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A Classical Realist Account of China's Policy in the South China Sea

以古典現實主義探討中國南海政策

INTERNATIONAL MASTER'S PROGRAM IN ASIA-PACIFIC STUDIES

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Abstract

The primordial causal relationship within politics lies in the condition of our human nature, as classical realists argue. The constant exchange in power defines the relative relationships within the anarchical world, and shapes our pursuit of interests thereof. Such a change in power is occurring within China, and this is being reflected on its shifting policy and conduct in the South China Sea. Classical realism ought to shed light on and put forth a new perspective on the situation in the maritime sphere of international politics. The thesis scrutinizes, through interpretive analysis within a geopolitical approach, China's policy and how it sees the world. The outcome of China's increasing power, strategy and subsequent policy results in a China-led regional order starting in the waters of the South China Sea. The importance of this method in seeing China's rise is the relativity of power and how the balance of power, including US, may prove to be inconclusive in trying to contain China's unprecedented rise.

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List of Abbreviations

ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COC	Code of Conduct in the South China Sea
CPC	Communist Party of China
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Company
DOC	Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ITLOS	International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea
PH	The Republic of the Philippines
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PMS	Preparation for Military Struggle
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCS	South China Sea
US	United States of America
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

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Chapter I. Introduction

Motivation and Purpose of Study

This author proposes this topic following an unprecedented rise in both the material and the perceived power of China in most recent years. In an era of intensified international relations, the South China Sea (SCS), *inter alia*, proves a heavy burden on the international community in the face of uncertainty and regional rivalry. Amidst all the propositions to resolve this nebula of individual interests, as yet there is not a single way that ought to declutter the area and find common ground. This is mainly because China aspires to possess the totality of it all through its 'U-shaped line' and manage it under its own guard, dismissing international law as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). China's *historical* U-shaped line is acting against the international community's wish to abide by the international law of the sea. Such 'defiance' will certainly not solve anything and may lead to increased tensions and a potential conflict between China and the many other claimants, under US military protection. This is seen from the classical realist lens of international relations theory, through which this thesis is constructed upon.

The purpose of the study is to enrich the academic community by applying an important theoretical perspective, which is most applicable and holds a certain authenticity in today's world, as depicted by the numbers of military conflicts in many of the world's regions. Moreover, the study will focus on China's ability and persistence in applying its claims to the South China Sea, and hence it is quite pertinent to try to understand the subtle meaning as posed by the research question: 'Why China will not give up the South China Sea? Classical realism is the theory chosen to represent the reality of China's method of applying itself in the region. The outcome of this study ought to open the minds of the keen observers to understand the conflict in a more nuanced way and look at alternate potential ideas to determine a peaceful resolution of tensions, and not give way to an impulsive clash of interests and allow 'human nature' play out in the form of 'self-other' conflict.

Yet, the case of the South China Sea is widely seen as a complex issue. The purpose of this thesis is not to suggest a simplified outline of a complex situation. However, its purpose

serves to leave all the complex ideas aside and make way for a simple theoretical understanding by way of classical realism, from which these complex ideas manifested in the first place. It is the understanding of human nature, which needs to be addressed in order to truly understand China's rationale. Another reason is to distinguish methodologically between classical realism and neorealism, which has often been misconstrued. What is driving international politics is primarily *fear*, however, what the author tries to point out is that in the 21st century, we should strive for understanding to find common ground, for that is the first step towards outgrowing our 'human nature' in the form of fear.

"Life is not to be feared; it is to be understood." – Marie Curie

Hypothesized Proposition

The thesis follows the case study of the South China Sea in relation to China's intent to control the sea. Through careful analysis of the research questions – '*Why will China not give up the South China Sea?*', *'What are the reasons for China's behavior?'*, and '*What are the potential outcomes of China's policy?'* – and through classical-realism and the accompanying 'human nature' argument, that is, the notion that politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature (Morgenthau and Thompson 1993), the thesis argues that with greater power comes greater legitimacy *from the point of view of the actor*, in this case China. Human nature is inherently flawed, and there is a correlation between power and interests of the state, a state which is a singular political entity, leading essentially to an anarchic international arena. The actor is essentially confined to face a geopolitical struggle. However, a greater relative power may overcome such anarchic tensions.

Framework of Study

The framework of the study follows a three-chapter logically-articulated structure, throughout which the methodology is consistent with that of classical realism. The chapters are divided into theoretical analysis, China's policy in the South China Sea, and finally, potential outcomes of such a policy, from a classical realist point of view.

The first 'theory' chapter, Chapter II, is sub-divided into three parts. The first part comments on the principles of classical realism and their importance primarily from Hans Morgenthau, the father of the more 'modern' classical realism, and subsequently Thucydides, and Machiavelli. The second part distinguishes between classical realism and neo-realism, as a few theses have previously analyzed the same topic but through neorealist theory. The third part puts forth various limitations in the application of classical realism.

Chapter III scrutinizes China's policy and how it has been able to achieve such a policy. The chapter is split into three parts. The first part analyzes China's power, which is the first step towards a more coherent policy in the SCS. The second part follows with the analysis of China's naval strategy, a necessary outcome of China's power. The third section puts power and strategy into practice in the form of China's land reclamation.

As a corollary, the Chapter IV combines the analysis of the previous two chapters to give a concise answer to the last research question: *What are the potential outcomes of China's policy?* The fourth chapter is likewise divided into three parts. The first part analyzes ASEAN's attempts to fight for international law. The second part delves into the US reaction and the accompanying concept of balance of power, which the US pursues. The third section puts forth an idea of China's new regional order after its potentially successful policy in the SCS.

Finally, Chapter V envelops the discussion and analysis into a conclusion and put forth a final answer to the three main research questions.

Literature Review

This literature review comprises three themes that are central to the premise of this thesis and that have been recurrent throughout the research for this thesis and subsequently incorporated into the argument that human nature governs the subsequent actions and policies of the actor.

The three main themes encountered in the pertinent literature is China's strategy, power and influence of geography upon policy. As such, this review will discuss the main authors and their arguments revolving around these core thematic notions.

In relation to the realist conception of power, Emmers (2010) cites Morgenthau's words that "international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power" (Emmers 2010, p. 13). This struggle for power supposes a balance of power, a recurrent concept in international relations. However, according to classical realists, as states struggle for power, this struggle does not lead to the aim of balancing, but precisely "at superiority of power in their own behalf" (ibid.). Owing to this behavioral nature of states, in an anarchical system balance of power exists, with each state overlapping the other in relative terms of power. Thus the concept of the balance of power is an essential tool of analysis in the study of realist and geopolitical theory. Emmers' methodology is based on a theoretical analysis, which subsequently is implanted into the study of maritime territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea, wherein a 'geopolitical interplay' is taking place.

Starting in 2010, China has "jettisoned its erstwhile 'low profile' international posture and has instead become more aggressive in pushing for its own narrowly defined national interests" (Li 2014, p.135). With these words, Li Mingjiang stresses China's evolving policy towards the South China Sea. Despite China asserting sovereignty for many decades, it is only a couple of years since it sees itself in a position to go from status quo to moulding the situation in its favor, at the expense of the other claimants. Li terms this shift as 'non-confrontational assertiveness.' Essentially, what the author argues that China has developed a substantial capacity to push its policy forward, yet at the same time not coercing its neighbors for fear it will negatively impact its regional strategy. The author puts himself in the shoes of China's strategic thinking and this term coincides well with China's advancements. In the past years, scholars and journalists alike have labeled Chinese activities as 'assertive' and it has become second nature in academic circles to correlate China with an 'assertive' strategy. According to realists, with rising power, the actor will do whatever to utilize such power to maximize its sense of security and development alike.

According to Holmes and Yoshihara (2008), in order to satisfy its naval strategy, China has turned to the maritime geopolitical thinker Alfred Mahan. Their study reflects that Mahan's work on sea-power has provided an indispensable framework to understand

China's naval strategy, not to mention that China has indeed included in its defense white papers a certain phrase: 'command of the sea'. Mahan's theory involves command of the sea as a symbol of national greatness, from which true power comes from, whereby the agent manages trade during peace time and controls the area during wartime. Invariably, the study (Holmes and Yoshihara 2008) hypothesizes that Chinese naval strategy will be compelled to align itself along Mahan's thought, yet, the authors contend that there is no suggestion that a positive correlation determines the outcome of China's naval strategy. Hence, the study follows a holistic interpretive methodology. Furthermore, the study analyzes potential futures of China's policy in the sea. One striking analysis points to a geopolitical, almost Hobbesian image of regional politics as "geography does not change, notwithstanding the vicissitudes of international relations" (Holmes and Yoshihara 2008, p.116). To a realist, "pacifying effects of economic interdependence are a fallacy" (ibid.). This points to the realist notion that economic interdependence alone cannot guarantee security, and we have to count in the complex nature of politics, strategy and geography, which do not necessarily comply with economics.

China's turn to Mahan's sea strategy has been well-noted, however, You (2006) illustrates another sea power dimension to China's strategy. In his article 'China's Naval Strategy and Transformation', he alludes to the Russian strategist Gorshkov and his book *Sea Power of the State*, and mentions how the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been ordered to closely study this piece on sea geopolitics. The author's methodology utilizes a comparison of the Soviet naval strategy to advocate for China's inspiration. By nature of this work, this would suggest China is sincerely building a blue water navy. A blue water navy is a navy with the capacity to monitor waters well beyond its coast and into the deep seas. The author argues that PLAN, apart from possessing a 'prescribed geographical scope of activities' (You 2006, p.75), the navy should go even beyond (i.e. South China Sea) to attain power projection capabilities as far as the North West Pacific. Thus, solidifying its control of the South China Sea bases is a prerequisite to attain such goal.

In *The Great Wall at Sea*, Cole (2010) outlines China's maritime strategy since the Cold War. As China was relatively weak following the Cultural Revolution, the navy's role was

primarily coastal. Ever since Deng Xiaoping's chief reforms and economic growth, interest in increasing the navy's capabilities increased. The ocean, not just the sea, was to be seen as its "chief strategic defensive direction" (Cole 2010, p.169). One of the navy's strategic tasks was to safeguard its 'water rights'. According to Cole, the 'chief architect' of China's emerging naval strategy was Liu Huaqing. His vision was to divide the Western Pacific into two island chains. The first island chain goes along the periphery of Japan and the Philippines, thus encompassing the entire South China Sea. The Second island chain goes beyond into the deep waters of the Pacific Ocean. This is the geopolitical scope of China's short-term sea strategy, since based on Mr. Liu's geopolitical thought, China ought to control these areas by 2020. Given China's rising power, by 2050 PLAN should aspire to be a global force. This is a strong continentalist perspective, a very first in China's history, despite China's regional scope. Cole's methodology is derived from access to material very close to the Communist Party, ranging to official documents to Chinese analysts such as Liu Huaqing or Zhang Lianzhong, a former PLA general and a former PLAN commander, respectively. From the analysis, it is conceivable to suggest a realist aspiration of the PLAN to take command of the Pacific seas, but more importantly, it gives us great insight into potential outcomes of China's present policy in the South China Sea.

In *The Revenge of Geography*, Kaplan (2012) discusses the geography of Chinese power and cites geopolitician Mackinder, who alluded to China's potential by "building for a quarter of humanity a new civilization, neither quite Eastern nor Western" (Kaplan 2012, p.189). Kaplan urges the audience to look at China's geography, which is one of the main sources of its economic dynamism and national assertiveness over recent decades. Furthermore, Kaplan labels China as a 'hydraulic civilization' which is relentless and dynamic. Its internal dynamism, coupled with "civil unrest and inefficiencies […] [and] an economic slowdown, creates external ambitions" (Kaplan 2012, p.198). He further argues that empires "are often not sought consciously" (ibid.). As states gain more power, they develop certain needs, and with needs come insecurities, thus allowing for further expansion in an organic fashion. Kaplan's argument complements the realist notion of thought that human nature is inherently flawed and such an outcome of a state's unconscious expansion is not only feasible, but very real.

The geopolitical aspect of the SCS is highly pertinent to the nations' actions and behaviour in the region. According to Kaplan, "geography is paramount" and from which "strategy and geopolitics naturally emerge" (Kaplan 2014, p.1). For him, the SCS became an "anxious and complicated armed camp" (Kaplan 2014, p.1). There have been geopolitical 'nodes' throughout history (Tebin 2011), such as Alsace-Lorraine, which has been the center of geopolitical struggle between France and Germany for decades, from the times of Bismarck until the end of World War II. The SCS may be regarded as the 'geopolitical node of the 21st century' and the 'future of conflict' (Tebin 2011; Kaplan 2012b). The SCS provides a host of useful reserves of "untapped resources and is understood to be of particular geopolitical significance" (Raine and Le Mière 2013, p.22). The geography of the SCS shapes the way states act in relation to it and in relation to each other (Kaplan 2012b).

In his book *Chinese Grand Strategy and Maritime Power*, Kane (2002) offers an argument on the basis of principles of Chinese seapower. Geography figures as one of the more important aspect of China's power. As a corollary, Kane's methodology is based on geopolitical grounds, assuming on every aspect of China's power geopolitical thought of Alfred Mahan, as well as those of Julian Corbett and C.E. Callwell. Kane summarizes Corbett's argument of a 'strategy of impeachment', wherein a smaller navy (that of China's) utilizes a 'strike first' attempt to give a leeway for better defensive capabilities. This suggests that China's strategy in the South China Sea is that of 'impeachment'; to go on an 'offensive' to best ensure 'defensive' capabilities. Additionally, Callwell maintains that a "sound strategy and [an] indirect approach may often allow the materially weaker side to achieve its ends" (Kane 2002, p. 50). This ties in with the 'non-confrontational assertiveness' idea that China pursues in the South China Sea, and may well work in favor of China.

China's government released its newest White Paper on defense last year entitled 'China's Military Strategy' (State Council 2015). The English version has been released through Xinhua news agency. Whereas the text seeks to portray China as peacefully rising, the rhetoric indeed shifts light when it comes to territorial disputes. It says that hotspot issues

such as "[…] territorial disputes […] are complex and volatile" (State Council 2015, p.1). Moreover, concerning China's maritime goals, China pertains that:

> *"some of its offshore neighbors take provocative actions and reinforce their military presence on China's reefs and islands that they have illegally occupied. Some external countries are also busy meddling in South China Sea affairs; a tiny few maintain constant close-in air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance against China. It is thus a long-standing task for China to safeguard its maritime rights and interests"* (State Council 2015, p.1).

In this passage, its realist 'human nature' feeling reverberates in our consciousness. Furthermore, the text continues that the "Chinese Dream is to make the country strong" (State Council 2015, p.2). As part of the Chinese Dream vision, the armed forces need to be strengthened because without a strong military, a "country can be neither safe nor strong" (ibid.). In line with the previous authors' arguments pertaining to China's strategy in South China Sea, China's navy needs to "work hard to seize the strategic initiative in military competition" (State Council 2015, p.2). According to classical realists, the state actor will seek more power than the other actors in the anarchic system. This text already implies 'military competition', and this is not peaceful rhetoric, especially when it comes to such a strong US navy hovering nearby and strengthening alliances with China's neighbors.

When it comes to China's actual strategy, the text mentions 'active defense'. This goes in line with Li's 'non-confrontational assertiveness'. This 'active defense' is the "essence of the CPC's military strategic thought" (State Council 2015, p.3). In addition to this concept is the so-called Preparation for Military Struggle (PMS) tactic. Within the PMS strategy is "highlighting maritime military struggle and maritime PMS" (ibid.). These two concepts of 'active defense' and PMS is already building foundations for a broader Chinese maritime strategy that goes beyond the regional, as previous analysis of various geopoliticians has suggested. Finally, "the PLA Navy (PLAN) will gradually shift its focus from 'offshore waters defense' to the combination of 'offshore waters defense' with 'open seas protection,' and build a combined, multi-functional and efficient marine combat force structure" (State Council 2015, p.4). From these words, one can assume that South China Sea is a given

when it comes to Chinese thinking of its territorial and geopolitical capacity to ensure its security. The textual references are being reflected in reality in what is happening in the South China Sea.

Research Methodology

This thesis will be tended to through interpretive analysis within a geopolitical approach, which is primarily qualitative research, utilizing primary and secondary data, such as official documents and peer-reviewed research articles and books.

As this dissertation has an underlying empirical premise due to the analysis of China's policy in the South China Sea, it is a necessary to analyze the content within a theoretical approach. Whilst many theoretical approaches exist, this dissertation is written following the classical realist perspective. As previously mentioned, the research methods chosen throughout this dissertation is interpretive analysis within a geopolitical approach. Pertaining to the research methods of this thesis, the researcher's job is to interpret *social action*. With regards to the proposed thesis, the *social action* is China's behavior in the SCS; China's policy in the SCS is the geopolitical response.

Interpretivism is one method amongst a few main methodologies in the social sciences; the other main method being positivism. Whereas positivism is mainly based on quantitative data, interpretivism suits well for qualitative research. Crucial to the interpretivist epistemology is that the researcher has to adopt an *empathetic* stance. The challenge here is to enter the social world of our research subjects and understand their world from their point of view (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis 2009, p.9). Interpretivism is well suited for classical realism, which is crucially based upon the human nature aspect and allows the researcher to view the subject from its own lens and try to understand the underlying meaning behind the subject's actions. Isaiah Berlin argues that an observer capable of 'understanding' people also has the "ability to 'enter into' their motives, their principles, the 'inward' movement of their spirit" (1960, p.25). "Without some ability to get into the skin of others", Berlin argues elsewhere, "the human condition, history, what characterises one period or culture as against others – cannot be understood" ([1979] 2013, p.135).

There are three interconnected principles that define the interpretive method. Firstly, 'social structures' are "considered to be little more than 'elaborate fictions' that we use to explain and justify our behaviour to both ourselves and others" (Sociology Central 1995, p. 4). Thus, we ourselves interpret the world and the 'social structures' around us, which is essentially misconstrued by our flawed human nature. Secondly, causal relationships are theoretically misguided, if people's behaviour is conditioned by the way in which they personally interpret their world, then conditions of cause and effect would constantly change. This supposes that change is a fundamental process in life, and nothing is ever constant. Thirdly, everything in the social world is seen to be relative to everything else (Sociology Central 1995). Based on our flawed nature and the law of change, our minds perceive everything in relative terms when it comes to social interaction. Hence, these three principles are the basis for understanding the interpretive researcher. When research is conducted, a certain methodology needs to be undertaken to understand from which lens the research project is viewed. This understanding of interpretive analysis fits into the classical realist methodology. Classical realists, unlike neorealists, understand that the international system, i.e. social structure, is fundamentally an illusion conducted by the agents in an anarchic world. Given the notion of relativity and change, classical realists understand this nature bequeaths from generation to generation.

Kirshner (2010) argues that we ought to analyze China's rise through classical realism for an answer and simultaneously dismisses the 'structuralist' neorealists as having methodological errors. It is not the structure that defines the behaviour of the actor, but the actor that defines the structure. Moreover, the structure is rigid at any point in time, however, the actor is fluid and often changes through its power, resources and capabilities relative to other actors within the international arena. Classical realism tends to combine the historical and political over a larger span of time, which defines the political reality of today. This is fueled by human nature and thus actors are self-conscious of themselves over a longer period of time. This suggests China's historical claim over the South China Sea is a product of a longer span of a self-conscious identity. This claim cannot be solidly explained by structural realists since the perception of the content in the international arena is different by, say, China and the other SCS claimants. The other claimants' positions are

derived by international law of the sea, but for China, the claim is wholly based on historical rights, which in and of itself is legal within China's perspective. Thus, a 'structure' is merely is misconstrued reality, which is often defined by a self-conscious dependency of an agent on the forces of relativity and change.

Classical realism, despite being integrated into mainstream IR Theory by E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau in early 20th century, dates back to even the Greek historian and general Thucydides, who through a realist lens analyzed the course of the Peloponnesian War. A few centuries later, Niccolo Machiavelli outlined how human political animals are made to conform with the established norms, laws and social conditions, but also equipped with the capability to change and alter such settings and conditioning. This is known as the 'agency'. Thus, this presupposes that indeed human nature is fundamentally the main driver for change, and not the structure that limits or constricts the agent to act. This is not simply limited to the individual, but to the state as a single unitary actor; and political scientists have sought to treat the state as a primary unit of analysis.

Finally, interpretive studies "assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them" (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991, p.5). Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them; this is an epistemological understanding. Ontological understanding suggests that reality is "an inter-subjective construction of the shared human cognitive apparatus (Walsham 1995, p.76). This is so-called *internal realism*, whereas an objective reality is shared amongst all the actors, i.e. states, in an anarchic international arena, a subjective reality is constantly created amongst individual actors. This may be a complementary definition of classical realism, and it is through these methodological approaches that this thesis is based upon.

This thesis is essentially structured around the notion of the causal relationship. Interpretivists see the world, the promulgation of change and general relativity through causal relationships. Causal relationships encapsulate: the reasons for cause, the actual cause and the outcome of cause. The analysis brings forth the causal forces of interpretation and transformation. This correlates with the thesis' framework. The reason for cause is

analyzed through the classical realist understanding of world politics. The actual cause, in this case study, is China's policy in the South China Sea. Thirdly, the outcome of cause is the reaction and changes of policy this prompted by other agents involved in the South China Sea.

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Chapter II. Theoretical Analysis of Classical Realism

Chapter I analyzes the works of classical realists that are pertinent to understanding the theoretical approach for this study. Amongst the classical realist authors are Thucydides, Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Hobbes and most primarily Hans Morgenthau. Chapter I is divided into three sub-sections. The first part of the chapter focuses on the principles of classical realism that will be important for further analyzing China's policy in the South China Sea. The second part distinguishes the methodological importance between the classical realists and neorealists (or structural realists), from which a clearer understanding will be brought to light as to why classical realism is still relevant in the 21st century international politics. The third and final part consists of the limitations of classical realism's application and its criticism.

II. i. The Principles of Classical Realism

Essentially, classical realism is not a theory as such, but more of a philosophical position articulating the basic functions of our human nature and Man's behaviour in the world. Albeit, to explain state behaviour on the international scene, realism has been incorporated into academia to found the International Relations discipline and to subsequently put a realist narrative on past, present and future events in a theoretical understanding.

Hans Morgenthau, known as the father of modern realist theory, outlined six principles of political realism. Firstly, politics is "governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature" ([1948] 2006, p.xx). This gives us the basis for understanding political realism. Relations between states is simply another (higher) level of relations between individuals in an anarchic scenario. Throughout the centuries many authors have touched upon the notion of human nature. Thomas Hobbes understood the human being as a rather dangerous figure without an assumption of authority in *Leviathan*, for he showed "how the dynamics of violence fall out of interactions among rational and self-interested agents" (Pinker 2011, p. 318). This has culminated in Morgenthau's 'objective laws' that govern the political world. These objective laws are manifested essentially from *fear*. Fear conjures up feelings of insecurity, mistrust and competitive behaviour in relative terms,

seeking more power to make up for such insecurity in an uncertain world. The remedy for *fear* is power.

This leads us to Morgenthau's second point: international politics is a "concept of interests defined in terms of power separate from other spheres of action, such as economics, ethics or religion" ([1948] 2006, p.xx). Classical realists argue that when it comes to a political decision, there is no correlation "between the quality of motives of a statesman and foreign policy in both moral and political terms" (ibid). A political decision overrides the moral precept. Moreover, when conducting a political decision, it is not directed through ideological channels, but rather what is possible to attain under the current set of circumstances. An ideology may provide a longer-term strategy, however, a more rational policy will be pursued in the short-term political decision-making process. As such, interests and power are taken into consideration first at the expense of economics, ethics, religion or ideology, when conducting a political decision.

In Morgenthau's words, 'it is exactly the concept of interest defined in terms of power that saves us from both […] moral excess and […] political folly' (Morgenthau 1948, p.11). The notion of interests is insurmountable in politics. Interests navigate a nation's foreign policy irrespective of time and place. A nation's interests are deeply imbedded and sustained within the national mind over a longer period of time. Surely, political action will depend on the political circumstance and cultural context within which foreign policy is conducted; such conditions under which foreign policy is formulated may be altered. This works through the concept of power and causal forces.

International politics is an arena of conflict of interests spearheaded by the relativity of power. As a nation accumulates power, causal forces will be at its disposition. Only through causal forces may an agent instill a change of the circumstances; and hence, change the structures. An agent with enough accumulated power is able to divert the causal powers to shape the world in their own eyes. For example, China has accumulated enough power over the past two decades to address the political arena. China now has enough causal forces to utilize and to shape the regional political order in its favor, however, to a certain extent, yet. Now, interests are a defined 'end' of the political spectrum. The 'means' to

attain that 'end' is it *moral* or *immoral*? In politics, as previously stated, morality and ethics do not necessarily correspond with a political decision.

In the universe, there must be 'universal' moral principles, however, human nature is not attuned with those 'universal' moral principles. When it comes to politics and interests, these moral principles are filtered through the state/mind apparatus; our minds filter through those moral principles and as a corollary adjust them to our own perspective or gain. This translates into a moulded form of moral principles under the circumstances of time and place. From nation to nation, the concrete moral principles will thus necessarily be different from one another. Morgenthau argues that prudence takes over as the 'supreme virtue' in politics. From the author's own perspective, prudence is the result of a careful juggling between the forms of interests and power at the disposal of the causal agent. As such, realism maintains an autonomy in the political sphere, where power takes precedence above all else. The reality creates an anarchic international system, where other actors of human nature play out their role in constant exchanges of power and history plays out accordingly.

History exists for us to learn from the bountiful mistakes we have made as humanity. Alas, are mistakes not part of the historical process? Is there any certainty we will not do the same mistakes and to what extent? For many of us, history is a story of the past, and as such we put it aside and focus on the present and future. The result is we are not in control of history, and the causal forces of history have a tremendous impact on us when its effects suddenly hit us. Take the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan. Retrospectively, history was in the making, and the causal forces of Great Powers have produced an ongoing conflict across the region even today. At the turn of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan was forgotten as history. However, the seeds of history have been planted and the effects today are in the form of an organic multi-cell form of terrorism across the world. The same cause-and-effect relationship happened in the Iraq War and the rise of the Islamic State. Concerning China, the gist of the historical process is that China has not forgotten its past. In fact, China has taken full control and ownership of the historical causal forces. As an agent in the anarchical world, China thus-far enjoys its accumulation of power to be able

to create an alternate reality from a future of infinite possibilities. Whereas at the outset of the post-Cold War era, the West has put history in its grave (Fukuyama 1992), China has enlivened the historical process.

When one seeks to understand human nature, there ought not to be a logical explanation, which is why it is relatively difficult to posit an argument along the lines of human nature. There is a fundamental difference between the natural sciences and social sciences. We use logic and reason to experiment and thus explain what happens in the natural world. However, we cannot use the same means in the social world; we cannot dissect a human being and understand why he did such an act, although we can understand where his kidneys are. We try to use ineffective *means* to explain a certain *end*. Language is one of those *means*. Whereas our statements may be logically intact, the facts remain unaltered. Returning to the idea of terrorism, the atrocious acts were in the name of God, Allah. 'We are liberating you in the name of God.' Whereas such a statement may be logical for people who worship Allah and believe the act carried out is for the greater good, this does not change the fact that many innocent people died. Despite this being a rather irrational behaviour, in the social world there is a delicate dichotomy between rationality and irrationality. Whereas according to classical realism states act as rational and prudent, the nature of the social world is governed precisely by those 'objective laws' that Morgenthau explained in *Politics Among Nations*.

Classical realism extends as far as Ancient Greece to the general and author Thucydides, who depicted the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta in his work *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The rise of Athens and the fear it caused in Sparta was the trigger for a contest of power and, hence, ended in war between the two sides. As such, *fear* of human nature was sincerely the single major cause of conflict. Welch (2003) poses the question whether or not is it an appropriate analysis or an anachronistic application. This is quite a valid standpoint, however, perhaps Thucydides' 'ancient' thought persists within the engagements of the political world. A heavily recurrent scenario throughout history has played itself out along such lines:

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> *In the famous Spartan debate, King Archidamus counseled patience, arguing that Sparta should watch, prepare, and play for time; but his prudence proved impotent in the face of Sthenelaidas' hot-blooded call to action in the face of Athens' insults and injuries (Strassler and Crawley 1998, 1.86).*

In Thucydides' quote we may see and understand prudence, in a way that this action has taken a toll on Sparta's own interests. Indeed, a paradox as it is, for taking a prudent stance to favor *our* own interests at the face of a perceived foe has paradoxically been met with ever-closer tensions that would fundamentally go against one's own interests. Thus, the interplay between prudence, interests and power is crucial to understanding the realist stance in world politics. To perhaps convolute this notion of prudence with that of the Sino-US relationship, under the leadership of Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese had the flexibility to exercise prudent behaviour, which has sincerely put China in the spotlight on the world stage. In a globalizing and an ever-growing world economy and power politics, the case for prudent behaviour is becoming increasingly dangerous. If we take into account a growing disparity in bilateral relations, take China and Japan for example, the rivalry is ever-expanding. This has grown into fierce nationalistic perturbation, if not jingoistic behaviour. As a corollary, Xi Jinping now "seems disturbingly captive to the intense Chinese nationalism that his predecessor Hu Jintao first mobilized a decade ago" (Welch 2015, p.1).

There is a positive correlation between nationalism and revival of history. Chinese political thought has also been recognized as a *Realpolitik*, or pragmatic realism, mostly observed as Chinese Legalism. The driver behind this thought has been Sun Tzu and his classic *The Art of War*. A more pragmatic approach in Chinese political thought is adopted to try to 'win' before any battle has even started (Sun-tzu [6th cen. BC] 2002, chapter 4). Such is the use of a deceptively calculating and prudent ability on the side of Chinese political philosophers have history on its own side, where power and heavy nationalism have the ability to expand the boundaries of foreign policy-making.

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II. ii. Distinguishing Classical and Neo-realist Methodology

The second part focuses on the methodological discrepancy between classical and structural realists. The reason for distinguishing between the original realist theory and neo-realist theory, or structural realism, is to provide the rationale this thesis enthuses. The basic difference between the two schools of international relations theory is within the *agent-structure problem*. Whereas classical realists tend to favor the agent, neorealists favor the structure in determining the function of international politics.

Power is the determinant factor in classical realism, and not the structure *per se* as in the neorealist tradition. Within classical realism, a structure in the international system does not exist as such. The ultimate deterrent is relative power and not an 'imagined' structure. Neorealists rather believe in such a structure created by the balance of power between state actors. For classical realists, the simple yet precise balance of power determines how the anarchic international system functions. For neorealists, states adapt to a certain accepted form of a structure that binds the international system together amidst international anarchy.

As previously argued, politics is autonomous of other fields such as economics, ethics or religion. It is this autonomy, which suggests that in a social interaction, there cannot be such a structure in an anarchic realm of politics. The argument of neorealists is thus non-pervasive. The autonomous nature of politics does not condemn that there is no process of socialization, such is within the world of international relations. However, the fundamental notion that agents are not in total control of their own free will, namely states, that somehow states are constrained by a certain imposed structure is not pertinent to political reality. Yes, there are norms that exist within the social world that actors over time abide by. Moreover, states are rational and prudent actors and can only act against how their relative power coincides with the others. As soon as the balance of power is tilted towards one side, the actor will consider increasing its relative power even more. Agents have causal powers, and when one's relative power is greater, its causal powers would have increased. The agents would invariably try to put those into practice.

In the article, *Tragedy of Offensive Realism*, Kirshner (2010) elaborates on the notion how dangerous it is to employ the offensive realist view in explaining the rise of China, where

offensive realism is an off-shoot of neorealist theory. If one were to adopt this view, war would inevitably come about due to China's rise and tilting the balance of power into its own sphere of influence, thereby seeking more power. On the other hand, classical realism does not directly advocate for war-like outcomes. Yes, war is a possibility, however since actors are rational and prudent, balance of power becomes a sensible outcome. Offensive realism argues that China will aggressively change the status quo to pursue its own reality of the regional order. The tragedy of such a notion is obvious in its own nature, enjoyed only by warmongers. Whilst neorealism tries to impose its own distortion of reality into international relations, classical realism discusses the reality thereof. As Thucydides timelessly argued in the *Melian Dialogue* that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must, such is the distinction in the relativity of power and the resulting outcomes. But what are the limitations of classical realist thought?

II. iii. Limitations of Classical Realism

The main problem is whether the notion of human nature can be applied historically, as in past, present and future, evolutionarily (evolution of mankind), culturally (applied in various cultures and people), or even psychologically (different pathological tendencies).

The main question to pose is to what extent is classical realism applicable to account for in the 21st century world. However, I argue that the reason classical realism is a popular theory even now is its timeless wisdom and insight into human nature. Others may argue, such as neo-realist Kenneth Waltz, that classical realism is based upon very strong assumptions about human nature. Human nature is indeed a complex concept to scrutinize. Nevertheless, if one were to dissect the essence of classical, or political, realism, it would be the objective laws governing the behaviour of a human being. Politics is the act of two or more actors engaging in prudent exchange of power and interests. There would be room for compromise and diplomacy, however, when there is a strong clash of interests and a struggle for power to pursue those interests, it is indeed difficult for the political actors to fathom the magnitude of their endeavors. If politics was not based on power and interests, would there be such a need for diplomacy or compromise? Yet, it is hard to measure objectively. Hence politics remains within the realm of a subjective social science. It is

also for this reason that neorealism fails to scientifically validate realist theoretical assumptions.

The reason for later theories to envelop the international relations theory sphere is such that there is a consistency of alliances and a sense of international community, as neo-liberal institutionalism would suggest. One might argue that the 21st century society is cohesive and binded together by common standards, such as morality, cooperation and diplomacy. Indeed, the realist theory was absorbed into the IR discipline at arguably the most tragic era in human history after suffering two total world wars. However, time after time the struggle of power is visible and real throughout history, and that has not altered in the 21st century. Albeit inter-state conflicts are at their lowest level, technological development, military efficiency and arms trade is increasing drastically, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Does this create more instability or stability, security or insecurity? It most reflects balance of power theory and how states seek alliances to balance against a stronger rival, such as China. However, aren't the alliances just a manifestation of this counter-balance or true allies of a superpower? This limits classical realist analysis to portray the state as the single unitary actor in an anarchic world. Weak states would surely cede some form of sovereignty towards a greater goal of security provided by a stronger state, as we may observe US military bases in weaker countries.

On a 'cultural' note, that "elusive entity of 'human nature'", writes Carr, "has varied so much from country to country and from century to century that it is difficult not to regard it as an historical phenomenon shaped by prevailing social conditions and conventions" (1961, p.27). To what extent is culture and social conditions independent of human nature? This was such enquiry by a classical realist Edward H. Carr. Indeed, the vagueness that revolves around human nature cannot go unnoticed. For we have states that do not even have a military, such as Liechtenstein, and who relies on Swiss police forces for protection. States are run by individuals, whom the 'human nature' argument possesses. As such, states would act upon the international arena accordingly through human nature. The 'human nature' argument cannot only suppose the dark side of humanity. There are two sides of the same coin. In more advanced cultures, the role of empathy and altruistic behaviour has

seen the light and matters of the 'darker' side of human nature have subsided. Peace studies have been formed in the Scandinavian nations over the 20th century and the realist human nature began to take new forms, however, which were already there to be uncovered. Certainly, not all political actions are caused by 'human nature' alone and there must be multifarious reasons that must be taken into account, such as geography, which cannot be manipulated by humans.

The fourth limitation is psychological, in the sense that human nature is an intricate cobweb of psychological and mental functions and which varies in each individual. Mental faculties developed in one person ought to have different repercussion on the ability of that individual to act in the world as opposed to another person's mental faculties. In classical realism, 'rationality' is part of human nature and states are deemed to be rational actors, but they are lost in their own 'rational' logic, for as Karl Popper, in his *Poverty of Historicism*, argues that 'rationality' cannot be measured 'in accordance with the logic of [its] situation' ([1957] 1964, p.97), for such 'rationality' makes no assumptions of the 'rationality of 'human nature'. He argues that we cannot measure human behaviour by psychological traits or human nature.

The difficulty in psychological behaviour lies in its measurement, for its difficult to assert that such an action was caused by a specific pathological inclination. "Perfectly normal psychological pathologies", argues Welch, "can incline people to underestimate the risks they run and overestimate the prospects of achieving what they consider a desirable or 'just' outcome" (2015, p.1). As we do not understand the intricacies of human nature, we identify it as the cause simply because we cannot understand it. Referring back to Popper, the complexity ensues when we engage in the decision-making process, as such that the "awareness that the prediction might itself exert influence on events predicted is likely to have repercussions on the content of the prediction; and the repercussions might be of such kind as gravely to impair the objectivity of the predictions and of other results of research in the social sciences" ([1957] 1964, p.14-15). This understanding comes to the social sciences from quantum physics. The metaphysical quantum world is a reality thus-far unfathomable to the scientific community. One experiment on electrons suggests their

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behaviour changes once observed, whereas unobserved the electron behaves differently. This supposes the notion that physics has a lot to say on mapping human behaviour and how attention with intention may alter reality. As a result, the concept of human nature cannot be a constant.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In sum, the chapter provided a theoretical background into classical realism, the main principles that the theory entails and a critical analysis of the human nature argument. Moreover, the chapter distinguished between other realist theories to account for the importance of classical realism in 21st century international relations. The chapter ended with four limitations of classical realism including historical, evolutionary, cultural and psychological. The following chapter will apply classical realist understanding to China's policy in the South China Sea.

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Chapter III. China's Policy in the South China Sea

Following the theoretical discussion of classical realism, this chapter analyzes China's policy in the SCS. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section evaluates China's increasing power and its implications. The second part scrutinizes China's strategy. The third part further analyzes the combination of China's increasing power and strategy in addressing China's island reclamations in the SCS. Through such understanding of China's overall policy, potential outcomes will become possible to evaluate in the fourth chapter. Firstly, it is necessary to provide a brief background of China and the SCS disputes.

SOUTH CHINA SEA BACKGROUND

The PRC issued its first formal claim to sovereignty over islands in the SCS in 1951 (Yahuda 2013, p.450). Whereas China bases its claim over the SCS via 'historical evidence' as a regional hegemon during the Ming and Qing dynasties (MOFA 2000, p.1), China's claim is also of a geopolitical and strategic nature. Through its 2009 Note Verbale and the UN (2009), China has repeatedly claimed that China "has indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the SCS and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and subsoil thereof" (Raine and Le Mière 2013, p.34). As such, the PRC appears to regard the SCS as a "Chinese lake" (Taylor 1997, p.28; Samuels 1982, p.22).

The situation today has become the product of historical events and their evolution. China has perhaps been exercising some form of 'sovereignty' over the SCS for centuries, having been the regional hegemon until the first Opium wars, due to which it has lost its ability to control the region for about 150 years. China is now seeking some form of revival or 'rejuvenation' of its past civilizational glory (The Economist 2013). For the CPC, history is not just the past; history is also the present and the future (Yu 2014, p.1; Gill and Small 2012, p.27). The PRC wants a *status quo ante*, to 'recapture' the reality under the Ming and Qing dynasties, when China ruled the SCS through a tributary system with the kingdoms and colonies of Southeast Asia, who were subjugated to China's rule (Möller 1995, p.19).

Recent developments suggest China's 'assertiveness' includes China's deployment of its first aircraft carrier Liaoning onto the waters of the SCS as well as China's claims on fishing rights over the entire SCS (Thayer 2014). The deployment of the Chinese aircraft carrier is a "strategic projection of power at sea" (Samuels 1982, p.145). These developments "exacerbated concerns about China's long term strategic objectives" as China's military expenditure exponentially increases (Russel 2014, p.1). Essentially, China seeks to "maximize its legal and political leverage, while the growth of its military and maritime assets gains physical leverage over its weaker neighbours" (EEAS 2012, p.1).

Since 2010, South China Sea became a part of its core interests on par with Taiwan and Tibet (de Castro 2015, p.5). Following this brief introduction into the nature and background of the SCS disputes, how can China manifest its dream of 'national rejuvenation'? The answer is through power. The next section analyzes China's newly-found power and how it will attempt to use it for its own benefit, and from its own position the benefit of the entire region.

III. i. Analysis of China's Power

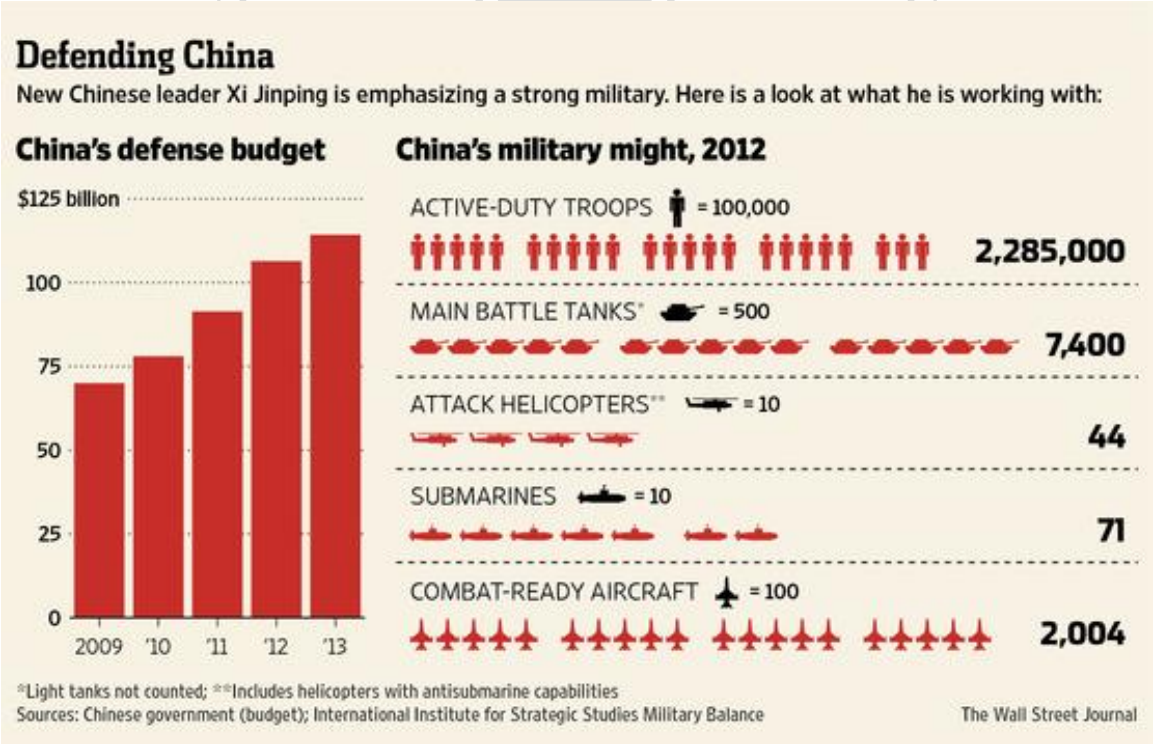
If a state seeks to alter a perceived 'status quo', the change is contingent upon power. China "is not a status quo power", argues Kaplan, "for it is propelled abroad by the need to secure energy, metals and strategic minerals in order to support the rising living standard of roughly a fifth of humanity" (2012, p.199). Classical realists then call the agent a 'revisionist power'. From previous analysis of power, the state with enough accumulated power has the causal forces to create the sought after change. Concerning power politics, one may discern that the post-Cold War era has been a unipolar form of power from the point of the US, until the global financial crash in 2008. Since 2010, as the global economy slowly recovers, not only have we seen a stronger China, but Russia has also risen to mark its geopolitical status. As such, the world is at present in a multipolar power setting. Much of causal powers of the US have been transferred to that of China and Russia. This notion of power supposes both hard and soft power, the overall ability of China to assert its influence and interests.

How has China gone about an increased power? Indeed, China has come out of the financial crisis on top. Its relative power has risen to the point where China has felt comfortable to position itself in Asia-Pacific as the director, rather than an actor. In 2010, China has overcome Japan as the strongest economy in Asia, and in the same year announced the SCS as part of its 'core' interests. As a corollary, it needs to provide security to that 'core' interest. The SCS is part of a larger core interest family, although this has to do with China's security and growth – traits of an 'uber-realist power' (Kaplan 2012, p.199). China's immense financial endowment has seen it influence neighbors through infrastructure projects and trade, and also invest in a home-grown military, reducing arms reliability on Russian imports. Its military growth stems from a financial clout and political backing by CPC leaders and the public. China's asymmetric rise has seen quite unprecedented consequences in the regional architecture. In comparison with ASEAN members contesting the SCS disputes, China dwarfs their military capabilities. Since classical realists view power in relative terms, we need to consider the regional military situation. How do others compare to China?

Regional military spending has reached a total of $439 billion, with China reaching a 9.7 percent increase in its military budget (Cronin 2015, p.26). Over the past decade, China has invested large amounts into PLA's military modernization. The PLA budget in 2015 surpassed $200 billion, six times larger than the combined budgets of ASEAN member states (Storey 2015, p.71). For comparison purposes, in the year 2000, the difference between the defense budgets of China and ASEAN was just over $2 billion. At present, the figure nearly surpasses $150 billion (Storey 2015, p.76). China's two main rival claimants in the SCS, Vietnam and the Philippines, are playing their part to not lag behind China too much. Vietnam's military spending has risen by 128 percent (SIPRI 2015, p.3) in 2015, a significant rise to boost Vietnam's defense and naval forces. On the other hand, Philippines enjoys very limited forces available to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), since Aquino's administration has lacked finances to pursue its modernization program (de Castro 2015). de Castro argues that the strategic imbalance between the Philippines and China "cannot be rectified in the foreseeable future" (2015, p.17). How has China managed to exponentially outmaneuver the others?

China is an agent of power. It is not that China's accumulated economic power allows China to pursue its interests more 'assertively', it is precisely an improved economic capability yielded to increased political power available to China that enabled a larger political clout. China is ready to "influence the meaning, the context and the rules" in East Asia (Xiang 2009, p.175). To account for such influence, China has had an annual double digit increase in defense spending since 2006 to allow for the development of a blue-water navy (de Castro 2015, p.4). *Figure 1* below shows the military might of the PLA, which now includes one aircraft carrier. For decades, China has relied on military imports from Russia. However, China is slowly homogenizing its military technology and refraining from external influence to internalize its research and development of military capabilities.

Figure 1: China's Military Might, 2012

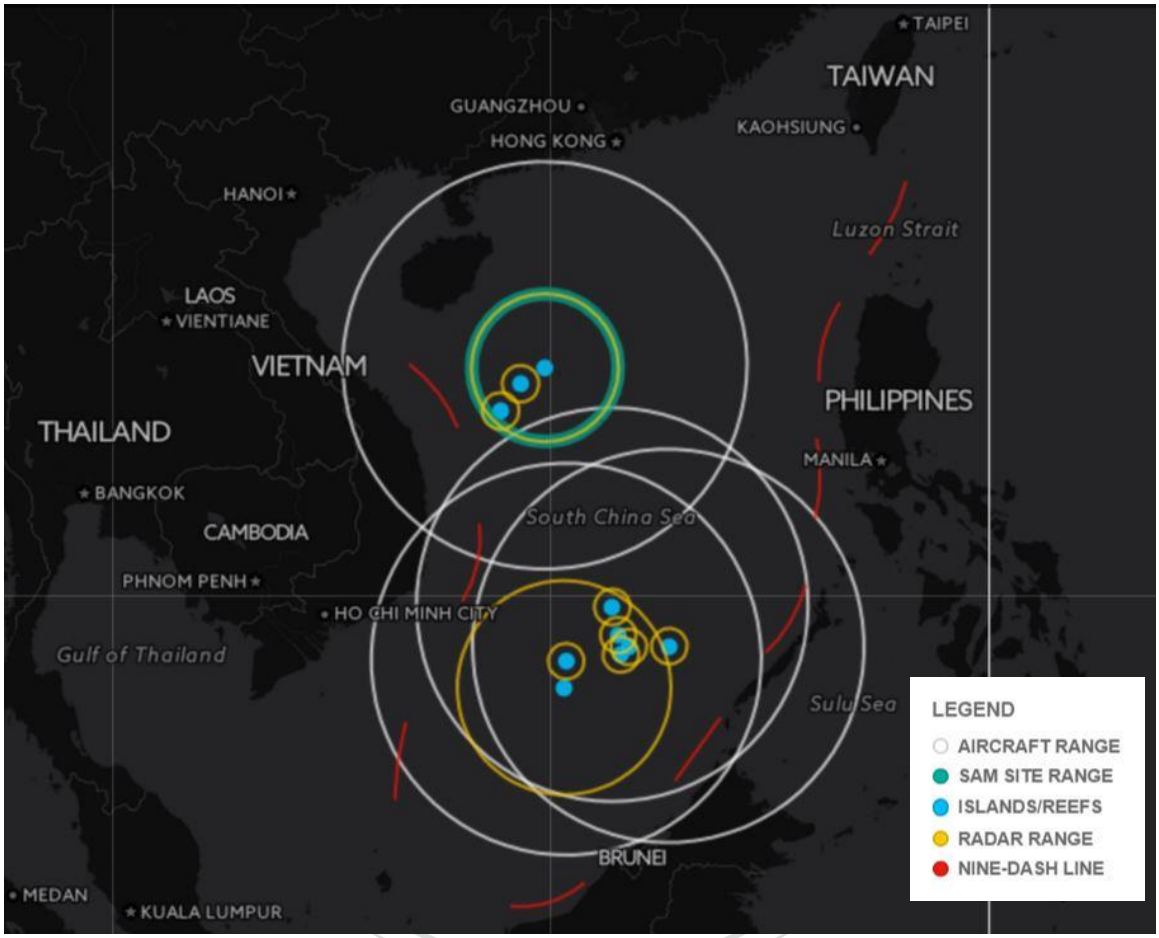


Source: WSJ (2013)

China's military research and development follows a dual track – low-cost quantity and high-end quality (Cronin 2015, p.26). Low-cost quantity allows for China's navy to deploy coast guard and frigates into the seas to protect its interests, whereas high-end quality are precisely those missiles and radar systems to deter US influence in the region. This suggests

that China has developed precise ballistic and cruise missiles aimed at US targets in the Western Pacific and aims to control its Chinese Lake through anti-access/area denial capabilities (de Castro 2015, p.4). Such installments may be viewed on *Figure 2* below.

Figure 2: Chinese Detection/Defense Capabilities in the South China Sea



Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (2016)

Moreover, the deployment of HQ-9 missile batteries and J-11 fighter jets to Woody Island in the Paracel Islands in the SCS has implications for PLA capabilities in the sea (Tiezzi 2016). These are the military capabilities that show China's increasing power. Politically, China's Hainan Island presides over the administration of the entire features in the SCS (de Castro 2015, p.7). China – militarily and politically – thus enjoys vast strategic depth and lands bases from which to achieve its goal of becoming a maritime power.

Having analyzed China's growing power, how does this renewed power enable China to pursue its strategy? The following section will discuss China's naval strategy in the SCS and beyond.

III. ii. China's Naval Strategy

In recent years, there has been a steady development in China's strategy, since its power is in constant change, thus it enables China to alter its short-term strategy. However, its long-term strategy indeed seems fixated upon 'national rejuvenation' and realizing the 'Chinese dream', pointing to the CPC's centenary in 2049. Ever since China's 'opening up' reforms by Deng Xiaoping, he urged China to maintain a 'low profile'. This has been pursued well into the early 2000s. At present, China has overthrown that idea by set of new strategies to accommodate its newly-found power.

China has transitioned from a "hide-and-bide approach" (Cronin 2015, p.26) to a far more active and assertive phase employing the so called 'cabbage strategy', as low intensity coercion. Yahuda (2013, p.447) argues that the Chinese have "begun to challenge more openly conventional interpretations of maritime international law in order to suit their own immediate strategic and national interests." Saul (2013, p.197) sees China being "recalcitrant"; being resistant, cautious, aggressive, opposed and prioritising in its respective policies. Others (de Castro 2015) see China employing Realpolitik strategies. China has a Realpolitik dating back thousands of years, often referred to as Chinese Legalism, which can be recognized through Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. Simply, China is challenging, but through low intensity coercion. Given the present conditions, China uses prudent behaviour to assert its control over what is available and possible. Realpolitik is how an actor conducts himself in a given situation, essentially bypassing its ideological, moral or ethical premises. Although ideology and morality may be integrated in a long-term strategy as an *end*, Realpolitik explains a rather short-term strategy, in which pragmatic politics takes precedence over all else.

CHINA'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY - FIRST AND SECOND ISLAND CHAIN

China has incorporated a long-term strategy for the SCS through its late general Liu Huaxing's two island chains strategy. This strategy is divided into the first and second island chains, which is depicted in *Figure 3*.

Figure 3: First and Second Island China Strategy

Source: Wingfield-Hayes (2014)

Given China's rising power, by 2050 PLAN should aspire to be a global force. This is a strong continentalist perspective, a very first in China's history, despite China's present regional scope. Cole's (2010) methodology is derived from access to material very close to the Communist Party, ranging to official documents to Chinese analysts such as Liu Huaqing or Zhang Lianzhong, a former PLA general and a former PLAN commander, respectively. From Cole's analysis, it is conceivable to suggest a realist aspiration of the

PLAN to take command of the Pacific seas, but more importantly, it gives us great insight into potential outcomes of China's present policy in the South China Sea.

If China is to become a global naval force, it needs to gain total control of these two island chains. The purpose of the SCS becoming China's 'core interest' in 2010 is to make the first steps necessary to gain control of the first island chain, of which the SCS is an integral part. By dominating the first island chain, China can extend its security perimeter and reinforce its influence over these crucial sea lanes of communication and thus develop a blue-water navy (de Castro 2015, p.4).

Concerning the first island chain, Kato (2010) suggests that in time China will be able to stave off incursions of the US navy into the area within the first island chain, encompassing the entire SCS. To make this possible, China has pursued a strategy conducting regular naval exercises that utilize modern surface combatants and even submarines with the intention to "unilaterally and militarily resolve maritime disputes" (de Castro 2015, p.5). With its naval prowess China is convinced that it can resolve its territorial row according to its own terms (de Castro 2015, p.5).

Taking advantage of its increased relative power, since incorporating the SCS as part of its 'core interests' in 2010, there are numerous examples of China's assertive behaviour in the SCS. In 2011, China encroached upon the Philippines' EEZ to conduct oil exploration. Moreover, the following year, Chinese ships have taken over the Scarborough Shoal within the Philippines' EEZ. They have evicted Filipino coast guard from the area and asserted control over the shoal. These cases have been met with increased tensions from the Filipino navy and finally forced the Philippines to file a case against China to ITLOS. This is further discussed in the fourth chapter.

China has also had cases with Vietnam, and since taking over the Paracel Islands in 1974 from South Vietnam's sovereignty at the time, there have been a number of incidents at sea between the two states. In 2014 in particular, there was a standoff at a Chinese oil rig within Vietnam's EEZ. Moreover, China has also gone exploring within Malaysia's and Indonesia's EEZs. These incidents in recent years together demonstrate China's pursuit of a more assertive strategy to extend its already strong presence in the SCS. This is part of

its short term strategy to conduct itself to a point where it can declare substantial control over the entire features of the SCS.

These are incidents in the open seas of the SCS, but what is more important is China's conduct on its own 'island' possessions in the SCS. How can China support its oil exploration and fishing adventures, and also increase its power projection in the SCS? The answer lies in its activities relating to the land reclamations in the SCS, which will be analyzed in the third section of this chapter.

III. iii. China's Island Building

What has China been doing?

In what has been dubbed by the head of the US Pacific Command, Adm. Harry Harris, the 'Great Wall of Sand' (Johnson and De Luce 2015), China has been reclaiming land on reefs within the conglomeration of the Spratly Islands, and turning them into actual islands for many purposes, not to mention military facilities. On 7 locations, including the Fiery Cross Reef (see Figure 4 below), China has been "erecting buildings, deploying troops, building harbors and airstrips, installing radar and surveillance systems" (Glaser 2015, p.31). Ashton Carter, US Secretary of Defense, said that China has reclaimed over 2000 acres of land, which is more than all of the other claimants combined, and China has achieved this feat only in the past two years (Dung and Minh 2015, p.66). *Figure 4* below provides a graphic of China's land reclamation projects in the Spratly Islands.

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Figure 4: China's Land Reclamation

Source: Reclamation marks. (2015, February 28th). The Economist. p.29

What are the reasons for land reclamation?

In her report, Glaser (2015) of the CSIS has outlined a number of reasons why China is pursuing such an extensive land reclamation. Firstly, the reclaimed islands with the necessary technology would satisfy China's sense of security. From previous analysis, there is a strong bond between power, interests and security. Classical realists argue that accumulated relative power enables the agent to pursue its interests and perhaps discover a new set of interests, as China included the SCS a part of its 'core interests' in 2010. With increased power and a new set of interests, China needs to protect those interests. Land reclamation would provide a tangible surface from which to operate that security and satisfy China's relative position in the disputes. Land reclamations would tip the scale in favor of China as time moves forward.

In particular, the improved infrastructure of the islands would enhance China's intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities (Glaser 2015, p.35-6). In fact, from its military strategy, China will be able to assert control of the sea, subjugating all other actors within the periphery of the islands. Furthermore, China's power would be upheld by military infrastructures such as surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles and aircraft based on the islands, with the ultimate goal of increasing anti-access/area denial capabilities to support its power projection vis-à-vis the US Pacific Command. Land reclamation is such first step to take full control over China's destiny, be it controlling the first island chain in the near future. *Figure 5* shows China's reclamation on one of its largest artificial islands, the Fiery Cross Reef.

Figure 5: Land Reclamation on Fiery Cross Reef

Source: Hardy (2015)

Thirdly, the enhanced islands would provide support of China's oil and fishing exploration in the region. The islands are "intended for thousands of China fishing ships to rest and refuel" (Glaser 2015, p.33). This is China's 'smart' power move, combining the 'softer' efforts of oil and fishing exploration with China's 'harder' coast guard and frigate protection of Chinese fishermen at sea. There have been occasions when Chinese fishermen

were held over maritime territory incursions in Indonesian waters, for example, and unprecedentedly Chinese 'warships' appeared to free the fishermen. As a corollary, the islands will allow China more capability to defend its oil rigs and fishing exploration (Glaser 2015, p.35). The China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) would directly be supported to continue rigging in the open seas, inasmuch as it may cross the boundaries of rival claimants' territorial waters.

What are the effects?

The produced effects of such a policy towards the SCS have been rather tumultuous coming from the international community, namely the rival claimants, especially the Philippines and Vietnam, and the US. This will further be discussed in the fourth chapter, the potential outcomes of China's policy.

China's island building 'binge' (Glaser 2015, p.27) has the potential to make its nine-dash line a *de facto* reality. The process for attaining such a reality is gaining leverage over the neighbors through "non-kinetic forces" such as informational, legal and psychological (ibid.). As previously analyzed, China's power enables it a privilege of having the ability to use causal forces to its advantage. Increased power enables China to pursue its interests with more rigor. As such, land reclamation would effectively affect the other actors psychologically in such a way that prudent behaviour on their side would have produced a missed opportunity to act against China. Perhaps from China's own view, building islands would increase its legal foundation on its claim, although it is not necessarily according to the UNCLOS. Moreover, land reclamation and newly built infrastructure already had such a proportional effect that China could readily control the flow of information in the SCS, especially through its new radar systems.

With this in mind, some authors (de Castro 2015; Glaser 2015; Jennings 2015; Dunh and Minh 2015) wrote about the possibility of the establishment of another Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). This would not be China's first attempt at consolidating its littoral territory. In November 2013, China unilaterally imposed an ADIZ over the East China Sea. This has caused outrage from Japan and the US, with the US testing the aerial zone moments after China's imposition. However, a rather restricted response from the

side of the US and Japan, no further protests have taken place. This gives China more leverage on imposing an ADIZ over the SCS, which is perhaps more complicated of an issue given the vast area, large amounts of natural resources, and a plethora of maritime claimants.

Given China's accelerated land reclamations over the past two years, debates about a potential ADIZ have surfaced not with the questions of *if*, but *when?* Glaser (2015, p.38) argues that China's three newly built 10 000 feet-long airstrips could help China enforce an ADIZ. Yet, unlike an immediate security threat coming from Japan, China does not readily feel a such a threat emanating from ASEAN nations and is generally optimistic with its neighbors (ibid.). Perhaps this may be a part of China's prudent behaviour on de-escalating the tensions and reservations about China's land reclamation works, but at the same time, a PLA expert suggests that an ADIZ over the SCS is necessary for China's long-term policy in the region (Chan 2014). As such, China's island building is seen as a building block for consolidating China's power, strategy and security in the region.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In sum, the chapter first analyzed China's asymmetric growth in power over recent years. China's ability to gauge further interest in the SCS and adjacent waters is precisely because of such a large accumulation in material wealth, which turns into its growing relative power over other actors. China's power enables it to pursue its long-term strategy in attaining control over the first and second island chains with the hope of marking the CPC's centenary in 2049. China's island building is the result of short-term strategy and power gains over others is a necessary step if China seeks to control the first island chain. The following chapter IV will discuss the outcomes of China's policy in the SCS.

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Chapter IV. Potential Outcomes of China's Policy

In reality, there could be many potential outcomes as from the present moment can stem an infinite possibilities of the future. However, for the purposes of this essay, the main potential outcomes, specifically as seen through classical realists, will be taken into account. This chapter revolves around the main actors in the SCS disputes, which is ASEAN, the US and China. There are three corresponding themes that deal with each actor and their respective actions. ASEAN seeks to resolve the disputes through international law, which is the first theme. The US has been counteracting China's policy with balance of power, which is the second theme. Thirdly, China's aim is to control the entire SCS and establish a China-led regional order and revive its legitimacy in the process, which is the third and final theme. As such, this chapter attempts to discuss these three themes in connection with the respective actors. The three options will envelop thus a potential outcome of China's current policy it the SCS.

The first section analyzes ASEAN's perspective towards the current situation in the SCS and maintains resolution through international law. The second section seeks an understanding of the US' response to China's policy and its intention of balancing China's power. The third section will look at a highly potential outcome of China's establishment of a China-led regional order and China's due legitimacy with respect to the SCS. Essentially, the three outcomes are seen from the lens of classical realists. A final paragraph will evaluate which potential outcome is most likely.

IV. i. ASEAN and International Law

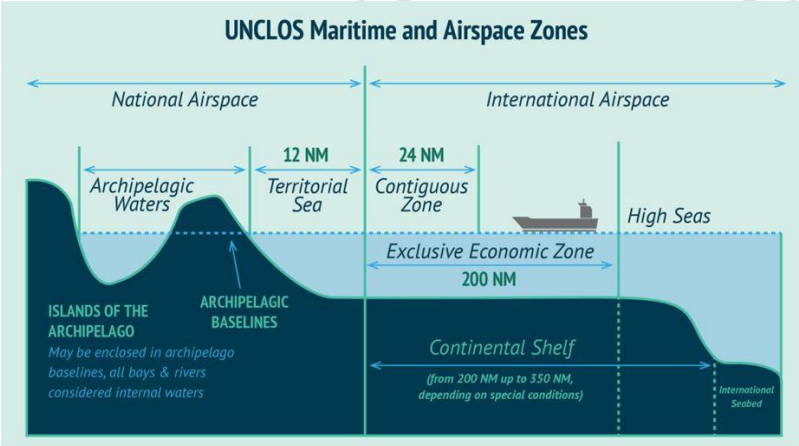
Cronin (2015, p.25) suggests that the "twenty first century should be based on the rule of law, and not spheres of influence as in the nineteenth century." ASEAN, as a regional bloc of ten nations, has greatly opposed China's pursuit in the South China Sea and these words sum up ASEAN's arguments, particularly those of the fiercest claimants. Vietnam and the Philippines have ongoing disputes with China, others include Malaysia and Brunei. The other members, namely Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore and Indonesia, do not have direct opposition to China's actions. ASEAN has nevertheless taken a united stance against China, however, there remains a heavy disparity amongst its members.

In its most recent summits, ASEAN expressed concern about Chinese land reclamation and said that the activity has "eroded trust and confidence and may undermine peace, security and stability in the SCS" (ASEAN Summit 2015a, p.10). Six months later, another ASEAN Summit statement opposed the 'further militarization of outposts' in the SCS (ASEAN Summit 2015b, p.24).

INTERNATIONAL LAW

International law has widely been regarded as the answer to solving the disputes, mainly the Sino-Philippine maritime dispute. The Philippines claims the island formations that are within the reach of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as indicated by international law under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Philippines have brought the case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the body that arbitrates claims related to UNCLOS, which helps determine maritime rights that nations claim (Sevastopulo 2014). *Figure 6* below helps to illustrate maritime law under UNCLOS to put the matter into perspective. However, there is one innate problem with this. China, whereas a signatory of the UNCLOS, has opted out of Article 298 under UNCLOS, which demands 'compulsory' conflict resolution under the ITLOS or any other international arbitration such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Raine and Le Mière 2013, p. 16; EEAS 2012, p.4). Thus, China has the 'right' of not participating despite the Filipino effort.

Figure 6: UNCLOS Maritime Law



Source: Batongbacal (2015)

The notion of international law pertinent to the dispute can be divided into two parts. Firstly, there is the international law commanded by the UNCLOS. Secondly, there is the inter-state 'Code of Conduct' (COC), which remains to be constructed and signed by the parties involved. In the meantime, the Declaration on the Code of Conduct (DOC) in the SCS has been materialized in 2002 (ASEAN 2002). However, it has been more than a decade and formal negotiations stagnated. The DOC remains a political instrument without any legally binding effect, and with a purpose to maintain the status quo and exercise self-restraint (Dung and Minh 2015, p.67). A COC is being negotiated to provide a legal framework to regulate the conduct in the SCS. China has been evading a final resolution, because it does not see fit the propositions to take away large swathes of its original claims. The presently accepted UNCLOS and corresponding international law cannot be correlated with China's ambitions in the region. Hence, the conclusion one can discern from this is that international law is yet to be abided by and concerning China's behaviour this is rather a far-fetched solution. One could observe that the "political space has no exact parallel in East Asian legal and political history" (Samuels 1982, p.51). Classical realists stress that politics supersede legal and moral issues, and this may be a classic case where this poses as reality.

It is worth quoting at length:

> *"Herein lies Asia's specific paradox: a high level of economic integration has not given rise to regional institutions that can support the stability required for sustained prosperity. Instead, Asia remains deeply scarred by unsettled disputes, periodic fits of nationalism, and contested borders, all of which tend to be amplified by apprehension stemming from the asymmetric rise of some of its powers. Regional integration is a recipe for long-term stability in Asia, and a second line of engagement for the EU. In Europe, once torn apart by war, armed conflict among EU member states is now almost unthinkable. The EU's institutional architecture facilitated the pivot from devastating and recurrent wars to peace and prosperity" (Solana 2013, p.1).*

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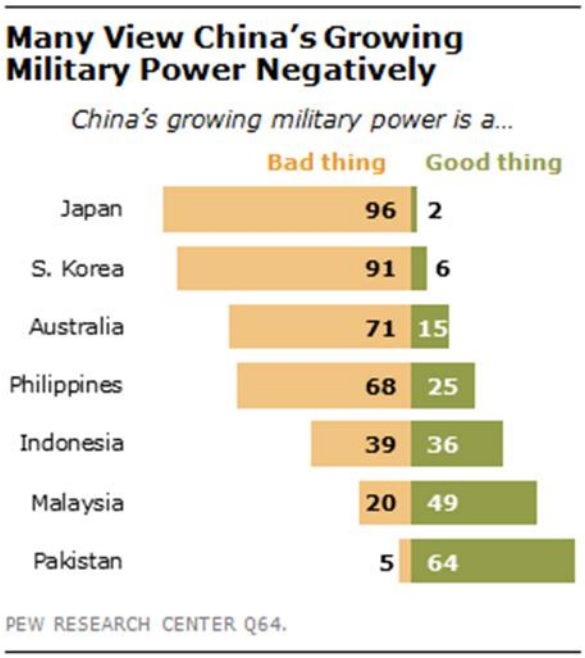
Whereas international law, its intergovernmental organizations and regional integration has flourished in the West, the paradox in Asia is such that behind the economic integration and regional prosperity lies a shadow of rivalry, mistrust and competition. A statement from the European External Action Service (EEAS) comments on such an 'Asian paradox': "while the region's economy is buoyed by integration and sense of optimism, strategic competition among regional powers is feeding concern about a fragmented security environment" (EEAS 2015, p.6). *Figure 7* below demonstrates such negative views and concern about China's military growth amongst its neighbors, particularly Japan, S. Korea and the Philippines.

Figure 7: Attitude Towards China



Source: PEW Research Center (2013)

International law can only work if all parties agree to those 'laws' that objectify agreements and the conduct of all stakeholders in the international community. However, in politics the 'objective laws of human nature' have taken form in such a way that China, a rising 'revisionist' power, has chosen to pursue its own interests at the expense of a *lesser* international law that would disrupt its own *higher* ground. What has then been a simultaneous repercussion of such denial of international law? The following section

discusses the concept of balance of power, an outcome of that rather negative view of China's rising power.

IV. ii. US and Balance of Power

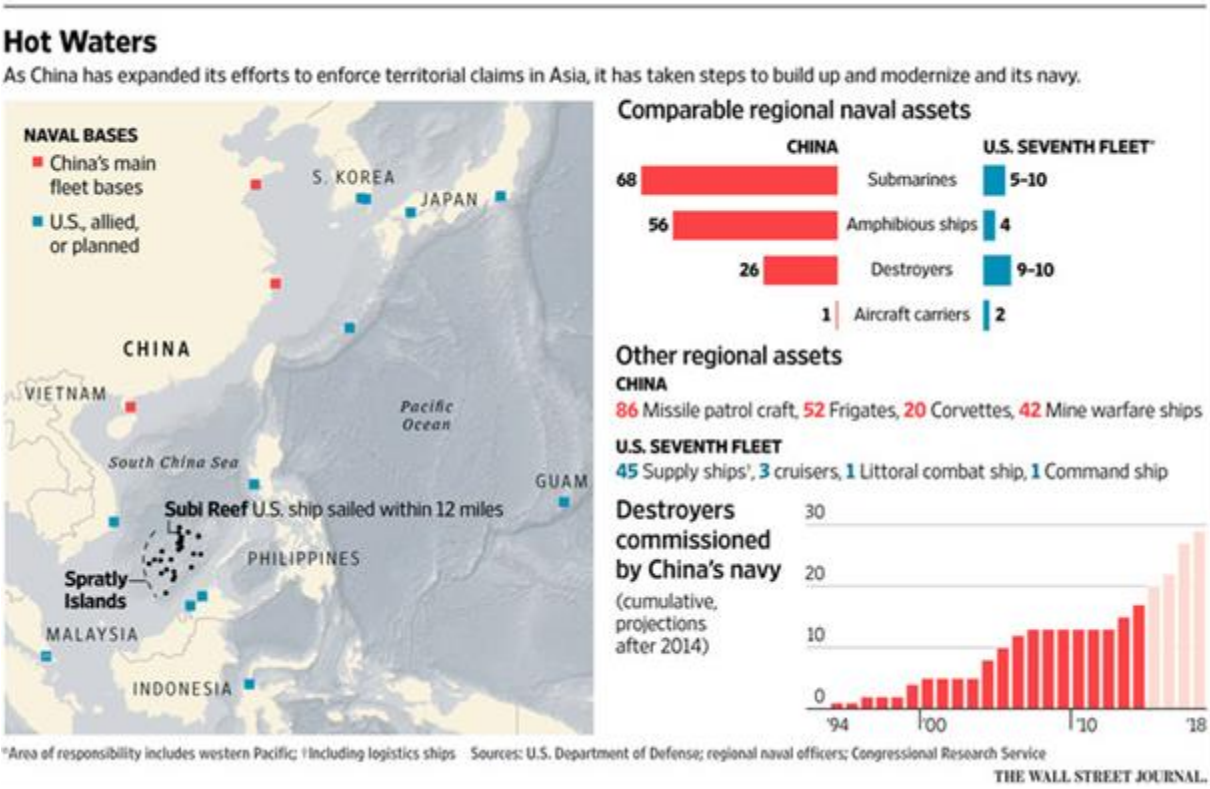
Classical realists take the concept of balance of power with great reverence and this has been at the backdrop of US' reaction towards China's policy. The idea is whenever a security and power equilibrium has become disrupted following an increase in power on one side, a response is followed in whatever form to *balance* such asymmetry in power. China's asymmetric rise in power in recent years has prompted the US to counteract to form a stronger alliance of nations. It is hard to fathom who has the upper hand, however the notion of the balance of power is such that it is in constant fluctuation, and whatever status quo is supposed to be is merely an illusion, as change is a natural law and both sides ought to adapt to constant changes in the international environment. What has thus-far been the US response to China's unprecedented change?

What is the US' response?

Following on from previous analysis, China has been increasing its capabilities and power projection in the SCS. There are several authors (Landler 2012; de Castro 2015; Jennings 2015) that have commented on what a US strategic response in the SCS may resemble. On a more assertive note, Landler (2012) urges the US to make China acknowledge America's strength, determination and strategy. In order to do so, the US military "must invest heavily in technology to neutralize or disable China's new asymmetric capabilities" (de Castro 2015, p.8). As part of its 'Asian pivot', Obama's strategic incentive to the Western Pacific includes shifting nearly 60% of its "maritime assets […] by 2020" (ibid.), which includes a total of 6 aircraft carriers. America's stronger presence, through its air and naval forces, will need to override China's anti-access systems and thus neutralize China's capability to control the air and sea around the first island chain. However, some critics, particularly Jennings (2015, p.54), have expressed lack of a concerted effort from the US' side, citing a US investment of a mere $426 million into a maritime security initiative to provide for capacity and confidence building efforts.

Most recently, the US has been conducting freedom of navigation exercises over the SCS in international airspace and waters. China's notorious reactions have involved fending the US off its territory through radio transmission. However, in May 2016, China has even gone so far as to intercept a US plane with two fighter jets (BBC 2016) to show it is indeed serious against US' incursions in *its territory*. Jennings furthermore argues that international coordination should take place "to sustain a pattern of military overflights and freedom of navigation naval operations, including within 12 nautical miles of disputed features" (Jennings 2015, p.59). This is in turn to balance out the power shift that is taking place in the region through the concept of balance of power. *Figure 8* below illustrates such a balance of power in practice.

Figure 8: Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific



Source: Browne (2015)

Concept of Balance of Power

The concept of balance of power has been prevalent and arguably the most discussed concept in the international relations domain. Following on from the analysis of the US and ASEAN reactions, it is favorable to touch upon the notion of balancing of power. The balance of power system "assumes competition between states and hence the ever-present risk of aggression and conflict" (Cook et al 2015, p.25), however at the same time it averted conflict through a stabilizing process. Furthermore, de Castro (2015, p.3) suggests the situation in the SCS is a "fluid and potentially dangerous strategic balance generated by mistrust, suspicion and rivalry between China and the US/Japan tandem over a maritime dispute." The author further argues that the current balance of power system can become the proverbial "calm before the storm" (de Castro 2015, p.12). How does this work in practice though?

As China is acting on protecting its own territorial integrity in the SCS and simultaneously pursuing a military modernization and increasing defense budgets, the US and its allies are finding ways to negate such an imbalance. For example, the Philippines and the US agreed on an updated Mutual Defense Treaty signing the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). This allows for the US forces to freely operate on Filipino bases. The US once had its military base in Subic Bay, north of the Philippines, and there is still potential to re-open its base there, which is dependent on China's further military actions in the region. Moreover, the other more significant player in the SCS, Vietnam, has had its arms embargo lifted by President Obama, which suggests closer ties between the two sides and a counterbalance towards a potential Chinese military supremacy (Spetalnick 2016).

On the peripheral balance of power scale, other ASEAN member countries are also bolstering their defense budgets in line with China's rise. Singapore bought submarines from Sweden, Malaysia bought French submarines, Indonesia acquired South Korean submarines and Thailand paradoxically Chinese-made submarines. Vietnam has a military partnership with Russia and the Philippines additionally and more recently with that of Japan. Japan's role has also intensified as a reaction to China's self-imposed ADIZ over the East China Sea. Japan's partnership with the Philippines provides capacity-building

training for the PH coast guard on maritime security, along with defense equipment and technology to the AFP. Nevertheless, in case of conflict, the PH might find itself militarily "ill-equipped, utterly defenseless and totally unprepared for a destructive onslaught" (de Castro 2015, p.23). One of the main reasons as to why Japan is supporting the PH is that China's advancements in the SCS may hamper Japan's trade, which is heavily dependent upon the connection of the South China Sea and East China Sea (Hayton 2015; Jennings 2015; Storey 2015).

The current balance of power between China and Southeast Asia requires more attention, one author suggests it is "too late to mind the gap" (Storey 2015, p.75). This prompts a re-evaluation of the military tactics in the SCS and the region beyond. However, are we being misled into thinking that an alternate reality is indeed possible or how can we act to negate the consequences of our human nature? Is such balancing of power an inevitable notion and a reflection of our human nature? According to classical realists, the balance of power is a crucial concept in the study of international politics and deeply embedded into our human nature. On the other side of the scale, some are not going along the 'convenient' bandwagon of US counterbalancing strategy as New Zealand has already decided that its "economic interests with China will trump strategic activism" (Jennings 2015, p.56). Is thus the balancing of power a success or not? What is China's response?

Success or not? China's response?

At the hands of an ineffective response, China has "adroitly taken advantage of a window of opportunity to assert control in some key areas at a point when other countries lacked the capacity or direct interest to intervene" (Jennings 2015, p.59). This assumes a certain 'belated' response from the US, before which China could strategically maneuver to assert itself and establish tangible results of power in the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the SCS. This suggests that the US 'balancing' of military power in the Asia-Pacific could not contain China to not be able to act. As a state's power relative to the others' increases, the more the state acquires the ability to act according to its own wish. As such, the US "strategic position has not stopped China from pursuing a more successfully assertive posture" (Jennings 2015, p.57).

The real threat comes from human nature and our ability to let our judgment become clouded by our inadvertent and yet prudent decision making. What would the US lose if it let China acquire the necessary grounds for security and naval expansion? Would the US allow such space for China, or would a rather more direct military approach, perhaps a military encounter try to stop China before the Chinese state acquires more power and thus more causal powers? Part of the human condition is both sides in our "inability to gauge threat accurately or to anticipate the actions of others" (Welch 2015, p.1). As such, the problem lies in "letting subjective perceptions of righteousness cloud their judgment about the likely consequences of their actions" (Welch 2015, p.1). This condition has been described by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* as the 'The Thucydides Trap', which is, in this case, "—a conscious calculation on the part of American leaders that war with China sooner is preferable to a war with China later (or kowtowing to Beijing once it has risen fully)— ", but this does not become the scenario for conflict, but the more potential outcome would be one that a smaller case could 'pull' the two great powers into a conflict, such as the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, Japan or the SCS with the Philippines or Vietnam (Welch 2015).

At the root of balance of power lies mistrust and rivalry, and as such, China views US' attempt as forging to build a coalition of states to constrain China's expansionism (de Castro 2015). As a result of such reciprocal behaviour, this may become counter-productive from US' point of view. Such contingencies may spearhead a Chinese move to adopt an ADIZ much quicker. Increased US military overflights and a potential new ADIZ would bring the sides closer to a conflict, or gradually reverse the seat of power into China's favor through a new regional order without any major conflict.

IV. iii. China's New Regional Order and Legitimacy

A classical realist analysis does not necessarily end in major power conflict. Classical realists try to outline the flaw of our human nature and the resulting actions caused by such a flaw in terms of power, interests, security and balance of power. Analysts and scholars may seek and identify such terms and the interplay when looking at the rise of China and a US shift in policy as a result. Following such an interplay of our human nature, there are

two results, or outcomes: either a major conflict or a more or less peaceful transition of power. Whereas the balance of power analysis does not call for a major power conflict, — a Sino-American war—, but it does perhaps find potential in a lesser smaller confrontation as power and interests interplay. The more potential outcome, especially in the SCS, would be an accommodation of China's rise in power, acknowledgement of such power (relative to others), and an establishment of a Chinese regional order, in a cautious manner exploited alongside the US naval forces.

Here, it is important to re-state China's more recent military strategy: moving the PLAN from an offshore water defense role to one of open seas protection. China is playing a game of *weiqi* (Go), whereas US plays chess. The Americans focus "too much on military technology whereas China can outmaneuver the US through political, economic, human and psychological competition" (Cronin 2015, p.29-30). Moreover, the international community cannot undermine China's power and its effects. From a military point of view, Chinese aircraft carriers will have an effect on the region's psychology about the future balance of power (Cronin 2015, p.28). In addition to the region's psychology, in the past two decades, especially under Hu Jintao and his rhetoric of a 'harmonious world' plays well with popular nationalist sentiment. Under Xi Jinping, such nationalist sentiment has been strengthened through the 'Chinese dream'. China's actions and results further build on its *own right* to pursue such re-invigoration of China and its society.

China is building its 'islands' in the SCS because it can, and because such an "assertion of strength is welcomed by a people schooled in the history of China's weakness and mistreatment by international powers" (Jennings 2015, p.51). Moreover, China has worked hard to make sure that ASEAN member states "struggle to hold and articulate a common position" on the SCS, use economic pressure to secure diplomatic leverage (Jennings 2015, p.53). Claimant states have "solid reasons not to want to risk their broader China relationships even as their positions are being eroded by the growth of a stronger Chinese presence on the disputed features" (ibid.). In short, ASEAN has more to gain by engaging China rather than confronting it from a military and strategic point of view. From China's point of view, Beijing "calculates that nothing it has done establishes a red line that China

cannot afford to cross" (Jennings 2015, p.57). China has continuously been noting its legitimacy, and perhaps so in the near future, such legitimacy may extend beyond China's circle of thinking and establish itself, if not in the international community, then at least in the regional community.

Concept of Legitimacy

The concept of legitimacy is a "crucial analytical instrument with which to investigate political behavior in human history" (Hsu 2007, xviii). Throughout historical empires, dynasties and even republics, legitimately governing a cohesive human society was based on the Divine rule and will. Law has been defined by divinity, and has been the predominant factor in establishing claims of legitimacy. The notion of law depicts how various entities ought to work. As such, law creates institutions – institutions such as governments, ministries, and even rules, customs, beliefs and many more. Hence, legitimacy and institutions are directly interchangeable and influence one another. Institutional change thus implicitly proposes a shifting legitimacy. Although the "forces of legitimacy do not always bring about institutional change" (Gilley 2008, p.261), institutional change is often a response to those forces, especially over the long term.

There are various conceptualizations of the term 'legitimacy.' Hsu (2007, xv) proposes that "legitimacy…with its etymological root of *lex*, indicates an institution related to laws or to established conventions or customs that guide the rule of succession of the governing person or the effective function of the government." If one looks at the Chinese word for politics, which means 'justified order', this indicates civilized order that "determines the common fortune of all peoples" (Zhao 2012, p.46). The Chinese perception of legitimacy is deep-rooted in its historical and political traditions (Guo 2013, p.22). Another interesting interpretation lies within the realm of psychology; political order is always psychological and deals with a "cognitive activity in the minds of the governed" (So 2007, p.28).

Moreover, Beijing has "legislated many internal maritime laws to justify its maritime activities including" (Ota 2014, p.78):

1992 1996	Law of the People's Republic of China Concerning the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone Proclamation of Territorial Base Line
1996	Public Relation Marine Science Research Administrative Regulation
1998	Law of the People's Republic of China on the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf
1999	Marine Environment Protection Law of the People's Republic of China
2001	Law of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of the Use of Sea Areas
2003	Desert Island Protection Usage Administrative Regulation
2009	Law of the People's Republic of China on Island Protection
2010	National Mobilization Law
2012	Maritime Observation Forecast Administrative Regulations

As China's power grows, China's world view shifts as well as world's view of China. This in and of itself brings about *cognitive* institutional change in the form of how everyone views China. The paradox comes in where China readily suggests its historical tradition of a great Chinese nation finds strong meaning in China's conduct of politics and law. As such, the "government's implicit argument is that a self-proclaimed 'tradition' trumps international law" (China vs the rest 2016, p.30). With a growing ability to assert itself, China's conduct of politics will become more reflected in international politics, as has been previously done with the US conduct of politics and its acceptance thereof. Such power would institute a form of a *legitimate* Chinese order in the SCS and beyond, as China looks to the open seas according to its *own laws*, as depicted in the above table.

Certainly, opponents of China's policy have called it an „ominous act of Chinese expansionism" (de Castro 2015, p.4). The condition of our human nature is to fear the uncertain future, and as such when we feel our power and control is threatened, we would

call on the 'perpetrator' to halt its action or 'policy' of expansionism, whereas it is only a natural and relative exchange of power. If one resists such a change, conflict would almost become inevitable. The only source of conflict is resistance to change. But our human nature is not fixed and may acquire a 'new face' if we are to embrace change. This is crucial more than ever in today's world, where change plays a part of daily life in terms of work, business, science, relationships and politics.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In sum, the chapter looked at various outcomes of China's more 'assertive' policy in the SCS. Firstly, the ASEAN fight for international law under UNCLOS has been an ongoing process, however, it has thus-far not been able to keep China at bay, as China looks out for its own version of maritime law. The US balance of power, according to many scholars, has either come 'late' or has been 'ineffective' to a certain extent. China has been able to freely manouever in the SCS and establish bases in order to attain control over the seas in a potentially 'new regional order' under the power of China.

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Chapter V. Conclusion

Classical realists argue that the currency of politics is power. China not only has large foreign reserves able to possess a financial clout over the economy and development, but China also possesses political power that translates into realization of interests. The South China Sea became a part of China's 'core' interests in 2010, a year that may be marked as a leap forward in China's relative and perceived power. Since then, China has been able to achieve a large military budget that would enable it to extend its muscles beyond its borders; and went east and south to the seas.

The thesis' main premise was to account for China's policy in the South China Sea, particularly through the lens of classical realism. It sought to answer the main research questions: '*Why will China not give up the South China Sea?*', *'What are the reasons for China's behavior?'*, and '*What are the potential outcomes of China's policy?'* Because of our inherently flawed human nature, accumulated power will want us to pursue our interests. As such, the SCS even became China's core interest and is incorporated into China's long-term strategy of becoming a global naval force, this is why China will not give in to the pressures of the international community and will seek its own way forward.

The reasons for China's more 'assertive' behavior lie in its accumulation of power. Not only has this enhanced its stance in the anarchic international arena, but it perceives on its own that China has the material capabilities and psychological ability to move forward with its long-term strategy. Power provides the pavement for China's 'national rejuvenation' and the 'Chinese dream' vision. As ASEAN and the US urge for a status quo through international law and balance of power, China is revising the regional *modus operandi*, by erecting artificial islands that would be capable of providing China with the necessary installments and infrastructure to control the first island chain.

The US has had tremendous influence over the Asia-Pacific in the post-Cold War order. However, two decades following the collapse of the bipolar world order, China has become the second highest economy in the world and is more willing to pursue its interests. The relative powers are progressively shifting. As China accumulates more power, the world has yet another 'great power' struggle, presently seen within the South China Sea. One can

expect higher volatility in the maritime disputes in the SCS in the coming years. Whereas a direct confrontation between China and the US is unlikely, there remains a possibility of lower-level conflict amongst great power allies. Despite this, a highly feasible outcome of China's policy in the SCS is such that China will become the likely winner in the maritime disputes. What analysts, scholars and politicians might expect alike is a new regional order under the control of China, according to a classical realist interpretation of such a case, as the causal forces are magnetized towards China's ability to accrue more power to pursue its interests.

The implications of this study suggest that whereas China's *short-term* policy has been successful, its *long-term* policy for celebrating the nation's might and being regarded as a global force for its centenary in 2049 is yet to be seen and hence remains inconclusive. Essentially, the findings of the study suggest a mere beginning of the disputes, and as the power buildup around the SCS continues, more studies will need to be conducted. The author's prediction, based on the analysis and results of this study, is that the key year ought to be 2020, when both Chinese and US forces aspire to 'collide', when China seeks to gain more control over the first and second island chains, and the US concludes its 'pivot' of re-allocating 60% of military forces into the region, including re-allocating as much as 6 aircraft carriers.

Further research on this topic is necessary as the subject matter is an ongoing process. The objective of this thesis was to view China's power, strategy and its policy from the classical realist conception of power. The potential outcomes remain to be seen and as such future research is encouraged to observe the influence of China's land reclamation on its military capability to deter US influence in the sea.

Concerning the limitations of the study, the theoretical application of classical realism becomes evident as human nature, the 'objective' basis of classical realist thought, becomes difficult to provide evidence for and thus can only be approached through a subjective, interpretive method utilizing previous studies based on human nature, politics and the social sciences. Following the analysis of classical realism's limitations within the second chapter, the main problem is whether the notion of human nature can be applied

historically, as in past, present and future, evolutionarily (evolution of mankind), culturally (applied in various cultures and people), or even psychologically (different pathological tendencies). What is important is to take into account the epistemological and ontological analysis of human nature done by political thinkers and philosophers and seek to construct a compelling argument, albeit the vicissitudes of international relations and political life. Social sciences, from its nature, would always be based on rather subjective interpretations of reality and hence the only message one could take is to what extent one has been polarized to one side or the other of the political issue at hand.

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