/11/content\\_7894391.htm](http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2015-05/11/content_7894391.htm).

<sup>135</sup> International Gas Union, *World LNG Report – 2015 Edition* (Fornebu (Norway): International Gas Union) p. 14, [http://www.igu.org/sites/default/files/node-page-field\\_file/IGU-World%20LNG%20Report-2015%20Edition.pdf](http://www.igu.org/sites/default/files/node-page-field_file/IGU-World%20LNG%20Report-2015%20Edition.pdf).

<sup>136</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, ‘*The 13<sup>th</sup> IISS Asia Security Summit: The Shangri-La dialogue, Second Plenary Session, Q&A*,’ March 31, 2014. <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/2014-c20c/plenary-2-cb2e/qa-94d2>.



and the end of the Mahathir premiership in 2003, the vision of Sino-Malaysian “sameness” has become more mundane in turn.

Mahathir’s successor Ahmad Badawi (2003-2009) still pointed to the joint vision of an East Asian Community that was to be “egalitarian and democratic in structure in spirit. [...] Some nations must be given pride of place. Those accorded this pride of place must in turn know how to behave.”<sup>137</sup> Yet with the Asian values gone the imagined “we-group” with China was slowly drained of much of its non-economic substance. Despite this de-ideologization of Malaysia’s position and the associated flattening of “we-ness” Malaysian politicians still signal accord with core Chinese self-role and world order conceptions based on the supposed similarity of the Chinese and Malaysian “dreams”.

Despite the various government ships that plied Malaysian claimed waters in recent years, overall Chinese assertiveness towards Malaysia has remained at low levels compared to the Philippines. China’s continued non-reaction to Malaysian assertive moves has gone largely unnoticed. Put simply, Malaysia can still get away with activities in the disputed territories that would result in serious Chinese protest if not counteractions in the case of the Philippines. This is especially visible with respect to Malaysian offshore oil and gas exploration and exploitation. Whereas China has become one of the main buyers of Malaysian LNG, most of which is pumped from Chinese claimed territories, China actively prevents Philippine efforts to explore in the disputed Reed bank by cutting exploration ships cables if necessary, even though prospects are far from promising. Whereas China is openly threatening the Philippines with reprisal in case of exploration, the maritime activities in the Malaysian EEZ have never publicly been connected to the latter’s much more intense efforts at exploration and exploitation. Likewise, whereas China threatened international oil corporations cooperating with the Philippines, the same corporations reap huge profits from their projects in Malaysian waters without encountering any Chinese criticism. Again, despite the Chinese coast guard vessels in the Malaysian claimed EEZ, China is still making a huge difference when it comes to reacting to its opponents’ assertions.

## 9. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis confirmed the two hypotheses established above. It showed that by conforming to and enacting a role-set that fits Chinese role-conceptions China’s opponents can positively influence Chinese behavior in the maritime and territorial conflicts. Higher levels of recognition and purported “we-group consciousness” displayed by Malaysia met with lower levels of Chinese assertiveness.<sup>138</sup> The Philippine strategy of challenging China’s self-role and world order conception corresponded to higher levels of Chinese assertiveness. At the same time, China displayed higher tolerance of Malaysian assertiveness, whereas it regularly protested and countered respective Philippine acts. When the Philippines temporarily changed course under the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, China reacted by enhancing relations and avoiding assertive acts. The Sino-Malaysian relationship

<sup>137</sup> Datuk Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, ‘*Building the East Asian Community: Many Questions, A Few Answers*,’ Kuala Lumpur, June 21, 2004, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=paklah&id=2861>.

<sup>138</sup> To a significant extent, the past and present Malaysian strategy for engaging China resembles the strategy developed by ASEAN in the 1990s: “informal, on-confrontational, open ended and mutual.” This strategy aimed at “creating cooperative relations by finding new areas of agreement. The key point about those areas of agreement is that they are shared; they need not be ‘liberal’ for them to provide the basis for stable cooperative relations” (Alice Ba, ‘Who’s socializing whom? Complex engagement in Sino-ASEAN relations,’ *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2006, quotes: p. 160-161).

closely resembles the positive equilibrium between asymmetric neighbors described by Brantly Womack that focuses on a trade-off between deference and autonomy. It also fits the predictions of the model provided by Shih and his collaborators as well as the optimum behavior of a weaker power in the context of the traditional tributary system in Zhou Fangyin's game theoretical model: Malaysia upholds recognition while maximizing immediate pay-offs; China sticks to its conciliatory strategy in order to uphold the overall, allegedly harmonious relationship.

In contrast, in Womack's language, the Philippines breach the minimum standard of deference, insofar as it does not pursue its interests in a manner that is respectful of China's relative status.<sup>139</sup> In Shih's and his collaborators' terminology, the Philippines violate the requirements of reciprocity and thereby denies "the concealment of disharmony."<sup>140</sup> The Philippine challenge to the Chinese dictum of harmony renders it impossible to tolerate Philippine assertive acts in the disputed territories, "forcing" China to turn to "harmonious disciplining"<sup>141</sup> in an effort to compel the Philippines to abide by the overall framework that is able to conceal disharmony.

To be sure, Chinese foreign policy is no function of its opponents' strategies; yet, this research has shown that it can be influenced by them to the better or worse. Whether the detected logic of a positive trade-off between a weaker party's recognition of a stronger parties' self role and world order conception in exchange for the latter's heightened readiness to compromise with respect to immediate interests and gains can also be applied to other cases is an important question for further research.

The Malaysian strategy of toning down the dispute by withholding information contrasts sharply with the Philippine governments' strategy of giving uttermost publicity to acts of Chinese assertiveness. Likewise the restraint shown by the Malaysia media is inconceivable in the Philippines, where the conflict is widely reported and commented on. It stands to reason that regime type may play a certain role in determining the options open to government, with non- or semi-democratic regimes having a higher ability to spin-doctor information.<sup>142</sup> Yet, glance at the Vietnamese public relations strategy of the past years illustrates that the structural advantage enjoyed by authoritarian regimes, need not translate in a uniform Malaysian-style strategy focused on minimizing a nationalistic outcry.<sup>143</sup> This holds also true with respect to China's relations with Japan, where the Chinese government seems to have utilized popular nationalism for external signaling.<sup>144</sup> While the capacity of authoritarian regimes to control the dissemination as well as the framing of information is superior to those of democratic regimes, this should not be equaled with a uniform will to act accordingly.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Brantly Womack, 'Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception,' p. 97.

<sup>140</sup> Shih Chih-yu and Yin Jiwu, 'Core National Interest and Harmonious World,' p. 75.

<sup>141</sup> Shih Chih-yu and Yin Jiwu, 'Core National Interest and Harmonious World,' p. 75.

<sup>142</sup> I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this important suggestion. For a theoretical framework with a Chinese application see Jessica Chen Weiss, 'Authoritarian Signaling, Mass Audiences, and Nationalist Protest in China,' *International Organization*, Vol. 67, No. 1, 2013, pp. 1-35.

<sup>143</sup> John D. Ciorciari and Jessica Chen Weiss, 'The Sino-Vietnamese Standoff in the South China Sea,' *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Winter 2012, pp. 61-69.

<sup>144</sup> James Reilly, 'China's History Activism and Sino-Japanese Relations,' *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2006, pp. 189-216; James Reilly, 'A Wave to Worry About? Public opinion, foreign policy and China's anti-Japan protests,' *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 23, No. 86, 2014, pp. 197-215. For analyses of Chinese and Japanese framing see Thomas A. Hollihan ed., *The Dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands: How Media Narratives Shape Public Opinion and Challenge the Global Order*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2014.

<sup>145</sup> On framing theory see Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, 'Framing Theory,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2007, pp. 103-126.

Likewise, democratic governments by filtering information and providing ready-made frames for the media may spin-doctor the ensuing reporting so that it fits their political needs.<sup>146</sup> At this point a final caveat seems in order. Given the opaqueness of the Chinese foreign policy decision-making process, this analysis could not prove that the specific levels of Chinese assertiveness have really been caused by differences in the opponents' recognition of core aspects of China's overall self-role and world-order conceptions. However, in contrast to alternative explanations it could provide a plausible argument not only for the between-dyad variation, but also for the within-dyad over-time-stability and variation.

Competing explanations include the popular salami-slicing "theory" according to which China for the past decades followed a conscious strategy of "using small incremental actions, none of which by itself is a casus belli,"<sup>147</sup> which, however, taken together result in a major strategic change. While this fairly popular explanation of Chinese assertiveness provides a rationale for the observable alternation between escalation and "cooling-off" periods, it would suggest a fairly coherent strategy towards all opponents and is unable to explain the consistent downgrading of the territorial and maritime conflict with Malaysia.

Another explanation links China's rising assertiveness to the leadership change from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping<sup>148</sup> and the corresponding downgrading of Deng Xiaoping's dictum that the South China Sea claimants should shelve the sovereignty issue and pursue joint development for the time being. While China clearly acted more self-confidently in the South China Sea (and beyond) during the past years, linking this shift to the leadership change from Hu to Xi seems to be an oversimplification of complex and overlapping dynamics, as early analyses of China's "new assertiveness" already surfaced several years before Xi's election,<sup>149</sup> and the Chinese leadership change closely trails the US pivot to Asia, which could equally qualify as a trigger for Chinese repositioning. More importantly, leadership change provides no explanation for the continuity of unequal dealing with Malaysia and the Philippines. The above analysis has shown that while Sino-Malaysian relations have not been left undamaged by the escalations in Sino-Philippine, Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Japanese relations, the behavioral differences continue to exist, despite some acts of Chinese assertiveness towards Malaysia.

Several other strands of explanation connect China's present assertiveness to its increased economic and military capabilities. Explanations focusing on the rise in China's capabilities clearly suggest a more or less linear rise of Chinese assertiveness and therefore are hard pressed to explain earlier phases of Chinese assertiveness. Compared to the past willingness to engage in shooting wars with its neighbors, China showed more restraint even in its initial effort at establishing a foothold on

<sup>146</sup> See for example: Emily D. Shaw, *The Heroic Framing of US Foreign Policy*, PhD dissertation, University of Berkeley, 2010,

<sup>147</sup> Bonnie Glaser, 'Opening Statement before U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, One Hundred Fourteenth Congress, First Session,' Washington, May 13, 2015.: p. 7, <http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/transcripts/May%2013,%202015%20Hearing%20Transcript.pdf>.

<sup>148</sup> Irene Chan and Mingjiang Li, 'New Chinese Leadership, New Policy in the South China Sea Dispute?,' *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2015, pp. 35-50. For an analysis embedding Xi's role in the institutional context of Chinese foreign policy-making see Kerry Brown, 'Foreign Policy Making Under Xi Jinping: The Case of the South China Sea,' *The Journal of Political Risk*, February 10, 2016, <http://www.jpolorisk.com/foreign-policy-making-under-xi-jinping-the-case-of-the-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>149</sup> For a critical appraisal of the literature on the new Chinese assertiveness see Alastair Iain Johnston, 'How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?,' *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2013, pp. 7-48.

the Spratlys in 1988,<sup>150</sup> and has then as later targeted elevations that did not require the ejection of any other claimant's occupying forces, even though this meant foregoing effective control of natural islands and thereby reducing the legal quality of the PRC's claims. Similar to the other alternative explanations discussed above "the rise of China" cannot explain variation in the behavior towards different opponents.

Alternatively, it can be argued that China resorted to a "divide and rule" policy aimed at undermining the opponents' solidarizing with each other and establishing a united front against China.<sup>151</sup> In general the argument may be supported by China's preference for bilateral negotiations and its consistent resistance against the involvement of ASEAN, non-claimant powers or international arbitration in conflict resolution. Yet, in order to be valid, this argument has to discount the rationale provided consistently by Chinese elites for their preference on "bilateralism" with respect to problem solving in territorial disputes. To China, bilateral negotiation is an apt strategy, as it enabled China in the past to achieve mutually satisfactory solutions to almost all other territorial disputes in the past decades. Insofar, the Chinese argument for restricting conflict resolution efforts to the concerned parties gains some credibility as a shared belief of Chinese elites gained from prior experience. Further, by not reacting to Malaysian assertive acts in the past, China not only allowed Malaysia to extract a large amount of oil and gas from disputed territories, but may have simultaneously weakened its legal claim to the disputed territories. The legal and political costs to a "divide and rule" policy then are clearly not insignificant. Finally, a divide and rule explanation cannot explain, why China decides for "preferential" treatment of certain opponents compared to the other opponents. In order to explain Chinese choice an additional line of reasoning is necessary. A final argument against the validity of the analysis advanced above may be derived from the simple observation that distance matters. Given China's meager but growing power projection capabilities, China could simply have focused its assertion on the "easiest" targets and saved Malaysia for later. The current Chinese moves in Malaysian claimed waters could be read as a possible first step in this direction. While distance certainly mattered in the 1970s, in the late 1980s already China could have occupied one or several of the Malaysian claimed islands to the South or East of Cuarteron reef. Similarly, the 1995 decision to occupy Mischief reef is not self-evident. Again, Erica Reef or Investigator shoal, occupied by Malaysia in 1999 only would have provided viable alternatives. A further argument against the dictum of distance is provided by taking a look at China's maritime dispute with Korea, which focuses on the limits of the two countries' overlapping EEZs and Socotra rock. Socotra rock is only approximately 250 kilometers off the nearest Chinese island and claimed by China as part of its EEZ, yet, China did not go beyond diplomatic protest when South Korea built an artificial installation on the rock that even included a helicopter landing pad in the early to mid 2000s. While Chinese patrols increased in the following years, both countries managed this conflict without much fanfare. Despite its misgivings about the Korean action and the short distance, China up to the present did not resort to more forceful assertions of its claims. When Korea made its submission to the Commission on the

<sup>150</sup> The armed clashes did not occur on an elevation already occupied by Vietnamese troops, but evolved, when the two parties tried to secure a further up to then unoccupied reef. Clearly, China had initially tried to avoid a direct confrontation by opting for unoccupied elevations. Yet, confronted with Vietnamese countermoves, they did not hesitate to use force for accomplishing their aim.

<sup>151</sup> David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith, 'Can Asean ever solve the South China Seas dispute through multilateral dialogue?,' *The Telegraph*, November 24, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/12012915/Can-Asean-ever-solve-the-South-China-Seas-dispute-through-multilateral-dialogue.html>; Pei Minxin, 'Beijing plays divide and conquer to win in South China Sea,' *The National*, July 17, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/beijing-plays-divide-and-conquer-to-win-in-south-china-sea>.

Continental Shelf in 2012, China did not protest, even though the Chinese and the Korean submissions overlapped. To the contrary, Chinese officials lauded Korea for consulting China during the preparation of the submission and stressed the two countries' "cooperative positions on the issue of the East China Sea shelf."<sup>152</sup> It is probably more than a mere coincidence that the past and present South Korean administrations in general accorded high priority to good overall relations with China, avoided any reference to its alliance relationship with the United States in handling the maritime conflict, and, with the exception of the Lee Myung-bak administration, tried to push various initiatives for enhanced and inclusive security cooperation during the past decades. Sino-Korean relations could be a further test-case for further substantiating the observation drawn from the comparison of Sino-Malaysian and Sino-Philippine relations that China may be willing to compromise its territorial interests when the significant other reacts positively to the Chinese normative framework for desirable international relations.

<sup>152</sup> Qiu Jun and Zhang Haiwen, 'Partial Submission by the Republic of Korea to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf,' *China Oceans Law Review*, No. 2, 2013, p. 88.